

Study on Romanian Consumers' Opinion Regarding the Animal Welfare Labelling of Animal Products

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Abstract

The aim of the paper was to investigate the influence some factors on the consumers' opinion regarding the animal welfare labelling of animal products. The analysed question was: “When purchasing eggs, meat or milk can you easily identify from the label those products sourced from animal welfare friendly production systems?” Respondents chosen only one answer out of the five offered: yes, most of the time; yes, some of the time; no, very rarely; no, never; and don't know. Thirty three percent of females considered they could find sometime information regarding the animal welfare on the labels, while males considered that this information could be found very rarely. Up to 55 years of age, 50% of the consumers consider that the labels do not contain the information about animal welfare, while after this age most of consumers consider they found this information on the labels. Over 50% of Orthodox and Roman Catholic responders considered that the information on animal welfare on the labels was found some of the time or very rarely. Respondents, irrespective of their living area or monthly income, considered that there is scarce information regarding animal welfare on the labels. Internet access significantly influenced the consumers regarding the availability of the information on the labels.

Keywords: animal products, animal welfare, labels, Romanian consumers

1. Introduction

Concerns about farm animal welfare vary among individuals and societies. As people increasingly consider the values underlying current farm animal production methods, farm animal welfare policy debates have escalated. Attending to the ethical questions posed by citizens, rather than simply consumers, will allow better identifying the factual knowledge that is needed for decision making about animal welfare without raising false expectations about what answers science can provide [1].

From a general standpoint, the importance of animal welfare is well recognized by the European Union citizens, who assigned, on a scale from 1 to 10, an average rating of 7.8 to the question “How important is to you that the welfare of farmed animal is protected?” [2]. Although most citizens believe that animal welfare standards have improved over the last ten years, the large majority of the public (77%) deems that further improvements are needed.

Even the farm animal welfare is an issue of growing concern for the European citizen, there is still a high tendency to buy the cheapest meat. This shows that buying behaviour does not simply reflect the attitude towards animal welfare. This gap between attitude and behaviour is referred to

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as the duality between the consumer and citizen [3].

One of the fundamental issues of food production is transparency. How much information should the consumer be able to obtain at the point of sales and how much should be readily accessible for inquiring consumers? [4]. For developed countries, the rise of food sciences and engineering for mechanical production of food has helped to produce more food at lower consumer costs than any movement in recent history.

Consumer research on voluntary food labelling commissioned by the National Consumer Council (2003) found that the consumers often felt overwhelmed by the information on food labels and found it difficult to distinguish between competing claims, endorsements or assurances. The consensus that emerged from this research was that consumers would like a short-cut to decision making based on kite marks or logos which represented a clear message with well defined claims that were transparent and trustworthy [5]. A significant advantage of meeting consumer demands for enhanced welfare standards is that others in the food supply chain and the food service sector will promote better animal welfare standards in order to try to meet the demands. A large majority of people (over 85%) indicated by the response to the EU on-line consultation on the welfare of farm animals in December 2005 that animals should be treated much better in production systems. 87% of the 45,000 who participated in the survey across Europe felt that food retailers do not provide enough information on welfare conditions. 89% felt that livestock production methods should be labelled more clearly to indicate animal welfare conditions.

The European Commission adopted on October 29, 2009 a report in which it outlines a series of options for animal welfare labelling, to facilitate an in-depth political debate with the other institutions. The overall goal of policy in this area is to make it easier for consumers to identify and choose welfare-friendly products, and thereby give an economic incentive to producers to improve the welfare of animals. A knock-on effect of this is that very few products provide information to the consumer on welfare standards and there is very little motivation for more producers to improve animal welfare and market their products accordingly.

In a study regarding the attitudes of European consumers towards the welfare of farmed animals [6], it was shown that respondents who state that they can identify the production system on the label have visited a farm which rears animals more frequently and they clearly think more often about animal welfare when purchasing meat. A slight majority of citizens of the EU-25 (51%) state that they can very rarely or never identify from the label whether the production system is animal welfare friendly when they buy eggs, milk or meat. For almost a third of citizens of the EU-25, this identification appears to be never possible. It was shown that Romanian consumers' willingness to pay for products obtained under animal welfare friendly systems is influenced by factors like age, gender, household income, internet access and the living area [7].

The aim of the present study was to identify the influence of gender, age, religion, living area, monthly net income, and access to internet on the easiness of Romanian consumers' to identify on the label the animal welfare-friendly products.

2. Materials and methods

The survey was carried out in year 2009, based on a questionnaire developed within the framework of the third work package of the WELANIMAL project (www.welanimal.aku.edu.tr).

The questionnaire had 12 questions, and 16 demographic questions. The respondents were able to respond the questions from the WELANIMAL project site, or they were asked to respond by students from the Banat University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine in Timișoara with different occasions.

The specific question that was analysed for this paper was as follows: "When purchasing eggs, meat or milk can you easily identify from the label those products sourced from animal welfare friendly production systems?" There were five possible answers for the respondents to choose: Yes, most of the time; Yes, some of the time; No, very rarely; No, never; and Don't know. The respondents have to choose only one answer out of the five offered.

A total of 190 questionnaires were returned, and some of them had no answers for this specific question, therefore the number of respondents per specific factor was different. The results were statistically computed according to six factors, as

follows: gender (male and female), age class (under or equal to 25 years, 26-35 years, 36-45 years, 46-55 years, and over 55 years), religion (Orthodox, Roman-Catholic and Others), the living area (rural, small and middle towns, and large towns), net household income per month (under 1000 RON, 1000-1999 RON, 2000-2999 RON, 3000-3999 RON, and over and equal to 4000 RON), and internet access in the household (yes and no).

3. Results and discussion

Table 1 presents the Romanian consumers' opinion on easiness to find information regarding the animal welfare on the labels of animal products. One third of male responders considered they find information some of the time on the labels of animal products regarding the animal welfare, while the same proportion of female

responders considered they find very rarely this information. In both genders, a great proportion of respondents, 57.2% in males and 61.3% in females, considered that they find some of time or very rarely the information on animal products labels. These results are consistent with findings of the European Commission in year 2005 [6] that showed women (46%), respondents with the highest level of education (47%) and managers (54%) identified animal welfare friendly systems on labels most easily. This study stipulates that in case of women, the higher rate may be explained by their greater involvement in buying food.

About half of the respondents up to 45 years of age found very rarely or never the information regarding the animal welfare on the labels of animal products (Table 2). Over this age the percentage decreased to 4.2% for respondents aged between 46 and 55 years and to 32.1% for those over 55 years old.

Table 1. Romanian consumers' easiness to identify from the label the products sourced from an animal welfare friendly production system according to the gender

Item	n	Can you easily identify from the label those products sourced from animal welfare friendly production systems? (%)					
		Yes, most of the time	Yes, some of the time	No, very rarely	No, never	Don't know	
Total respondents	187	13.4	32.1	26.2	18.7	9.6	
Out of which	Male	138	11.6	33.3	23.9	19.6	11.6
	Female	49	18.4	28.6	32.7	16.3	4.1

Table 2. Romanian consumers' easiness to identify from the label the products sourced from an animal welfare friendly production system according to the age

Item	n	Can you easily identify from the label those products sourced from animal welfare friendly production systems? (%)					
		Yes, most of the time	Yes, some of the time	No, very rarely	No, never	Don't know	
Total respondents	170	13.5	32.4	27.1	18.8	8.2	
Out of which	<=25 years	38	7.9	26.3	31.6	18.4	15.8
	26-35 years	37	8.1	32.4	24.3	24.3	10.8
	36-45 years	41	14.6	31.7	36.6	12.2	4.9
	46-55 years	26	23.1	23.1	15.4	30.8	7.7
	>55 years	28	17.9	50.0	21.4	10.7	0.0

Half of the people aged over 55 years old responded that they could find some of the time this information on the labels, while for the other age classes the percentage was lower, between 23.1% and 32.4%. Only about 8% of young respondents with age up to 35 years old found the information regarding animal welfare on the labels.

According to religion (Table 3), the majority of the respondents were Romanian Orthodox. Thirty four percent of these could find some time information on the labels regarding the welfare of the animals producing the products, and 26.1% found it very rarely. These two categories make up about 60% of the total respondents. In the Roman Catholic people, these percentages are switched, that is 26.3% of them found on the labels the

information regarding the animal welfare only some times, and 31.6% very rarely.

About 20% of people from these two religions had never found information regarding animal welfare on products' labels. Number of people with other religious believes was very low and their opinion distributed among the possible answers.

Results regarding the responses distribution according to the living area of respondents are presented in Table 4. A little over half of the respondents living in rural area (51.4%) found some of the time or very rarely the information

regarding animal welfare on the animal products labels. The other half of responses was spread almost equally among the other possible answers.

The highest percentage of people living in small or middle towns did found some time the information on the labels (40.5%), while one third of them did found it very rarely (32.4%).

People living in large towns believed in equal percentage that they found the information on animal welfare on the labels some of the time or very rarely (30.6% and 29.2%, respectively).

Table 3. Romanian consumers' easiness to identify from the label the products sourced from an animal welfare friendly production system according to the religion

Item	n	Can you easily identify from the label those products sourced from animal welfare friendly production systems? (%)					
		Yes, most of the time	Yes, some of the time	No, very rarely	No, never	Don't know	
Total respondents	185	13.5	31.9	26.5	18.4	9.7	
Out of which	Orthodox	153	13.7	34.0	26.1	18.3	7.8
	Roman-Catholic	19	5.3	26.3	31.6	21.1	15.8
	Others	13	23.1	15.4	23.1	15.4	23.1

Table 4. Romanian consumers' easiness to identify from the label the products sourced from an animal welfare friendly production system according to the living area

Item	n	Can you easily identify from the label those products sourced from animal welfare friendly production systems? (%)					
		Yes, most of the time	Yes, some of the time	No, very rarely	No, never	Don't know	
Total respondents	185	13.5	32.4	26.5	17.8	9.7	
Out of which	rural area	76	17.1	30.3	21.1	15.8	15.8
	small/middle town	37	13.5	40.5	32.4	10.8	2.7
	large town	72	9.7	30.6	29.2	23.6	6.9

Romanian customers earning less than 1000 RON per household declared in large percentage (53.3%) that they find very rarely the information regarding the animal welfare on the labels of animal products (Table 5).

People that were earning monthly between 1000 and 2999 RON believed in large ratio (over 40%) that some times information regarding animal welfare could be found on the labels.

An equal percentage of people earning between 3000 and 3999 RON per month per household (35.7%) find this information on labels either sometimes or very rarely. Also, in this category the largest percentage of respondents considered that they could find the information most of the time (21.4%).

Respondents whose monthly household income was greater than 4000 RON showed considered in high rate (34.4%) that they could never find information about animal welfare on labels of animal products. This result is probably because this category of people are higher educated, and is in agreement with findings of the European Commission findings in 2005 [6].

According to the internet access there was a difference between respondents having access and those without access to the internet. Thus, the percentages of responses were more spread in the case of people with internet access. About the same rate responded that they could find the information on labels some of the time (28.5%) and very rarely (29.2%). Also, 20.4% of these people considered they never find this

information, compared to only 9.3% of people that has no access to internet.

Respondents having no access to internet believed in great percentage (46.5%) that the information

about animal welfare could be find some of the time on the labels of animal products, and 23.3% of them believed this information could be find most of the time.

Table 5. Romanian consumers' easiness to identify from the label the products sourced from an animal welfare friendly production system according to the monthly net income

Item	n	Can you easily identify from the label those products sourced from animal welfare friendly production systems? (%)					
		Yes, most of the time	Yes, some of the time	No, very rarely	No, never	Don't know	
Total respondents	142	15.5	34.5	28.9	16.2	4.9	
Out of which	<1000 RON	15	20.0	26.7	53.3	0.0	0.0
	1000-1999 RON	40	17.5	40.0	17.5	22.5	2.5
	2000-2999 RON	41	14.6	41.5	29.3	4.9	9.8
	3000-3999 RON	14	21.4	35.7	35.7	7.1	0.0
	>=4000 RON	32	9.4	21.9	28.1	34.4	6.3

Table 6. Romanian consumers' easiness to identify from the label the products sourced from an animal welfare friendly production system according to access to internet in the household

Item	n	Can you easily identify from the label those products sourced from animal welfare friendly production systems? (%)					
		Yes, most of the time	Yes, some of the time	No, very rarely	No, never	Don't know	
Total respondents	180	13.3	32.8	26.1	17.8	10.0	
Out of which	Yes	137	10.2	28.5	29.2	20.4	11.7
	No	43	23.3	46.5	16.3	9.3	4.7

4. Conclusions

Generally Romanian consumers, irrespective of their gender, age, religion, living area, monthly net income, or internet access admit that they can very rarely or some of the times identify products sourced from animal welfare friendly production system based on the labels of animal products.

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