Does Taste Beat Food Safety? Evidence From the “Pêra Rocha” Case in Portugal

PIERRE COMBRIS
Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique (INRA), Ivry-sur-Seine, France

ALEXANDRA SEABRA PINTO and ANTÓNIO FRAGATA
National Institute of Biological Research (INRB), Oeiras, Portugal

ERIC GIRAUD-HÉRAUD
Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique (INRA), Ivry-sur-Seine, France

Nowadays, fresh fruits such as pears are differentiated by cultivars, origins, and appearances, as well as by companies’ production and processing methods. We may now observe many denominations of origin, retailers’, and private labels in order to signal the differentiation to the consumers, who are often willing to pay large price premiums for products with specific attributes. In this article, we used an experimental auction to assess how information on quality attributes affects consumers’ willingness to pay for different types of pears. The main results show that information on the products’ characteristics related to food safety instantly influences consumers’ willingness to pay. However, it appears that in the end, sensory intrinsic attributes related to taste beat the guarantee of food safety in driving the buying behaviour.

KEYWORDS experimental auction, willingness to pay, quality signals, food safety, fruits

This research was part of a project of the National Institute of Biological Resources (INRB) “Segurança e qualidade em fileira de produtos frutícolas: sistemas de certificação e tecnologias de informação ao consumidor (FrutaConfiança).” Research support from the Portuguese Ministry of Agriculture (programme AGRO) is gratefully acknowledged. The authors would like to thank the Portuguese Rocha Pear Growers Association (ANP) for the offer of the ‘Rocha’ pear DOP, evaluated in the experimental auction and the colleagues at the Department of Post-Harvest Research of INIAP for their help during the experiment.

Address correspondence to Pierre Combris, Senior Researcher, Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique (INRA), 65, Bd de Brandebourg, 94205, Ivry-sur-Seine, France. E-mail: Pierre.Combris@ivyri.fr