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## **ATTITUDES TOWARD GREEN FOOD PURCHASE AMONG STUDENTS: EVIDENCE FROM EASTERN CROATIA**

### **ABSTRACT**

*Every day consumers around the globe are making a shift toward healthier and more environmentally conscious lives, especially concerning their food preferences. Following this trend, many food producers focus their efforts on targeting prospective green food buyers in the best possible way. To do that, they need to have a deep understanding of the main factors that drive the decision to buy green food. Considering a high growth potential of Eastern Croatia in terms of production and distribution of green food products, this topic is of the utmost importance for all stakeholders interested in sustainable food industries. This is further emphasized by the fact that consuming locally grown and processed food is particularly important issue when green food is concerned.*

*The main purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between personal attitudes and intentions to buy green food products. Personal attitudes are widely acknowledged as an influential factor in explaining the reasons for green food purchasing decision. This paper moves a step forward from previous research and investigates specific types of attitudes that facilitate green food purchases. The study is based on the outcomes of a questionnaire completed by a sample of 181 undergraduate and graduate students at the Faculty of Economics in Osijek. Results from regression analysis reveal significant positive relationship between green food purchase intention and personal attitudes related to health consciousness, environmental protection and green food origins. Finally, implications for policy makers, green food producers as well as companies and marketers engaged in the promotion and commercialization of green food products are discussed.*

**Keywords:** green food, intentions, attitudes, students, Eastern Croatia

# STAVOVI STUDENATA PREMA KUPNJI EKOLOŠKIH PREHRAMBENIH PROIZVODA: SPOZNAJE IZ ISTOČNE HRVATSKE

## SAŽETAK

*U novije vrijeme na globalnoj razini moguće je zamijetiti sve češće preusmjeravanje potrošača prema zdravijem i ekološki osviještenijem načinu života, a što se posebice odražava na njihov odabir prehrambenih proizvoda. Utemeljeno na ovom trendu, mnogi proizvođači prehrambenih proizvoda usmjeravaju svoje napore na ciljanje potencijalnih kupaca ekoloških prehrambenih proizvoda. Pri tome je od izuzetne važnosti dubinsko razumijevanje temeljnih faktora koji usmjeravaju odluku o kupovini ekoloških prehrambenih proizvoda. Uzimajući u obzir veliki potencijal Istočne Hrvatske u smislu proizvodnje i distribucije ekoloških prehrambenih proizvoda, ova tema od iznimne je važnosti za sve dionike vezane uz održivu proizvodnju hrane. Ovo je dodatno naglašeno činjenicom da je konzumiranje lokalno uzgojenih i prerađenih prehrambenih proizvoda izuzetno važno pitanje kada je riječ o ekološkim prehrambenim proizvodima.*

*Temeljna svrha ovog istraživanja je utvrditi odnose između osobnih stavova i namjera kupnje ekoloških prehrambenih proizvoda. Osobni stavovi široko su priznati kao utjecajni faktor u objašnjavanju razloga za donošenje odluke o kupnji ekološkog prehrambenog proizvoda. Ovaj rad odlazi korak dalje u odnosu na prethodna istraživanja te istražuje specifične vrste stavova koji dovode do kupnje ekoloških prehrambenih proizvoda. Ovo istraživanje utemeljeno je na podacima prikupljenim putem upitnika provedenog na uzorku od 181 studenta preddiplomskog i diplomskog studija na Ekonomskom fakultetu u Osijeku. Rezultati provedene regresijske analize otkrivaju signifikantnu pozitivnu vezu između namjere kupnje ekoloških prehrambenih proizvoda i osobnih stavova koji se odnose na zdravstvenu osviještenost, zaštitu okoliša i podrijetlo (lokalni karakter) ekoloških prehrambenih proizvoda. Također, u radu se raspravlja i o implikacijama za donositelje strateških političkih odluka, proizvođače ekoloških prehrambenih proizvoda kao i za sve gospodarske subjekte i marketere uključene u process promocije i komercijalizacije ekoloških prehrambenih proizvoda.*

**Ključne riječi:** ekološki prehrambeni proizvodi, namjere, stavovi, studenti, Istočna Hrvatska.

## **1. Introduction**

Every day consumers around the globe are making a shift toward healthier and more environmentally conscious lives, especially concerning their food preferences. It is expected that this trend will only be strengthened in the future (Salleh et al., 2010) under the influence of consumers' increased and continuously growing interest in nutrition, health, and environmental protection (Brčić-Stipčević, Petljak, Guszak, 2013; Gil, Gracia, Sánchez, 2000), in addition to the influence of increased confidence of consumers based on the certification and improvement of the availability of these products through their increasing penetration into standard channels of distribution. In line with that, many food producers focus their efforts on targeting prospective green food buyers in the best possible way.

Of all the forms of environmentally-oriented consumer behavior in Croatia, the most accepted and widespread is precisely the behavior related to the purchase of green food products, and this kind of behavior has recently become one of the main research focuses for Croatian scientists from the different scientific disciplines. Another reason for this lies in the fact that the Republic of Croatia's strategic development directions are based on factors that are closely related with the production of healthy food and the preservation of the environment. This is particularly true in Eastern Croatia, since here is the highest number of areas registered for eco-agriculture. It could be argued that eco-agriculture is one of the dominant features of Eastern Croatia.

Considering a high growth potential of Eastern Croatia in terms of production and distribution of green food products, this topic is of the utmost importance for all stakeholders interested in sustainable food industries. This is further emphasized by the fact that consuming locally grown and processed food is particularly important issue when green food is concerned. On the other hand, the existing literature does not provide sufficient information and knowledge about consumers, necessary for development of marketing strategies in this growing market. (Brčić-Stipčević, Petljak, Guszak, 2013). In order to achieve positive synergy of different stakeholders and to steer their actions in the right direction, they need to have a deep understanding of the main factors that drive the decision to buy green food.

Previous research in Croatia provides some insight into the level of environmental awareness of consumers (Ham, 2009) and consumers' attitudes towards environmental products (Krupka, Kelečić, 2011), or, more specifically, into attitudes related to the purchase of environmentally friendly food products (Brčić-Stipčević, Petljak, 2011; Štefanić, Štefanić, Haas, 2001; Renko, Bošnjak, 2009). The present research attempts to add knowledge on facts important for promoting and fostering purchases of green food. This paper examines the relationship between personal attitudes and intentions to buy green food products. Personal attitudes are widely acknowledged as an influential factor in explaining the reasons for green food purchasing decision.

## **2. Personal Attitudes**

Personal attitude is usually defined as permanent mental or neural willingness gained from the experience, making the directive or dynamic influence on an individual's response to objects and situations that he comes into contact with (Allport, 1935). Psychological attitude structure consists of three components: cognitive, affective and conative. The cognitive component consists of what we think about someone or something (regardless we are right or not). The

affective component consists of our feelings toward someone or something, while third component (conative) represents the intention to act in a certain way and is sometimes called the behavioral component (Fraj, Martinez, 2007, 27). We can also say that the first two components form and direct the third (behavioral) component (Stone, Barnes, Montgomery, 1995, 597). In other words, cognitive component includes the opinions, beliefs, and ideas about the object of the attitude, emotional refers to the feelings that are associated with the object of the attitude, and behavioral consists of the tendency or willingness to act in relation to the object of the attitude.

Personal attitudes of individuals towards environmentally-oriented behavior are based on positive or negative evaluation of outcomes of the observed behavior (Ajzen, Fishbein, 1975). When it comes to individuals' attitude formation, most contemporary psychologists take the cognitive approach. The focus on the cognitive component in most research stems from early research that showed significant influence of knowledge and awareness on attitudes toward environment. That early research assumes that knowledge affects attitudes and attitudes affect behavior. That is the so-called linear model. However, it should be stated that there is no consensus on that matter. Some studies show only limited influence of cognitive components like for example, the knowledge about environment, while demonstrating the significant influence of affective components on making environmentally oriented purchasing decisions. (Hartmann, Apaolaza Ibáñez, Forcada Sainz, 2005, 12). In accordance with that is also the Fishbein and Ajzen's theory of attitudes and values (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1975) according to which an attitude is formed based on the beliefs that an individual has about a particular object (another person, object, place, or event) and is represented by attributes that are tied with the observed object. In the case of the attitude towards a certain behavior, each belief links the behavior with a specific outcome, consequence, or some other attribute (such as the cost of undertaking a specific behavior). Since each attribute is evaluated in advance as positive or negative (emotional component of the attitude), the behavior is therefore automatically perceived as desirable (if it has predominantly positive outcomes) or undesirable (if it is linked with the predominantly negative outcomes).

Chan and Lau (2000) confirmed in their study that even people with little knowledge on environmental issues can demonstrate a strong emotional connection toward environment. Also they proved that knowledge and emotional variables have independent influence on certain behavior and it is therefore justifiable to treat them as independent. The relationship between attitude and intention to perform a certain behavior is confirmed to be stronger than the relationship between intentions and actual behavior (Kim, Hunter, 1993), which is expected, considering that the relationship of intentions and behavior is under the powerful influence of external factors.

Research indicates that measures of specific attitudes (e.g., judgments about products or behaviors) rather than general measures of environmental concern (e.g., judgments about environmental problems) are likely to manifest in environmental behavior (Tanner, Wölfling Kast, 2003). According to Newhouse (1990), inconsistency between attitudes and behavior occurs most frequently when measurement of general attitudes is applied for predicting the specific (concrete) behaviors. Namely, the variables that measure attitudes toward specific behaviors (attitudes toward activities) are better predictors of environmentally oriented behavior than those that measure general attitudes towards environment (Bodur, Sarigöllü, 2005, 504). It is necessary to take into consideration the possibility that attitudes of consumers toward different environmental issues as well as toward different environmental behaviors can vary.

## **2.1. Attitudes toward Buying Green Food**

Foods which are safe to use, have fine quality, are nutritious, take into account concerns for the welfare of animals and are grown and produced in line with the principles of sustainable development, are known as green food (Saleki, Seydsaleki, 2012). An individual's attitude towards consuming a product is one of the most important antecedents for predicting and explaining consumers' choices across products and services, including food products (Honkanen et al., 2006). Previous studies have associated organic food consumption with behavioral attitudes such as health consciousness, environmental consciousness, trust of organic food claims, desirability of organic food attributes such as taste, texture, freshness (Voon et al., 2011, Salleh et al., 2010; Michaelidou, Hassan, 2008; First, Brozina, 2009) and other attitudes such as attitudes toward local origin of products, fair trade (Tanner, Wölfling Kast, 2003) and reference knowledge (Amran, Nee, 2012; Saleki, Seydsaleki, Rahimi, 2012).

Trust of organic food claims is a strong determinant of intention to consume due to the credence nature of organic food. Credence products are those for which consumers are not able to evaluate effectively as the benefits of consumption cannot be directly or immediately observed. Consequently, consumers may rely on product labeling, advertisements and certifications as signals of the trustworthiness of product claims. The extent to which these engender consumer trust will therefore influence the intention to consume organic food. (Voon et al., 2011). The lack of consumers' confidence in the credibility of environmental products and producers is often identified as one of the main barriers to increasing the purchase of ecological products in general (Kalafatis et al., 1999, 459)

Furthermore, the growing level of interest, awareness and knowledge about health and nutrition, and easier access to all information in this regard leads to increasing levels of so-called health awareness. Consequently it leads to greater willingness to adopt healthy lifestyles. As green food is generally believed to be more nutritious, healthier and safer than conventional food, it is likely that the health-conscious consumer will have positive attitudes towards green food which will drive the greater demand for this type of products. Accordingly, many studies found that health benefits are the main motives for buying green food products (Wier, Calverly, 2002; Roitner-Schobesberger et al., 2008). Salleh and his associates (2010) determined that health consciousness factor has more impact on customer purchase intention of organic food products rather than the environmental concern.

According to the research of Voon et al. (2011) health and environmental concerns together with trust of organic food claims and desirability of organic food attributes form Malaysian consumers' attitude towards organic food. The importance of health and environmental concerns reflect the growing affluence of consumers. The rising educational levels coupled with better access to worldwide communication and information channels have raised their awareness of health and environmental issues. Following Tanner and Wölfling Kast (2003), it is also important to consider the attitudes toward local origin of products.

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1. Sample**

The sample consisted of 181 undergraduate and graduate business students. Data were gathered using a questionnaire distributed in the classroom. Students who participated in the study were awarded additional points toward earning grade in respective class. However, it

was emphasized that their answers will not affect participation points. Out of the respondents, 25,8% were male students and 74,2% were female students with an average age of 22 years.

### 3.2. Instrument and Measurement

To explore the relationship between various types of attitudes and green food purchase intention, five main measurement scales were employed to capture an individual's attitudes toward health concerns, environmental protection, local origin of the green food products, and individual's trust toward information found on the product label of the green food items, as well as individual's intention to purchase green food product.

The authors adopted Tanner and Wölfling Kast (2003) measurement scales to gauge two constructs: 1) individual's attitude toward health concerns and the extent to which they take into account information about food ingredients when considering buying and consuming green food item; and 2) the importance of local origin to prospective green food buyers. Additionally, to measure an individual's trust toward information provided on the product label as well as their attitude toward environmental protection, the authors used same measurement scales as in Voon et al. (2011). The measure for purchase intention was modified based on Liñán, F., Chen, Y. W. (2009) scale used to assess entrepreneurial intentions. Each scale comprised a set of statements presented in Likert-type format with a five-point scale to capture the extent to which respondents agree or disagree with the statements in the questionnaire. Number of items included in each construct and basic reliability measures are provided in the Table 1.

Table 1. Reliability Measures of the Constructs

<i>Measurement scale</i>	<i>Number of items</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>Average inter-item correlation</i>
Purchase intention	5	13,22	4,789	0,924	0,712
Attitude toward health	4	12,79	3,787	0,852	0,592
Attitude toward environment	4	16,62	7,700	0,723	0,400
Attitude toward local origin	6	20,89	4,877	0,833	0,457
Attitude toward trust	4	13,91	3,252	0,848	0,583

All constructs have an adequate level of internal consistency measured by Cronbach's Alpha coefficient and average inter-item correlation.

### 4. Research Results

Results of Pearson Correlation are shown in Table 2. The table indicates the relationship between all four types of attitudes and intention to buy green food. Attitude toward health and attitude toward local origin are shown to have the strongest positive relationship with the purchase intention.

Table 2. Correlations Analysis (n = 181)

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Intention to buy green food</i>	
	<i>Pearson Correlation</i>	<i>Significance</i>
Attitude toward health	,410	,000*
Attitude toward environment	,272	,000*
Attitude toward local origin	,408	,000*
Attitude toward trust	,203	,006*

\* Correlation is significant at the 0,01 level (2-tailed)

Results obtained from the regression analysis are presented in Table 3. Based upon results, the predictive power of attitude toward health, environment and local origin is confirmed.

Table 3. Linear Regression Model

<i>Predictor variable</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>Significance</i>
Attitude toward health	,250	3,302	,001
Attitude toward environment	,203	2,694	,008
Attitude toward local origin	,239	3,526	,001
Attitude toward trust	,097	1,526	,129

a. Dependent variable: Intention to buy green food

Overall, the model explains 31% of variance. The findings strengthen the view that people concerned with their state of physical and mental well-being are more inclined to purchase green food. Furthermore, concerns about environmental pollution and presence of pesticides in the food can also induce people to switch their dietary to green and environmentally friendly food. Theoretically and practically relevant finding of this study relates to the importance that the youth attach to the local origin of food. Attitude toward local origin is shown to have statistically significant predictive power of purchase behavior among student population.

## 5. Implications and further research

From the research perspective, the measurement scales used in this study are for the first time applied on the population of students from Croatia. Relatively high indicators of internal reliability point to the potential of used measurement scales to be retested and further amended to create an instrument that will provide reliable and valid tool for assessing attitudes and intentions of people in Croatia.

When it comes to practical implications, the results of this research may serve as a useful input for producers and retailers of green food products in designing an optimal marketing strategy and marketing plan to market and promote green food product. They may also be useful for other social stakeholders involved in fostering and promoting more widespread consumption of green products and green consumer behavior in general, especially among young consumers. The fact that health considerations variable has certain influence on the intention for buying green food products (it is a predictor variable) suggests that health benefits of green food should be in the focus of marketing communications related to green food products. In order to stimulate the demand for green food products, the consumers should be educated on positive influence of ecological products on their health. Furthermore,

demand for these products can be increased by promoting additional motives, such as preference for domestically produced food since this variable also has the predictive power and a very strong correlation with the intention to buy. In other words, positive effects of marketing efforts can be achieved by focusing on locally produced products and by targeting health conscious consumers.

Consumers' trust in the credibility of green products and their attitudes toward environmental issues are also significantly correlated with intention to buy. However, the correlation is much weaker and there is no predictive power of trust variable. To achieve a significant influence on consumer behavior, it is still necessary to invest significant efforts into consumers' knowledge on genuine green products differentiation and their influence on environment.

Encouraging individuals to purchase green food products is undoubtedly a desirable social goal. Individuals can then, through their demand for a particular kind of product, focus production systems in the direction of environmentally friendly modes of production and a better supply of green food products. It is precisely this course of action we consider to be particularly important in terms of contribution to sustainable development of the Eastern Croatia.



## APPENDIX

### List of items included in the measurement scales

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Items</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Attitude toward health	It is important to me that food products contain no preservatives.	Tanner and Wölfling Kast (2003)
	I avoid products containing too much sugar.	
	When making purchases, I pay attention to whether the food products contain unhealthy substances.	
	Health issues play an important role for me when I make up my menus.	
Attitude toward environment	The government is not doing enough to help control pollution of the environment.	Voon et al. (2011)
	I am greatly concerned about the harm being done to plant and animal life by pollution.	
	Environmental pollution is not a serious issue. (reverse)	
	I am concerned about how food is processed.	
	It frightens me to think that much of the food I eat is contaminated with pesticides.	
Attitude toward local origin	It is important to me to support local farmers when making purchase.	Adapted from Tanner and Wölfling Kast (2003) and complemented with additional items.
	It is good to support domestic agriculture by buying regional products.	
	It is not important to me whether food products are grown locally or not. (reverse)	
	When considering food products, it is very important that they are produced in Croatia.	
	If there is a local product available, I will always choose local over imported product.	
	I will buy local food product even if the imported one can be bought at a discounted price.	
Attitude toward trust	I trust that those selling organic food are honest about the organic nature of their products.	Voon et al. (2011)
	I trust that local producers of organic food are practicing organic farming.	
	I trust the organic certification logo on organic food labels.	
	I trust the information on organic food labels.	
Intention to buy green food	I am willing to go out of my way to obtain green food products.	Adapted and modified from Liñán, F., Chen, Y. W. (2009)
	My personal goal is to consume as much green food products as possible.	
	I will make every effort to purchase green food products.	
	I have seriously thought of buying more green food products.	
	I have a firm intention to buy green food products in the future.	

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