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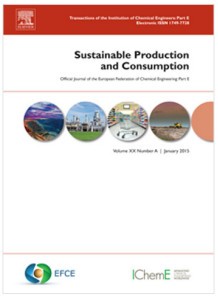

Measuring sustainable food consumption: A case study on organic food

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Measuring sustainable food consumption: a case study on organic food

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Abstract: This study aims to contribute to the debate on consumers' food buying practices with regard to sustainability issues, and specifically to preferences for organic. In order to analyse organic food buying practices in depth, this paper proposes a methodology of analysis based on two steps. First of all, a fuzzy logic has been used for the construction of composite index. In particular, we propose three indices that summarise a set of variables for measuring organic consumption intensity (OCI), the degree of both food sustainability concerns (FSCI) and sustainability in consumers' lifestyle (SLI). Then a regression has been implemented to analyse if organic consumption intensity is affected by the other two previously mentioned indices (FSCI and SLI), and by other selected covariates. As case study, survey data on a sample of consumers resident in Campania (a region in south of Italy) have been used. From our results it emerges that consumers with a high OCI show a higher level of sustainability concern in their general food choices and have a more sustainable lifestyle. Furthermore, food scares and concerns over food safety are strong predictors of organic consumption intensity. Lastly, women and young people show a higher intensity of organic food consumption. Overall, these empirical findings suggest to industry practitioners and policy makers that to increase organic food consumption efforts should be made, to communicate health, as well as environmental and social benefits related to the production and consumption of such food, focusing on younger consumers as key stakeholders in the transition towards more sustainable food systems.

Keywords: sustainable food choices, organic consumers; fuzzy set theory; quantile regressions.

1. Introduction

Ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns is one of the goals of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development (Goal n. 12). A key element for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals is to define evidence-based quantitative indicators to measure and monitor progress towards the goals and their corresponding targets (United Nation, Agenda 2030).
It is widely recognized that food is one of the three consumption domains responsible for the largest share of environmental impact. According to Reisch et al. (2013), food production and consumption are related to several main environmental impacts such as GHG emissions, water pollution and loss of biodiversity that will be exacerbated in the future by the growing global population. At the same time environmental sustainability is a fundamental determinant of food security, safety and human health (Myers et al., 2013). Overall food consumption is an important factor in shaping the sustainability of food supply (Verain et al., 2016) due to its impact on economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainability.