NAUKI INŻYNIERSKIE I TECHNOLOGIE
Journal of Food and Engineering Sciences

Nauki Inżynierskie i Technologie
Journal of Food and Engineering Sciences
Year 2025, Vol. 41
ISSN 2449-9773
journals.ue.wroc.pl/niit

Consumer Knowledge of Organic Poultry Meat Foods. Survey Studies

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Quote as: Kęsiak, M., & Lesiów, T. (2025). Consumer Knowledge of Organic Poultry Meat Foods. Survey Studies. *Nauki Inżynierskie i Technologie. Journal of Food and Engineering Sciences*, *41*, 13-22.

DOI: 10.15611/nit.2025.41.02

JEL: Q19

Abstract

Aim: This study aimed to determine the level of consumers' knowledge of organic food from poultry meat.

Methodology: A survey was conducted in 2024 among 100 respondents.

Results: The respondents showed an average level of knowledge about the benefits of organic poultry. When making purchasing decisions, they were not always guided by certificates or organic labels and more often took into account the brand of the product, the localness of the source, and the health and taste qualities of the meat. Concerns about quality, safety, and environmental sustainability still challenge producers and distributors. The respondents often obtained information about organic food from the Internet, personal experience, and recommendations from family and friends.

Implications and recommendations: Education and consumer awareness, therefore, play a key role in shaping preferences and purchasing decisions. There is a need for further educational and informational activities, both on the part of producers and distributors, as well as academic and social institutions, to support the development of the organic poultry meat market and meet consumers' growing expectations.

Originality/value: It is the first time a survey has been concerned with poultry meat products, compared with literature surveys concerned with all organic foods.

Keywords: organic food, surveys, poultry meat

1. Introduction

With increasing importance given to health and the environment, organic food is gaining more and more importance. This is an area attracting attention of consumers seeking healthier alternatives, becoming a widely debated topic in the context of animal production ethics and social responsibility. In this context, poultry meat, as an essential part of the diet of many people worldwide, is becoming a focus, particularly regarding the ecological aspects of production and consumer knowledge about this type of food.

Satisfying human nutritional needs is a prerequisite for the proper functioning of the human body. Meeting these conditions further the physical and psychological development of the individual (Zalega & Szostak-Węgierek, 2013). Consumers' eating behaviour is inextricably linked to the choice of food items, dishes, purchasing, planning, preparation for consumption, and storage. Demographic changes, ageing populations, and the pandemic have influenced the modification of eating behaviour. Increased consumer interest in organic food has determined behavioural concepts and new trends in the food market, with the method of producing organic food that places as little burden on the environment as possible becoming crucial; this excludes monoculture crops, the application of synthetic fertilizers, and plant protection products (Kuczuk, 2022). By using crop rotation, natural fertilisers influence the quality of the food produced. The high quality of organic plant and animal products is determined by the following factors (Łukasiński & Pastuła, 2018):

- the environmental conditions of land crops,
- the environmental conditions of animal breeding,
- production methods and principles.

These factors do not pose a threat to the food produced, thus guaranteeing its quality. This is reflected in the system adopted and in force for producing and controlling organic plant and animal food. The control includes assessing the farm's and processing plant's environmental conditions, and concerns the implementation of the requirements of the organic way of food production, including the product's packaging and the way it is stored, processed, transported, and disposed of. Positive results of the inspection are a prerequisite for obtaining certification according to the criteria adopted and complying with Regulation (EU) No 848/2018 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2018 concerning organic production and labelling of organic products, in force from 1 January 2022 repealing the previous Council Regulation (EC) No. 834/2007 and the implementing and delegated regulations of the European Commission issued to this regulation (Litvinov, 2020; Regulation (EU) 2018/858 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2018)). The application of the regulation above is guaranteed by the Law of 23 June 2022 on organic farming and production, OJ. 20231235 (Ustawa z dnia 23 czerwca 2022 r.).

This regulation defines organic production and its main principles, including sustainable natural resource management, environmentally sound agricultural practices, animal welfare, and prohibiting genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Products certified as organic must be labelled accordingly (EU logo, code of the certifying body, and place of production of the agricultural raw materials, e.g. 'EU Agriculture' or 'Non-EU Agriculture'). The EU organic production logo combines two symbols: the EU flag and a leaf, symbolising nature and the idea of sustainability. Food and food products labelled with the logo guarantee that the product comes from the production of a certified organic farm, meets all the requirements of the control system, comes directly from the producer, and that at least 95% of the product's ingredients have been organically produced (Didkowska et al., 2017; Pietraś, 2018).

Several authors have conducted surveys analysing the attitudes of Polish and international consumers towards organic food, taking into account factors, such as environmental awareness, purchase motivations, price, availability, frequency of purchase, and preferences regarding the quality, safety and health effects of organic products (Hermaniuk, 2018; Iqbal et. al, 2021; Kamboj et al., 2023; Nestorowicz, 2018; Miecznikowska-Jerzak, 2022).

For example, Eyinade et al. (2021) listed factors influencing the willingness to consume organic food, such as human health, food safety, and the desire to pay a higher price for organic products as the top factors. They also pointed to the need to increase awareness and knowledge among consumers about the health benefits of eating organic food. In another study of 294 respondents in India, Kamboj et al.

(2023) found that consumers' intentions to purchase organic food were influenced by functional quality, social norms, consumer innovation, and trust in organic origin. Health benefits, convenience and availability, and knowledge about organic products also determine their choices.

It is well known that organic chicken meat contains more n-3 essential fatty acids (EFAs) (Çapan & Bağdatli, 2021; Cömert et al., 2016; Średnicka-Tober et al., 2016). Chicken breast muscles are characterised by a higher fat content, thigh muscles a higher protein content, and the meat contains more minerals than conventionally reared muscles and meat (Çapan & Bağdatli, 2021). According to Cömert et al. (2016), carcass, breast and thigh muscle weight, and abdominal fat are higher in organically reared chickens compared to conventionally reared chickens; yet according to Abdullah & Hulánková (2021), the carcasses of organically reared chickens have a comparable meat content but a lower breast muscle mass than those of conventionally reared chickens. The sensory evaluation of meat from organically reared chickens is higher than from those conventionally reared (Abdullah & Hulánková, 2021). No information on consumer attitudes towards selected organic products, e.g. poultry meat, was found in the available literature. This study aimed to determine the level of consumers' knowledge of organic food made from poultry meat.

2. Materials and Methods

A proprietary survey questionnaire was prepared, consisting of four metric questions and 14 questions about respondents'' preferences, opinions, and knowledge of organic food made from poultry meat.

The survey was conducted in 2024 via electronic Google Forms among 100 respondents. Assuming a 20% proportion of the distinguished characteristic in the population under study, an estimation error of 8%, and a 95% confidence level (for which u_α is 1.96), the minimum random sample size was 96 individuals. The value was calculated from the following equation (Kaczmarczyk, 2011):

$$n = \frac{u_\alpha^2(p(1-p))}{e^2}$$

where n – minimum sample size, p – proportion of the population (0.20), e – 8% estimation error, u_α – multiple standard error of the mean (in the tables, 1.96).

$$n = 1.962\ (0.2 \times 0.8)/0.082 \quad n = 0.614656/0.0064 \quad n = 96$$

The surveys were voluntary, with participation from all social groups of varying economic status, education level, and food preferences. Metric data are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Metric data of the surveyed respondents

Gender		Female	Male	Total
Age	Under 18 years	–	1	1
	18-24	8	2	10
	25-34	25	9	34
	35-44	35	12	47
	45-54	4	2	6
	55 and over	1	1	2
Place of residence	Rural	24	–	24
	City up 50 000	20	12	32
	City to 100 000	8	3	11
	City to 500 000	9	5	14
	City over 500 000	12	7	19
Education	Secondary	35	14	49
	Higher	38	13	51
Specialised training	In food technology	13	6	19
	I do not have	60	21	81
Poultry meat consumption	Yes	70	24	94
	No	3	3	6

Source: own study.

In the studied group, women accounted for 73% of the respondents, while men for 27% (see Table 1). The age groups 35-44 and 25-34 were the most represented (47% and 34%) among both men and women; 10% were 18-24 year-olds, 6% were 45-54 year-olds, and 2% were over 55. The largest group (36%) were women with higher education living in a city of between 100,000 and over 500,000 inhabitants, while men with higher education made up a group of 13% living in a city of up to 50,000 inhabitants; 19% of the respondents declared a specialist education in food technology. Secondary education was declared by 49% of the group, including 35% of women and 14% of men.

For statistical analysis the authors used Pearson's χ^2 test, available in MS Excel 2010, taking into account the accepted significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ (Oziembłowski et al., 2022; Słowińska, 2019).

3. Analysis of Results and Discussion

It was found that consumers' awareness and knowledge of the differences in poultry-rearing methods was at an average level. In the respondents' opinion, free-range rearing was the most bird-friendly option 64%, followed by organic rearing 22% and barn rearing 8%; cage management was indicated by 6% of the respondents (women from large urban areas).

The respondents gave their opinions on how they perceived organic poultry rearing, and 63% thought that the organic poultry rearing method provides better living conditions and animal welfare than the conventional poultry rearing method indicated by 37%, whilst according to 66% of the consumers surveyed, organic poultry farming is less environmentally harmful as it poses less of a threat to the climate, whilst 34% felt that it did not have a greater impact on the environment, and therefore it did not matter which poultry farming method was used.

The respondents pointed to the differences between organic and conventional farming and the resulting products (multiple choice question, $n = 256$), where the greatest differences were in animal nutrition (23.1%), in the use of hormones and antibiotics (19.5%), the living conditions of the birds (19.5%), the microbiological safety of the food (11.3%) and the impact on the environment (10.6%) and the taste and quality of the products (11.7%). In contrast, 3.9% did not see a fundamental difference between organic and conventional livestock farming or were unsure and did not have the knowledge to give a precise answer, whereas one person (0.4% of the respondents) did not understand the question.

The frequency with which the respondents buy organic food was dominated by the answers "rarely" (32%), "sometimes" (28%), and "often" (19%). Others answered that they never buy such food (16%), and only 5% declared that they always do. Although more women purchase organic food (73%) compared to men (27%), no relationship ($p > 0.05$) was found with the chi-square test between gender and frequency of buying organic food. Similarly, no significant differences were found between education, residence, or purchase frequency.

The next section of the survey focused on the factors influencing the respondents' purchase of organic meat, what drives them to buy it, and what is most important to them in this process.

When choosing poultry meat, the respondents were primarily guided by the producer's brand (54%) and purchased meat from favourite retail chains (21%) or local shops, from local producers/carriers (33%). An essential economic argument was the product's unit price, as indicated by 24% of the consumers, whilst one-fifth, i.e. 19% stated that they made purchases without analysing their needs and preferences and did not focus on the product's specific qualities. On the other hand, 1% of the respondents purchasing poultry meat were influenced by the expiry date of organic meat – this meat was often discounted due to its short shelf life. Only 1% of the respondents travelled to the farm to check the animal welfare, the rearing method, and the general sanitary and epidemiological status of the products on offer before deciding to buy organic meat. One person (1%) did not understand the question. Łuczka-Bakuła (2011), in a survey conducted in five specialist shops with organic food in

Poznań (395 consumers of organic food), found that the respondents mainly chose specialist shops (77.2%), or purchased directly from agricultural producers (farms, 46.1%), also indicating a growing interest in the ranges offered by supermarkets (68.1%). Therefore, this study showed that the respondents purchased organic poultry meat from selected retail chains (21%), or local shops supplied by local entrepreneurs/carriers (33%).

The respondents were also asked for their opinion on what was most important when purchasing poultry meat (see Table 2). In their purchasing decisions, 46% chose poultry meat with the following certifications: organic/bio, non-GMO label (30%), a label on the farmer's commitment to sustainability (3%), and an animal welfare label as the main criterion indicating the maintenance of a high standard of poultry meat quality (12%). The remaining respondents (54%) made purchases without any additional information about the product and its quality guiding their decisions.

Table 2. Variation in responses to the question 'What is most important to you when buying poultry meat?' according to education (*n* = 100)

Responses		Education		Total	Significance of differences
		Secondary	Higher		
Eco-label and sustainability commitment certificate	number	17 and 2 = 19	13 and 1 = 14	33	0.32439
	%	57.6%	42.2%	10.0%	
Animal welfare certificates/labels	number	8	5	13	0.365814
	%	61.5%	38.5%	100.0%	
I am not guided by any labels, I just buy	number	22	32	54	0.224709
	%	40.7%	59.3%	100.0%	
Total	number	49	51	100	
	%	49.0%	51.0%	100.0%	
Significance of differences		0.1956			

Source: own study.

Pearson's chi-square independence test result of 0.1956 indicated that there were no significant differences between the expected and observed distributions, i.e. there was no association between education and the answer to the question: "What is most important to you when buying poultry meat". Similarly, no association was found between gender and responses (0.4989).

Łukasiński & Pastuła (2018), based on a survey of a group of 137 people, found that the respondents were aware that organic food is subject to a certification process (76%) and that when purchasing certificates they "sometimes checked" (52%), "occasionally or not at all" (32%), and "always" – one person (6%), whereas in this study, more respondents (42%) declared that when buying poultry meat, they pay attention to whether the product has food certification.

The respondents were then asked to indicate their concerns when consuming poultry (multiple choice question, *n* = 209, see Figure 1).

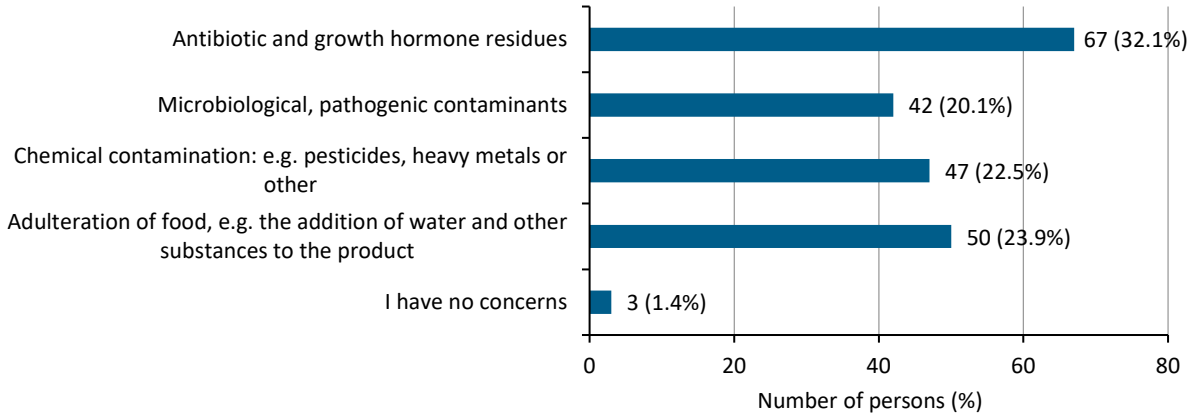

Fig. 1. Consumer concerns about eating poultry meat (*n* = 209)

Source: own study based on own research.

The highest risk associated with the consumption of poultry meat was pointed out by 32.1% of the respondents regarding the residue of antibiotics and growth hormones (see Figure 1). Almost a quarter (23.9%) were concerned about food adulteration, e.g. by injecting meat with water or brine solution of incorrect composition and adding substances to increase meat or product weight. Chemical contamination, e.g. with pesticides, heavy metals, and other chemicals, was indicated by 22.5% of the respondents, while 20.1% were concerned about microbiological, pathogenic contamination in the product. Only 1.4% indicated that they consume poultry meat without fear. No relationship ($p > 0.05$) was found by the chi-square test between consumers' concerns ($n = 206$, without answers "I have no concerns") regarding poultry meat consumption and gender ($p = 0.8912$) and education ($p = 0.3774$). However, it was noted that women (74.3% of the responses) were more likely to indicate risks than men (25.7%).

The health aspects associated with consuming organic food products were also highlighted by Hermaniuk (2018) in a 2014 survey of 377 respondents. The conviction that organic food is free of harmful chemicals, contains more vitamins and minerals, and is more palatable than conventional food, was important for consumers. Similarly, in this study, it was essential to the respondents that organic meat was chemically safe (22.5%), microbiologically safe (20.1%) and free of antibiotic residues and growth hormones (32.1%), and that it had a natural meat taste (26 people).

The answers regarding what did or did not make them buy organic poultry meat were interesting (multiple response options, $n = 166$). In their purchasing decisions, the respondents indicated the health values of organic meat and the low content of harmful substances (24.1%), whilst 15.7% cited taste qualities, i.e. the natural taste of meat, as the main factor. As many as 13.3% considered birds' welfare in their purchasing decisions, assuming that organic farming provides better living conditions, whereas 7.8% cited medical or dietary recommendations as the main factor in changing their eating and health habits. For 4.8% of the respondents, the main concern when buying was environmental, namely to have a tangible impact on reducing the negative environmental impact of farming. On the other hand, the reasons for not buying organic poultry meat were that "it was too expensive" (14.5%), that "it was not available" (9.6%), that "it did not matter" (7.8%) and, according to 1.8%, the belief that such meat had no health benefits and was even of inferior quality. One person (0.6%) stated that no organic poultry meat was available in retail outlets and could only be purchased directly from the farmer.

Although the labels indicate an organic product, the product may not be such, and this calls into question the veracity of the information on the labels that the meat comes from organic farming. Consumers' purchasing decisions are therefore determined by the following factors: knowledge, health values, taste, animal welfare, medical or dietary recommendations, and environmental protection. Women were more likely than men to cite price as a criterion for not purchasing poultry meat.

Health aspects related to the consumption of organic food products were also highlighted by Hermaniuk (2018)as the conviction that organic food is free of harmful chemicals contains more vitamins and minerals, and is more palatable than conventional food, was important for consumers. According to Łuczka-Bakuła (2011), the motive for buying organic food was primarily health concerns (58.4%). Similarly, in this study it was of great importance to respondents that organic meat was chemically safe (22.5%), microbiologically safe (20.1%), and free of antibiotic residues and growth hormones (32.1%) (see Figure 1).

Hence, in their purchasing decisions, the respondents mainly indicated the health value of organic meat, its low content of harmful substances (24.1%), and its taste (15.7%). In line with the authors' research, several studies found that the excessive price of organic food (Abdullah & Hulánková, 2021; Eyinade et al.2021; Hermaniuk, 2018; Łuczka-Bakuła, 2011: Łukasiński & Pastuła, 2018; Pawlewicz, 2020; Witek, 2018) and its availability (Hermaniuk, 2018; Łukasiński & Pastuła, 2018) were barriers to its purchase. According to Łuczka-Bakuła (2011), the criterion for choosing organic food to a small extent was also the impact of production on the environment (13.4%), which coincides with this study's findings, i.e. for 4.8% of the respondents, the main reason for purchasing organic poultry meat was environmental concern.

The survey also asked to identify the retail chains that offer the best quality poultry products (multiple response options, *n* = 129); where 29.5% did not identify any listed retail chains as trusted and safe retailers of high-quality organic poultry products. In contrast, 21.7% of the respondents pointed to Lidl as the shop offering the best quality poultry products; 13.9% pointed to the Dino chain, whilst 10.9% appreciated the products provided by Biedronka, 8.5% indicated Kaufland and its poultry products, 6.2% considered that the products offered by Netto were a guarantee of high-quality, 5.4% trusted Auchan, 3.1% praised the products of Carrefour, and the least one person (0.8%) indicated the Lewiatan chain. It can be seen that the respondents did not trust the organic poultry products offered by the retail chains and pointed to other suppliers. However, it should be noted that some are legitimized by quality and food safety standards (e.g. British Retail Consortium (BRC) and International Food Standard (IFS)).

The level of knowledge influences consumers' purchasing behaviour and determines their choices in the purchasing process. To verify their level of knowledge, the respondents were asked to indicate their sources of information on organic food (multiple response options, *n* = 176) (see Figure 2).

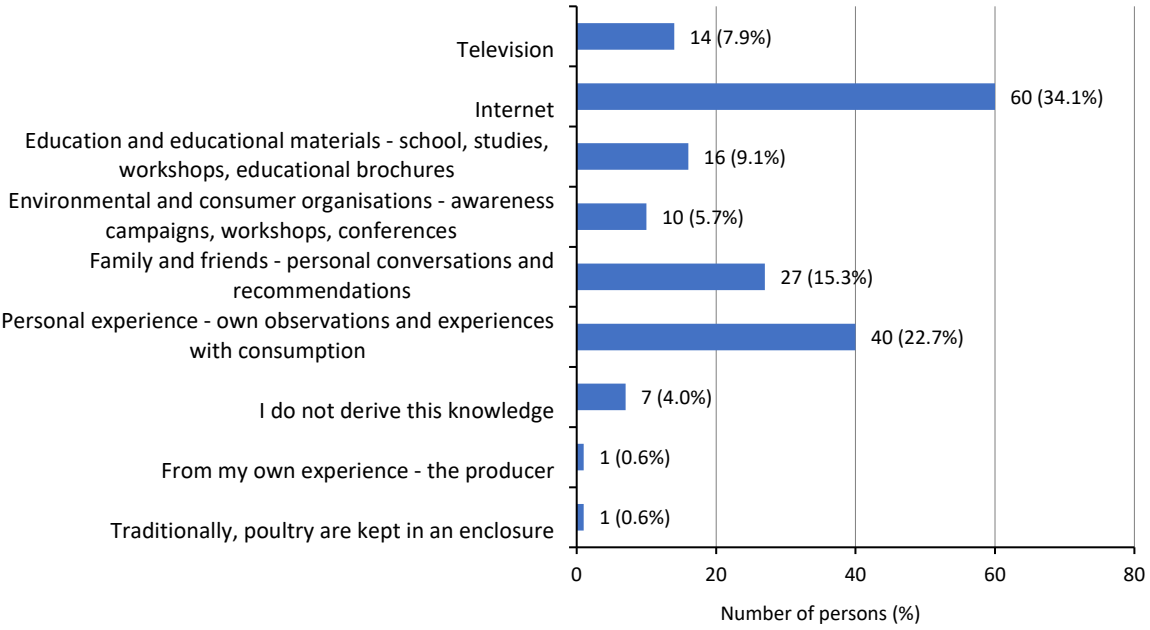

Fig. 2. Sources of knowledge by respondents on organic food

Source: own study based on own research.

In the survey on the source of information about organic food, 34.1% pointed to the Internet (see Figure 2), whilst 22.7% indicated personal experience as a consumer and their own observations, and one person (0.6%) acquired this knowledge from their experience as a producer. For 15.3% of the respondents, personal conversations and recommendations from family and friends were the primary source of information, and slightly fewer (9.1%) acquired their knowledge about organic food during their education at school and university, workshops, and from educational materials, e.g. brochures. Television, as a source of knowledge, as indicated by 7.9% of the respondents, whilst environmental and consumer organizations, information campaigns, workshops, and conferences, were cited by 5.7%. A small group of 4% considered knowledge about organic food unnecessary and did not try to obtain it in any way; one person (0.6%) did not understand the question.

As in this study, other authors also found that the Internet was the most popular source of knowledge about organic food (Cichocka & Krupa, 2016; Nestorowicz, 2018). However, the fact remains that the level of knowledge about organic food revealed in this study and in studies by other authors remains unsatisfactory (Kamboj et al., 2023; Nestorowicz, 2018).

According to Nestorowicz (2018), this lack of knowledge translates into reduced trust in the information provided by producers and distributors of these foods (certificates and eco-labels) and low willingness to pay higher prices than conventional foods. Kamboj et al. (2023) suggested that an increase in knowledge about organic food had a fundamental positive impact on the purchase intention of organic food consumers. Furthermore, consumer involvement in the purchase of organic products is also essential, which involves not only understanding the importance of certifications and eco-labels indicating that the product is of high quality and that it is safe, but also the consumer's attention to its ingredients, the content of artificial colours, artificial flavours, and whether it is free of undesirable chemical ingredients and pesticides (Iqbal et al., 2021). Moreover, it is also important to convince consumers that organic food includes food that does not produce negative environmental impacts.

4. Conclusion

The respondents showed an average level of awareness and knowledge of the differences between poultry farming methods, with free-range and organic farming receiving the highest recognition as the most animal-friendly. Most felt that organic poultry farming provided better living conditions for animals and positively impacted the environment, reflecting the growing public's environmental awareness. Certificates and organic labels were not the main criteria for most of the respondents, who were more often guided by the product's brand, the source being local, and the unit price. Purchasing decisions regarding poultry meat were mainly based on health, taste, and concern for animal welfare, indicating a growing interest in healthy lifestyles and ethical issues related to food production.

The survey also voiced concerns about the quality and safety of organic poultry meat, such as antibiotic residues, food adulteration, and chemical contaminants, which challenge producers and distributors in building consumer confidence. Retail chains were not highly trusted as a source of organic poultry meat, suggesting the need to develop alternative distribution channels to meet consumer expectations. The indicated sources of information about organic food included the Internet, personal experience, and recommendations from family and friends, which shows the need for education raising consumer awareness in decision-making about purchases. Despite the increasing public environmental awareness, much is still to be done in this area.

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Wiedza konsumentów dotycząca żywności ekologicznej z mięsa drobiowego. Badania sondażowe

Streszczenie

Cel: Celem pracy było poznanie wiedzy konsumentów dotyczącej żywności ekologicznej z mięsa drobiowego.

Metodyka: Badania ankietowe przeprowadzono w 2024 roku wśród 100 respondentów.

Wyniki: Ankietowani wykazali średni poziom wiedzy na temat korzyści wynikających z ekologicznej hodowli drobiu. Podczas podejmowania decyzji zakupowych nie zawsze kierowali się certyfikatami czy oznakowaniami ekologicznymi, a częściej brali pod uwagę markę produktu, lokalność źródła oraz walory zdrowotne i smakowe mięsa. Obawy dotyczące jakości, bezpieczeństwa oraz zrównoważonego wpływu na środowisko nadal istnieją i stanowią wyzwanie dla producentów i dystrybutorów. Informacje o żywności ekologicznej respondenci najczęściej pozyskiwali z Internetu, doświadczeń osobistych, rekomendacji od rodziny i znajomych.

Implikacje i rekomendacje: Edukacja i świadomość konsumencka odgrywają zatem kluczową rolę w kształtowaniu preferencji i decyzji zakupowych. Istnieje potrzeba dalszych działań edukacyjnych i informacyjnych zarówno ze strony producentów i dystrybutorów, jak i instytucji edukacyjnych i społecznych, aby wspierać rozwój rynku mięsa drobiowego ekologicznego i zaspokoić rosnące oczekiwania konsumentów.

Oryginalność/wartość: Po raz pierwszy przeprowadzono badanie ankietowe dotyczące produktów z mięsa drobiowego w przeciwieństwie do badań literaturowych uwzgledniających wszystkie produkty ekologiczne.

Słowa kluczowe: żywność ekologiczna, badania ankietowe, mięso drobiowe