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Is there an Urban Market Niche for Vegetables from Tribal Jharkhand, India?

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Abstract

In Jharkhand, AVRDC, The World Vegetable Center, is promoting vegetable production among tribal communities with the goal of diversifying diets and improving household nutrition. Over time, farmers also may be able to generate income from commercial vegetable production if suitable market opportunities are identified. AVRDC, The World Vegetable Center's Regional Center for South Asia, advocates integrated pest management (IPM) for safe vegetable production, and when IPM is successfully adopted, suggests that vegetables be labeled as “safely produced.” However, little is known about consumers' shopping preferences in Jharkhand and neighbouring West Bengal. This study focuses on consumers' vegetable shopping behaviour, their awareness and knowledge about health risks, quality labels, and criteria of importance when buying vegetables. It also elicits their willingness to pay for “safely produced” and “certified organic” eggplant and cauliflower, and integrates constructs from the theory of planned behaviour to gain a better understanding of consumer choices. A standardised questionnaire was translated into Hindi and Bengali, back-translated and pre-tested before being administered by trained enumerators. Interviews (500) were conducted with vegetable shoppers at stratified randomly selected market places in Ranchi, Jharkhand's capital, and in the closest mega-city, Kolkata. Respondents buy the majority of vegetables (86%) at daily wet markets and purchase an estimated 289 g/capita/day of vegetables on average. An average household spends 33% of total monthly food expenses for vegetables (US\$ 0.21 /capita/day). Important selection criteria are good visual appearance, cleanness, and low price, while packaging, the presence of a quality label, and geographical origin play a minor role. Respondents are willing to pay 9% more for “safely produced” and 16.6% more for “certified organic” vegetables. The theory of planned behaviour model is able to explain 35% of the variation in consumers' intention to purchase “safely produced” vegetables. These results are discussed in comparison to models using additional variables as well as a structural equation model. While the present results hint at a potential market for “safely produced” vegetables, they must be evaluated in light of the actual costs of producing and marketing this type of quality vegetable.

Keywords: Certified organic, consumer preference, contingent valuation, India, pesticide residues, structural equation modelling, theory of planned behaviour

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