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## ПОТРЕБЛЕНИЕ НА БИОЛОГИЧНИ ХРАНИ В БЪЛГАРИЯ: МОТИВИ И БАРИЕРИ

### ORGANIC FOOD CONSUMPTION IN BULGARIA: MOTIVES AND BARRIERS

Нели Бенчева<sup>1\*</sup>, Теодора Стоева<sup>1</sup>, Екатерина Вълчева<sup>1</sup>,  
Милена Тепавичарова<sup>2</sup>  
Nelly Bencheva<sup>1\*</sup>, Teodora Stoeva<sup>1</sup>, Ekaterina Valcheva<sup>1</sup>,  
Milena Tepavicharova<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Аграрен университет – Пловдив

<sup>2</sup>Висше училище по сигурност и икономика – Пловдив

<sup>1</sup>Agricultural University – Plovdiv

<sup>2</sup>University of Security and Economics – Plovdiv

\*E-mail: [bencheva@gmail.com](mailto:bencheva@gmail.com); [teodorastoeva@gmail.com](mailto:teodorastoeva@gmail.com)

#### Abstract

The increased supply of organic food in large food chains and specialized stores attracts the interest of an ever rising number of consumers. As a result, the necessity to study the main factors, motives and barriers associated with the consumption of organic food deepens. The study of its power and influence is crucial to manufacturers and retailers with regard to the development of marketing approaches and strategies of the supply and demand of these food products.

The consumers believe that organic food, though more expensive than non-organic, is healthier, tastier and is produced in ways that protect and preserve the environment. Consumer confidence in the quality of these foods is higher, because of the strict control and standards of production. According to surveyed consumers some of the most important characteristics of organic food are its wholesomeness and high quality. A major barrier to the development of the organic food market in Bulgaria is the high cost (37%) followed by lack of consumer awareness (24%), lesser availability of organic products in the food web (29%), short shelf life (20%), etc.

**Keywords:** organic food, barriers, motives.

#### INTRODUCTION

The increased supply of organic food in large food chains and specialized stores attract the interest of more and more consumers. As a result, the necessity

to study the main factors, motives and barriers associated with the consumption of organic food deepens.

The study of its power and influence is crucial to manufacturers and retailers with regard to the development of marketing approaches and strategies of supply and demand of these food products.

The purpose of this article is to study the factors, motives and barriers affecting the purchase of several groups of organic food: vegetables, fruits, grains and legumes, milk, eggs, honey and tea.

The consumers believe that organic food, though more expensive than non-organic, is healthier, tastier and is produced in ways that protect and preserve the environment. Consumer confidence in the quality of these foods is higher, because of the strict control and standards of production.

According to consumers surveyed some of the most important characteristics of organic food are its wholesomeness and high quality. A major barrier to the development of organic food market in Bulgaria is the high cost followed by lack of consumer awareness, lesser availability of organic products in the food web, short shelf life, etc.

#### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

For the purpose of this analysis a question naire was developed that involves fundamental questions about the motives and barrier saffecting the demand and consumption of organic food.

The survey polled 128 recipients of different age groups; the core was between 20 and 30 years old. Our focus was on young consumers of organic food whose opinions and attitudes are crucial for the increase of demand and consumption of organic products in Bulgaria.

The method of interview was used to define more accurately the data and information. The survey was conducted during the period from May 2016 to October 2016. The statistical package SPSS 13.0 and Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, Power Point) were used for data analysis.

#### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

At this stage, the information available for organic food in Bulgaria is insufficient. The practice is in sore need of extensive theoretical and practical research. All this requires an in-depth analysis of the existing conditions and problems associated with the production and marketing of organic products in the country.

The study emphasizes the following points:

- Creating aprofile oforganic food consumer;
- Consideration of the main motives and barriers to purchase;
- Establishing the level of consumers'awareness;
- Establishing thelevel of satisfaction, as well as the attitudes and expectations in the process of purchasing organic foods.

The data in table 1 show some of the main characteristics of respondents.

**Таблица 1. Демографска характеристика на респондентите**  
**Table1. Demographic characteristics of respondents**

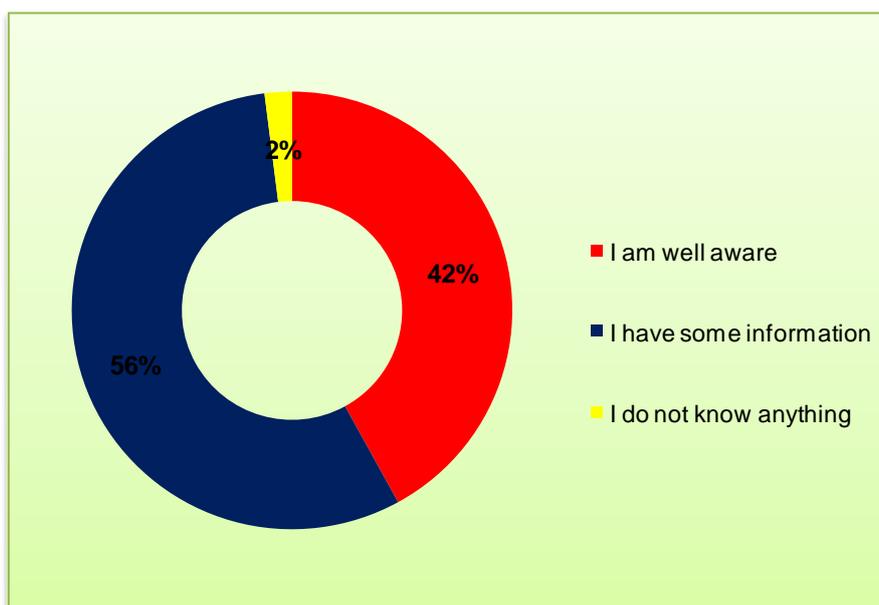
|                      |                | Frequency | %  |
|----------------------|----------------|-----------|----|
| Gender               | Men            | 68        | 54 |
|                      | Women          | 58        | 46 |
| Age                  | 20             | 3         | 2  |
|                      | 20-25          | 49        | 39 |
|                      | 26-30          | 28        | 22 |
|                      | 30-35          | 21        | 17 |
|                      | >35            | 25        | 20 |
| Education            | secondary      | 55        | 44 |
|                      | Bachelor       | 37        | 29 |
|                      | Master         | 21        | 17 |
|                      | Doctor         | 13        | 10 |
| Income per month     | Without income | 25        | 20 |
|                      | <500           | 30        | 24 |
|                      | >500           | 71        | 56 |
| Food costs/per month | <100           | 15        | 12 |
|                      | 100-300        | 86        | 68 |
|                      | 300-500        | 15        | 12 |
|                      | >500           | 10        | 8  |

In terms of the gender, there is a minimum percentage difference in favour of men. For the purposes of the study, it is essential to follow the views of both genders together and separately. The age pattern indicates that the major share of respondents were young people aged between 20 and 30 years. As consumers of organic food, they are bearers of a new attitude towards food quality and formation of healthy eating habits.

The main group of respondents (44%) had secondary education, but this can be explained by the relatively low age limit of the group. However, the views of respondents with a bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees were also taken into account in the survey. Although the main group consisted of relatively young people, most of them (56%) received income above BGN 500 per month allowing them to search and use better quality food. This is evidenced by the last column in the study, which shows the average cost for food of the respondents. The majority of them (68%) stated that they typically spent between BGN 100 and 300 per month.

The level of awareness is of crucial significance for the analysis of demand and consumption of organic food (Figure 1). Survey data showed that a very small proportion of respondents (2%) had no information about organic food. However, more than 40% were well aware of their advantages. A major proportion of respondents (56%) said they had no further information regarding the manufacture and supply of high quality and healthy organic food. The conclusion is that the

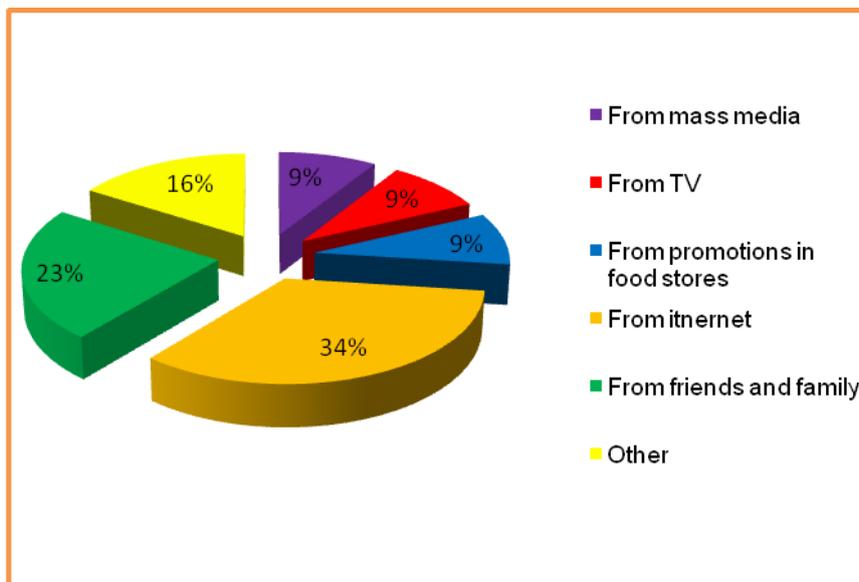
information available for organic food is still not sufficient and the data are mainly from foreign sources. Official statistics are very few, but in fact there is a dire need of theoretical and practical studies.



**Фиг. 1.** Ниво на информираност за биологичните храни  
**Fig. 1.** Level of knowledge about organic food

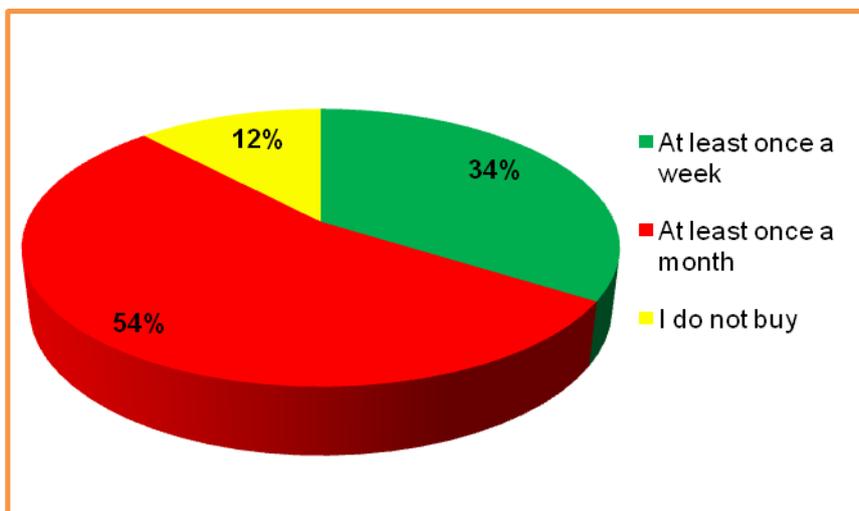
Here, the question of the need to promote the benefits of organic food arises again. (Figure 2). This study showed that a major proportion of respondents (34%) were informed by the Internet. Rapid technological and social networks in recent years are a major factor in the dissemination of information. Younger respondents are likely and able to get informed mainly through social networks. This also applies to the knowledge about the benefits of organic food. No small part of respondents (23%) learned about organic food from relatives, friends and colleagues, which indicates that information from "word of mouth" is still an important factor in the diffusion of information. About 16% of respondents' knowledge about organic food came from other sources: specialist in personal contacts, manufacturers, specialized literature, exhibitions and more.

Different media and promotions in retail outlets, as main channels of information, showed the lowest share (both 9%). The use of mass information and advertising campaigns is of particular importance for the development of organic food market. That will increase the level of awareness and knowledge of the potential consumer, which in turn is a precondition for an increase in the market share of organic food.



**Фиг. 2.** Основни канали на информираност относно биологичните храни  
**Fig. 2.** Main information channels regarding organic food

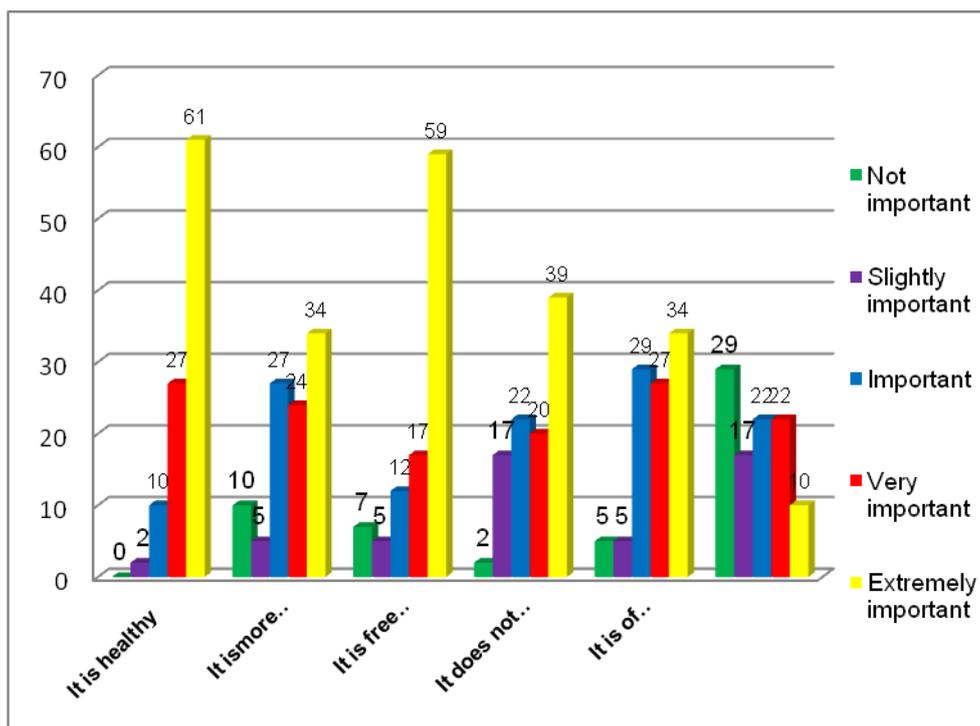
The level of awareness is important for the frequency of demand and purchase of organic food (Figure 3).



**Фиг. 3.** Честота на покупката на биологични храни  
**Fig. 3.** Frequency of purchase of organic food

The study established that more than half of respondents (54%) bought organic food only once a week, which is not enough. At the same time 12% of respondents did not buy organic food. That confirms the need to develop more and better information and advertising strategies. They in turn would stimulate larger groups of consumers to seek and demand from manufacturers a variety of organic food products. It calls for study of the main motives that stimulate consumers to make a decision and realize the purchase.

For 61% of respondents the main reason for the preference of organic food was the fact that it was healthy (Figure 4). Almost as many (59%), stated that the fact it was GMO-free was extremely important. For 39% of the respondents, it was essential that the cultivation and supply of organic food helped protect the environment. A relatively large number of respondents also mentioned its quality and taste as an important reason for their preference. This shows that consumers of organic food buy it to satisfy their own needs for tasty, quality and healthy food, rather than to demonstrate prestige in society.

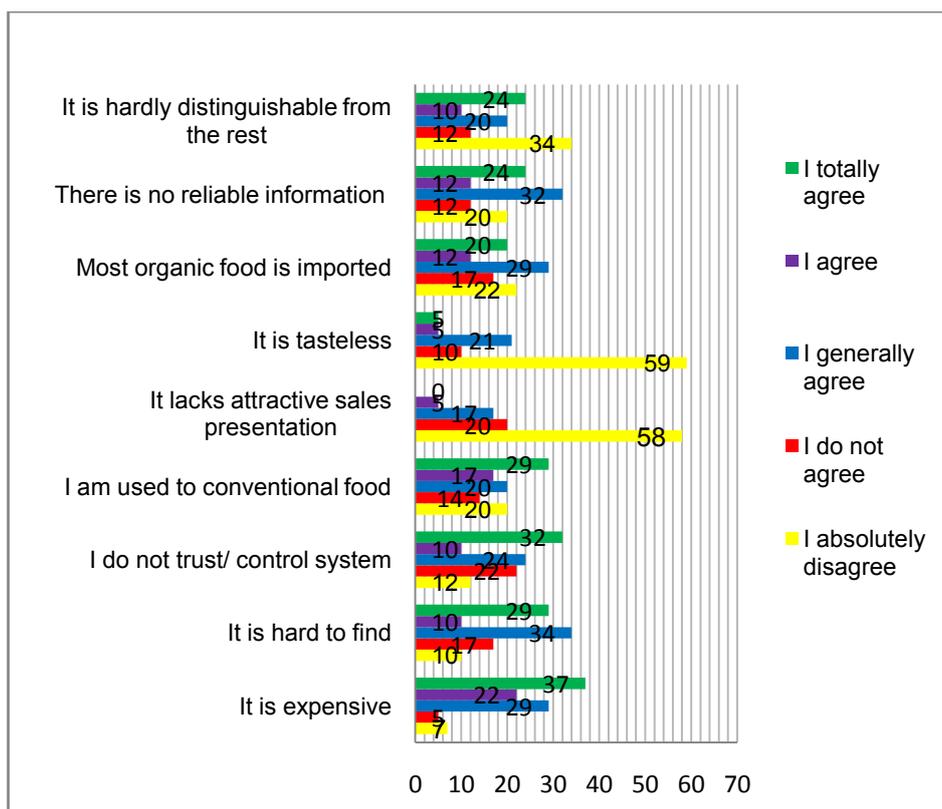


**Фиг. 4.** Основни мотиви за купуване на биологични храни  
**Fig. 4.** Main reasons for purchase of organic food

Although the consumption of organic food in Bulgaria has been increasing in recent years, we can point out some negatives which still hamper its demand by

a number of consumers (Figure 5). One of the main reasons indicated in this study, is its higher price. Yet, for a particular group of consumers, organic food is beyond their family budget. Another major reason stated by the respondents is the reduced food control, hence the lack of confidence in its quality. This may prove to be a particularly significant problem for the future development of organic food and the increase in its consumption unless the responsible authorities impose a reliable control system. In this way the consumer confidence would be improved, which could also guarantee greater demand for organic food.

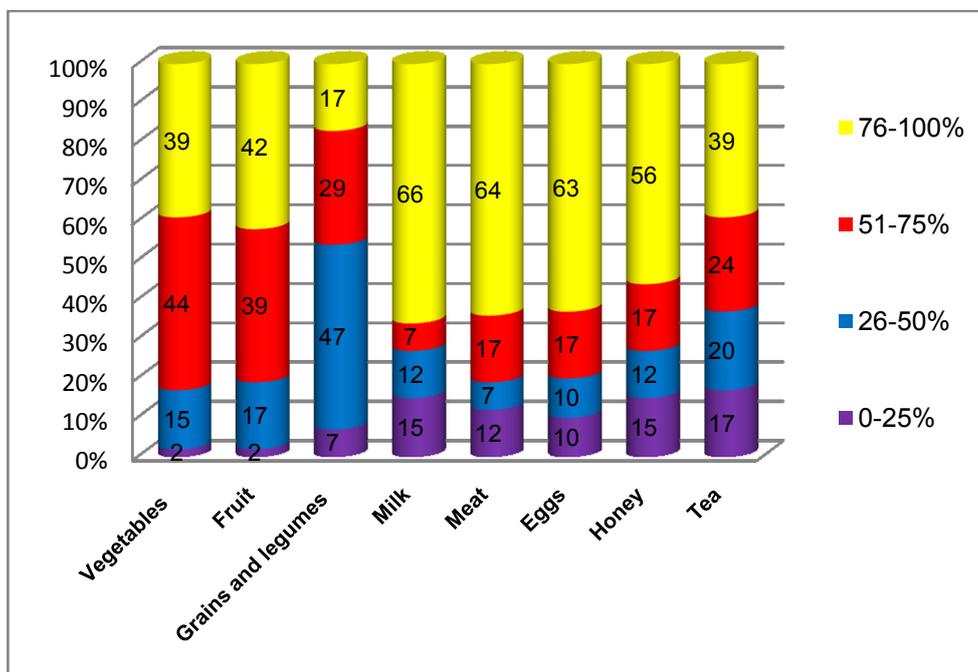
This is where we should mention a few other reasons which are an obstacle for the faster penetration of organic food in our daily lives. 29% of the respondents stated they used non-organic food out of habit. An equal number of them pointed out as a main reason the fact that organic food was still hard to find in commercial stores. However, a particularly high percentage of the respondents absolutely disagreed that organic food had unattractive appearance and was tasteless.



**Фиг. 5. Основни причини за малкото търсене на биологични храни**  
**Fig. 5. Main reasons for the low demand of organic food**

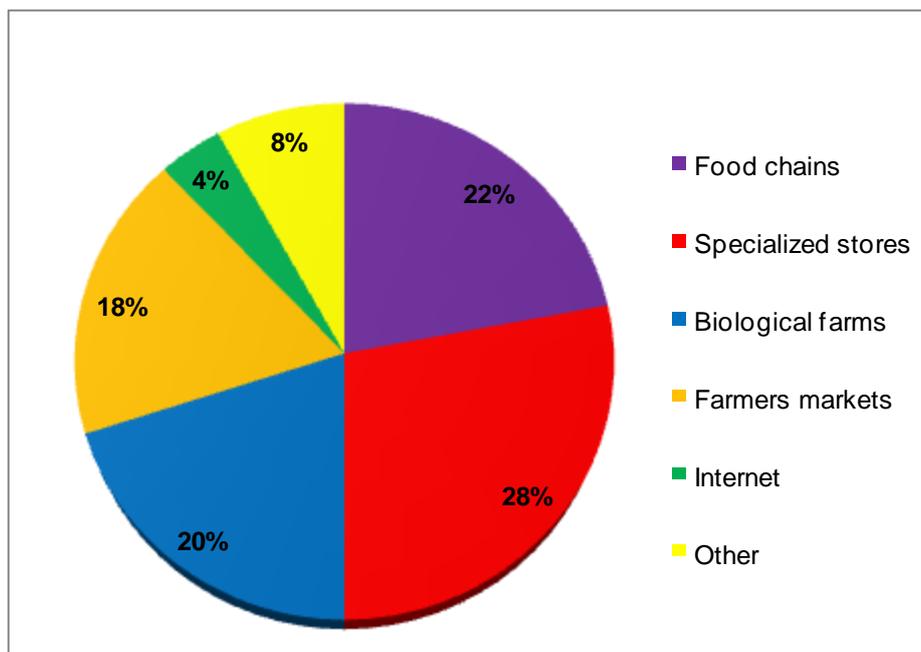
The data from the study showed that the frequency of purchase of organic food in Bulgaria is still very low. This is partly due to the very limited assortment range. The most frequently purchased organic food, mentioned by respondents, was milk, meat and honey (over 60%) (Figure 6). Fruit, vegetables and tea (about 40%) were also important for the consumers of organic food. The types of organic food indicated above by the respondents constitute the product structure of organic food available on the Bulgarian market. As a result of the limitation of the proposed range, it is difficult to conclude that the current distribution is a result of specific consumer preferences. Rather, it is due to the market structure existing at the time of the survey, characterized by limited availability and accessibility to organic products.

The most preferred shopping sites for buying organic food, according to the respondents, were specialized shops for healthy and organic food (28%), followed by the hypermarkets and the supermarkets (Figure 7). A very important and promising food channel for organic products is the direct one. A large majority of the respondents preferred to buy organic food directly from the manufacturers – from the farm and/or open markets for producers. Thus, the consumers can personally check the origin of the desired product, and also can obtain further information on its qualities and properties. A similar system builds confidence in the buyer and strengthens the producer – consumer relationship.



**Фиг. 6.** Процент на закупени органични храни  
**Fig. 6.** Percentage of purchased organic food





**Фиг. 7.** Предпочитани канали за закупуване на органични храни  
**Fig. 7.** Favourite channels to purchase organic food

### CONCLUSIONS

1. Consumers' attitudes and preferences, willingness to purchase and the level of satisfaction are crucial for the development of marketing approaches and strategies related to supply and demand of organic food. There is a link between the frequency of purchases and income level – the main part of the purchasing is done by consumers with high incomes.

2. Consumers appreciate Bulgarian organic food – they prefer these products since they meet consumers' own needs for delicious, quality and healthy food.

3. The limited distribution of organic products, the lack of specialized shops and affordable sources of information are barriers hindering the consumption of organic products. The main distribution channels are specialized shops for healthy and organic food and hypermarket chains. Through another channel – direct delivery, customers can see for themselves the origin of the product and obtain further information on its qualities and properties.

4. The high consumer price of organic products is one of the main barriers to market expansion and contraction of organic food consumption.

5. Insufficient consumer awareness of organic food is a serious obstacle for organic food consumption.

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