

Farmer Consumer Partnerships (FCP)

FCP

How to communicate ethical values

The market for organic products does not look the same throughout Europe and the cultural and behavioural backgrounds of European consumers vary a lot. Is it possible to develop communication strategies for organic companies and farmers that can be successful in all those different contexts and varying consumer approaches? Which are the most convincing arguments when communicating added values such as higher social responsibility?



Globalisation and growing anonymity of trade with organic products are seen as a problem by many organic farmers and consumers in Europe. Due to competition with producers in countries with lower production costs, organic farmers in Europe see themselves forced to lower their standards. At the same time an increasing number of consumers are unhappy about the consequences of globalisation on food provision: anonymous, uniform and replaceable food products that are produced under unsatisfactory social and environmental conditions. Therefore, a promising strategy for organic farmers is to differentiate their production methods and products from the organic mass market by including additional social responsibility values into their concepts. The project "Farmer Consumer Partnerships" will investigate marketing and communication strategies by which organic farmers try to include ethical values in their production methods that are higher than those set out in the governmental standards for organic production. The overall objective is to analyse and test innovative communication strategies and arguments that are related to the concept of "Corporate Social Responsibility" (CSR)*

Detailed objectives are:

- ▶ To identify successful initiatives in each partner country and analyse their CSR communication strategies with the general public, with stakeholders and specially with consumers in a case study approach
- ▶ To test the most promising communication arguments with respect to consumers' buying behaviour in all partner countries with different methods
- ▶ To develop and test new generic communication strategies as a valuable tool for the strategic positioning of farmers' initiatives using CSR arguments in the organic market.



Testing good arguments

In the first part of the project promising communication strategies and arguments of farmers' organisations in five European countries will be identified. In a second step some communication arguments used in one country or a special region will be tested in different countries and regions through a so-called Information Display Matrix (IDM). With this tool consumers can rank and value alternative product attributes.

Using the best-ranked arguments, advertising companies will develop product labels and leaflets that will be tested in focus group discussions and sales experiments in so-called Consumer Choice Tests. The tests will be used to analyse consumers' buying behaviour toward organic products presented with additional social responsibility arguments for organic food. In these tests real products are presented in a near-to realistic laboratory setting where the consumers are given the offer to buy or not to buy.

Tool for strategic positioning

The results of a comparison of different social responsibility arguments and communication strategies in the participating five European countries will provide a valuable tool for the strategic positioning of organic companies and farmers' initiatives which then follow strategies of social responsibility in the organic market. With such strategies these farmers or companies can differentiate their products from the mass market for organic products and improve their products' image and the consumers' willingness to pay. The results will also be interesting for policy-makers to gain better understanding of the country-specific attitudes of ethical consumers. This then offers an insight into the challenges of how to fulfil consumers' expectations for a sustainable development of Europe.



Project coordinator:

Ulrich Hamm, University of Kassel, Germany,
e-mail: hamm@uni-kassel.de

Project partners:

Bernhard Freyer, University of Natural Sciences
and Applied Life Sciences (BOKU), Austria
Raffaele Zanolì, Università Politecnica delle
Marche (UNIVPM), Italy
Roberta Callieris, CIHEAM – MAIB (Mediterranean
Agronomic Institute of Bari), Italy
Susanne Padel, University of Wales, UK
Matthias Stolze, Research Institute of Organic
Agriculture (FiBL), Switzerland

- * Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operation and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis. It is about enterprises deciding to go beyond minimum legal requirements and obligations stemming from collective agreements in order to address societal needs. Through CSR, enterprises of all sizes, in cooperation with their stakeholders, can help to reconcile economic, social and environmental ambitions (EU-Commission 2006).

Work packages

In the project the following work packages will be conducted:

- WP1 Trans-disciplinary framework integrating the different research and CSR arguments and stakeholder perspectives
- WP2 Emerging CSR marketing arguments
- WP3 Test of the most promising CSR communication arguments of WP2 by means of an Information Display Matrix (IDM) in five European countries
- WP4 Elaboration and test of new communication arguments

WP5 Conduction of sales experiments with the best two (country-specific) proposals to find out consumers' buying behaviour for products that were offered with additional benefits using the CSR arguments and the communication tools chosen in WP 4

WP6 Dissemination activities and compilation of the interim WP reports

Further information

You will find further information at the project website <http://www.fcp.coreportal.org>

The project is initiated as a result of the cooperation in CORE Organic. In this EU supported ERA Network, 11 European research funding organisations have launched a joint call, which intends to step up cooperation between national research activities in organic food and farming. Further information on CORE Organic can be obtained at www.coreorganic.org.

By subscribing to the CORE Organic news you can follow the progress in the project. Subscription is possible via www.coreorganic.org.

