

The study of consumption patterns and expectations of organic catering consumers in Taiwan

Tzu-Ying Li, Kathy Yuchi Chu

Department of Tourism, Shih Hsin University, #1, Lane17, Mu-Cha Rd, Sec.1, Taipei, Taiwan

ABSTRACT

Organic catering is increasingly provided in public and private food services. In Taiwan, most organic catering is vegetarian and affiliated with organic food stores. These offer diners organic meals to make themselves competitive to attract target markets, and provide related information to improve consumers' knowledge of organic foods and hopefully increase their consumption. Organic catering consumers' knowledge of organic foods, attitudes toward consumption, and consumption behavior are all related. Consumption is affected by gender, marital status, age, religion, education, occupation, personal health, family health and expenditure allowance. Regular organic catering customers emphasize "balanced nutrition" and "certification or reliability of organic sources". The obstacles to consumption for non-regular organic catering consumers are "too expensive" and "difficult to find". Most organic catering consumers prefer the service styles "health-themed restaurant" and "located inside the organic food stores".

Keywords: organic foods; organic catering; knowledge; attitude; behavior

INTRODUCTION

The need for organic catering is increasing in public and private food services in Nordic countries (Kristensen, 2001), western Europe (USDA, 1999), England (Tseng, 1999) and America (Phillips & Peterson, 2001). In Asia, Japanese organic catering developed from family restaurants and fast food stores. In Taiwan, it is located in vegetarian restaurants and organic food stores (Jones & Doolan, 1998). Originally most organic catering consumers were vegetarians, but more regular consumers are interested in organic foods because of more information provided by the media. This paper explores the relationships between the organic food knowledge, attitudes, and consumption behavior among organic catering consumers. The study also examines the difference in consumption patterns among organic catering consumers and indicates the emphasis, obstacles and expectations of organic catering consumers in organic catering services.

RESULTS

A survey was conducted of 257 consumers at 27 organic catering stores in the Taipei area. The survey had three parts. The first part included true/false and multiple-choice questions to investigate consumers' knowledge, attitudes, and organic food consumption. Pearson correlation was used to find the relationship between knowledge, attitude, and behavior. Knowledge, attitudes and behavior were positively correlated. This means that improving consumers' knowledge of

organic foods will improve their attitudes toward organic food, and stimulate their consumption of organic foods.

The second part asked regular organic food consumers what they emphasized in their regular consumption. It also asked non-regular consumers what stopped them choosing organic foods regularly. In addition, the survey asked all consumers what they expected in the type of organic catering services. The regular organic catering customers emphasized "balanced nutrition" and "certification or reliability of organic sources". The obstacles to consumption of the non-regular organic catering consumers were "too expensive" and "difficult to find". Most organic catering consumers expected "health-themed restaurant" and "located inside the organic food stores".

The third part of the survey asked for personal information from the consumers and how much money they spent on organic catering every week. Consumption was affected by gender, marital status, age, religion, education, occupation, personal health, family health, and expenditure allowance. However, the characteristics of organic food consumers will be different in different areas, and affected by the availability of organic food information. They will even change with time. Therefore, most results can only be used for certain populations in certain areas and countries. The results indicate that organic catering can be provided to let customers experience the difference between organic and conventional foods. If customers only look at the price tags on organic foods, they will probably only feel the expensive price difference. But if they have a chance to try organic catering and find that organic foods can be both nutritious and tasty, they may increase their consumption and loyalty to organic foods.

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