The final publication is available at
http://www.springerlink.com/content/51n4h186l7j92g16/fulltext.pdf

Publication to be cited as: Janssen, M. and Hamm, U. (2011): Consumer perception of different organic certification schemes in five European countries, Organic Agriculture 1(1):31-43.

Consumer perception of different organic certification schemes in five European countries

Meike Janssen and Ulrich Hamm

Agricultural and Food Marketing
University of Kassel
Faculty of Organic Agricultural Sciences
Steinstrasse 19
D - 37213 Witzenhausen
Germany

Corresponding author:
Meike Janssen
m.janssen@uni-kassel.de
tel. +49 (0) 5542 981331
fax +49 (0) 5542 981286

Abstract
With the introduction of the new mandatory EU logo for organic food and farming the various existing organic certification schemes in the European market face a challenge: Producers and retailers might only continue to display the existing organic logos on product packages if the underlying certification schemes offer consumers an added value compared to the mandatory EU logo and its scheme. The present study aims to identify potential added values that organic certification schemes could incorporate to differentiate themselves from the mandatory EU logo. The study explores consumer awareness and perception of different organic certification schemes and the corresponding logos, about which little is known to date. The qualitative approach with focus group discussions in the five European countries Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Italy and United Kingdom revealed that consumer knowledge of organic certification schemes is generally low. In Italy and the United Kingdom, the great majority of participants was not aware of any differences between the schemes that were discussed. In the Czech Republic, Denmark and Germany, several participants preferred a particular organic certification scheme over others. The following aspects could be identified as potential added values for certification schemes to differentiate themselves from the EU logo and the underlying scheme: Stricter production standards, stricter control, domestic origin, and fair prices for farmers.

Keywords

Organic food, consumer perception, organic certification, organic logos

1 Introduction

In the European Union (EU), organically produced food has to comply with predefined standards in order to be labelled and sold as ‘organic’. Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 constitutes the regulatory framework for the production, processing, labelling and control of organic products[1]. EU Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 came into force on 1 January 2009, substituting Regulation (EEC) 2092/91. One major change of the new regulation concerns the labelling of organic food: The new regulation stipulates the introduction of a new mandatory EU logo for organic food. From July 2010 on, all prepacked organic products produced within the EU must carry the new logo.[2] The new logo replaces the old EU organic logo whose use was optional.

In all European countries, voluntary organic certification logos[3] have been in the market for many years: Besides the old EU logo, numerous governmental (e.g. the German ‘Bio-Siegel’ and the Danish ‘Red Ø’) as well as private organic logos are currently found across Europe. The term ‘private logos’ covers the logos of farmers’ associations (e.g. Demeter), their umbrella organisations (e.g. Bio Suisse), certification bodies (e.g. Ecocert) and other private organisations.

Most organic certification logos target the final consumer. The key function of organic certification logos is to communicate that the production process has been certified and the product meets certain standards (Roe and Sheldon 2007; Golan et al. 2001; Jahn et al. 2005). The use of other organic logos in addition to the mandatory EU logo seems reasonable if consumers associate an added value with the additional logo, for instance stricter standards,

[1] In this contribution, the term ‘organic products’ solely refers to organic food.

[2] A transition period is granted for product packages and labels produced before 1 July 2010. All packaging and labels manufactured after that date shall feature the new EU logo (Commission Regulation (EC) No 889/2008).

[3] In this contribution, the terms ‘organic certification logo’ and ‘organic logo’ refer to the logos of governmental and private certification schemes. These are not to be confused with organic producer and retailer brands (such as Rapunzel and Tesco’s organic).

higher food security or any other perceived quality aspect. Against this background, public as well as private owners of organic certification schemes need to consider the implications of the new mandatory EU logo on the future use of their own logos and schemes (this point is further elaborated in Section 2).

This contribution aims at identifying potential 'added values' from the consumer's perspective that organic certification schemes could incorporate in order to differentiate themselves from the mandatory EU logo and the corresponding standards. Recommendations for public and private owners of organic certification schemes are made. The analysis is based on the investigation of whether and why consumers prefer particular organic certification schemes over others. To date, little is known about these questions. The following research questions are addressed with regard to consumers in the five European countries Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Italy and United Kingdom:

- Do consumers perceive differences standing behind different organic certification logos? In what way?
- Do consumers prefer particular organic certification schemes over others and what are the added values that consumers associate with the preferred schemes?
- In what way do consumer views differ between the study countries with respect to the above questions?

The contribution is structured as follows: Section 2 introduces the theoretical framework of organic certification upon which this contribution is based. Section 3 outlines the methods of data collection and data analysis. Section 4 presents the results of the study which are discussed in Section 5. In the final Section 6, recommendations for governmental as well as private organic certification schemes are made.

2 Theoretical framework of organic certification labelling

The economic rationale of organic certification labelling is closely related to the characteristics that make a product an organic product. EU Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 defines standards for the production and processing of organic food. Organic products are thus characterised by particular principles for the production and processing, which cannot be verified by consumers neither during the purchase process nor after consumption of the product (Jahn et al. 2005). In information economics, products with attributes that the consumer cannot verify are referred to as credence goods (Darby and Karni 1973). Credence goods feature a high degree of information asymmetry, i.e. information is distributed unequally among producers and consumers (Darby and Karni 1973). Markets with information asymmetry involve the danger of opportunistic behaviour in the supply chain such as fraud, since chances of being uncovered are low (McCluskey 2000; Darby and Karni 1973). Consumer trust in the product integrity is therefore a critical issue for credence goods to successfully compete in the market, in particular if the credence attribute is accompanied by a price premium like in the case of organic food (Jahn et al. 2005; McCluskey 2000; Bonroy and Constantatos 2008).

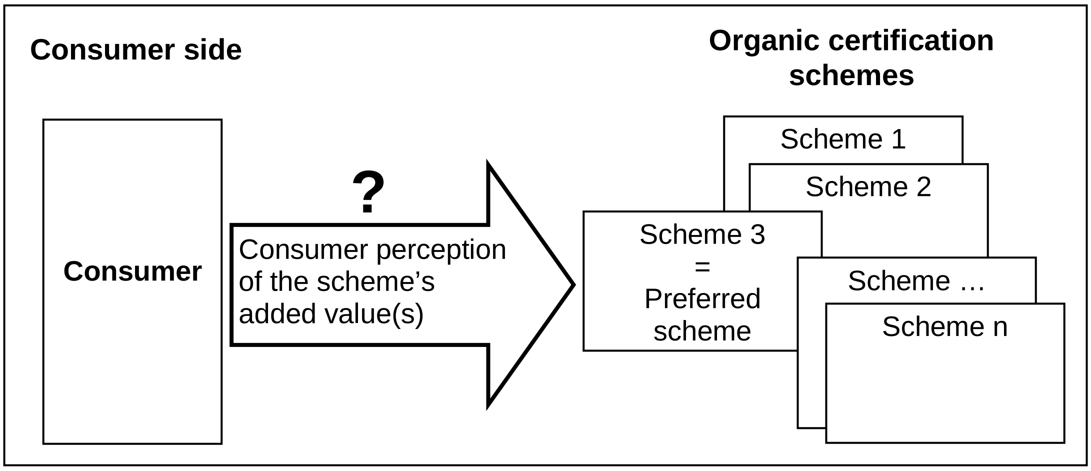
Third-party certification represents an instrument for overcoming the dilemma of information asymmetry of credence goods (McCluskey 2000). A neutral certifier, which is accredited by a competent authority, guarantees regular inspections of the processes within the supply chain and ensures compliance with the respective standards. This is signalled to final consumers by product labelling (Roe and Sheldon 2007; Golan et al. 2001). Organic food products often carry the logo of the respective certification scheme on the package. In this context, several authors point out that third-party certification involves a shift of the credence attribute from the producer to the certifier: Third-party certification diminishes the problems of asymmetric information in the producer-consumer relationship *only if* the final consumer trusts the certification scheme (Golan et al. 2001; Jahn et al. 2005; Albersmeier et al. 2010). Thus the success of a certification scheme like the certification of organic food largely depends on the level of consumer trust in the scheme.

In the EU market, all organic products must be certified according to Regulation (EC) No 834/2007. The Regulation is enforced in the same way in all EU member states, i.e. the same minimum standards and certification procedures apply. Once a product has been certified by an accredited certification body in an EU country it is automatically recognised EU-wide. Certification can be carried out by a) accredited private bodies, b) governmental bodies or c) a combination of both forms. Many certification bodies operate in several EU countries. With the EU Regulation setting the *minimum* requirements, other certification schemes are free to define standards which may – but do not have to – exceed and/or supplement the requirements of the EU Regulation. In fact, many different organic certification schemes with own logos are currently found in the European market for organic food:

- Governmental organic logos are found in several (but not in all) EU countries. The requirements for using the governmental logos slightly differ from country to country. The German 'Bio-Siegel', for example, can be used on request on all products complying with the EU Regulation on organic food and farming (Öko-Kennzeichengesetz). In other countries such as Denmark and the Czech Republic, the production standards of the governmental scheme also correspond with the EU standards but some further requirements regarding the control procedure must be met: The Danish 'Red Ø' requires that the latest preparation of the product (packaging and/or labelling) is undertaken by a company in Denmark under the inspection of the Danish governmental control authorities (Bekendtgørelse om økologiske fødevarer m.v. No 1258; Fødevarestyrelsens vejledning om økologiske fødevarer m.v.). In the Czech Republic, the product must have been certified by the respective Czech control body in order to carry the Czech governmental logo (Act on Organic Farming No 242/2000 Coll.).
- Private certification schemes – i.e. farmers' associations and their umbrella organisations, certification bodies, and/or other private organisations – are found in many EU countries. There are great differences between the various schemes in the extent to which the schemes' requirements differ from the EU Regulation. Demeter, for example, has own production standards exceeding and supplementing the EU Regulation in many areas. The logos of several certification bodies, in contrast, 'only' signal that the product has been certified according to the EU Regulation by the respective certification body.

In a competitive environment with many different organic certification schemes, the success of a certification scheme not only relies on the extent to which consumers prefer organic over conventional food, but further on the extent to which consumers prefer organic products of that particular scheme over other organic products. The introduction of a *mandatory* EU logo for organic food represents a novelty in the European market and raises the question whether existing organic logos should additionally be displayed on product packages. In fact, from the viewpoint of producers and retailers, marketing budgets as well as the space on product packages are limited. Practical considerations might thus question the use of two or more organic logos. In this sense, existing organic logos 'compete' with the mandatory EU logo for organic food. Marketing theory suggests that a product must offer an added value or a unique selling proposition important to consumers, in order to successfully compete in the market (Armstrong and Kotler 2003; Wilson and Gilligan 2003). Given the mandatory EU logo, other organic certification schemes should hence strive to be perceived as unique by consumers. This contribution aims to identify potential added values of organic certification schemes that are important to consumers. Figure 1 depicts the theoretical concept for analysing consumer perception of organic certification schemes which is applied in this contribution. It is noteworthy that simply being different from products certified according to the EU Regulation is not enough. Rather, the consumer perspective is the crucial point (Golan et al. 2001): Stricter organic production standards compared to the EU regulation, for instance, do not constitute an added value *per se*; an added value is only given if consumers know about and appreciate a scheme's stricter standards.

Figure 1: Organic certification schemes and the consumer side



3 Methods

Hardly any previous findings exist regarding consumer awareness and perception of different organic certification schemes. In particular, a cross-country comparison on this topic has not yet been conducted. Therefore, a qualitative research approach with focus group discussions was chosen for the analysis of consumer awareness and perception (Bryman 2008; Denzin and Lincoln 2008; Snape and Spencer 2003).

3.1 Method of data collection

With focus group discussions it is possible to gain insights into the different aspects and dimensions of a problem (Bryman 2008). One of the method's main strengths is the communicative character. Compared with other qualitative methods based on personal interviews, the key advantage lies in the mutual stimulation of the participants: A broader spectrum of opinions is revealed, since the participants interact with each other and reflect the opinions of the others (Bryman 2008; Finch and Lewis 2003). However, depending on the research topic the group context of focus group discussions can also be a major drawback: Firstly, the method might encourage participants to express culturally expected views and, secondly, it is not appropriate for sensitive topics where participants might feel uncomfortable talking in the presence of other people (Bryman 2008). In the present study, it was assumed these issues would not cause any problems.

The discussion guideline for this study contained two main sections:

- Section 1: Awareness of different organic logos and preferences for products with particular organic logos
- Section 2: Awareness of different organic standards and preferences for products with particular organic standards

During the discussions, the participants of the focus groups were shown the most common organic certification logos in the respective study country (see Table 1). In addition, the labelling with the term 'organic' without a certification logo was shown. The selection of the logos was based on the results of an inventory study which had been conducted by the authors of this study and their partner organisations a few months before. [4]

Table 1: Organic certification logos discussed in the focus groups

Country	EU logo	National governmental logo	Logos of farmers' associations and umbrella organisations	Logos of certification bodies
CZ	✓	✓	–	–
DE	✓	✓	Bioland Demeter Naturland	–
DK	✓	✓	Demeter	–
IT	✓	–	Demeter AIAB	Bioagricert Controllo Biologico ICEA
UK	✓	–	Soil Association	Organic Farmers & Growers Organic Food Federation

Primary data was collected in the five EU countries Czech Republic (CZ), Denmark (DK), Germany (DE), Italy (IT), and United Kingdom (UK). The participants were consumers of organic food. In the Czech Republic, Denmark and Germany, participants were recruited by staff members and/or students of the partner organisations in front of stores with an organic food range. In Italy and the United Kingdom, participants were recruited by market research institutes via telephone. In all countries, the screening of participants was based on the same set of criteria: The participants had to be at least partly responsible for the food purchase in their household and they had to be consumers of organic food. In all countries, two focus groups were conducted with occasional organic consumers and one group with frequent organic consumers.[5] The two consumer segments were separated because their level of knowledge of organic certification schemes was expected to be different. In mixed groups, the more frequent consumers might have been ascribed the role of an 'expert', which could have prevented less experienced consumers from actively involving in the discussion.

Quota sampling for the age and gender distribution of the focus groups was applied, with country-specific quotas for the five countries. Two age groups were differentiated: '18 to 44 years' and '45 to 75 years'. The quotas for the two age groups reflected the distribution of these age groups within the population of the study country. The quota for the share of the younger age group ranged from 43% in Italy to 53% in the Czech Republic. Regarding gender, the quotas reflected the buying behaviour of households in each country. The quota for the share of women ranged from 60% in the UK to 70% in Italy. The actual composition of the focus groups slightly deviated from the quotas, since some recruited participants

[4] The authors thank the following partners for their contribution to data collection and analysis: Lukáš Zagata and Michal Lošťák, Czech University of Life Sciences Prague, Czech Republic; Lizzie Melby Jespersen and Simon Olling Rebsdorf, International Centre for Research in Organic Food Systems (ICROFS), Denmark; Simona Naspetti and Raffaele Zanoli, Polytechnic University of Marche, Italy; Susanne Padel and Jane Vine, Aberystwyth University, United Kingdom.

[5] The intensity of organic food consumption was measured by means of an index with a scale from 0 to 14 points. The participants were asked for their organic consumption intensity in seven different product groups with the standardised answer categories 'almost never' (0), 'sometimes' (1) and 'almost always' (2). The numbers in brackets show the points assigned to the categories. For each participant, the points reached in the seven product categories were added up. In all countries, consumers with less than 3 points were excluded from participating in the study. The number of points that determined the classification as occasional and frequent buyers was different from country to country, in order to take the different stages of the organic market development into account. Consumers with an index of 3 to 5 points (in the Czech Republic and Italy), 3 to 6 points (in Germany and the United Kingdom), and 3 to 9 points (in Denmark), respectively, were classified as occasional organic consumers. Consumers with a higher index were classified as frequent buyers of organic food.

cancelled with short notice or did not come to the appointment.[6] Nevertheless, the failure rates were within the normal range for focus groups (Greenbaum 2000).

A total of three focus groups was conducted in each study country in May and June 2009. The group size ranged from 8 to 15 participants. Altogether, 218 consumers participated in the study. All groups were moderated by staff members of the partner organisations. The focus groups lasted between 52 and 90 minutes.

3.2 Method of data analysis

In order to conduct a cross-country comparison of the national results, it was necessary that the national data was analysed and reported in a similar way. This was achieved by a two-stage process of qualitative content analysis (Mayring and Brunner 2007; Mayring 2003).

In the present study, the original material was analysed by the respective national partners according to a common framework.[7] The purpose of *Stage 1* of the data analysis process was to get an overview of the occurring themes in each study country, in order to develop the category scheme for qualitative content analysis. Initially, the focus group discussions were transcribed in the national languages. Those statements relevant to the main questions of the discussion guideline were identified and paraphrased. A two-column table was used with the original material in the left hand column and the corresponding paraphrase in the right hand column. The occurring themes were identified, collected in a list and summarised in national summary reports in English language. The reports were organised according to the main questions of the discussion guideline.

The objectives of *Stage 2* of the data analysis process were to report the national results in more depth and make the results comparable across the study countries. Based on the five national summary reports, the authors of this contribution developed a category scheme for qualitative content analysis adapted from Gläser and Laudel (2006) as well as from Ritchie et al. (2003). The category scheme for this study consisted of a list of themes and subthemes which were extracted from the national summary reports. In addition to explicit categories, the scheme contained the subcategory 'Other' to cater for country specific conditions. At national level, the original material was then analysed based on the category scheme. The results were reported in detailed national reports that were structured according to the category scheme.

Finally, a cross-country comparison was conducted by the authors of this contribution with feedback from the other partners. Based on the detailed national reports, the results from the different countries were compared with each other, so that similarities and differences regarding the research questions could be identified.

4 Results

The results of the focus group discussions are presented in two thematic sections according to the two main research questions: 1. Awareness and perception of differences standing behind different organic logos, 2. Perceived added values associated with particular certification schemes. Both questions are closely linked to the participants' awareness level of the different organic logos that were discussed, which is presented in Table 2. It needs to be pointed out

[6] The focus groups were composed as follows (the figures after the country code refer to the share of the younger age group and the share of women respectively): CZ 70% and 70%; DE 56% and 61%; DK 56% and 67%; IT 43% and 70%; UK 52% and 59%.

[7] A centralised approach to data analysis with one person analysing the focus group discussions of all countries was seen unfeasible, since crucial meaning would have been lost if the original material had been translated into English language and analysed by a foreigner.

that in qualitative research studies, the awareness level is not measured in quantitative terms. Rather, a general idea on the participants' perspectives is presented here.

Table 2: The awareness of different organic logos among the focus group participants

Country	Well-known	Known by some	Mostly unknown
CZ	Czech governmental logo	–	EU logo
DE	German governmental logo	Bioland Demeter Naturland	EU logo
DK	Danish governmental logo EU logo	–	Demeter
IT	–	EU logo Controllo Biologico	AIAB Bioagricert Demeter ICEA
UK	–	–	EU logo Organic Farmers & Growers Organic Food Federation Soil Association

In the following two sections, selected verbatim quotations of the participants' comments are used to illustrate the results. All quotations are indicated with the respective study country (CZ, DE, DK, IT, UK), the number of the focus group (1 to 3), the organic consumption intensity of the participant ('O' for occasional buyer and 'F' for frequent buyer) and the anonymous participant number (1 to 15).

4.1 Awareness and perception of differences standing behind different organic logos

In all study countries, the focus group discussions showed that the participants' knowledge of differences standing behind different organic logos is generally low. In total, three main aspects were raised by the participants: Standards, control and origin of the product. The two latter, however, were only brought up in some study countries. Further, in many comments it became obvious that the participants did not clearly distinguish between standards and control. Both terms were used interchangeably and the general perception seemed to be that stricter control goes hand in hand with stricter standards. Despite the low level of knowledge among participants in all countries, the participants' awareness of differences between different logos varied across the study countries. The results reflect the different regulatory frameworks and ways of how the organic sectors evolved in the five countries.

Only very few participants could name actual differences between the organic standards of different certification schemes. Interestingly, in all countries many participants believed that the domestic standards were higher than in certain other European countries. However, different 'reference countries' were mentioned across the study countries: In the focus groups in Italy, for instance, lower standards were associated with Rumania, whereas in the German focus groups, the domestic standards were perceived to be stricter than the Italian and Spanish counterparts.

In the Czech Republic and Denmark, several participants perceived the governmental standards to be stricter than the EU standards, but many of the participants' assumptions were, in fact, false. Interestingly, several participants mistakenly thought the respective governmental logo stood for products of domestic origin. In both countries, however, no participant could mention actual differences between the organic standards that were discussed, which one participant expressed as follows: "For sure, I don't know the standards. (…) [I] have no clue about it." (CZ FG1-O/6). Still, many speculative statements were made. The three labels discussed in the focus groups in the Czech Republic actually represent the same standards. However, the Czech governmental standards were mostly perceived to be the strictest. The EU standards were seen to be less strict and were referred to as minimum standards. Products without a certification logo were generally not trusted, since it was assumed that these products did not comply with any organic standards at all.

In Denmark, several participants perceived the Danish standards to be stricter than the EU standards, which is not true anymore since January 2009 (Fødevarestyrelsens vejledning om oekologiske foedevarer m.v. of July 2009). Many participants commented on differences in the control systems, and the general view was that the Danish governmental control was the most trustworthy since it was carried out by a governmental authority: "I think that governmentally controlled [the 'Red Ø'], there is a greater guarantee that it has been [farmed] organically for a longer period than with that EU logo" (DK FG3-F/2)".

In Germany, the standards of farmers' associations were perceived to be stricter by some participants, whereas lower standards were associated with the governmental logo 'Bio-Siegel' and the EU logo, respectively. However, hardly any participant could name actual differences between the standards. Only Demeter was commented on in more detail and the anthroposophical background was mentioned a number of times. Accordingly, several participants perceived Demeter to have the highest standards. The governmental logo 'Bio-Siegel', in contrast, was often referred to as the minimum standard with a negative connotation: "I know that the Bio-Label [Bio-Siegel] is only minimum standard." (DE FG1-O/10). The standards of the farmers' associations Bioland and Naturland were either seen as 'in-between' Demeter and the Bio-Siegel or as equally high as Demeter. The EU standards were not commented on at all, since no participant in Germany really knew the old EU logo.

In Italy and the United Kingdom, almost all participants were unaware of any differences between different organic certification schemes. Only very few participants had knowledge of standards or control systems. In Italy, hardly any participant had ever considered that the various organic logos could mean different things, which one participant expressed as follows: "I really did not know the different logos could imply different standards." (IT FG1-F/7). Many Italian participants believed there were universal European standards all organic products complied with. In the United Kingdom, the organic logos that were subject of the discussion were mostly unknown.[8] A few participants considered the Soil Association to have strict standards, but no real comparisons could be made. Many of the participants were confused about what 'organic' meant. Several participants were unsure how organic production was regulated and had no perception of standards and their enforcement: "Are companies actually regulated and checked on? (…) Do they have (…) standards they have to go by or can anyone say 'organic'?" (UK FG3-F/10).

4.2 Perceived added values associated with particular organic certification schemes

Regarding consumer preferences for particular organic certification schemes, the focus group discussions revealed different pictures across the study countries. While in the Czech Republic and Denmark, the majority of participants clearly preferred products with the governmental logo, most participants in Italy and the United Kingdom had no preferences for any particular organic certification scheme. Germany represents the case 'in-between': Several participants clearly preferred products of particular organic certification schemes whereas others had no preferences.

The findings show that preferences for a particular organic certification scheme could stem from a number of aspects that the participants associate with the logo and the corresponding

[8] The low level of knowledge of organic certification logos among the UK participants might have to do with the fact that in the UK most organic produce is sold in supermarkets under prominent organic retail brands (e.g. Tesco's organic). Organic certification logos are often displayed on the back of product packages (if they are shown at all). The UK participants frequently mentioned several organic retail brands in the focus group discussions proving that they were familiar with organic products. However, it needs to be pointed out that the sample is not representative of the UK population.

scheme. The following aspects were mentioned most often: Perceived stricter production standards, perceived stricter control, domestic origin of the product, familiarity with the logo, and greater trust. Table 3 provides an overview of the perceived added values that participants associated with particular certification schemes, which are explained further in the following sections. The last section deals with reasons for *not* preferring any particular organic certification scheme.

Table 3: Perceived added values associated with particular certification schemes

Perceived added values	**Country**				
	CZ	**DE**	**DK**	**IT**	**UK**
Perceived stricter production standards	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓		✓
Perceived stricter control		✓	✓✓	✓	
Domestic origin of the product	✓✓		✓✓		
Familiarity with the logo	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓		
Greater trust	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	

✓✓ = mentioned by several people, ✓ = mentioned by a few people, empty cell = not mentioned

Perceived stricter production standards

In the Czech Republic and Denmark, many participants stated to prefer the respective domestic standards represented by the governmental logo, since these were perceived to be stricter than other standards. A Czech participant explained that “the reason why I prefer Czech Bio [the governmental logo] is the quality (...). For instance Germany does not have as strict norms for meat production as the KEZ [Czech inspection body].” (CZ FG2-F/5). In Germany, some people preferred the farmers’ associations for their perceived stricter standards compared to the Bio-Siegel. Among the three farmers’ associations, Demeter was referred to most often: “I know that Demeter has very high requirements (…). Whereas Bioland-products, they also have a long period of conversion (…), but the standards are not as strict. Demeter, they are really according to anthroposophic principles.” (DE FG3-O/6). Like in this statement, many participants commenting on Demeter mentioned the anthroposophical background in connection with high production standards. In the United Kingdom, only one participant mentioned a preference for the Soil Association due to the organisation’s strict production standards, but no detailed information about the standards were provided. In Italy, no participant stated a preference for particular organic standards.

Perceived stricter control

Participants in three study countries associated certain organic logos with stricter control, which generated greater trust in the product integrity. This was particularly pronounced in Denmark, where the majority of the participants expressed great trust in the Danish control system behind the governmental logo, since it is carried out by governmental authorities. As one participant put it “many have more faith in Denmark even though it may be the same rules, then Denmark may give more attention to the enforcement of the rules” (DK FG1-O/5). In Germany, a few people mentioned stricter control in connection with their preference for the farmers’ associations. In Italy, a few people associated the EU logo and the logo of the certification body ‘Controllo Biologico’ with stricter control. One participant explained “I am very careful to check that the product carries the [EU] logo, it gives me a feeling of safety. I know it implies a quality control.” (IT FG2-O/7). In the Czech Republic and the United Kingdom, greater trust in the control system was not mentioned as a reason for preferring particular certification schemes.

Domestic origin of the product

In the Czech Republic and Denmark, many participants preferred products with the respective governmental logo, since they thought that the logo stands for the domestic origin of the product: "I accept that label [the Czech governmental logo] automatically for organic products, because then I do not have to think about the place of origin [of the product]." (CZ FG1-O/1). However, this assumption is false.

Familiarity with the logo

For some people in the Czech Republic, Denmark and Germany, preferences for particular certifications schemes were based on the fact that the participants were familiar with the logo. In these cases, the preferred logo was not associated with any particular characteristic of the corresponding scheme but with organic production in general. The logo was a tool to identify organic produce. In many of these comments, it was apparent that the participants had greater trust in products with an organic logo that they knew: "I would not choose [products just labelled with the word 'organic']. I would rather go by the labels (…) that I know." (DE FG2-F/2).

Greater trust

Some people in all study countries apart from the United Kingdom mentioned that they trust particular organic certification schemes more than others. It became apparent that trust was largely intertwined with the other four concepts mentioned above. In particular, perceived stricter control and familiarity with the logo were directly associated with greater trust.

No preferences for particular organic certification schemes

Most participants in Italy and the United Kingdom and some participants in the other study countries stated to have no preference for particular organic certification schemes. One reason was that the participants did not know of any differences standing behind the different logos, which the following statements illustrate: "I never raised myself the question of the differences between all these logos, it is something totally new to me." (IT FG1-F/2). "I do not know the differences, I honestly admit, and therefore it does not really have a meaning to me." (DE FG1-O/5). Other participants explained that they were aware of certain organic standards or control systems being stricter, but the differences were not relevant to them. Several people considered other criteria to be more important when buying organic products. Foremost, trust in the seller or retailer was mentioned in all study countries. Furthermore, organic retailer and producer brands played a decisive role, particularly in the United Kingdom, but also in the other study countries.

5 Discussion

Based on the focus group discussions, a number of perceived added values could be identified that consumers currently associate with particular certification schemes. However, the results reflect consumer views *before* the introduction of the mandatory EU logo. It is now discussed whether the identified aspects represent potential added values by which existing certification schemes could differentiate themselves from the mandatory EU logo and the corresponding certification scheme in the future.

Perceived stricter production standards

Defining the standards of a certification scheme falls under the competency of the institution that 'owns' the scheme. EU regulation (EC) No 834/2007 only sets *minimum* standards for organic production and processing. As the results of the focus group discussions suggest, some consumers prefer particular organic certification schemes because of perceived stricter standards. Defining stricter production standards could thus be a promising strategy for existing certification schemes to differentiate themselves from the mandatory EU logo. However, communication with consumers is extremely important in this context. According to previous studies, consumers know little about organic production methods (Hughner et al. 2007; Stolz et al. 2009). A differentiation strategy based on stricter production standards must therefore focus on those aspects that are a) important in the eyes of consumers and b) easy to communicate. Previous studies show that especially animal welfare is of particular concern for organic consumers in European countries (Zander and Hamm 2010; Hughner et al. 2007).

Perceived stricter control

The findings from the focus group discussions illustrate that many consumers are not aware that organic products are subject to a control system. It can therefore be concluded that certification schemes should communicate to consumers more clearly that all organic products underlie a control process. However, it is questionable whether the implementation of a control system stricter than required by the EU regulation represents a potential added value: Firstly, it has to be determined what ‘stricter control’ means in the eyes of consumers. Secondly, private standard owners like farmers’ associations and inspection bodies face a dilemma: They compete for producers who, in turn, might actually oppose stricter control measures like more frequent control visits or stricter bureaucratic requirements, at least as long as the producers do not receive a special price premium for their products.

Another possible added value connected to ‘control’ was revealed in the focus group discussions in Denmark. The domestic control system was perceived more trustworthy and somehow stricter than foreign certification bodies. This example suggests that private as well as governmental certification schemes could thus differentiate themselves from the EU scheme by stipulating that the product must have been inspected by a domestic certification body.

Domestic origin of the product

Several studies confirm that the regional or local origin of food products is increasingly important to consumers (Zander and Hamm 2010; Wirthgen 2005; Stolz et al. 2009; Toler et al. 2009). The focus group discussions in Denmark and the Czech Republic revealed that the participants associated certain organic logos with the domestic origin of the product, which led to a positive notion. For *private* organic certification schemes a promising strategy to offer a unique selling proposition to consumers could thus be to define criteria regarding the domestic or regional origin of the raw materials. Governmental certification schemes, however, cannot simply introduce criteria for the origin of the raw materials, since state aid for promotion activities referring to the domestic or regional origin of products may infringe upon Article 87 of the Treaty of Rome (Becker 2009). A publicly funded organic label including a regional indication would need to be carefully phrased. Further quality or control criteria would have to be established and the promotion activities would need to focus on these criteria rather than the regional origin, as a decision by the European Court of Justice regarding a label from Germany showed (Becker 2005). A relaunch of governmental organic logos as regional organic logos is thus not advisable.

Familiarity with the logo

Compared to voluntary organic logos, the new mandatory EU logo will probably gain consumer awareness relatively quickly, since all prepacked organic products must carry the logo. For governmental and private certification schemes, a well-known logo might thus not be enough to differentiate themselves from the mandatory EU logo in the long run.

Trust in the certification scheme

Consumer trust in the certification scheme is a crucial prerequisite for overcoming the dilemma of information asymmetry in the organic market (Golan et al. 2001; Jahn et al. 2005; Albersmeier et al. 2010). According to the marketing literature, consumer trust is a multidimensional and dynamic construct (Flores and Solomon 1998; Butler 1991). In our study, the moderators did not specifically address consumer trust, but several participants raised this topic and four sources of trust in certification schemes could be identified, namely the four concepts mentioned above. It is currently unclear how successful the new mandatory EU logo will be in building consumer trust. However, our findings suggest that governmental and private certification schemes might successfully build greater consumer trust than the EU logo if they successfully incorporate stricter production standards and/or a domestic control system. Private certification schemes could further include criteria regarding the domestic or regional origin of the product.

6 Conclusions

With the introduction of the new mandatory EU logo for organic food and farming, it is currently unclear which role the existing voluntary organic logos might play in the future. As outlined in Section 2, voluntary organic logos ‘compete’ with the mandatory EU logo: From the viewpoint of producers and retailers, marketing budgets as well as the space on product packages are limited, which questions the use of two or more organic logos – unless the additional logo is recognised by consumers as a signal for an ‘added value’ compared to the mandatory EU logo. Based on the results of the focus group discussions with consumers, a number of potential added values could be identified that organic certification schemes could incorporate so that – in the eyes of consumers – these schemes differentiate themselves from the mandatory EU logo and the corresponding standards. However, the findings highlight that consumers know little about organic standards and certification. In some countries, the participants did not particularly prefer any certification schemes over others suggesting that there might actually not be a high latent demand for certification schemes with additional requirements, unless more efforts are made to communicate the added values to consumers. These issues highlight the need for further research, in particular on the phenomenon that consumers buy organic products despite their limited knowledge about organic production and certification. Recommendations are now made for public and private owners of organic certification schemes regarding how to proceed with their logos and the underlying requirements in light of the mandatory EU logo and the marketing potentials of added values.

Governmental organic certification schemes

In the Czech Republic, Denmark and Germany, the respective governmental logo for organic products was subject of the focus group discussions. In these three countries, the governmental standards correspond with the EU standards (Act on Organic Farming No 242/2000 Coll.; Öko-Kennzeichengesetz; Bekendtgoerelse om oekologiske foedevarer m.v. No 1258 of 12.12.2008), but while the German Bio-Siegel can be used on request on all products complying with the EU standards (Öko-Kennzeichengesetz), the governmental logos in the Czech Republic and Denmark require some further conditions (see Section 2). In both latter countries, our results suggest that consumer trust in products with the governmental logo is very high. Therefore, it seems advisable to continue the use of the governmental logos in the future. Interestingly, Denmark is one of the countries that have promoted the introduction of a mandatory EU logo from the beginning on. In Germany, the Bio-Siegel is widely known, but trust in the governmental logo is less pronounced than in the Czech Republic and Denmark. However, given the Bio-Siegel’s high awareness level, it is advisable to display the governmental logo in addition to the EU logo in a *transition period*. Once the

EU logo has gained consumer trust, the Bio-Siegel is basically needless, since it stands for the exact same standards and control system as the EU logo. The Bio-Siegel would just require additional space on product packages but space is often very limited.

Private organic certification schemes

Our findings suggest that consumer perception of the farmers' associations and the private certification bodies in the EU countries is rather low. With the introduction of the new mandatory EU logo, the private certification schemes therefore need to raise their profiles, otherwise producers and retailers might not use these logos on product packages any longer. Based on the focus group results, three potential added values could be identified which private schemes could incorporate in order to differentiate themselves from the EU logo: Stricter production standards, a domestic control system and domestic origin of the product. Besides, a study by Zander and Hamm (2010) on additional ethical attributes of organic food provides a further differentiation strategy for private standard owners: Organic consumers in the European countries Austria, Germany, Switzerland and United Kingdom are particularly interested in 'fair prices for farmers'. Translating fair prices into a certification scheme is certainly not an easy task but could be a promising niche strategy for selected private standard owners.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to the anonymous referees for their valuable comments on the manuscript. This publication was generated as part of the CERTCOST Project, agreement no. 207727 (http://www.certcost.org), with financial support from the European Community under the 7th Framework Programme. The publication reflects the views of the authors and not those of the European Community, who is not to be held liable for any use that may be made of the information contained. The authors gratefully acknowledge funding from the European Community.

References

Act on Organic Farming No 242/2000 Coll. (Czech legislation)

Albersmeier F, Schulze H, Spiller A (2010) System dynamics in food quality certifications: Development of an audit integrity system. Int J Food System Dynamics 2010(1):69-81

Armstrong G, Kotler P (2003) Marketing – An introduction, 6th edn. Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River

Becker T (2005) Zur Bedeutung geschützter Herkunftsangaben. Hohenheimer Agrarökonomische Arbeitsberichte. http://opus.ub.uni-hohenheim.de/volltexte/2006/136/pdf/haa-nr12.pdf. Accessed 9 November 2009

Becker T (2009) European food quality policy: The importance of geographical indications, organic certification and food quality assurance schemes in European countries. The Estey Centre J Int Law Trade Policy 10(1):111-130

Bekendtgoerelse om oekologiske foedevarer m.v. No 1258 of 12.12.2008

Bonroy O, Constantatos C (2008) On the use of labels in credence goods markets. J Regul Econ 33(3):237-252

Bryman A (2008) Social research methods, 3rd edn. Oxford University Press, Oxford

Butler JK (1991) Towards understanding and measuring conditions of trust: evolution of a condition of trust inventory, J of Management 17(3):643-63

Commission Regulation (EC) No 889/2008 of 5 September 2008 laying down detailed rules for the implementation of Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 on organic production and labelling of organic products with regard to organic production, labelling and control. Official Journal of the European Union, L250 (18.09.2008), p. 1-84

Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 of 28 June 2007 on organic production and labelling of organic products and repealing Regulation (EEC) No 2092/91. Official Journal of the European Union, L189 (20.07.2007), p. 1-122

Council Regulation (EEC) No 2092/91 of 24 June 1991 on organic production of agricultural products and indications referring thereto on agricultural products and foodstuffs. Official Journal of the European Communities, L198 (22.06.1991), p. 1-15

Darby M, Karni E (1973) Free competition and the optimal amount of fraud. J Law and Economics 16 (1):67–88

Denzin N, Lincoln Y (2008) Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In: Denzin N, Lincoln Y (eds) Strategies of qualitative inquiry, 3rd edn. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks et al, pp 1-44

Finch H, Lewis J (2006) Focus groups. In: Ritchie J, Lewis J (eds) Qualitative research practice. Sage Publications, London, p. 170-198

Flores F, Solomon R (1998) Creating trust. Bus Ethics Q 8(2):205-232

Fødevarestyrelsens vejledning om oekologiske foedevarer m.v. of July 2009

Gläser J, Laudel G (2006) Experteninterviews und qualitative Inhaltsanalyse, 2nd edn. VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, Wiesbaden

Golan E, Kuchler F, Mitchell L, Greene C, Jessup A (2001) Economics of Food Labeling. J Consumer Policy 24(2):171-184

Greenbaum TL (2000) Moderating focus groups – A practical guide for group facilitation. Sage Publications, Thousands Oaks

Hughner RS, McDonagh P, Prothero A, Shultz CJ II, Stanton J (2007) Who are organic food consumers? A compilation and review of why people purchase organic food. J Consumer Behav 6(2-3):94–110

Jahn G, Schramm M, Spiller A (2005) The reliability of certification: Quality labels as a consumer policy tool. J Consumer Policy 28(1):53-73

Mayring P (2003) Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse, 8th edn. Beltz, Weinheim

Mayring P, Brunner E (2007) Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse. In: Buber R, Holzmüller H (eds) Qualitative Marktforschung – Konzepte, Methoden, Analysen. Gabler Verlag, Wiesbaden, p. 669-680

McCluskey JJ (2000) A game theoretic approach to organic foods: An analysis of asymmetric information and policy. Agr Resour Econ Rev 29(1):1-9

Öko-Kennzeichengesetz: Gesetz zur Einführung und Verwendung eines Kennzeichens für Erzeugnisse des ökologischen Landbaus vom 10. Dezember 2001, neugefasst durch Bekanntmachung vom 20. Januar 2009. In: BGBl. I S.78

Roe B, Sheldon I (2007) Credence good labeling: The efficiency and distributional implications of several policy approaches. Amer J Agr Econ 89(4):1020-1033

Snape D, Spencer L (2003) The foundations of qualitative research. In: Ritchie J, Lewis J (eds) Qualitative research practice. Sage Publications, London, p. 1-23

Stolz H, Bodini A, Stolze M, Hamm U, Richter T (2009) Lebensmittelqualität aus der Verbraucherperspektive – eine Synthese qualitativer Studien zur Wahrnehmung und Beurteilung verschiedener Qualitätskriterien bei Öko-Produkten. Berichte über Landwirtsch 87(1):153-182

Toler S, Briggeman BC, Lusk JL, Adams DC (2009) Fairness, farmers markets, and local production. Amer J Agr Econ 91(5):1272-1278

Wilson R, Gilligan C (2003) Strategic marketing management – Planning, Implementation and Control, 2nd edn. Elsevier, Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford

Wirthgen A (2005) Consumer, retailer, and producer assessments of product differentiation according to regional origin and process quality. Agribus 21(2):191-211

Zander K, Hamm U (2010) Consumer preferences for additional ethical attributes of organic food. Food Quality and Preference 21(5):495-503