
CONSUMER BEHAVIOR TOWARD ECO-LABELED AGRI-FOOD PRODUCTS: EVIDENCE FROM TÜRKİYE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates consumer behavior toward eco-labeled agri-food products by integrating eco-label trust, perceived support for local producers, perceived price fairness, and purchase intention into a comprehensive structural model. Data were collected from 410 adult consumers in Türkiye through an online survey and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling after confirming the validity and reliability of the measurement model. The findings indicate that both eco-label trust and perceived support for local producers significantly enhance consumers' perceptions of price fairness as well as their intention to purchase eco-labeled products. Moreover, perceived price fairness emerges as a meaningful direct predictor of purchase intention. Overall, the results suggest that consumer decisions regarding sustainable agri-food products are shaped not only by environmental considerations but also by the combined influence of trust mechanisms, social value orientations, and fairness evaluations.

Introduction

Sustainable agricultural production holds a critical position for the future of global food systems, gaining increasing importance as consumer awareness rises and policymakers respond to mounting environmental and economic concerns. Today, consumers evaluate food products not only on traditional criteria such as price and taste but also on factors related to environmental impact, production methods, and broader societal benefits. In this context, eco-labels have emerged as powerful communication tools that provide reliable and easily accessible information about a product's sustainability performance (Thøgersen, 2000; Delmas & Grant, 2014). However, the effectiveness of eco-labels depends heavily on consumer trust. When trust is lacking, the informational value of eco-labels is unlikely to influence purchasing behavior, thereby diminishing the intended marketing impact of these labels.

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Beyond environmental considerations, agricultural food consumption also encompasses significant social and economic dimensions. Supporting local producers and strengthening rural economies play a strategic role in national food security and regional development policies. Skallerud and Wien (2019), demonstrates that consumer preferences for local foods are not driven solely by personal benefit but are also influenced by motivations such as contributing to community welfare, supporting local producers, and preserving regional economic structures. These findings highlight the importance of social value orientations in shaping consumer behavior and underscore the need to understand consumers' motivations to support local producers for sustainable agricultural policies to be successful.

Eco-labeled agricultural products often command higher prices in the marketplace, making price evaluation a critical component of consumer decision-making. Perceived price fairness-defined as consumers' assessments of whether a price is reasonable, justified, and equitable-lies at the core of willingness to pay for sustainable products (Bolton et al., 2003; Xia et al., 2004). When prices are perceived as unfair, consumers may refrain from purchasing eco-labeled products even if they trust the label. Therefore, understanding the interplay between trust, social contribution perceptions, and price fairness is essential for developing a holistic explanation of sustainable purchasing behavior.

Although prior studies have examined eco-label trust, social contribution perceptions, and price fairness, these constructs have largely been studied in isolation. Research investigating how these three dimensions jointly shape purchase intention remains limited. In particular, integrating perceptions of support for local producers into the decision-making framework for eco-labeled agricultural products introduces a novel and meaningful contribution to the literature. Addressing this gap, the present study integrates Eco-Label Trust, Support for Local Producers and the Local Economy, Perceived Price Fairness, and Purchase Intention into a single structural model. By doing so, it aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the psychological and social determinants of consumer behavior toward sustainable agricultural products, contributing to both the sustainable food consumption literature and rural development-oriented agricultural economics research.

Literature review

Eco-labels function as signals that enable consumers to quickly assess product attributes and positively influence purchasing behavior, especially when they enhance perceptions of environmental benefit, sustainable production, and product credibility (Thøgersen, 2000). Prior studies have shown that trust in eco-labels increases perceived product quality and expectations of environmental benefits, thereby directly strengthening purchase intention (Delmas & Grant, 2014; Testa et al., 2015; Nguyen et al., 2025). Eco-label trust is not only associated with environmental concern but also with beliefs about the accuracy and transparency of product information, both of which play a decisive role in green consumption behavior (Van Amstel et al., 2008). Accordingly,

eco-label trust is recognized as a fundamental psychological mechanism influencing both price evaluations and purchase intention (Brécard et al., 2009).

Based on this theoretical foundation, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H₁: Higher trust in eco-labels increases consumers' perceptions of price fairness.

H₂: Higher trust in eco-labels increases consumers' purchase intention.

In the context of agri-food products, another important factor is consumers' motivation to support local producers and the local economy. Skallerud and Wien, demonstrated that preferences for local products are associated with helping behavior, meaning that consumers perceive supporting local producers as an ethical action (Skallerud & Wien, 2019). Similarly, Chiciudean et al. (2023) emphasized that the consumption of local products contributes to regional economic vitality and rural development. This literature indicates that perceptions of supporting local producers can significantly shape both price evaluations and purchasing behavior.

Based on this framework, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H₃: Greater perceived support for local producers and the local economy increases consumers' perceptions of price fairness.

H₄: Greater perceived support for local producers and the local economy increases consumers' purchase intention.

Perceived price fairness refers to consumers' judgments regarding whether a product's price is consistent with the value it provides (Xia et al., 2004). Marketing literature shows that when prices are perceived as unfair, purchase intention decreases significantly, whereas fair prices enhance brand preferences and positive behavioral outcomes (Bolton et al., 2003). Because sustainable and eco-labeled products typically carry higher prices, consumers' perceptions of price fairness become a critical determinant of purchase intention (Iyer et al., 2016; Konuk, 2018). This effect is especially pronounced in sustainable products, as consumers take perceived social and environmental benefits into account (Gleim et al., 2013).

Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₅: Higher perceived price fairness increases consumers' purchase intention.

Within this framework, the study model tests the relationships among four key constructs: (1) Eco-label trust, (2) Perceived support for local producers and the local economy, (3) Perceived price fairness, and (4) Purchase intention.

The model is grounded in robust theoretical foundations and offers an integrated perspective by examining how trust mechanisms and social value perceptions jointly influence consumer behavior in the context of sustainable agri-food products.

Materials and methods

This study adopts a quantitative and cross-sectional research design to examine consumer behavior toward eco-labeled agri-food products. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed, as it allows the simultaneous estimation of multiple latent constructs within a single model (Hair et al., 2019). The model includes four latent variables: Eco-Label Trust, Support for Local Producers and the Local Economy, Perceived Price Fairness, and Purchase Intention.

The target population consists of individuals aged 18 and above who regularly purchase packaged agri-food products (e.g., organic fruits and vegetables, dairy products, legumes, olive oil). Given that eco-labeled products are widely available across Türkiye and consumer characteristics vary by region, the accessible population was defined as consumers residing in Türkiye. A convenience sampling method commonly applied in consumer behavior studies on sustainable food consumption was utilized (Testa et al., 2015; Skallerud & Wien, 2019).

All measurement scales were adapted from established instruments in prior studies. The items measuring Support for Local Producers and the Local Economy were adapted from the helping behaviour/local food support constructs developed by Skallerud and Wien (2019), ensuring conceptual consistency while tailoring them to the eco-labeled agri-food context. Eco-Label Trust items were adapted from Thøgersen (2000) and Delmas and Grant (2014). Perceived Price Fairness was measured using items adapted from Xia et al. (2004) and Bolton et al. (2003). Purchase Intention items were adapted from Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior and Dodds et al. (1991). All items were assessed using a five-point Likert scale.

In accordance with recommended SEM sample size guidelines (at least ten respondents per estimated parameter) (Hair et al., 2019), a total of 410 valid responses were obtained. Data were collected through a self-administered online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, assured of anonymity, and reminded that participation was voluntary. To ensure the validity and reliability of the survey, a pilot study was conducted with a small sample of 30 people prior to the main data collection process. Based on feedback from the pilot study, minor linguistic adjustments were made to clarify the meaning of some items while maintaining the overall structure of the scales. Internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) values were examined, and all variables were found to be within acceptable reliability thresholds. The survey used in the study was designed to explain the participants' demographic characteristics and the statements in the research model after the pilot study.

SmartPLS 4 statistical software package (SmartPLS GmbH, Oststeinbek, Germany) was used for data processing and statistical analysis. To estimate the relationships among the core constructs of the research model, the consistent Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLSc-SEM) approach was applied. The primary objective was to investigate the theoretical structural relationships within the proposed

model and assess the predictive capability of exogenous variables. For measurement model evaluation, Cronbach's alpha (α), composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), outer loadings, the Fornell-Larcker criterion, and HTMT ratios were computed. For the structural model assessment, inner VIF values and effect sizes (f^2) were examined. Finally, hypotheses were tested using SEM.

Results

In this study, the demographic characteristics of the respondents who completed the survey were first identified. The results obtained in this context are presented in detail in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographics of the participants

Demographic Characteristics		n	%
Age	18-24	48	1.7
	25-34	66	16.1
	35-44	85	20.7
	45-54	68	16.6
	55-64	76	18.5
	65≤	67	16.4
Gender	Male	186	45.4
	Female	224	54.6
Education	Primary education	29	7.1
	High School	23	5.6
	Associate degree	103	25.1
	Bachelor's degree	169	41.2
	Master's degree/Ph.D.	86	21.0
Perception of income status	Very low	57	13.9
	Low	89	21.7
	Average	193	47.1
	High	46	11.2
	Very high	25	6.1

Source: Authors' calculation

An examination of the age distribution shows that the sample is relatively well balanced. The largest proportion of respondents (20.7%) falls within the 35-44 age group, followed by those aged 55-64 (18.5%) and individuals aged 65 and above (16.4%). This distribution indicates that attitudes toward eco-labeled agri-food products are not limited to younger consumers but are also widely shared among middle-aged and older adults. The age distribution of the participants was relatively balanced, with 48.5% of the respondents being under the age of 45 and 51.5% being aged 45 or older. With respect to gender, 54.6% of the participants are women. Prior research on sustainable consumption and healthy eating practices suggests that female consumers tend to exhibit higher levels of environmental sensitivity and ethical consumption behavior. Therefore, the gender composition of the sample is consistent with the general consumer profile documented in the literature.

Regarding education level, the majority of respondents have attained higher education. Specifically, 41.2% hold a bachelor's degree, and 21% have completed postgraduate studies. This finding aligns with previous studies indicating that awareness of eco-labels and sustainable food consumption is more prevalent among individuals with higher educational attainment. Additionally, the share of associate degree graduates (25.1%) demonstrates that individuals with tertiary education are strongly represented in the sample. In summary, the sample exhibits a suitable cognitive profile for evaluating environmental labels and sustainability-related product information.

In terms of perceived income status, the largest group of respondents (47.1%) rated their income status as "Average", followed by those who rated it as "Low" (21.7%). The relatively small proportions of respondents in the "Very low" and "Very high" perceived income status categories indicate that most participants placed themselves in the intermediate categories. The predominance of income average consumers also indicates that eco-labeled products are largely evaluated by individuals with moderate purchasing power. This distribution further supports the inclusion of price fairness as a critical variable in the model, as price sensitivity tends to be higher among income average consumers.

Overall, the demographic findings demonstrate that the sample provides an appropriate profile for analyzing attitudes toward sustainable agricultural products. Age and education levels are well represented, and the socio-demographic tendencies observed are consistent with those commonly reported in eco-label and sustainable consumption studies.

The measurement model was evaluated through construct validity procedures, including assessments of convergent and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2014; Çavuşoğlu, 2021). As a first step, external loadings were examined to evaluate factor loadings, and all indicators were found to exceed the recommended threshold value of 0.50 (Kaiser, 1974).

Convergent validity was assessed using AVE and CR values (Kement et al., 2021). An AVE value of 0.50 or higher indicates adequate convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), and all constructs should have a CR value above 0.60 to be considered reliable (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). The reliability of the factor structures was further supported by Cronbach's alpha coefficients, which were used to assess internal consistency (Marmaya et al., 2019). In this study, all Cronbach's alpha values exceeded the 0.60 threshold, indicating satisfactory reliability (Kalaycı, 2005). Additionally, all CR values were greater than 0.60 and all AVE values met or surpassed the 0.50 criterion.

The results presented in Table 2 confirm that the model demonstrates a good fit. Overall, the measurement model was successfully validated based on both validity and reliability assessments.

Table 2. Reliability and validity

Items	Factor loading
<i>Eco-Label Trust (ELT)</i>	
$\alpha = 0.913$; $CR = 0.939$; $AVE = 0.794$	
I trust that eco-labeled agri-food products are produced using environmentally responsible methods.	0.914
Eco-labels indicate that an agricultural product is genuinely more sustainable.	0.919
I believe that eco-labeled products are more reliable than non-labeled alternatives.	0.908
I am confident that the production conditions of eco-labeled products are subject to stricter controls.	0.821
<i>Perceived Price Fairness (PF)</i>	
$\alpha = 0.853$; $CR = 0.901$; $AVE = 0.696$	
I find the higher prices of eco-labeled agri-food products justified.	0.824
I believe the price I pay for these products is fair.	0.895
Eco-labeled products are worth the price considering the benefits they offer.	0.836
Paying a slightly higher price for such products is acceptable to me.	0.778
<i>Support for Local Producers and Local Economy (SLPE)</i>	
$\alpha = 0.863$; $CR = 0.902$; $AVE = 0.648$	
I believe that purchasing eco-labeled agri-food products supports local producers.	0.850
I think choosing such products contributes positively to the local economy.	0.837
Buying eco-labeled local products provides an opportunity to support the livelihoods of rural producers.	0.856
I find purchasing eco-labeled products personally meaningful because it strengthens local producers.	0.744
Contributing to local farmers and rural communities is an important factor in my purchasing decisions.	0.730
<i>Purchase Intention (PI)</i>	
$\alpha = 0.815$; $CR = 0.879$; $AVE = 0.645$	
I intend to purchase eco-labeled agri-food products in the near future.	0.748
Whenever possible, I prefer to choose eco-labeled agricultural products.	0.865
My likelihood of purchasing these products regularly is high.	0.845
When choosing between similar products, I am more likely to select the eco-labeled option first.	0.749

Source: Authors' calculation

To assess the discriminant validity of the constructs, the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) and the Fornell-Larcker criterion values were analyzed. The HTMT results are presented in detail in Table 3. The analysis showed that all HTMT values were below the recommended threshold of 0.85 (Kline, 2011), confirming adequate discriminant validity among the constructs.

Table 3. HTMT

Variables	ELT	PF	SLPE
PF	0.812		
SLPE	0.630	0.753	
PI	0.737	0.761	0.775

Source: Authors' calculation

Second, to further establish discriminant validity, the Fornell-Larcker criterion was calculated. For this purpose, the square root of each construct's AVE value was computed and compared with the corresponding inter-construct correlations. The results obtained from this analysis are presented in detail in Table 4.

Table 4. Fornell Larcker Criterion

Variables	1	2	3	4
ELT	0.891			
PF	0.720	0.834		
SLPE	0.564	0.649	0.805	
PI	0.639	0.635	0.653	0.803

Source: Authors' calculation

The analysis revealed that the square root of each construct's AVE value was higher than its inter-construct correlations (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Based on these findings, it was concluded that all constructs demonstrated adequate discriminant validity.

To structurally evaluate the research model, the Inner VIF values and effect size (f^2) results were examined. The Inner VIF values of the constructs used in the study were found to be below the threshold of 3 (Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2006). Accordingly, it was concluded that there is no multicollinearity issue among the constructs. The detailed results are presented in Table 5. Second, the effect size values were assessed within the structural model. Effect size coefficients between 0.02-0.15 are considered small, 0.15-0.35 moderate, and values above 0.35 large (Cohen, 1988). The results showed that eco-label trust had a large effect on perceived price fairness ($f^2 = 0.467$). Support for local producers had moderate effects on perceived price fairness ($f^2 = 0.218$) and purchase intention ($f^2 = 0.165$). By contrast, eco-label trust had a small effect on purchase intention ($f^2 = 0.095$), while perceived price fairness also had a small effect on purchase intention ($f^2 = 0.028$). The effect size estimates are provided in Table 5.

Following the completion of the measurement and structural model evaluations, the hypotheses were tested using structural equation modeling. The findings obtained from this analysis are presented in detail in Table 5.

Table 5. Structural properties (hypothesis testing)

Hypotheses		β	T Statistics	P Values	InnerVIF	f ²	Results
H₁	ELT → PF	0.520	10.767	0.000	1.467	0.467	<i>Supported</i>
H₂	ELT → PI	0.304	4.794	0.000	2.152	0.095	<i>Supported</i>
H₃	SLPE → PF	0.355	7.249	0.000	1.467	0.218	<i>Supported</i>
H₄	SLPE → PI	0.367	6.719	0.000	1.787	0.165	<i>Supported</i>
H₅	PF → PI	0.178	2.455	0.014	2.532	0.028	<i>Supported</i>

Source: Authors' calculation

The structural model analysis conducted using SmartPLS showed that all proposed hypotheses were supported. Eco-label trust was found to have a positive effect on consumers' perceived price fairness as well as their purchase intention. The results indicate that as trust in eco-labels increases, consumers' perceptions of price fairness improve, and their purchase intentions strengthen. Accordingly, Hypotheses H₁ and H₂ were supported. Furthermore, perceptions of supporting local producers and the local economy were also found to positively influence both price fairness perceptions and purchase intention. The analysis revealed that higher levels of perceived support for local producers correspond with higher perceived price fairness and stronger purchase intention. Thus, Hypotheses H₃ and H₄ were also supported. Finally, perceived price fairness exerted a positive effect on purchase intention. This result demonstrates that as consumers perceive prices to be more fair, their intention to purchase eco-labeled agri-food products increases. Thus, Hypotheses H₅ were also supported.

Discussions

This study examined the psychological and perceptual factors shaping consumers' purchase intentions toward eco-labeled agri-food products and demonstrated that the majority of the theoretically proposed relationships were empirically supported. The structural model results indicate that almost all hypotheses align with findings from previous research in the literature.

First, Eco-Label Trust (ELT) was found to significantly enhance both Perceived Price Fairness (PF) and Purchase Intention (PI). This outcome is consistent with earlier studies showing that trust in eco-labels positively influences green consumption behavior (Thøgersen, 2000; Delmas & Grant, 2014; Testa et al., 2015). As highlighted in the literature, when consumers trust the accuracy and credibility of eco-labels and their certification processes, they perceive the environmental benefits of the product as more authentic, which in turn strengthens their intention to purchase.

The finding that Support for Local Producers and the Local Economy significantly affects both price fairness perceptions and purchase intention parallels studies emphasizing that local product consumption is driven by community-benefit and helping-behavior motivations (Skallerud & Wien, 2019; Chiciudean et al., 2023). Accordingly, the study reinforces the idea that social value orientations constitute an important determinant of sustainable product choices.

The third major relationship in the model is the positive effect of Perceived Price Fairness (PF) on Purchase Intention (PI). This result corresponds with marketing literature demonstrating the critical role of price fairness in shaping consumer behavior (Bolton et al., 2003; Xia et al., 2004). Prior research showing that the higher prices of sustainable and ethical products are accepted only when consumers perceive commensurate value and social benefit (Gleim et al., 2013; Iyer et al., 2016) further supports the findings of this study.

Overall, the study reveals that consumer behavior toward eco-labeled agri-food products is shaped by a multidimensional process involving trust, perceptions of supporting local producers/local economies, and price evaluations. The alignment of the hypotheses with prior empirical evidence reinforces the theoretical validity of the model. The results underscore the need to consider both individual and societal benefit perceptions in the marketing of sustainable agricultural products.

Conclusions

This study explained consumer behavior toward eco-labeled agri-food products through an integrated model that captures the interplay between trust, perceptions of social benefit, and price evaluations. The analyses revealed that both eco-label trust and perceived support for local producers shape consumers' perceptions of price fairness as well as their purchase intentions. Although perceived price fairness had a positive and statistically significant effect on purchase intention, its direct influence was weaker than those of eco-label trust and support for local producers. Thus, perceived price fairness should be regarded as a complementary rather than the dominant predictor of consumers' purchase intention toward eco-labeled agri-food products.

These findings demonstrate that consumer adoption of sustainable agri-food products is not driven solely by environmental concern; rather, it is shaped by the interaction of trust mechanisms, perceptions of societal contribution, and judgments of price fairness. The study highlights the need for a multidimensional approach that considers both individual and collective values in the marketing of eco-labeled agricultural products, offering meaningful theoretical and practical contributions to the sustainable consumption literature.

This study offers three significant contributions to the theoretical literature explaining consumer behavior toward eco-labeled agri-food products. First, it highlights the multidimensional role of eco-label trust in shaping consumer evaluations. The findings show that trust in eco-labels functions not only as a cognitive cue signaling product quality but also as a fundamental psychological mechanism that shapes consumers' price assessments and purchase decisions. This expands trust-based decision-making processes within the eco-label context and adds a meaningful contribution to the existing literature (Thøgersen, 2000; Delmas & Grant, 2014).

Second, incorporating perceived support for local producers and the local economy into the model introduces a socially oriented perspective to consumer behavior research.

The results demonstrate that sustainable product consumption is driven not only by environmental motivations but also by a desire to contribute to societal well-being. This finding extends studies that explain support for local producers (Skallerud & Wien, 2019) and deepens the social value dimension that has been relatively underexplored in the literature.

Third, the study reaffirms the mediating and explanatory role of perceived price fairness in consumer decision-making. Since sustainable agri-food products often carry higher prices, perceiving these prices as fair is essential for maintaining purchase intention. By showing that price fairness is not merely an economic evaluation but a holistic process intertwined with trust, social benefit perceptions, and sustainability considerations, this study enriches the marketing literature in a substantial way (Bolton et al., 2003; Xia et al., 2004).

The findings of this study offer actionable implications for all stakeholders within the agricultural food value chain, from producers to policymakers. For producers and retailers, the results demonstrate that enhancing the credibility of eco-labels directly strengthens purchase behavior. Therefore, ensuring transparency in certification processes, making production practices more visible, and clearly communicating trust-related messages on product packaging are of critical importance. Additionally, the strong consumer motivation to support local producers indicates that claims such as “supports local farmers” or “contributes to the regional economy” should be emphasized more prominently on labels. This approach reinforces perceptions of price fairness and increases purchase intention.

For local producer organizations and cooperatives, the findings highlight the positive influence of community-supported agriculture (CSA), short supply chains, and local markets on consumer behavior. Effectively communicating that products contribute not only to environmental sustainability but also to rural development can enhance the competitiveness of local producers.

From a policy perspective, the study underscores the importance of integrating sustainable agricultural product policies with rural development strategies. Supporting eco-label programs through incentives for local producers and increasing the visibility of these initiatives through consumer awareness campaigns will strengthen the cycle of sustainable agricultural production and consumption. Moreover, designing agricultural support mechanisms that align with consumer behavior can foster both the growth of local economies and the expansion of the sustainable products market.

While this study provides important insights into consumer behavior toward eco-labeled agri-food products, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, data were collected through an online survey using a convenience sampling method. This may limit the extent to which the sample represents the broader population of Türkiye. Future studies are encouraged to employ stratified sampling across different regions or design comparative analyses between rural and urban consumers. Second, all data were obtained through self-reported measures. Given that consumers may exhibit a tendency

to provide socially desirable responses regarding sustainable products, future research would benefit from incorporating behavioral data-such as actual purchase history, eye-tracking measures, or willingness-to-pay experiments-to triangulate and validate the findings. Third, the study utilizes a cross-sectional design, which does not allow the assessment of causal relationships over time. Longitudinal research designs could provide stronger evidence regarding the temporal and causal dynamics between the constructs. Lastly, the research model focuses on four primary variables. Incorporating additional variables-such as environmental concern, ethical consumption values, green knowledge, sensory quality perceptions, or price sensitivity-may strengthen the theoretical comprehensiveness of the model. Moreover, comparative international studies examining how support for local producers varies across cultural contexts would offer valuable contributions to the literature.

Conflict of interests

The author declare no conflict of interest.

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