Marketing to Organic Consumers

Introduction
The organic food industry is experiencing rapid growth throughout the world. According to Onyango, Hallman, and Bellows (2007), “the organic food industry has been growing rapidly and now accounts for about two percent of the world’s retail food market” (p. 399). It is important to understand how to market to organic consumers. Conscious marketing efforts aimed at ideal organic consumers can increase consumption and, ultimately, profits in the organic foods industry.

Through many studies, researchers have a better understanding of organic consumers, what motivates them to purchase organic foods, and their intent to purchase organic products. With this knowledge, the target audience is specified, making it easy for agricultural marketers and advertisers to implement a successful marketing or ad campaign for organic products.

Organic Consumers
Hughner, McDonagh, Prothero, Shultz, and Stanton (2007) conducted research to identify the typical organic consumer. Through demographic profiling, the authors concluded that the regular consumer of organic foods (RCOF) is female, older, and has children in the household.

The RCOF is a health-conscious individual who is interested in attaining a healthy lifestyle. The younger the consumer, the more positive their attitude toward organic products. However, older consumers are more likely to actually purchase the products.

Younger consumers have a much more positive attitude toward organic products than do older generations. The lower rate of purchasing in younger generations can be linked to the amount of income received by young consumers. According to the research found by Hughner et al. (2007) “one explanation is that the price premiums on organic food may be affordable by older respondents” (p. 96).

Consumer Motivation
Food safety and environmental concerns are motivating factors for consumers to purchase organic products. According to Michaelidou and Hassan (2007), “these reasons are often themed by existing literature into two broad categories consisting of individual or health (egoistic) and environmental or animal welfare (altruistic) motives” (p. 163).

The more aware the consumer is of the health benefits associated with organic produce, the more likely they are to make the purchase. It is important as an agricultural marketer and advertiser to make the consumer aware of the advantages organic products have over non-organic. Until the information is presented to the consumer in a way in which they can understand it, it is irrelevant to them.
Environmentally-conscious consumers are becoming increasingly aware of the impact of conventional farming on the environment. According to Anderson, Wachenheimm, and Lesch (2006), “organic food users felt that their food purchases would make a difference in helping sustain a healthy environment” (p. 182).

With increasing support for go-green campaigns, marketers need to pay special attention to marketing campaigns, making sure the advantages of organic farming are highlighted. When consumers feel they are making a difference in the environment through purchases of organic products, they are more apt to make the purchase again.

**Consumer Intent**

Gender was found to be the most significant factor in the consumers’ intent to buy organic foods. A consumer’s intent to buy organic food was predicted by attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control (Lodorfos & Dennis, 2008). Based on research using Ajzen’s theory of planned behaviour (TPB), price, availability, product information, and other consumers’ opinions are also determining factors of a consumer’s intent to purchase organic products (See Figure 1).

Ajzen’s TPB is a model used to predict consumer behavior. The TPB uses consumer intent to predict behavior. Lodorfos and Dennis (2008) found, “the stronger the intention to engage in a behavior, the more likely should be its performance” (p. 23). Figure 1 shows the TPB model. The central theme in TPB is the individual’s intention to perform a given behavior (Lodorfos & Dennis, 2008).

Agricultural marketers should pay special attention to these guidelines when preparing a marketing plan for organic products. Many different campaigns may be necessary in order to reach each target market.

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*Figure 1. Ajzen’s theory of planned behavior (Lodorfos & Dennis, 2008).*
Conclusion
With the growth of the organic industry it is becoming increasingly important that agricultural marketers and advertisers know who their target audience is. Through the information provided in this research brief, marketers can get a feel for who the organic consumer is and what motivates them to purchase organic products.

If marketers and advertisers use these demographics to build their campaigns, successful marketing and advertising efforts can be accomplished. It is fundamental that marketers and advertisers understand the diversity of organic consumers. One broad marketing or ad campaign will not persuade all consumers to make the purchase. Individual campaigns geared toward each demographic is necessary to achieve desired results.

Audience
This research brief is intended for individuals with an interest in understanding how to market to organic consumers. Agricultural marketing and advertising professionals can greatly benefit from the following information as can undergraduates seeking a career in the agricultural marketing and advertising industries, with a special interest in the organic foods industry. A basic understanding of marketing and a background in the study of marketing and advertising is essential in understanding this brief.

References


