



Is food security important to consumers?

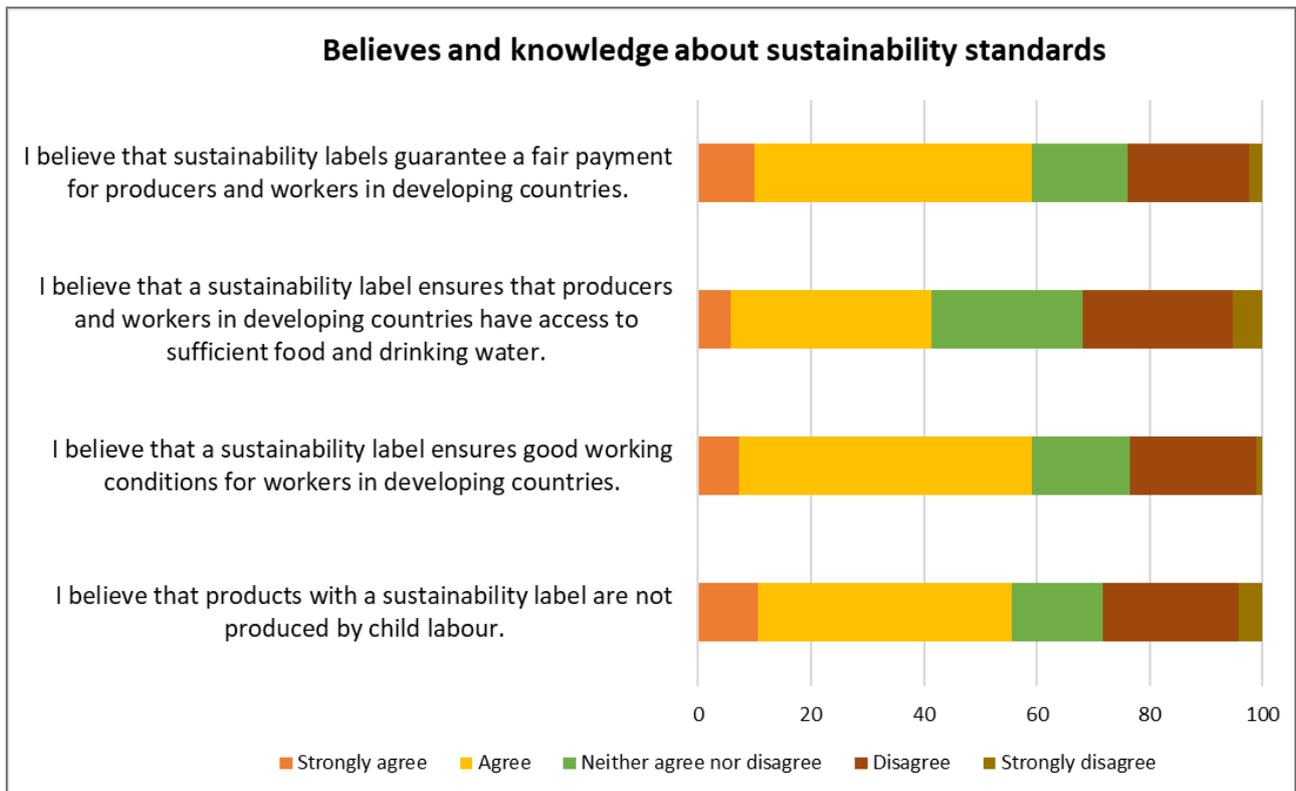
As part of the accompanying research on the Food Security Standard (FSS), the significance of sustainability standards in German consumer behaviour was investigated using the example of chocolate. The short study looks at the relevance of sustainability certification with regard to environmental and social aspects in purchasing decisions. In particular it was examined whether food security of farmers and workers is important to consumers. This helps to understand whether there is an acceptance of the “Food Security Standard” and a respective food security label by German consumers.

The online survey

An online survey was carried out to find out whether consumers are prepared to pay a premium for more sustainable chocolate and for ensuring food security of workers and smallholders. A total of 333 people interested in health and environmental issues were interviewed. The majority of the respondents were women (65%), between 20-30 years old (49%) and had a university degree (67%). They could choose between three sustainability standards for chocolate: The UTZ certification and two fictitious certifications: a biodiversity label and a food security label.

Attitude and knowledge about sustainability standards

The majority (66%) of the participants are familiar with 3-5 labels, with Fairtrade, EU organic and the MSC label being the best known. About 50% of the participants said that they consciously buy certified products and trust the labels, while 28% of the respondents tended not to trust sustainability labels. Certified products are bought for environmental reasons or because the buyers want to help people in developing countries. Almost half of the respondents assume that workers and producers can



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suffer from hunger despite a sustainability label, while 41% believe that workers and small farmers are food-secure when buying certified products. 70% choose certified products because they want to be sure that working conditions in the agricultural production sites are good and fair wages are paid. However, participants have less confidence that this is really the case in practice. The same applies to child labour. In general, quality is more important to the respondents than a sustainability label. Price also plays a role, although most respondents state that they do not find certified products too expensive.

The willingness to pay

The choice experiment shows that the participants are willing to pay more for chocolate with a sustainability label than for not certified and labeled chocolate. For the entire sample, the participants have the highest willingness to pay for the food security label (€ 0.70), followed by the biodiversity label (€ 0.59) and the UTZ Certified label (€ 0.57). However, if the respondents are divided according to their socio-economic characteristics into two groups, a differentiated picture is obtained.

The first group has a high willingness to pay for all labels; the highest is for the UTZ Certified label (€ 1.47), but respondents are also willing to pay a high additional price for the food security label (€ 1.02) and the biodiversity label (€ 0.97). Members of this group have a higher educational background, a generally high interest in sustainability issues and a strong affinity for sustainability labels. Also, they buy sustainability-labeled products mainly for social and environmental reasons, which is why they can also be classified as "sustainability-conscious label-buyers".

Although the second group has also signaled a willingness to pay for all labels, its willingness is much lower. The decision to choose depends primarily on the price of the chocolate, so that the respondents can be characterized as price sensitive. Their purchasing decisions are less influenced by sustainability issues, so labels have less relevance for this

group. As a result, they also buy certified food less frequently because of social or environmental reasons. It should be emphasized that food security is the most important aspect for this group: the willingness to pay for a food security label (€0.42) is significantly higher than for a biodiversity label and almost twice as high as for the UTZ label.

Conclusion

The short study shows that consumers are generally willing to pay more for sustainable production that is certified. The more knowledge the respondents have about sustainability and certifications, the greater is the willingness to pay. It was also found that overcoming hunger in cocoa production is very important to both groups and that there is a clear willingness to pay for food security. From this it can be deduced that the Food Security Standard (FSS) could have a positive effect on purchasing decisions in Germany, as there is a willingness to pay for food security.

The study was conducted within the frame of Wiebke Veenhuis' Master thesis at the University of Kiel and can be downloaded on the FSS homepage (see link below).

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