ANALYSIS OF GERMAN WINE CONSUMERS' PREFERENCES FOR ORGANIC VS NON-ORGANIC WINES

Gergely Szolnoki & Katharina Hauck
Geisenheim University, Geisenheim / Germany

Organic food has been playing a crucial role in everyday life of consumers for some years. All kinds of food stores recognised this trend and reacted to the increasing demand for organic products. The wine industry seems to be affected by this development, too. However, this raises the question of whether the wine industry is able to attract consumers with organic wines to the same extent as the meat-, dairy-, and vegetable- or fruit industry.

The literature review shows a very heterogeneous picture regarding consumer behaviour and preferences for organic wine. The main motives for buying organic food are altruistic: environmental protection and animal welfare. They are faced with a large number of purchase barriers that prevent consumers from buying organic food. Purchase barriers can be the higher price level, an inferior taste, little knowledge about and the lack of familiarity with organic food. Consumers with a strong environmental orientation show a greater willingness to buy organic wine (Brugarolas Mollá-bauzá et al. 2005; Barber et al. 2009) and are more likely to pay a price premium (Olsen et al. 2011; Zander and Janssen 2012). Consumers of organic food often do not consider buying organic wine; they rather buy the conventional alternative (Remaud et al. 2008). Furthermore, some consumers perceive wine as a natural product in general and thus do not have the same positive differentiation when buying wine as an organic alternative, as they have with other foods (Sirieix and Remaud 2010). As Lockshin and Corsi (2012) concluded, the importance of organic wine is present but strongly heterogeneous and restricted. In this study, we surveyed German wine drinkers to investigate the acceptance of organic wines, to display the differences between organic and non-organic wine drinkers and to understand the reasons, why non-organic wine drinkers chose only conventional wines.

In order to analyse the preference of wine consumers for organic wines, a representative survey of 2,000 respondents in Germany was conducted. Organic and non-organic wine consumers were analysed, compared and described in detail as well as segmented by factors as gender, age and social class.

Regarding organic products, we can conclude that more than one-third of German wine consumers frequently buy fresh fruits and vegetables with organic labels, while organic milk and dairy products have a share of 27%. Organic wine, on the other hand, is regularly being purchased by only 3% of the German wine drinkers. The analysis of consumption frequencies reveals that organic wines are still niche products. The analysis of consumption frequencies reveals that organic wines are still niche products. Merely 4% of the wine drinkers purchase organic wine at least once a month, 25% at least once a year and approximately 75% do not buy organic wine at all.

Based on these results, we assume that a certain share of the estimated total consumption of approximately 1 million hectolitres organic wines in Germany is being purchased unintentionally. This underlines the results of Corsi and Strøm, (2013) and Schmit et al. (2013) who stated that the attribute organic wine is not the key driver for buying wine.

By describing organic and non-organic wine drinkers, it became clear, that intentionally organic wine drinkers – those who purchase organic wine at least occasionally – belong to a special segment. They differ mainly in their social level, wine drinking frequency and attitude towards other organic products. The results indicate that wine consumers with higher education and higher income combined with an above average wine consumption are more likely to buy organic wines. In addition, this special segment generally has a higher intention to buy organic food which confirms the result of other studies by Brugarolas Mollá-bauzá et al. (2005), Barber et al. (2009) and Zander and Janssen (2012).

The fact, however, that the share of non-organic wine drinkers is that high (73%), is at the same time a huge chance for organic wine producers. Assuming that organic food consumption will increase in the next years, we predict that also organic wine will benefit from this positive development. Therefore, all these consumers can be defined as potential organic wine drinkers in the future, provided that the organic wine industry gets detailed information about these consumers in order to develop a communication strategy for the future since lack of knowledge seems to be the main reason for not purchasing organic wines. To deliver this information, we suggest using qualitative survey methods such as individual interviews or focus group discussions. In this way, a much broader and deeper understanding of attitudes towards organic wines and the reasons for not buying organic wines can be achieved.