

Assessing Consumer Demand for Food Quality Certification: Case of "HACCP Certified Eggs"

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Abstract

This study attempts to identify the key food quality attributes the consumers take into account as they purchase essential food items, in general, and eggs in particular, and the extent to which the provision of information augments consumer demand for "HACCP-certified eggs". It uses the attributes categorized in 'Caswell's Classification on Food Quality' under different subsets, i.e.: Food safety, Nutrition, Sensory, Value, Process, Text and Cues, and another classification based on the level of information used by a consumer, i.e.: Search, Experience and Credence to develop the analytical framework. Data were collected from a sample of educated, middle-income urban consumers (n=200) from Kurunegala and Colombo districts from March - April 2015 through personal interviews carried out with the aid of a structured questionnaire and various flyers designed for the purpose. The results showed that consumers rank the "Label" (83.5%), "Purity" (49.5%) and "Price" (40%) as the most important attributes as they purchase an essential food item; yet, for the case of eggs, "Appearance" (75.5%) ranked the first followed by "Price" (69.5%) and "Purity" (30.5%). This highlights that consumer demand for eggs is mainly decided by Search (e.g. appearance, purity) and Experience (e.g. weight, place of origin) attributes of quality. Interestingly, product certification - used extensively with food items like meat, fish, sea food and milk to signal the compliance of product with Credence attributes, plays an insignificant role with regard to eggs. It is concluded that, from a food economics point of view, HACCP-certified eggs is not 'value for money' for an average consumer as the price premium paid for which does not compensate for the marginal benefit obtained through the "augmented quality".

Keywords: Certified food, Food information, Food safety and quality, HACCP

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