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Can alternative markets become a main channel for consumers' food purchases? Evidences from a large scale survey in Italy

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Abstract

Objective - The spread of alternative markets is highly driven by the changing demands of consumers, who are increasingly concerned about quality, as well as about how and where the food they buy is produced. However, alternative food networks are still regarded as a niche, because of the limited assortment available and the little quantity of products marketed with respect to mainstream food channels. Twenty-five years after the emergence of the first short food supply chains, a still open question concerns the potential for growth of this distribution channel. This paper studies if and under what conditions alternative food markets can become a main channel for consumers' food purchases.

Methodology - The paper is based on data from a survey conducted in Italy on 1,184 alternative food markets shoppers. A logistic regression is used to investigate the factors influencing the rate of purchase at alternative food networks, with respect to the total food purchased for the household.

Results

Results show that consumers' motivations play a key role, especially when the products offered at alternative markets are perceived as more eco-friendly and are judged to have a high quality; another key factor is the type of alternative food network where the consumer is used to shop at, with box schemes' customers being more likely to have high rates of purchase with respect to consumers participating in farmers' markets and farm shops. These findings suggest that, even if alternative food networks are still regarded as a niche in the food market, under some conditions they can become the main distribution channel for some consumers. This discloses a potential in terms of marketing management, with the aim of

broadening the consumer base of these practices and making them better meet consumer needs and preferences.

Keywords: alternative food networks; short food supply chain; local food; food purchase; consumer behaviour; survey; logistic regression

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