



Consumer perceptions and disclosure preferences regarding post-harvest additives

Introduction

Applications of edible coatings (regulated as food additives) can extend the quality and shelf-life of fresh fruits and vegetables and as such contribute to achieving sustainability goals (e.g. food waste reduction). Little is known about how consumers perceive such additives, and whether and how they want to be informed about the use of post-harvest additives on the produce they purchase and consume.

Aim

The two main aims of this research project were to investigate:

- 1) European consumers' awareness, knowledge and attitudes with regard to the use of post-harvest additives on fresh fruits and vegetables;
- 2) European consumers' expectations, needs and preferences regarding disclosure of post-harvest additives.

Methods

The project consisted of two studies. First, six focus group discussions were executed among Dutch consumers to explore the topic and obtain in-depth insights. Next, to validate and further extend the focus group findings, an online survey was developed and executed among consumers in The Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Spain and France (N~1000 per country).

Conclusion

In order to meet European consumers' need for transparency, while taking into account their limited knowledge of food additives and the lack of time and motivation to educate themselves in this respect, it is recommended to:

- always disclose the use of post-harvest additives;
- use concise information focusing on the use purpose of post-harvest additives rather than mere ingredient or E-number declarations;
- explore alternative disclosure strategies.

Main findings

- European consumers have low awareness of, and little knowledge about, post-harvest additives.
- The method in which consumers are informed about post-harvest additives strongly influences their perceptions.
- Existing disclosure methods (ingredient names, E-numbers) are perceived as unclear, and negatively affect consumer attitudes toward post-harvest additive use on fresh fruit and vegetables.
- Most consumers are positive toward post-harvest additives, once they are informed about their **use purpose**, environmental **benefits** and **origin** (at least in the case of plant-derived edible coatings).
- European consumers find transparency regarding post-harvest additives essential, but take little effort in learning more about the foods and ingredients they purchase and consume.

Information

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