

# Can processed food really be organic?

## A consumer perspective

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### Abstract

#### • Objectives / Research Questions

The public regulation of the European organic label, which introduces principles applicable to organic processing in general, has several weaknesses: one of them is that the compatibility between processing and organic principles has been assessed from the perspective of food science, with little consideration given to the consumers' point of view. The present research aims to investigate consumer expectations concerning organic processing, which requires understanding their representations in a context of very imperfect information. How do consumers perceive processing in the case of organic products?

#### • Methodology

The analysis of thirty interviews provides keys to the conceptual interpretation of the criteria that consumers use to assess the extent to which processed food can be described as organic.

#### • Results

Not surprisingly, naturalness emerges as an important cross-cutting dimension. However, the new result is that it highlights the gap between the attention of food scientists, focused mainly on the effects of processing on naturalness, and the attention of consumers, focused mainly on the naturalness of the processes and their purpose.

#### • Managerial implications

This result could lead some brands to renounce certain technologies, even if they are desirable from a biochemical or functional point of view.

#### • Originality

Research shows that the way consumers perceive food processing is not the same for organic and conventional products. A field of research is therefore open.

• **Keywords:** representation, naturalness, processing, process, organic, ingredient.

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