

BARRIERS TO THE PURCHASE OF ORGANIC FOOD FROM LOCAL PRODUCERS

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Purpose: The aim of the study is to identify and to assess barriers to the purchase of organic food from local producers in the opinion of consumers. Three groups of barriers were analyzed, i.e. product-related barriers, barriers related to consumers and barriers related to the communication process, depending on such consumer characteristics as: gender, age, education, place of residence and wealth.

Design/methodology/approach: The analysis includes the opinions of all surveyed consumers of organic food and, for comparison, the opinions of a selected group of consumers who buy a local product. The empirical material of the work consists of the results of a survey conducted among 850 organic food consumers in Poland. The research was conducted in December 2020 using the CAWI method.

Findings: The research shows that, among the barriers to purchasing organic food from local producers analyzed in this paper, barriers related to the product, including its high price, are of the greatest importance for consumers, which especially applies to consumers buying local organic food products. On the other hand, the remaining barriers, i.e. those related to consumers and the communication process, are of little importance for the surveyed consumers.

Originality/value: The article presents the barriers to the purchase of organic food from local producers, three groups of barriers were analyzed, i.e. product-related barriers, barriers related to consumers and barriers related to the communication process.

Keywords: organic food, local organic food product, local producers, barriers to purchase.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

One of the most important human rights is access to adequate food quality, which depends on an efficiently functioning food system, which includes activities related to production, processing, distribution and consumption. Food is one of the products that must be present in

human consumption; there is no substitute for it. In the hierarchy of needs, regardless of the level of income, it is always of primary importance. The food we produce and consume is inextricably linked to human well-being and the natural environment (Gołębiowski, 2019, p. 5). Ecological production combines the best practices for the environment, a high degree of biodiversity, the application of high standards of animal welfare, and consumer preference for products made with the use of natural substances (Daly, 2007, p. 82; Komorowska, 2016, p. 124). In organic farming, the production possibilities are not yet fully utilized. However, the increase in economic efficiency in this type of farming is and will be limited by rigorously established guidelines for certified cultivation and animal husbandry, and especially by a complete ban on the use of chemical means of production. Therefore, the level of income generated by organic farms and the level of subsidies seem to be decisive for the development possibilities of organic farming. In countries with a low and moderate level of external support for this form of cultivation, farmers' interest in undertaking organic production is decreasing (Runowski, 2009, p. 182). The image of organic farming is influenced by many factors, but it should be remembered that organic production gives the possibility of obtaining natural and safe products. Eco-farms not only produce high-quality food, but also care for the quality of the environment in which they operate. The global organic food market is facing a great opportunity for development. Along with the increase in environmental awareness and the level of wealth of society, the interest in this type of products increases (Domagalska, Buczkowska, 2015, p. 370). Organic farming is an instrument of sustainable development. It protects the environment, preserves biodiversity and prevents climate change. At the same time, it also responds to the needs of consumers who buy more and more consciously and want safe and healthy food. In its "farm to fork" and "biodiversity" strategies, which are part of the European Green Deal, the European Commission has set a target of at least 25% of the EU's agricultural land under organic farming. The European Green Deal, the European Union's new economic growth strategy until 2050, stresses that the key to success is a sustainable food system, in which organic farmers are pioneers of sustainable agriculture of the future, and consumers are sure that the product is safe for their health. Organic farming area has grown by almost 66% in the last 10 years and represents 8.5% of the EU's total utilized agricultural area. The increase in space was accompanied by a significant increase in retail sales, the value of which has doubled in the last 10 years, from around 18 billion EUR in 2010 to over 41 billion EUR in 2020. The largest consumption of organic food in 2021 was in Denmark (344 EUR per person), Switzerland (338 EUR per person) and Luxembourg (265 EUR per person). Poland ranks 18th in terms of organic land – organic farming accounts for 3.5% of all crops, consumption per person is 8 EUR, and the share of sales of organic products in the food market is 0.6%. (Communication from the Commission, 2021, p. 1, 3; The World of Organic Agriculture, 2022, p. 19, 66). Shortening the supply chain, developing direct sales and processing activities, and returning to localness is an essential element of the Farm to Fork strategy included in the European Green Deal. An important issue is the "attachment" of the consumer to the local

product and the perception of the impact of this “localness” on the development of the region. Consumers in Poland believe that what is local is better, fresher and more identifiable, as well as cheaper and tastier. They believe that this development should be supported by buying Polish food and overcoming barriers, the most important of which include: high price, lack of knowledge among buyers and the need to change attitudes and ways of thinking in the area of nutrition and shopping, difficulties in accessing the offer, lack of promotional activities (Nesterowicz et al., 2016, p. 49, 54). The research issues undertaken in the study are part of the concept of sustainable development, and at the same time also concern important aspects of sustainable consumption (Akenji, Bengtsson, 2014, p. 513) and the concept of local development, which involves activities aimed at increasing the use of available resources from the local environment in order to improve the quality of life of the inhabitants of a given community and the functioning of economic activity (Sitek, 2016, p. 37, 38). Consumers function within contemporary culture and become similar to each other – they become global, but remain attached to regional and local values (Usunier, Prime, 2003, p. 11; Prime, Usunier, 2012, p. 420, 429). This context leads to the question about barriers to buying organic food from local producers.

2. The aim, empirical material and the method of the research

The aim of the study is to identify and to assess barriers to the purchase of organic food from local producers in the opinion of consumers. Three groups of barriers in this respect were analyzed, i.e. product-related barriers, barriers related to consumers and barriers related to the communication process, depending on such socio-economic characteristics of consumers as: gender, age, education, place of residence and wealth. The opinions of all the consumers of organic food surveyed (850 people) were analyzed, and, for comparison, the opinions of a selected group of consumers who buy a local product (480 people), in order to answer the question whether it is important for the researched phenomenon, i.e. for the existence of barriers to the purchase of organic food from local producers.

The empirical material of the work consists of the results of a survey conducted among 850 organic food consumers in Poland. The research was carried out in December 2020, using the CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interview) method, via an online panel. The collected and structured empirical material was developed in a descriptive, tabular and graphic form, using the method of comparative analysis.

The study presents a research hypothesis which assumes that for consumers buying local organic food products at organic farms (direct sales), all the analyzed barriers to purchasing organic food from local producers are of the least importance, mainly due to the fact that they have the possibility of direct contact with producers.

3. The results of the research

The ability to identify and to predict specific barriers helps to avoid the serious consequences and risks of such restrictions. It also gives the opportunity to look for new ways and forms of management which, on the one hand, make it possible to cope with threats, but on the other hand, will not generate barriers in the future (Becla, Czaja, Graczyk, 2020, p. 7). When analyzing the opinions of consumers regarding the barriers to purchasing organic food from local producers (barriers related to the product), it should be noted that they most often indicate the high price of organic food products in this respect: such a barrier is indicated by fewer than half of the surveyed consumers. Subsequently, the product-related barrier in the purchase of organic food from local producers is the low availability of organic food products, followed by their limited assortment. However, the percentage of consumers' indications about the last two barriers is low. On the other hand, for consumers buying a local organic food product, product-related barriers to the purchase of organic food from local producers are slightly more important: its high price and low availability, while the barrier of the small range of local ecological food products is slightly less important. It should be added that for consumers buying a local organic food product at organic farms (direct sales) (139 people), the significance of the analyzed barriers to the purchase of organic food from local producers (barriers related to the product) is definitely the smallest, especially such as: availability and small assortment, for which the percentage of indications by these consumers is almost negligible (Figure 1).

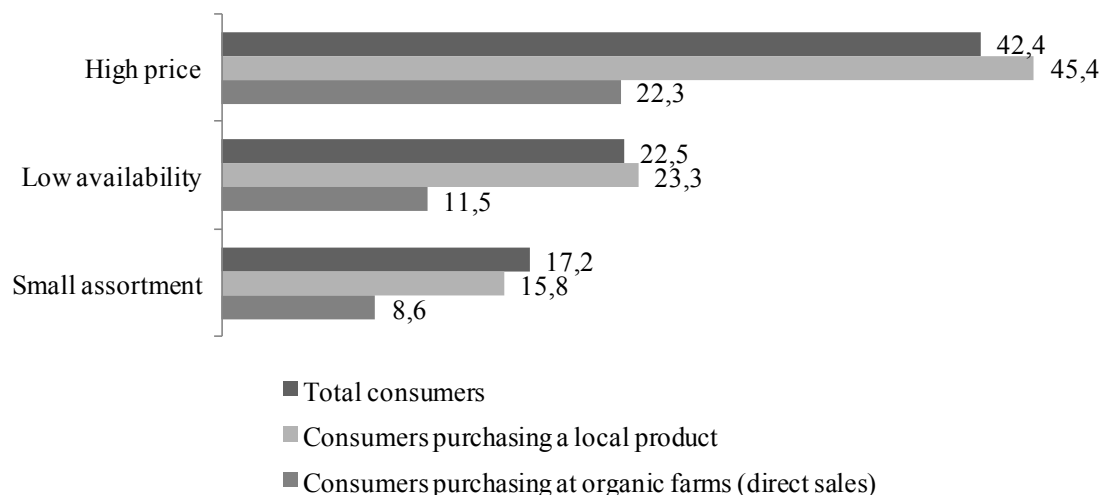


Figure 1. Percentage of consumers indicating barriers to purchasing organic food from local producers (barriers related to the product). Source: own elaboration based on conducted survey research.

In the opinion of the surveyed consumers, the barriers to buying organic food from local producers related to consumers are of little importance to them. In this respect, they most often indicate such a barrier as eating habits, while the percentage of indications is low and similar in the case of all consumers and those who buy a local organic food product. On the other hand,

the other two barriers, i.e. the lack of trust in the quality and the origin of the product and customs, are of little importance for the surveyed consumers, especially for those who buy a local organic food product. On the other hand, for consumers buying local organic food products at organic farms (direct sales), the significance of all analyzed barriers to the purchase of organic food from local producers (barriers related to consumers) is clearly the smallest, or even negligible (Figure 2).

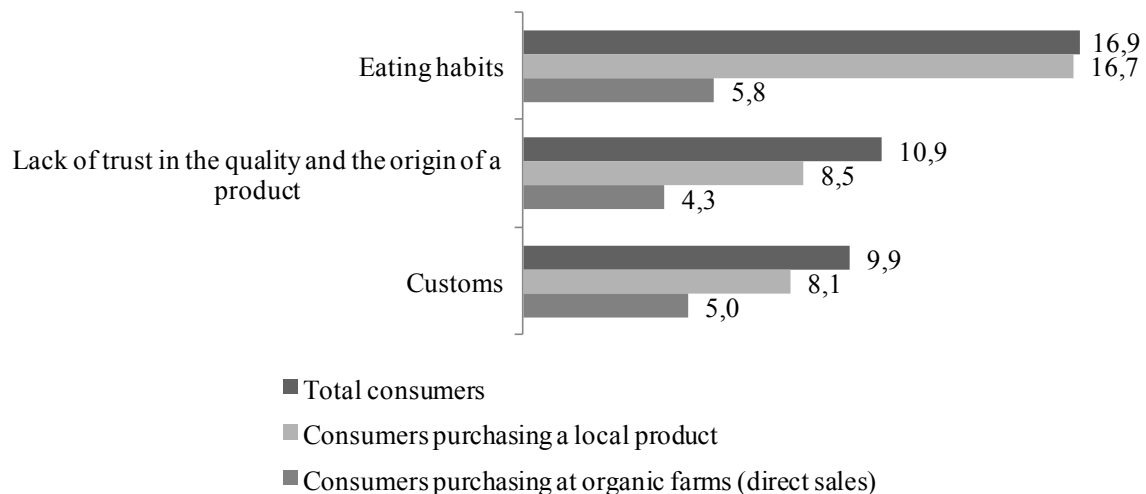


Figure 2. Percentage of consumers indicating barriers to purchasing organic food from local producers (barriers related to consumers). Source: own elaboration based on conducted survey research.

According to the surveyed consumers, barriers to buying organic food from local producers (barriers related to the communication process) are not of great importance to them, just like barriers related to consumers. In this regard, they most often indicate such a barrier as the difficulties in distinguishing organic food from the so-called "healthy" food, with a low percentage of indications, similar for all consumers and those who buy a local organic food product. On the other hand, the other two barriers of this type, i.e. the lack of appropriate labeling and the lack of information about the possibility of purchase, are of little importance for the surveyed consumers, and especially for those who buy a local organic food product. Additionally, it should be noted that consumers buying local organic food products from organic farms (direct sales) did not indicate the existence of the analyzed barriers at all. On this basis, it can be concluded that direct contact between consumers and producers completely eliminates such barriers in purchasing organic food from local producers (Figure 3). Therefore, the conducted research confirmed the research hypothesis presented in the study.

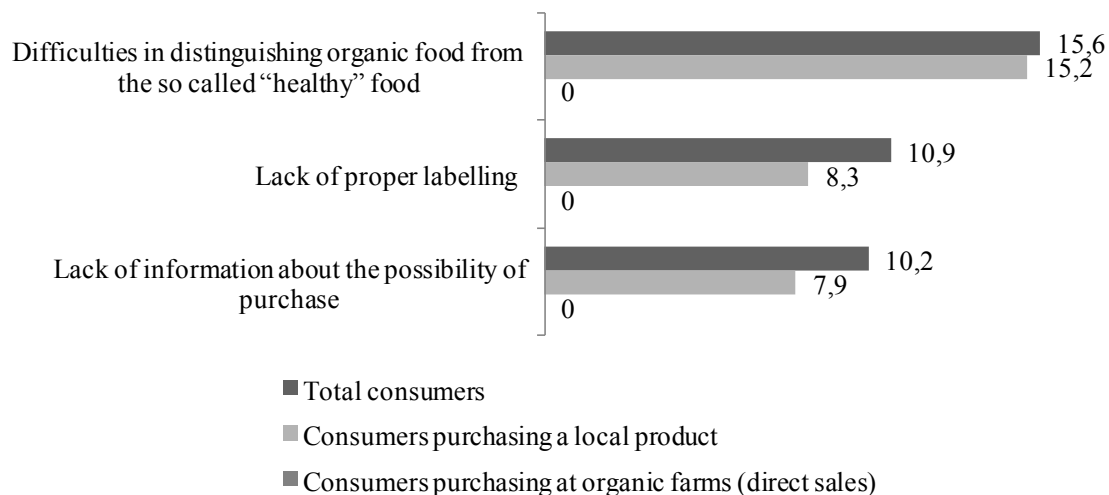


Figure 3. Percentage of consumers indicating barriers to purchasing organic food from local producers (barriers related to the communication process). Source: own elaboration based on conducted survey research.

In the further part of the work, the analysis covered the socio-economic characteristics of the surveyed consumers indicating barriers in the purchase of organic food from local producers (Tables 1, 2 and 3). The data in Table 1 show that over 62% of women stated that the barrier to buying organic food is the high price and the low availability of such food. More than half of young consumers under 40 indicated all barriers related to the product, with a slightly lower percentage of indications in the case of consumers purchasing a local product. When analyzing consumer opinions on the barriers to purchasing organic food from local producers (barriers related to the product), it should be noted that the range of products is important for people with higher education. The small assortment of organic products is indicated, to a greater extent, by consumers buying a local product. Taking into account the place of residence, it should be noted that half of the consumers living in large cities indicate barriers related to high prices and low availability of organic products. The inhabitants of villages and less affluent persons indicated a similar opinion.

Table 1.

Socio-economic characteristics of consumers pointing to barriers in purchasing organic food from local producers (barriers related to the product)

Specification	High price		Low availability		Small assortment	
	I [N = 360]	II [N = 218]	I [N = 191]	II [N = 112]	I [N = 146]	II [N = 76]
Total consumers (in %)	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0
Women	61,4	62,8	61,8	61,6	55,5	56,6
Men	38,6	37,2	38,2	38,4	44,5	43,4
Age of consumers						
Up to 40 years old	58,6	57,4	58,6	51,8	52,7	50,0
40-60 years old	34,7	36,2	35,1	41,1	36,3	38,2
61 years old and more	6,7	6,4	6,3	7,1	11,0	11,8

Cont. table 1.

Education of consumers						
Higher	48,1	51,4	48,2	50,9	51,4	52,6
Secondary	49,7	46,8	49,7	48,2	47,9	47,4
Primary	2,2	1,8	2,1	0,9	0,7	-
Place of residence of consumers						
Countryside	30,0	28,9	26,7	26,8	25,3	25,0
Towns (up to 50 thousand inhabitants)	20,8	21,1	23,0	26,8	29,5	32,9
Cities (50 thousand and more inhabitants)	49,2	50,0	50,3	46,4	45,2	42,1
Wealth of consumers (monthly income per 1 family member)						
Up to 327 EURO	30,3	32,6	29,8	33,9	22,6	23,7
327-545 EURO	43,0	40,4	37,7	33,9	49,3	48,7
550 EURO and more	26,7	27,0	32,5	32,2	28,1	27,6

Clarification for the table: I – total consumers, II – consumers purchasing a local product

Source: own elaboration based on conducted survey research.

The data in Table 2 shows that women pay a lot of attention to the quality of the product as more than 2/3 of the surveyed women indicated barriers related to the lack of trust in the quality and the origin of the product. Young people and people with better education included eating habits and customs among the most important barriers related to consumers (over 55% of respondents). As a result, it seems that young and educated people show greater trust in local food producers. The Organic Food Report in Poland (2021) shows that women more often admit that they are prompted to buy organic food by the safety of such food, its taste, and the belief that organic food is free from genetic modification. The inhabitants of large cities make purchases of organic food much more frequently, while the inhabitants of towns and villages are the least likely to buy organic food, which may be a consequence of the fact that these people have their own home gardens, where they grow organic products for their own needs.

Table 2.

Socio-economic characteristics of consumers pointing to barriers in purchasing organic food from local producers (barriers related to consumers)

Specification	Eating habits		Lack of trust in the quality and the origin of a product		Customs	
	I [N = 144]	II [N = 80]	I [N = 93]	II [N = 46]	I [N = 84]	II [N = 43]
Total consumers (in %)	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0
Women	59,0	56,2	68,8	65,2	53,6	60,5
Men	41,0	43,8	31,2	34,8	46,4	39,5
Age of consumers						
Up to 40 years old	59,0	56,2	46,2	45,7	58,3	60,5
40-60 years old	33,4	33,8	44,1	43,5	31,0	27,9
61 years old and more	7,6	10,0	9,7	10,8	10,7	11,6
Education of consumers						
Higher	45,1	52,5	46,2	47,8	51,2	55,8
Secondary	52,8	46,3	49,5	47,8	48,8	44,2
Primary	2,1	1,2	4,3	4,4	-	-

Cont. table 2.

Place of residence of consumers						
Countryside	28,5	30,0	28,0	28,3	26,1	25,6
Towns (up to 50 thousand inhabitants)	21,5	21,2	21,5	17,4	17,9	16,3
Cities (50 thousand and more inhabitants)	50,0	48,8	50,5	54,3	56,0	58,1
Wealth of consumers (monthly income per 1 family member)						
Up to 327 EURO	31,2	32,5	28,0	28,2	31,0	37,2
327-545 EURO	29,9	32,5	32,2	37,0	35,7	32,6
550 EURO and more	38,9	35,0	39,8	34,8	33,3	30,2

Clarification for the table: I – total consumers, II – consumers purchasing a local product.

Source: own elaboration based on conducted survey research.

Based on the data contained in Table 3, it can be inferred that for women, the barriers related to quality are important, i.e. the difficulty of distinguishing organic food from the so-called “healthy” food, with a low percentage of indications, similar for all consumers and those who buy a local organic food product. Women pay attention to the freshness of the product and prefer to buy organic products from local producers more frequently. The Covid-19 pandemic has increased the demand for organic products from local producers. On the other hand, the other two barriers of this type, i.e. the lack of appropriate labeling and the lack of information about the possibility of purchase, are of greater importance for consumers purchasing a local organic food product, who are young and have a higher level of education and the highest level of income per family member. Additionally, it should be noted that consumers buying local organic food products at organic farms (direct sales) to a lesser extent indicated barriers related to the lack of information about the possibility of purchase (mainly inhabitants of rural areas and large cities). This means that direct contact between consumers and food producers eliminates such barriers in purchasing organic food from local producers.

Table 3.

Socio-economic characteristics of consumers pointing to barriers in purchasing organic food from local producers (barriers related to the communication process)

Specification	Difficulties in distinguishing organic food from the so called “healthy” food		Lack of proper labelling		Lack of information about the possibility of purchase	
	I [N = 133]	II [N = 74]	I [N = 93]	II [N = 50]	I [N = 87]	II [N = 45]
Total consumers (in %)	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0
Women	58,6	59,5	58,1	48,0	51,7	57,8
Men	41,4	40,5	41,9	52,0	48,3	42,2
Age of consumers						
Up to 40 years old	47,4	39,2	57,0	56,0	47,2	48,9
40-60 years old	40,6	48,6	29,0	32,0	42,5	40,0
61 years old and more	12,0	12,2	14,0	12,0	10,3	11,1
Education of consumers						
Higher	49,6	51,4	55,9	62,0	57,5	53,3
Secondary	48,9	45,9	43,0	38,0	40,2	44,5
Primary	1,5	2,7	1,1	-	2,3	2,2

Cont. table 3.

Place of residence of consumers						
Countryside	25,6	25,7	29,0	26,0	39,1	37,8
Towns (up to 50 thousand inhabitants)	25,6	27,0	25,8	22,0	18,4	24,4
Cities (50 thousand and more inhabitants)	48,8	47,3	45,2	52,0	42,5	37,8
Wealth of consumers (monthly income per 1 family member)						
Up to 327 EURO	27,1	27,0	34,4	30,0	28,7	26,7
327-545 EURO	42,9	51,4	37,6	44,0	39,1	37,8
550 EURO and more	30,1	21,6	28,0	26,0	32,2	35,6

Clarification for the table: I – total consumers, II – consumers purchasing a local product.

Source: own elaboration based on conducted survey research.

The research by Grzybowska-Brzezińska and Grzywińska-Rapca (2018) and Bryła (2016) shows that consumers in Poland believe that what is local is better, fresher and more identifiable, as well as cheaper and tastier. The main barriers to the purchase of organic food were: limited availability of the full range of these products, a small number of points of sale and, above all, the high level of prices of this type of food. According to Kesse-Guyot et al. (2013) French consumers (the study was conducted among 54 111 adult consumers in France, with the average age of 43), buyers of organic food also perceive it as better for their health and the environment (over 70% of indications). People with higher education declared that they buy and eat organic food more often, with the aim of taking care of their own and family health. More than half of the French respondents (51%) said that organic food is too expensive (mainly older respondents with low income and lower levels of education).

Among the reasons for purchasing organic food, in the first place the respondents mention health. They are willing to pay a higher price for organic products, seeing them as more natural, with a higher nutritional value and free of hazardous toxins, and as a result positively influencing their health and well-being (Arvola et al., 2008; p. 444; Eisinger-Watzl et al., 2015, p. 59; Żakowska-Biemans, 2011, p. 621). Often, organic food is also equated with food bought directly. Consumers place their trust in proven, direct points of sale which, in their opinion, provide access to organic food. Consumers of organic food include those better educated and more physically active compared to those who declare no interest in organic food. Polish consumers usually justify the choice of organic food with care for health, the belief that there are no harmful substances and genetically modified organisms in organic products, as well as care for the natural environment and animal welfare (Średnicka-Tober, Kazimierczak, Hallmann, 2016, p. 100, 107; Raport, 2021, p. 39). Health and quality considerations of organic food are the main driving force behind consumer purchases in Germany and Denmark (Eisinger-Watzl et al., 2015, p. 70; Hjelm, 2011, p. 36). The development of organic farming is influenced by many economic and social factors. No doubt that the Covid-19 pandemic has taken its toll on this sector as well. Consumers are already beginning to appreciate organic food as safe and helpful in maintaining proper immunity. Organic farming has a chance to become more common also due to the aid and strategies undertaken by the European Union, especially

the European Green Deal, which indicates the health of every EU citizen as the most important added value. Rood, Muilwijk and Westhoek (2017) created a value pyramid in which the most important added value is health and lifestyle, and the Moerman's Ladder, in which high-quality organic food is the key.

4. Conclusions

1. Among the barriers to purchasing organic food from local producers analyzed in this paper, barriers related to the product, including its high price, are of the greatest importance to consumers, which applies especially to consumers buying local organic food products. On the other hand, the remaining barriers, i.e. those related to consumers and the communication process, are of little importance for the surveyed consumers. This especially applies to consumers buying a local organic food product and such barriers as: lack of trust in the quality and origin of the product and customs, as well as the lack of appropriate labelling and the lack of information about the very possibility of purchasing.
2. The conducted research confirmed the research hypothesis formulated in the work. Thus, for consumers buying local organic food products at organic farms (direct sales), all analyzed barriers to buying organic food from local producers are of the least importance, mainly due to the fact that they have direct contact with producers. This especially applies to barriers related to the communication process, which these consumers did not indicate at all, i.e. direct contact between consumers and producers completely eliminates such barriers in purchasing organic food from local producers.
3. Analyzing the socio-economic characteristics of the surveyed consumers pointing to barriers in purchasing organic food from local producers, it was found that women pay a lot of attention to the quality of the product, because over 2/3 of the surveyed women indicated barriers related to the lack of trust in the quality and the origin of the product. Taking into account the opinions of consumers regarding the barriers to purchasing organic food from local producers (barriers related to the product), it should be noted that the range of products is important for people with higher education. The small assortment of organic products is indicated to a greater extent by consumers buying a local product. Moreover, it was noticed that young and educated people show more confidence in local food producers.

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