



The influencing factors of consumers' attitudes towards green food : a case of Henan Province, China

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ABSTRACT

The green food has been developing for years and is being recognized by more and more consumers in China. The demand for green food is also growing in the market. As China develops in sync with global economic integration and its domestic consumption is directed towards greater fulfillment and comfort. Over this course, great changes have occurred to the lifestyles of China residents, especially reflected in the higher requirement on the quality of agricultural products and food and in the increasing demand for pollution-free food and green food. With insights from the perspective of consumers in Henan Province, this paper attempts to discuss consumers' attitudes towards green food and their influencing factors mainly from the perspective of the consumer lifestyles, environmental concerns and ecological perception of consumers and prices of green food.

Key words: green food, consumers' attitudes, consumers' lifestyles, influencing factors

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Definition of green food

The green food does not refer to food in "green color"; instead, it is a vivid description of "pollution-free" food. Green symbolizes life and vitality, and food is the material basis to sustain human life. Green food refers to pollution-free, safe, high-quality and nutritious food. Natural resources and the ecological environment are essential to food production. Because the word "green" alludes to everything related to life, resources and environment and in order to emphasize the sound ecological origin of such food and their ability to vitalize their consumers, they are named "green food". In a strict sense, green food is a general term for pollution-free, safe, high-quality and nutritious food that is produced in a specific way in line with the principle of sustainable development and certified by specialized agencies to bear the green food logo or trademark.

Currently, the green food in China is divided into AA-grade and A-grade. AA-grade green food refers to the products that are certified by specialized agencies to bear the AA-grade green food logo for they are produced and processed according to specific

production operating procedures without any harmful chemical synthetic substances in places of origin where the quality of the ecological environment meets the specified standards, and their quality and packaging are tested and inspected to meet specific standards. A-grade green food refers to the products that are certified by specialized agencies to bear the A-grade green food logo for they are produced and processed according to specific production operating procedures with the limited use of designated chemical synthetic substances in places of origin where the quality of the ecological environment meets the specified standards, and their quality and packaging are tested and inspected to meet specific standards.

1.2 Development history of green food in China

As the development of modern industry in China brings economic prosperity, ecological environmental pollution comes along and food pollution has become a growing concern. With the development of the economy, the improvement of living standards and the enhancement of environmental protection awareness, people's consumption concept and behavior are changing profoundly. In the food sector, after their need for basic food has been met, people are looking for safer, more nutritious and higher-quality food. To this end, many countries turn to agriculture, actively exploring sustainable agricultural development. They have accelerated the practice of alternatives to conventional agricultural production methods, such as "ecological agriculture", "organic agriculture", "natural agriculture", and "biological agriculture", and have introduced "organic food", "ecological food", and "natural food". In the above-mentioned international context, instead of simply copying the foreign model, China determines its own green food development path with reference to related foreign technologies, standards and management methods and in combination with its basic national conditions.

The development history of green food in China consists of three stages:

Stage I: foundation building from the initiation of the agricultural reclamation system (1990-1993)

Stage II: rapid development with promotion to the whole society (1994-1996)

Stage III: full advancement to society, market and the world (1997 to present)

In China, the concept of green food was introduced in 1989. On May 15, 1990, the Ministry of Agriculture held the first national "Working Conference on Green Food". The establishment of China Green Food Development Center (CGFDC) officially marked the start of green food development. More than 20 years later, the green food business is developing on a good foundation: a work system and a team have been created; the standardization and specification process and logo management are on the right track; the overall image of green food has been established; and innovative green food is developed on a considerable scale, to name just a few. By 2022, there have been nearly 20,000 certified green food companies in China, producing nearly 30,000 products. In spite of the great achievements after years of development, the annual output of green food is about 30 million tons, accounting for only about 6% of the market share of food commodities in China, according to the data provided by the CGFDC. The green food market is seriously unnoticed by consumers.

Henan Province has a large population in China, including about 100 million permanent residents. It is also an important province in terms of the cultivation and processing of agricultural products. In terms of food demand, about 100 million tons of food is consumed in the province on an annual basis. Therefore, this dissertation draws on insights from the perspective of consumers in Henan Province for investigation and demonstration around the topic. The research findings will have important implications for green food companies and the economic policies and regulations of China.

Through years of "green" practice and development, we have learned that only the path

of “green food” can lead us to balanced and sustainable development of human beings, the economy and the environment. The green food consumption market mainly depends on the purchasing attitudes and purchasing behaviors of consumers as the core of market towards green food. Their purchasing attitudes directly influence their purchasing behaviors. What are the factors that influence their choices of green food? How are their purchasing attitudes related to their purchasing intentions towards green food? How do green companies combine with national policies to encourage more consumers to accept and choose green food? These issues will be important research issues for countries and economic systems around the world.

2.0 RESEARCH PROBLEMS

The development of green food is an important strategic measure for sustainable development. Although the green food sector in China has entered the third stage of development, namely the stage of rapid advancement into the domestic and foreign markets, green food stills take up only a small share of consumers’ purchasing demands. This conceptual paper suggests on improving the share of green food and boosting the demand for green food. From extensive literature review, it is found that most of the previous studies focus on the green food marketing of companies and the marketing way and method to better attract consumers. However, there are few theoretical studies and empirical analyses focused on consumers’ attitudes and purchasing intention towards green food, and there are even fewer discussions on consumers’ attitudes and purchasing behaviors towards green food from the perspective of their lifestyles as a market segment. This dissertation will investigate and analyze these questions with a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods.

3.0 THE SIGNIFICANCE

As a healthy living habit (behavior), green consumption pays attention to environmental protection, reduces environmental pollution, and facilitates the harmonious development of human beings, society and the environment. At the same time, it is a perfect fit with the overarching theme of calling for every individual to participate in the global endeavors of emission and pollution reduction and environmental protection. This research will provide a better picture of Chinese consumers’ attitudes towards green food and their influencing factors and the relationship between their purchasing attitudes and purchasing intention. It can provide scientific and empirical insights for the government to make decisions on advocating green consumption behaviors in the whole society. Therefore, studying consumers’ attitudes towards green food and their influencing factors is of great realistic significance.

Attitude is the basis for purchasing decision-making. To predict the development prospects of the green food market, it is important to understand consumers’ attitudes towards green food and their determining factors and to predict their behaviors, which can inform the decision-making of companies on developing green food products and formulating strategies to advertise and promote these products. At the same time, it can also provide insights for the government in developing macro-consumption guiding policies that are conducive to environmental protection. Consumers are an important stakeholder that influences the green marketing of companies and also the key to the success of such green marketing, and their attitudes will directly influence the behaviors of companies. Consumers’ attitudes towards green food directly determine the willingness of companies to sell green food. If consumers are skeptical and opposed to green food and refuse to buy them, companies will be unlikely to make profits by selling green food. Therefore, understanding

consumers' attitudes and identifying their influencing factors is important and will help companies better carry out green marketing campaigns.

4.0 SUMMARY

Food is the paramount necessity of the people. Food safety has become a hot issue that people all over the world pay close attention to. The development and application of green food and the rapid development of the green food industry can boost improvement in the quality of agricultural products and food, ensure safe food consumption, help optimize the structure of food economy, and promote strategic structural adjustment of the food industry in China. This research expects to identify the reasons for the low share of green food in the consumption structure. Based on the reasons, the government may make a series of policy adjustments and green companies may figure out more detailed consumer market segmentation and take more targeted strategic measures to encourage consumers to choose green food. In this way, sustainable development of humans, economy and environment can be achieved.

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