



Tropentag, September 20-22, 2023, hybrid conference
“Competing pathways for equitable food systems transformation:
Trade-offs and synergies”

The rise of A2 milk: Consumer demand, farmer perception, and marketing strategies in a metropolitan area

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Abstract

Since 1970 per capita milk consumption in India has quadrupled, in part due to rising incomes and urbanisation, which has spurred dietary changes. In our work we examine how the rise in dairy consumption is shaping consumer preferences and how dairy farmers are meeting these demands. We focus on direct marketing between farmers and consumers in order to understand why some consumers prefer to purchase milk directly from dairy farmers. We also explore the perceptions of dairy farmers regarding the quality of their milk and direct sales to consumers. From May to July 2022 we conducted interviews with 62 dairy farmers and 95 consumers who purchase milk directly from our sample farmers. Our study took place in urban and peri-urban regions of the south Indian megacity Bengaluru. We focused milk from indigenous zebu cows (*Bos indicus*) with the A2 variant of beta-casein as opposed to raw milk from crossbred animals (*Bos indicus* X *Bos taurus*). Our findings reveal that farmers are able to capitalize on the urban demand for farm-gate fresh milk, whereby farm-gate milk demand is primarily driven by freshness, quality, and health expectations. Furthermore, we identified a growing market for A2 milk, with urban consumers in high income and education brackets willing to pay on average 90 Indian rupees (1 Euro) for a liter, nearly double the price for a liter of regular milk. Consumers choose A2 milk for two main reasons - because of the advertised health benefits and because it comes from indigenous cattle. Farmers advertise A2 milk on social media and on their own website as healthier and more nutritious and highlighting that it comes from indigenous cattle. However, neither farmers nor consumers have a clear understanding of A2 milk certification so far. Nevertheless, there is a growing consumer demand for A2 milk and farmers who are aware can benefit from this niche market. To this end, a direct marketing relationship between farmers and consumers is vital for the farmers' livelihood and to supply consumers with milk that is commercially largely unavailable.

Keywords: A2 milk, certification, consumers, dairy farmers, India, indigenous cattle