

# ***MARKETING COMMUNICATION OF ORGANIC FOOD***

**Alica Lacková, Ph.D. Associate Profesor**

**University of Economics in Bratislava**

This paper provides a comprehensive overview of the tools of marketing communication used by producers and sellers of organic food active on the Slovak market and the results of the research focused on identifying the current level of consumer awareness in relation to the issue under examination. Currently, the organic agriculture is on a global scale a continuously growing sector, particularly with regards to the current Eco trend, characterised by sensitive approach to the environment through protection of water, soil and atmosphere (by not using damaging chemical substances), recycling and decreasing the amount of waste and by improving the living conditions of livestock. Organic agriculture provides several other benefits: it helps to protect biodiversity and with maintaining the principles of sustainable growth. From an economic perspective, it supports development of rural areas, which results in increased amount of employment opportunities and thus growth in employment. In most countries, organic agriculture is therefore one of the areas that are strongly supported by both the private and public sectors.

Organic food market in Slovakia is for several years one of the fastest expanding markets. This is due to several factors. One of them is intense globalisation tendency that have resulted in the actual appearance of organic food on our market. Slovak consumer is, as a result of better access to information (quantity and quality of which is constantly increasing), as well as faster appearance and acceptance of new trends, having more and more demands on the products, which are being offered to him. Slovak consumers demand foodstuffs that will not only satisfy their nutrition needs, but also will have positive effect on their fitness or health. The next factor is the entry of several supermarket chains (such as Tesco, Kaufland, Billa) on the organic food market, which has partially solved one of the major problems, which is their poor accessibility for the end consumer. Until recently, it was only possible to buy them from specialised shops or directly from producers on their eco farms. Today, however, it is possible to choose from a comparatively wide selection of organic food, including baked products, meat products, candy, beverages, fruits and vegetables, but also infant food or other less demanded products.

Despite the good initial situation, the Slovak market also has to - like majority of the foreign markets - face several initial obstacles. Low awareness of potential consumers, distrust of the 'new' or unwillingness for changes from their side and a long period for returning of the investment, imperfect legislation and the competition in the form of cheaper or 'established' foreign products are currently very real threats. One of the most obvious problems (or challenges), which the current Slovak organic food market has to face, is the above-mentioned lack of awareness of potential

customers. If the targeted segment is not informed about specific contributions of the organically produced food, it becomes 'unreachable' for sellers. Potential customers must be made aware of the positive aspects associated with both production and consumption of organic food. It is necessary to introduce them to all of the related benefits, i.e. consumption of organic food as the basis for a healthy lifestyle, and also the ecological and economic aspects of their production. Clarifying and spreading the principles of organic agriculture and the benefits resulting from production and consumption of organic food should be one of the main focuses of marketing communication of these products.

Marketing communication is in the literature also referred to as a part of the activation of the sales of products and services, including food products. Actuation of sales is achieved by utilising various forms of communication, such as advertising or sales promotion. The role of these tools is to attract potential customers and then to convince them to buy the products. However, in the case of organic food, the purpose of the communication with the market is also to raise awareness about the positive effects of consumption of these products stemming from their organic origin.

Significant benefits of organic food - not only for human health and the environment, but also with regard to their economic benefits, lack of awareness of potential consumers about the positive aspects of production and consumption, and consequently the marketing communication as one of the main options for improving the current situation (in terms of increasing public awareness) are the main motives for exploration the given issue. The neglect of the role of marketing communications of organic food already in the early stages of market development seems like an insurmountable barrier for further development of this market.

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