

Consumer Preferences for Socially Responsible Food Production Attributes: An Empirical Analysis Based on Urban Supermarket Setting in Sri Lanka

Herath, H.M.T.K, Jayasinghe-Mudalige, U.K, and Udugama, J.M.M

The purpose of this study was to assess empirically the preferences of women consumers in Sri Lanka towards socially responsible production of food, which is an emerging global concept and is addressed a great deal in the food and agricultural marketing literature at present. The empirical analysis was, in particular, aimed to investigate whether consumers accept certain alterations made to three major food products i.e: (1) Hormone injected Chicken; (2) Pasteurized Milk and (3) genetically-Modified Soya Meat, and how much the consumers are Willing-To-Pay (WTP) to purchase such products. Given that the consumer food preferences are associated with the values they placed upon various attributes of food quality (e.g. health, labeling, packaging, animal welfare etc.) a series of Dichotomous-Choice Contingency Valuation questions (m-13) were formulated, which elicits consumers' WTP for these three products by taking in to account of these quality attributes and included in a structured questionnaire together with other questions to explore consumer motivational and demographic characteristics influencing their choices. The questionnaire was administered with 500 randomly selected consumers visiting two major supermarkets in the Anuradhapura city during May-June 2010. The stated preference models characterized by the Principle Component Analysis Techniques were employed to assess the relative strengths of consumer preferences and motivation to purchase these products. The outcome of the analysis implies that consumer expectations on food firms ethical conduct in production, the level of food quality and their anxieties over the food risks were increased progressively in the recent past and that had an impact on their food purchasing behaviour and consumption patterns. The results imply that remaining food firms and potential entrants into the market should consider catering their client-base with socially responsible food products to be competitive in the market

Key Words: Agricultural and food markets, Consumer behavior, Food safety and quality, socially responsible food production