
SOCIO-ECONOMIC DETERMINANTS AND BARRIERS TO ORGANIC PRODUCT CONSUMPTION IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the paper was to examine the impact of socio-economic characteristics on organic product consumer behavior in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The research was conducted via a structured online survey on a sample of 336 respondents. Results indicated a specific trust paradox, where high consumption was not accompanied by knowledge of the certification system but relied on the subjective perception of domestic origin. Women were identified as primary decision-makers, while income level directly determined purchase frequency. Dominant market barriers were high price and unavailability, confirming the high price elasticity of demand. It is concluded that the observed market is in an early development stage and burdened by information asymmetry, where organic food retains the character of a premium good. For further sector development, strengthening the recognition of the national organic label through consumer education and developing short supply chains to reduce transaction costs is recommended.

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Introduction

Driven by growing consumer awareness regarding health and sustainability, the global organic food market has transformed from a niche into a significant industry segment. Consumers increasingly seek ‘more natural’ alternatives to regain control over their dietary choices (Dragolea et al., 2023). While health concerns (‘egoistic motives’) remain the primary driver, particularly for older demographics (Vietoris et al., 2016), younger generations increasingly base their purchasing decisions on environmental and ethical considerations (Dragolea et al., 2023).

In the Western Balkans, the development of the organic sector faces specific challenges. Although consumers generally perceive organic food positively, actual consumption is constrained by undeveloped market institutions and weak purchasing power (Cerjak et al., 2010; Đokić & Milićević, 2022). Research indicates that high prices and limited availability remain the dominant barriers across the region (Vehapi & Dolićanin, 2016; Čagalj et al., 2020). Specifically, in Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H), despite significant natural potential and a long tradition of extensive agriculture (Pržulj & Tunguz, 2016; Tomić et al., 2016), the sector remains marginal. According to recent data, cultivated organic land occupies only 0.1% of total agricultural area (2,495 hectares), while the sector is heavily reliant on the export of wild-collected berries and herbs (Willer et al., 2026).

This market environment fosters a specific ‘trust paradox.’ Organic food is a ‘credence good’ that requires institutional verification, yet consumers in transitional economies often lack familiarity with official labels and rely on alternative signals like ‘domestic’ origin or direct contact with producers (Nagy et al., 2022; Miftari et al., 2022). In B&H, this terminology conflation leads consumers to perceive uncertified, traditionally produced food as equivalent to certified organic products (Petrescu et al., 2017).

Despite its potential, the lack of empirical data on consumer profiles in B&H hinders the creation of effective agricultural policies. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to examine the impact of socio-economic characteristics on the perception, attitudes, and behavior of organic food consumers in B&H. The study seeks to identify key purchasing motives and analyze the economic and institutional barriers that limit the expansion of this market segment.

Materials and methods

The research presented in this paper was based on primary data collected during 2025 in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Considering the nature of the research problem, which requires an analysis of consumers’ attitudes, perceptions, and latent motives, a quantitative approach was applied using a structured survey questionnaire method. The research instrument (questionnaire) was created based on a review of relevant literature and previous related research in the region (Vehapi & Dolićanin, 2016; Kranjac et al., 2017) to ensure the comparability of the results.

The questionnaire was conceptualized into three logical units. The first part included a set of closed-ended questions intended to determine the socio-demographic profile of the respondents, including the following variables: gender, age, level of education, employment status, level of monthly household income, household size, and settlement type (village, suburban settlement, city). The second part of the questionnaire focused on consumer habits, including purchase frequency, preferred distribution channels, and the types of products the respondents most frequently buy. The third, most complex part of the questionnaire, was designed to measure attitudes, perception of barriers, and the level of information. A five-point Likert scale (from 1 – completely disagree/dissatisfied, to 5 – completely agree/very satisfied) was used to measure the strength of attitudes about the importance of nutrition, trust in organic products, and satisfaction with quality.

The distribution of the questionnaire was carried out digitally (online survey), using social media platforms and specialized groups dedicated to healthy nutrition and agriculture. This approach was chosen due to the possibility of rapid data collection and access to a specific target group of consumers who are digitally literate and informed. Although the convenience sample (N=336) carries certain limitations regarding the representativeness of the general population (the sample is slightly biased towards the urban and more educated population), it is adequate for researching the organic food market, given that previous empirical research (Vapa-Tankosić, 2018; Đokić & Milićević, 2016; Vehapi & Dolićanin, 2016) confirmed that precisely this demographic group represents the basis of real demand for premium food products.

After logical control and cleaning, the collected data were entered into a database and processed using the statistical package SPSS (version 22). In addition to standard descriptive statistics (frequencies, arithmetic means, standard deviations), methods of inferential statistics were used to test the set hypotheses. To analyze the impact of socio-demographic factors (as independent variables) on consumer attitudes and behavior (dependent variables), a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied. To accurately determine between which groups statistically significant differences exist, the Tukey HSD (Honestly Significant Difference) post-hoc test was subsequently used. Given the unequal number of respondents in the groups (e.g., a significantly higher number of respondents with high incomes compared to those without income), the harmonic mean of the sample size (N=40.102) was used in the post-hoc analysis to ensure the robustness of the results and the validity of the statistical conclusions. The dependence between categorical variables, specifically between the habit of consumption and the level of information about certification, was tested using Pearson's Chi-square (χ^2) test of independence, along with the calculation of Cramer's V coefficient to assess the strength of the association.

Results and discussions

Socio-economic profile of the sample as a determinant of demand

The analysis of the socio-demographic structure of the sample (Table 1) provided insight into the profile of a typical organic food consumer in Bosnia and Herzegovina and indicated specific market segments. Women dominated the sample (65.2%), which was fully consistent with the findings of Kranjac et al. (2017), who identified women as the primary “gatekeepers” regarding food choices and family health care. The age structure showed that the most represented population categories were between 35 and 54 years of age (cumulatively 58.6%), which represented the economically most active part of the population. These respondents were in the life stage of family formation and childcare, which, according to recent empirical evidence (Woś et al., 2022), represents one of the strongest motivational factors for switching to an organic diet. Parents increasingly seek organic options to minimize their children’s exposure to synthetic contaminants and provide higher nutritional value during critical developmental stages.

Table 1. Socio-economic characteristics of the respondents (N = 336)

Variable	Category	Number (n)	Share (%)
Gender	Male	117	34.8
	Female	219	65.2
Age	up to 24 years	31	9.2
	25 – 34	63	18.8
	35 – 44	111	33
	45 – 54	86	25.6
	55 and over	45	13.4
Education	Primary	8	2.4
	Secondary	85	25.3
	Higher (College)	36	10.7
	University degree	146	43.5
	Academic (Master’s/Doctorate)	61	18.2
Place of residence	Village	61	18.2
	Suburban settlement	63	18.8
	City	212	63.1

Variable	Category	Number (n)	Share (%)
Monthly income (BAM)	No income	32	9.5
	up to 500	19	5.7
	500 – 1000	41	12.2
	1000 – 1500	126	37.5
	over 1500	118	35.1
Number of household members	1 – 2 members	70	20.8
	3 – 4 members	199	59.2
	5 and more members	67	19.9

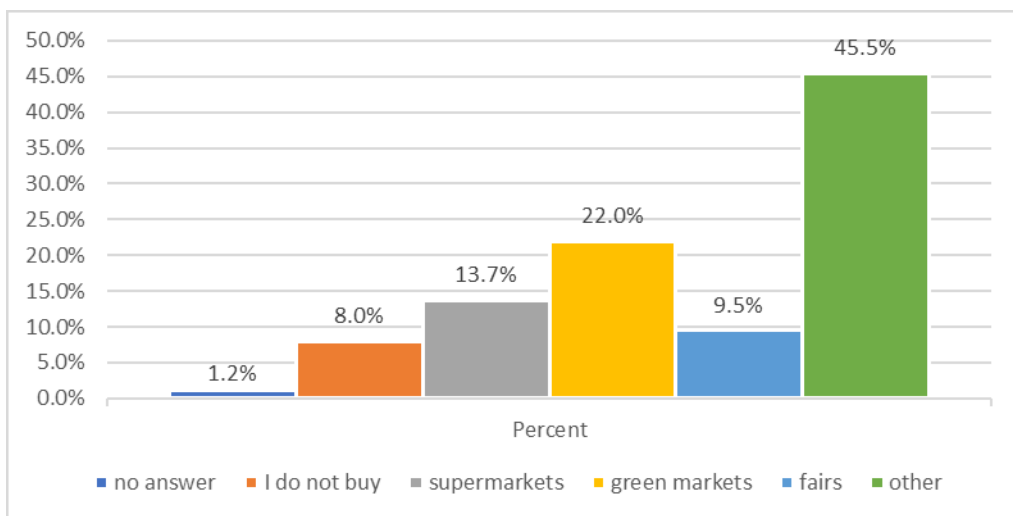
Source: Authors' calculation based on the conducted research.

It was particularly important to highlight the educational structure of the sample, where respondents with a university and academic education accounted for a majority of 61.7%. This data corresponded with the research by Galić (2022) for the territory of the Republic of Srpska, confirming that a higher level of education correlated with greater interest in food quality and the ecological aspects of production. The spatial distribution of the respondents showed a pronounced concentration in urban areas (63.1%), while the economic analysis revealed that the majority of respondents (72.6%) belonged to households with monthly incomes above 1000 BAM.

Although this structure deviated from the average of the general population in B&H, it faithfully represented the target market for organic products, which, due to higher production costs, also carried a higher market price. Previous empirical research in the region (Vapa-Tankosić, 2018; Vehapi & Dolićanin, 2016; Đokić & Milićević, 2016) emphasized that precisely this demographic group—an urban, educated population with stable incomes—represented the real demand base for organic products. Therefore, the results of this research should be interpreted primarily through the prism of the behavior of the financially capable part of the population, whose preferences were crucial for the formation of market strategies.

Consumer habits and the phenomenon of the “informal market”

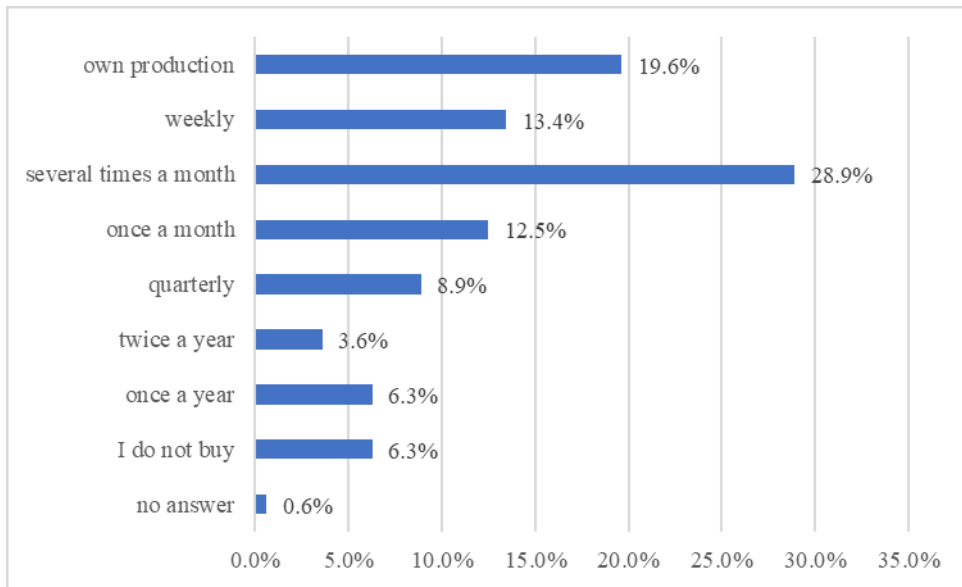
The analysis of consumer habits revealed a high presence of organic products in the respondents' diet. The results showed that 89.6% of the research participants declared themselves as consumers of organic food. However, a deeper analysis of distribution channels (Graph 1) indicated a specificity of the domestic market that differentiated it from developed Western economies. While specialized stores and supermarkets dominated in EU countries, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, these channels accounted for only 14% of the total procurement. In contrast, the dominant channel was the “other” category with 46%, followed by green markets with 22%.

Figure 1. Place of purchase of organic products (in %)

Source: Authors' calculation based on the conducted research.

The analysis of distribution channels (Figure 1) further illustrates the functioning of the trust paradox in practice. As Wu et al. (2021) point out in their critical review, consumer trust in food systems can be built directly (through interpersonal relationships and direct contact with producers) or indirectly (through institutional labels, certification bodies, and retail packaging). The overwhelming dominance of informal channels in this study, with 46% of respondents using 'other' channels (primarily direct farm purchases) and 22% using green markets, indicates that consumers in B&H predominantly rely on direct, face-to-face trust, which was in contrast to the findings of Vehapi and Dolićanin (2016), who observed the growing importance of supermarkets as the primary distribution channel in the Serbian market. The formal retail system (supermarkets), which requires indirect trust in the institutional label, accounts for only 14% of purchases, confirming that the local organic market is still heavily reliant on traditional, uncertified supply chains.

The purchase frequency (Figure 2) confirmed that these products were not just an occasional luxury, but a regular part of the consumer basket for a significant part of the sample, given that 42% of respondents procured them on a weekly or monthly basis. These findings indicated the existence of a strong informal market and short supply chains based on personal trust, rather than on commercial mechanisms. Consumers, although urban and highly educated, still preferred authenticity and direct contact with the producer over impersonal purchasing in a supermarket, which represented significant potential for the development of direct sales and agrotourism models.

Figure 2. Purchase frequency of organic products (in %)

Source: Authors' calculation based on the conducted research.

Consumption patterns and the “trust paradox”

One of the most significant findings of this research related to the discrepancy between declarative consumption and actual knowledge about the control system, which we defined as the “trust paradox”. Although almost 90% of respondents stated that they consumed organic products, data on information levels were devastating: only 23.2% of respondents knew to name certification bodies in B&H, while 36.9% admitted that they were not informed at all. The exceptionally high rate of declared consumption (89.6%) must be interpreted with caution. Firstly, it reflects the methodological bias of the online sample, which naturally attracts a more informed, digitally literate, and socio-economically stable segment of the population that is already interested in healthy lifestyles. Secondly, this high percentage is a direct manifestation of the terminology conflation typical for transition economies. Consumers in the region frequently conflate the concepts of ‘organic’, ‘domestic’, and ‘home-produced’ food, perceiving uncertified food bought directly from farmers as equally or more authentic than officially certified products in supermarkets (Miftari et al., 2022). Therefore, the reported consumption rate reflects the consumers’ subjective perception of eating ‘healthy and domestic’ rather than the actual purchase of institutionally certified organic products.

Table 2. Information about certification bodies in relation to product consumption

Consumption	Not informed (%)	Know they exist (without name) (%)	Know cert. bodies in B&H (%)	Total (%)
Yes	35.9	39.9	23.9	100
No	45.7	37.1	17.1	100
Total (sample)	36.9	39.6	23.2	100

Source: Authors' calculation based on the conducted research.

To statistically test the relationship between these two variables, the Pearson Chi-square (χ^2) test was applied. The test results ($\chi^2=1.617$; $p=0.656$) showed that there was no statistically significant relationship between consumption and knowledge of certification bodies. The value of Cramer's V coefficient ($V=0.069$) additionally confirmed an extremely weak, practically non-existent connection. As could be seen from Table 2, even among regular consumers of organic food (group 'Yes'), more than one-third (35.9%) admitted that they were not informed at all about the institutions that guarantee certification, which served as a basis for further statistical testing.

This statistical finding had a strong qualitative implication: the decision to purchase organic food in B&H was not rationally based on the recognition of an official mark or certificate. Instead, consumers equated the terms "organic" and "domestic". Trust was placed in the producer, not the institution. This was in line with findings from other developing markets, where informal quality guarantees often replaced institutional ones. Thus, Petrescu et al. (2017) pointed out that consumers, due to mistrust in the control system, preferred to choose uncertified food directly from farmers, while Nagy, Lakner, and Temesi (2022) emphasized that in the absence of institutional trust, consumers often rely on local origin and direct contact, equating organic with 'domestic', whereby the producer themselves becomes the main guarantor of the product's credibility.

Also, high satisfaction with quality ($M=3.99$) suggested that consumers perceived organic food as safer for health, which was in line with the research by Jotanović (2022) on the quality of food of animal origin, as well as the study by Madureira et al. (2022) which emphasized the perception of food safety as a key purchasing motive.

The impact of socio-economic factors on consumer behavior (ANOVA results)

In addition to the analysis of behavioral patterns, the research examined the impact of socio-economic variables on attitudes and actual consumption (Table 3). By applying a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), it was determined that the economic power of the respondents, measured by the level of monthly income, did not have a statistically significant impact on the satisfaction with the quality of organic products itself ($F = 0.948$; $p = 0.436$). Average satisfaction scores were consistently high across all income groups. Similarly, the analysis showed that the level of education also did not make a statistically significant difference in the perception of quality ($p = 0.456$). This meant that consumers of all economic categories, regardless of the intellectual or economic

status of the respondents, when they came into possession of an organic product, equally valued its quality and universally perceived it as superior.

Table 3. Summary of ANOVA test results: The impact of socio-economic factors on consumer attitudes and behavior

Independent variable	Dependent variable (Attitudes / Behavior)	F-value	p-value (Sig.)	Significance
Monthly income	Perception of differences (organic vs. conventional)	3.725	.006	Yes*
	Purchase frequency	2.831	.025	Yes*
	Importance of organic diet	.436	.783	No
	Personal opinion on organic products	1.138	.338	No
	Satisfaction with quality	.948	.436	No
Education level	Satisfaction with quality	.915	.456	No
	Purchase frequency	.636	.637	No

* Statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level

Source: Authors' calculation based on the conducted research.

However, when it came to purchase frequency, economic power became a crucial factor. The ANOVA test showed a statistically significant difference ($F=2.831$; $p=0.025$). The subsequent Tukey HSD test specified that the key difference occurred between the group with no income and the group with the highest incomes (over 1500 BAM), with a mean difference of -1.197 ($p=0.029$). This unequivocally confirmed that organic food in B&H was a price-elastic good – the desire to purchase was universal, but the realization of the purchase was strictly limited by the budget.

These findings were fully complementary to the results obtained by Vehapi and Dolićanin (2016), who also determined the existence of a statistically significant relationship ($p=0.034$) between the level of monthly net household income and the frequency of purchasing organic food in the Serbian market. Tomić et al. (2021) also confirmed this pattern, pointing out that population income had a strong impact on purchasing, and that households with high income decided on this type of consumption significantly more often.

Another important finding of the ANOVA test related to the perception of differences between conventional and organic products ($F=3.725$; $p=0.006$). The Tukey test showed that respondents with incomes over 1500 BAM statistically significantly better noticed these differences compared to the middle class (1000-1500 BAM) ($p=0.003$). This suggested that a higher economic status did not only bring greater purchasing power, but often went hand in hand with better information and a more sophisticated taste, enabling those consumers to more clearly differentiate the attributes of an organic product.

This thesis was also strengthened by the findings from the doctoral dissertation of Vapa-Tankosić (2018), which determined that the household monthly income variable made a significant unique contribution to predicting consumers' willingness to pay a higher price (premium) for organic products. Consumers who were more informed and who highly evaluated the nutritional properties of food were more willing to allocate additional funds. Also, Vehapi and Dolićanin (2016) concluded that precisely consumers with higher incomes and higher education represented the key segment showing recognition of benefits and willingness for more regular purchasing.

Gender dimension of diet perception

The analysis of differences in attitudes according to gender (T-test approximation through descriptive analysis) further illuminated the consumer profile. Although both genders highly rated the importance of diet for health, women expressed a statistically higher average score ($M=4.14$) compared to men ($M=3.87$). The difference of 0.27 points, with a stable standard deviation in both groups ($SD \approx 1.0$), indicated that women were generally more aware of the connection between diet and health.

The obtained results were fully complementary to the findings of Petrescu et al. (2017), who determined a statistically significant difference between genders in the Romanian market, confirming that women were significantly more dedicated to a healthier lifestyle and showed a higher degree of trust in the attributes of organic products compared to men. Similarly, the empirical research by Vapa-Tankosić (2018) pointed out that female respondents evaluated the nutritional properties of organic food with significantly higher scores and showed a greater willingness to allocate additional funds for it. Tomić et al. (2021) also recognized that predominantly women (especially those aged between 30 and 45, who had children) gave a distinct preference to organic food, viewing its purchase as a necessity.

The economic implication of these results was clear: although there was a universal desire for a healthier diet, actual demand remained price-elastic and strongly limited by income constraints, which continued to position the organic product on the domestic market as a premium good. This confirmed the thesis that marketing campaigns for organic products should primarily target the female population, using arguments related to health and family well-being. This recommendation was directly reinforced by Petrescu et al. (2017), who concluded that in promotional campaigns, the female segment required significantly less persuasion effort, given their greater initial belief in the health benefits of organic products.

Economic and institutional barriers to market development

The analysis of barriers using the multiple-response method ($N=310$) revealed a clear hierarchy of obstacles that limited the expansion of the organic food market; in the first place was the high price, followed by a lack of availability and weak supply.

Table 4. Key barriers to greater consumption of organic products

Barrier	Frequency (N)	Percentage of respondents (%)
High price	194	62.6
Lack of availability	188	60.6
Lack of information	173	55.8
Weak supply	162	52.3
Lack of trust	137	44.2
Other	18	5.8

Source: Authors' calculation based on the conducted research (N=310). Note: The sum of percentages is greater than 100% because respondents had the option of multiple choices.

The dominant barrier was the high price, which was cited as a key limiting factor by 62.6% of respondents. This data unequivocally showed that, despite the expressed demand, consumption in the domestic market remained highly price-elastic for the majority of the population. These findings fully corresponded with the research conducted by Ak and Teker (2019), emphasizing that economic factors remained the primary constraint in other developing markets as well. Thus, Đokić and Milićević (2016) identified precisely the “price premium” as the primary obstacle to converting preferred into actual consumption, which was confirmed by Tomić et al. (2021) who pointed out that the high price (51% of respondents) and weak purchasing power of the population (22%) were the main reasons for not purchasing organic products in the Serbian market.

In addition to the price factor, the results indicated critical physical market limitations: a lack of availability was highlighted by 60.6% of respondents, while a weak supply was cited by 52.3% of respondents. These data suggested that the high transaction costs of finding organic products additionally demotivated the average urban consumer, which is why these products remained marginalized compared to the conventional supply. Vehapi and Dolićanin (2016) pointed out similar problems of insufficient physical availability in developing markets, stating that inconsistent supply, lack of product assortment breadth, and poorly developed distribution channels represented significant obstacles to the growth of this sector.

The second key group of barriers related to institutional shortcomings. It was particularly indicative that 44.2% of respondents highlighted a lack of trust in the labeling system as a key obstacle, while 55.8% cited a lack of information. This finding directly corresponded to the previously identified problem of not knowing certification bodies and confirmed that the obstacle to market development was not exclusively in low purchasing power, but in a systemic lack of credibility. This thesis was also confirmed by Vapa-Tankosić (2018), whose empirical research emphasized that insufficient consumer information and lack of trust in product authenticity, due to doubts in control and certification systems, represented key barriers to demand expansion in transition markets.

These data sent a strong message to the supply chain. In conditions of pronounced information asymmetry, educational and marketing campaigns could do more for market growth than merely mechanically lowering prices. Consumers, especially those in urban centers who do not have direct contact with the village, simply could not easily find organic products in their regular places of purchase, and even when they found them, they were not sure of their origin due to not recognizing official certificates.

Comparative analysis of regional market trends

The comparison of the obtained results with related research in the Western Balkans region indicated clear specificities of consumer behavior in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Observing the market of neighboring Croatia, on the example of the Split region, Čagalj et al. (2020) identified that the high price was the main obstacle to greater organic food consumption, which fully corresponded with the findings of this research where the price barrier was also dominant. However, a notable difference was observed in the primary motivation; while Čagalj et al. (2020) found that consumers in Split highlighted environmental protection as the most significant purchasing motive, our results showed that consumers in B&H were primarily driven by personal health aspects and the nutritional value of food.

Significant deviations were observed when comparing with the Serbian market, especially in the segment of distribution channels. Analyzing consumer behavior in the Republic of Serbia, Vehapi and Dolićanin (2016) pointed out a clear trend of growing importance of conventional retailers, whereby supermarkets became the main place where consumers bought organic food. In contrast, our research confirmed the absolute dominance of informal and direct procurement channels in B&H (green markets and direct purchase from producers). Nevertheless, a common characteristic of both markets was information asymmetry, given that Vehapi and Dolićanin (2016) confirmed that a significant number of consumers did not recognize the national label for an organic product and did not know the certification process.

Similar challenges of transition economies were analyzed by Miftari et al. (2022) on the example of Kosovo, where they proved that the level of awareness about organic products was growing, but that the lack of an adequate institutional framework slowed down the development of the sector. Their research indicated that health care and recognition of the certification system significantly shaped consumer attitudes and intentions. In direct contrast to these findings, the results of our research proved that in the B&H market, institutional certification still did not have a decisive impact on consumption itself.

This phenomenon was further explained by findings from the Romanian market, where Petrescu et al. (2017) highlighted the phenomenon of the “trust paradox” – consumers, due to doubt in the official control system, preferred to choose uncertified food directly from farmers, considering it “more organic” than the one in supermarkets. While in more mature markets trust was gradually transferred to institutions, consumers in B&H, similarly to Romania, continued to build trust on traditional relationships, acquaintance with the producer, and the perceived “domestic” origin of the products.

Research limitations and recommendations for future research

Like any empirical research, this study carried certain limitations that should be taken into account when interpreting the results, but which simultaneously opened up space for further scientific research. The main limitation arose from the applied data collection methodology. Given that the research was conducted via an online survey questionnaire, the obtained convenience sample showed a certain degree of methodological bias (sample bias) towards a younger, urban, digitally more literate, and highly educated population. Although this demographic group undoubtedly represented the primary target market for organic food products, the obtained results could not be generalized with absolute certainty to the total population of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This particularly applied to older age groups and the rural population with limited access to digital technologies, whose behavioral patterns might deviate significantly.

Regarding recommendations for further work, there was an imposed need for a qualitative and field research approach that would encompass a broader and more nationally representative sample. In addition, future studies should be directed from a general analysis of organic food to specific production sectors. In-depth market research of organic products of animal origin would have a special scientific and practical contribution, given the pronounced comparative advantages for the development of sustainable organic livestock farming in the Republic of Srpska and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The integration of such specific, narrowly profiled topics into the framework of academic research – for example, through the preparation of student master's theses and broader projects in the field of agroecomics and rural development – would provide a valuable primary data base. Such an academic approach would enable more precise mapping of short supply chains and a more detailed evaluation of the economic sustainability and ESG aspects of local agricultural holdings' operations, which is a necessary prerequisite for creating efficient sector policies and adequate preparation of professional presentations at scientific symposiums in the field of agriculture.

Conclusions

The empirical investigation into the perception and behavior of organic food consumers in Bosnia and Herzegovina reveals that the domestic market remains in an early, transitional stage of development. The most critical finding of this study is the identification of the 'trust paradox,' characterized by a pronounced discrepancy between high declarative consumption and a pervasive lack of institutional trust. Consumers predominantly rely on informal supply channels and subjective perceptions, frequently equating the term 'domestic' with 'organic'. Consequently, the official certification system currently fails to fulfill its fundamental market function of mitigating information asymmetry. This creates an environment where consumers cannot clearly differentiate certified organic products from conventional or hobby agriculture, leaving ample room for unfair competition and market inefficiencies.

Furthermore, the socio-economic profiling confirms that organic food in this region functions primarily as a premium good intended for a specific market niche. The research identifies highly educated women from urban areas with above-average incomes as the primary purchasing decision-makers. Income level emerges as the key determinant of both consumption frequency and the ability to recognize superior quality. Given that respondents identified high price, limited physical availability, and a lack of clear information as primary barriers, it is evident that demand remains highly price-elastic for the majority of the population. Conversely, the less price-sensitive, high-income segment represents the primary target group for immediate marketing strategies.

Reflecting on the broader implications of these findings, it is evident that the sustainable expansion of the organic sector requires a strategic shift beyond merely subsidizing primary production. For organic agriculture to transition from an elite market niche to a mainstream driver of public health and rural development, a systemic transformation of consumer trust is imperative. Trust must be redirected from exclusively interpersonal relationships, such as personal acquaintance with the producer, towards robust institutional guarantees. This necessitates intensive, state-backed educational campaigns focused on the visual identity and credibility of the official national organic label. Additionally, addressing the critical barriers of physical availability and high transaction costs will require institutional support for short supply chains, such as 'farm-to-fork' initiatives and digital direct-sales platforms. Ultimately, overcoming the 'trust paradox' through targeted education and market formalization is the essential prerequisite for unlocking the full economic and ecological potential of organic agriculture in the region.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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