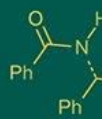


International Journal of Advanced Biochemistry Research



ISSN Print: 2617-4693
ISSN Online: 2617-4707
IJABR 2024; 8(12): 1182-1188
www.biochemjournal.com
Received: 03-09-2024
Accepted: 04-10-2024

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Organic food products: A study of urban households' perception

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33545/26174693.2024.v8.i12o.3391>

Abstract

This study investigates the perceptions of urban households in Kanpur Nagar towards organic food products, focusing on their health benefits, cost, quality, taste, health consciousness, variety, consumption frequency, and price variation. Organic food products are a holistic approach to farming and food production that prioritizes sustainability, health, and environmental stewardship. Understanding local consumer attitudes is crucial for promoting the adoption of organic food. A survey was conducted on 200 randomly selected respondents, and the data collected through the interview schedule method. The majority of respondents preferred consuming organic food items as a prestige signal in society and due to their nutrient-rich nature. Most respondents fully preferred certified standard products, while fruits, vegetables, milk, and their products were mostly consumed because they were good to very good but expensive. Most respondents frequently consumed organic food products. Consumer perception towards organic products relates to their eco-friendly nature and health benefits. However, high costs and limited availability of organic products are significant challenges. To raise consumer awareness of the key justifications for promoting organic food, which are primarily connected to environmental protection, it is essential to systematically educate and raise consumer awareness of these reasons. High costs and limited availability of organic products are significant challenges, and it is crucial to educate and raise consumer awareness of these reasons to promote organic food adoption.

Keywords: Organic food products, urban households, perception, health consciousness

Introduction

Organic production is a comprehensive system of farm management and food production that aims at sustainable agriculture, high-quality products and the use of processes that do not harm the environment or the health and welfare of humans, plants or animals. Due to consumers' perception on food safety and quality, there is a trend noted towards organic food consumption in the last decades (Hurtado-barroso *et al.* 2019) ^[7]. Organic farming is still in its early stages in India. India's rank 2th in terms of World's Organic Agricultural land and 1st in terms of total number of producers (APEDA 2024) ^[1]. The organic food consumption is increasing because of concerns over environmental and health issues associated with food production. The increase in consumer interest in organic food products has been attributed among other issues to the growing demand (Ramesh and Divya, 2015) ^[13]. Organic consumption is greatest in the USA and Europe, but there is also a developing trend in many other countries of the world (Falguera, 2012) ^[7]. It is argued that in countries like India, where organic food markets are in the early phase, consumers have a comparatively lower level of awareness (Nandi, 2019) ^[11]. The marketers can focus on appropriate pricing and promotional methods particularly to increase the visibility of organic products to make a positive impact on their perception so as to increase potential sales in the domestic market (Manohar *et al.* 2012) ^[9]. The adoption of organic production and processing is highly determined by market demand. This is reflected in consumers' perceptions and attitudes towards organic food products (Sangkumchalianga and Huang 2012) ^[14]. Knowledge and awareness about organic products could affect attitudes and perceptions about the product and ultimately buying decisions of the consumers. Vegetables followed by fruits and beans are the most preferred and highly demanded the commodities at present and the price of vegetables specially the leafy ones are higher than other normal vegetables.

But, quality characteristics affect consumers' preferences for organic products; with the most important including health and nutritional value, taste, and fresh and general appearance. (Chandrashekar 2014) ^[5]. The food consumption practice is changing worldwide among the consumers and now they want to opt food which is free from synthetic chemicals, fertilizers, and pesticides, *i.e.*, they want to consume for organic food which is not only sustainable for health but also environment- friendly (Sharma and Singhvi 2018) ^[15]. Despite its benefits, organic food often comes at a higher price point, which can be a barrier for many consumers. The constraints used for accessing organic food products include lower socio-economic status, inadequate availability, limited knowledge, and infrequent advertising. Conversely, the main obstacle for not purchasing organic food is the higher prices when compared to non-organic foods (Doorn and Verhoef, 2015) ^[6]. To overcome this, the awareness and availability of organic food products increased.

On this background the present research study was undertaken during 2023-2024 to assessing perception of urban households about organic food products in Kanpur Nagar with following specific objectives.

1. To understand the Perception regarding reasons why organic food products are healthier?
2. To find out the Perception regarding reasons why OFPs are expensive?
3. To assess the Perception regarding of quality and taste of OFPs.
4. To assess the Perception regarding health consciousness.
5. To examine the Perception regarding purchase of different variety of OFPs.
6. To understand the Perception regarding consumption frequency of OFPs.
7. To study the Perception regarding variation of price of OFPs

Materials and Methods

The present study was carried out using descriptive survey research approach in Kanpur Nagar, UP as purposively. A standardized interview schedule was developed and pilot tested by 20 persons as respondents to identify problems and shortcomings. The survey was completed by urban households living across the 6 zones of Kanpur Nagar in which two zones were randomly selected. From each selected zones, two wards were again randomly selected and 50 respondents were selected from each ward. Thus, a total

of total 200 respondents as urban households were selected for collection of data. A quantitative survey was performed based on primary data collected by interview schedule which were completed from 8rd March to 8th April, 2024. The collected information was evaluated, categorized, and compiled into tables displaying percentages, arithmetic mean, weighted means, and rankings These data were analysed using both mechanical and manual methods as well as a calculator, to complete the statistical analysis.

Results and Discussion

1. Perception regarding reasons why organic food products are healthier?

It had observed from Table-1 that 42% of respondents fully preferred toxin-free products, 17% partially preferred them and 42% never preferred them. This concept was ranked Ist with a mean score value 2.33 followed by 34% of respondents fully preferred, 26% partially preferred it and 40% never preferred nutrients rich food. This concept was ranked IInd with a mean score value of 1.94. Furthermore, 30% of respondents fully preferred products free from chemical fertilizers and pesticides, 26% partially preferred them and 44% never preferred them. This concept was ranked IIIrd with a mean score value of 1.87. Moreover, 14% of respondents fully preferred organic food products free from additives, preservatives and colours, 28% partially preferred them and 58% never preferred them. This concept was ranked IV with a mean score value of 1.55. Lastly, 12% of respondents fully preferred eco-friendly and pollution-free products, 28% partially preferred them and 60% never preferred them. This concept was ranked V with a mean score value of 1.52.

Therefore, 42% of respondents fully preferred toxin-free products followed by 34% of respondents fully preferred nutrients rich food and 30% of respondents fully preferred products free from chemical fertilizers and pesticides. These findings are supported by the study conducted by Sangkumchalianga and Huang (2012) ^[14] indicated that main reasons for purchasing organic food products are an expectation of a healthier and environmentally friendly means of production. These findings are also supported by the study conducted by Sharma and Singhvi (2018) ^[15] observed that the food consumption practice is changing worldwide among the consumers and now they want to opt food which is free from synthetic chemicals, fertilizers, and pesticides, *i.e.*, they want to consume for organic food which is not only sustainable for health but also environment- friendly.

Table 1: Perception regarding reasons why organic food products are healthier? n=200

S. No.	Perception regarding reasons why OFPs are healthier	Distribution of Respondents							
		Fully Prefer		Partial Prefer		Never Prefer		Mean	Rank Order
		f	%	f	%	f	%		
1.	Free from chemical fertilizers, Pesticides, etc.	61	30.50	52	26.00	87	43.50	1.87	III
2.	No additives, preservatives, colour, etc.	28	14.0	55	27.50	117	58.50	1.55	IV
3.	Non-polluted/ Eco-friendly	25	12.50	55	27.50	120	60.00	1.52	V
4.	No toxin / Safe for health	83	41.50	34	17	83	41.50	2.33	I
5.	Rich in nutrients	68	34.0	53	26.50	79	39.50	1.94	II

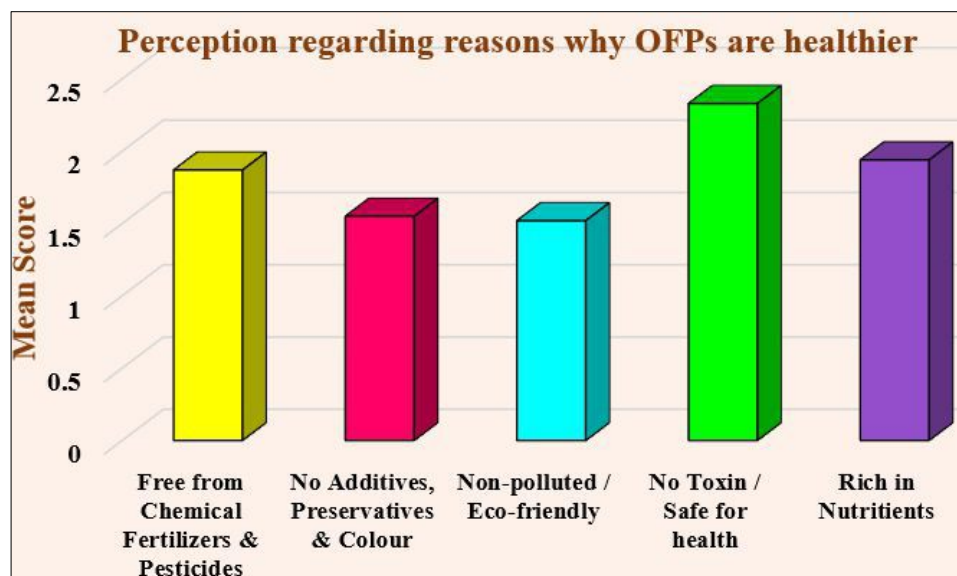


Fig 1: Distribution of respondents according to perception regarding reasons why organic food products are healthier

2. Perception regarding reasons why OFPs are expensive?

It reveals from Table 2 that 50% of respondents fully preferred price variation and competition, 24% partially preferred, 34% never preferred. This concept was ranked Ist with a mean score value of 2.17. Followed by 38% of respondent's fully preferred low production and poor productivity, 27% partially preferred it and 36% never preferred it. This concept was ranked IInd with a mean score value of 2.02. Additionally, 41% of respondents fully preferred the idea that growing organically is a challenge for farmers, 16% partially preferred it and 43% never preferred it. This concept was ranked IIIrd with a mean score value of 1.98. Next, 32% of respondents fully preferred critical and expensive quality parameters, 24% partially preferred it and 44% never preferred it. This concept was ranked IVth with a mean score value of 1.89. Following this, 12% of respondents fully preferred easy access, 54% partially preferred it and 33% never preferred it. This concept was ranked Vth with a mean score value of 1.80. Additionally, 14% of respondents fully preferred high demand in markets, 50% partially preferred it and 36% never preferred it. This

concept was ranked VIth with a mean score value of 1.79. Next, 19% of respondents fully preferred the presence of less variety of choice, 34% partially preferred it and 47% never preferred it. This concept was ranked VIIth with a mean score value of 1.72. Furthermore, 16% of respondents fully preferred poor supply chain management, 38% partially preferred it and 46% never preferred it. This concept was ranked VIIIth with a mean score value of 1.70. Therefore, 50% of respondents fully preferred price variation and competition followed by 38% of respondent's fully preferred low production and poor productivity and 41% of respondents fully preferred the idea that growing organically is a challenge for farmers. These findings are supported by the study conducted by Chandrashekar (2014) [5] concluded that the organically grown products are available in the markets but in limited amounts though the growing demands are there for such products. Consumers are willing to pay price premium of 5-50% for organic products which could be viewed as the cost of investment in human health. Knowledge and awareness about organic products could affect attitudes and perceptions about the product and ultimately buying decisions of the consumers.

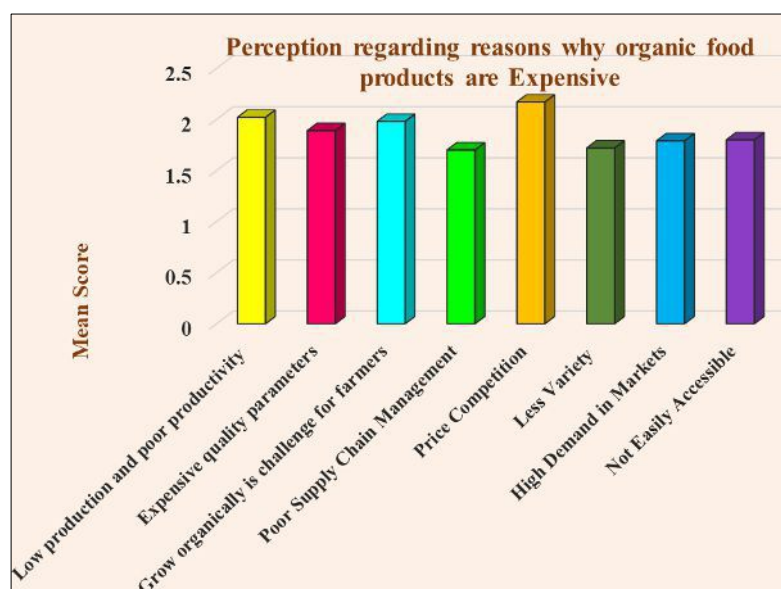


Fig 2: Distribution of respondents according to perception regarding reasons why organic food products are expensive

Table 2: Perception regarding reasons why OFPs are expensive? n=200

S. No.	Perception regarding reasons why OFPs are expensive	Distribution of Respondents							
		Fully Prefer		Partial Prefer		Never Prefer		Mean	Rank Order
		f	%	f	%	f	%		
1.	Low production and poor productivity	75	37.50	54	27.00	71	35.50	2.02	II
2.	Critical & expensive quality parameters	65	32.50	48	24.00	87	43.50	1.89	IV
3.	Grow organically is a challenge for farmers	82	41.00	32	16.00	86	43.00	1.98	III
4.	Poor Supply Chain Management	32	16.00	77	38.50	91	45.50	1.70	VIII
5.	Price variation/ competition	101	50.50	49	24.50	67	33.50	2.17	I
6.	Less variety of choice	38	19.00	68	34.00	94	47.00	1.72	VII
7.	High demand in markets	29	14.50	100	50.00	71	35.50	1.79	VI
8.	Not easily accessible	25	12.50	109	54.50	66	33.00	1.80	V

3. Perception regarding of quality and taste of OFPs.

It observes from Table-3 that 40% of respondents fully preferred fresh food, 24% partially preferred & 36% never preferred it, this ranked Ist with mean score value 2.04 followed by 16% of respondents fully preferred a sense of satisfaction, 28% partially preferred & 56% never preferred, which ranked IInd with mean score value of 1.60. Additionally, 18% of respondents fully preferred natural

flavours & taste to attract for consumption, 23% partially preferred & 59% never preferred, this ranked IIIrd with mean score value of 1.59.

Consequently, a maximum number of the respondents (40%) were fully preferred fresh foods followed by 16% of respondents fully preferred a sense of satisfaction and 18% of respondents fully preferred natural flavours and taste to attract for consumption.

Table 3: Perception regarding of quality and taste of OFPs. n=200

S. No.	Perception regarding of quality and taste of OFPs	Distribution of Respondents							
		Fully Prefer		Partial Prefer		Never Prefer		Mean	Rank Order
		f	%	f	%	f	%		
1.	Gives a sense of satisfaction	31	15.50	57	28.50	112	56.00	1.60	II
2.	Natural flavours, taste, etc. attract to consume OFPs	36	18.00	46	23.00	118	59.00	1.59	III
3.	More fresh compare to conventional food products	80	40.00	48	24.00	72	36.00	2.04	I

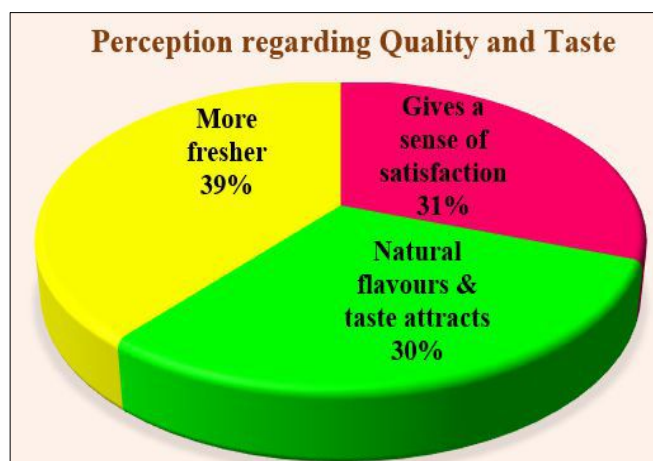
**Fig 3:** Distribution of respondents according to perception regarding quality and taste

Table -4: Perception regarding health consciousness: It observes from Table -4 that 44% of respondents fully preferred nutrients, 12% partially preferred them and 44% never preferred them, ranked Ist with mean score value 2.00 followed by 26% of respondents who fully preferred zero side effect products, 36% who partially preferred them and 38% who never preferred them. This concept was ranked IInd with a mean score value of 1.89. Additionally, 14% of respondents fully preferred lower risk of foodborne illness, 24% partially preferred it and 62% never preferred it, ranked IIIrd with mean score value 1.52 followed by 10% of respondents who fully preferred free from genetically modified organism's food items, 18% who partially preferred them and 72% who never preferred them. This concept was ranked IVth with a mean score value of 1.38.

Therefore, 44% of respondents fully preferred nutrients followed by 26% of respondents who fully preferred zero side effect products and 14% of respondent's fully preferred lower risk of foodborne illness.

Table 4: Perception regarding health consciousness n=200

S. No.	Perception regarding health consciousness	Distribution of Respondents							
		Fully Prefer		Partial Prefer		Never Prefer		Mean	Rank Order
		f	%	f	%	f	%		
1.	More nutritious	88	44.00	25	12.50	87	43.50	2.00	I
2.	Free from side effects and ensures health benefits	53	26.50	72	36.00	75	37.50	1.89	II
3.	Lower risk of food borne illness	28	14.00	48	24.00	124	62.00	1.52	III
4.	Free from genetically modified organisms (GMOs)	20	10.00	36	18.00	144	72.00	1.38	IV

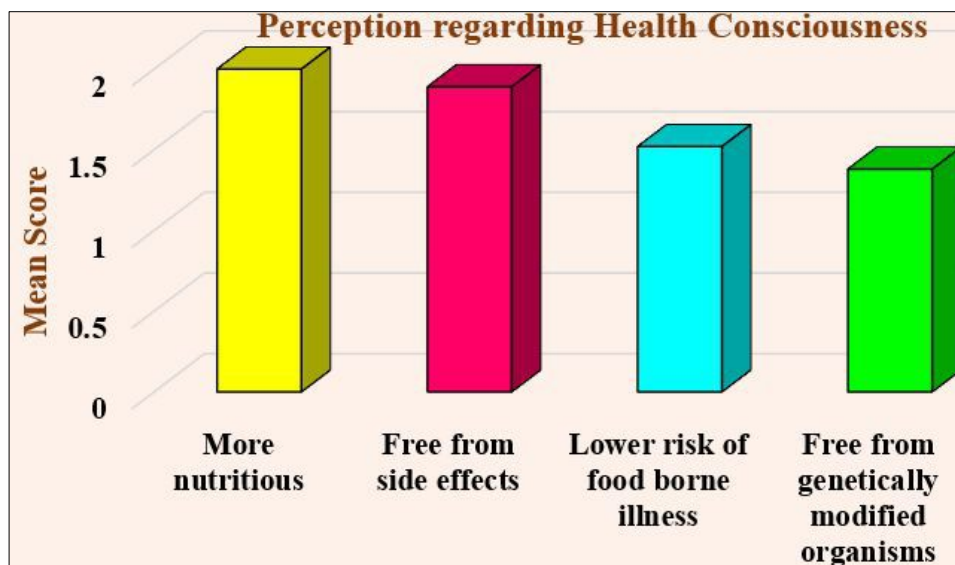


Fig 4: Distribution of respondents according to perception regarding health consciousness

5. Perception regarding purchase of different varieties of OFPs

It shows from the Table -5 that 62% of respondents were fully preferred fruits and vegetables, 28% partially preferred and 10% never preferred it, ranked Ist with a mean score value of 2.52 followed by 49% of respondents fully preferred milk and milk products, 29% partially preferred, and 22% never preferred it, ranked IInd with a mean score value of 2.27. Additionally, 44% of respondents fully preferred beverages, 34% partially preferred and 22% never preferred it. This concept was ranked IIIrd with a mean score value of 2.23. Furthermore, 40% of respondents fully preferred cereals and pulses, 33% partially preferred and 28% never preferred it. This concept was ranked IVth with a mean score value of 2.12, followed by 30% of respondents fully preferred spices, 23% partially preferred and 27% never preferred it, ranked Vth with a mean score value of 1.63. Lastly, 26% of respondents fully preferred processed food products, 22% partially preferred and 52% never preferred it. This concept was ranked VIth with a mean score value of 1.5.

Therefore, 62% of respondents fully preferred to purchase fruits and vegetables followed by 49% of respondents with milk and milk products and 44% of respondents purchase beverages.

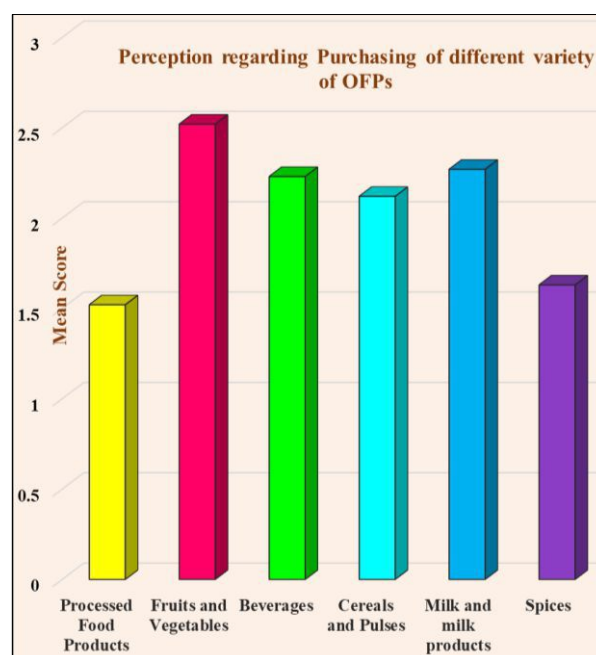


Fig 5: Distribution of respondents according to perception regarding purchasing of different variety of organic food products

Table 5: Perception regarding purchase of different variety of OFPs. n=200

S. No.	Perception regarding purchase of different variety of OFPs	Distribution of Respondents							
		Fully Prefer		Partial Prefer		Never Prefer		Mean	Rank Order
		f	%	f	%	f	%		
1.	Processed Food Products	52	26	43	21.50	105	52.50	1.52	VI
2.	Fruits and Vegetables	125	62.50	55	27.50	20	10.00	2.52	I
3.	Beverages	89	44.50	68	34.00	43	21.50	2.23	III
4.	Cereals and Pulses	79	39.50	66	33.00	55	27.50	2.12	IV
5.	Milk and milk products	98	49.00	58	29.00	44	22.00	2.27	II
6.	Spices	60	30.00	46	23.00	54	27.00	1.63	V

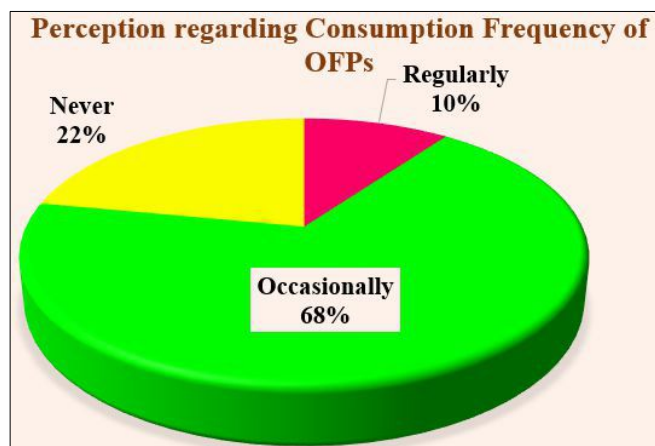
6. Perception regarding consumption frequency of OFPs

It observes from Table-6 that 68% of respondents occasionally consumed organic food products, ranked Ist followed by 22% of respondents never consumed organic

food products, ranked IInd. Lastly, only 10% of respondents regularly consumed organic food products, ranked IIIrd. Thus, majority (68%) of respondents occasionally, 22% never & only 10% were regularly consumed OFPs.

Table 6: Perception regarding consumption frequency of OFPs. n=200

S. No.	Perception regarding consumption frequency of OFPs	Distribution of Respondents		
		<i>f</i>	%	Rank Order
1.	Regularly	21	10.50	III
3.	Occasionally	136	68.00	I
4.	Never	43	21.50	II

**Fig 6:** Distribution of respondents according to perception regarding consumption frequency of OFPs.

7. Perception regarding price of OFPs

It observes from Table-7 that 90% of respondents held the opinion that the price of organic food products was expensive, ranked Ist and only 10% believed that the price was moderate, ranked IInd. No one said that the price of OFPs was low.

Thus, 90% of respondents held with the opinion that the price of organic food products was expensive only 10% believed that the price was moderate.

Table 7: Perception regarding price of OFPs. n=200

S. No.	Perception regarding price of OFPs	Distribution of Respondents		
		<i>f</i>	%	Rank Order
1.	Expensive	180	90.00	I
2.	Moderate	20	10.00	II
3.	Low	00	0.00	III

**Fig 7:** Distribution of respondents according to perception regarding price of OFPs n=200

Discussion: The adoption of organic production and processing is highly determined by market demand. This is

reflected in consumers' perceptions and attitudes towards organic food products. The main reasons for purchasing organic food products are an expectation of a healthier and environmentally friendly means of production. Organic buyers tend to be older and higher educated than those who do not buy them. However, the main barrier to increase the market share of organic food products is consumer information (Sangkumchalianga and Huang 2012) ^[14]. The consumers and now they want to opt food which is free from synthetic chemicals, fertilizers, and pesticides, *i.e.*, they want to consume for organic food which is not only sustainable for health but also environment- friendly. Organic products are not so much popular among consumers because of lower productivity of organic produce by farmers, which in result lead to the high market price of organic food. There is a need to create awareness about the advantages of organic food products among people and promote its use whereas on the other hand there is the foremost need to motivate the farmers to opt for organic farming (Sharma and Singhvi 2018) ^[15]. The organically grown products are available in the markets but in limited amounts though the growing demands are there for such products. Consumers are willing to pay price premium of 5-50% for organic products which could be viewed as the cost of investment in human health. Knowledge and awareness about organic products could affect attitudes and perceptions about the product and ultimately buying decisions of the consumers (Chandrashekar 2014) ^[5]. The consumers worldwide are becoming health conscious and are concerned with food safety issues taking into consideration various factors. Here the marketers can focus on appropriate pricing and promotional methods particularly to increase the visibility of organic products to make a positive impact on their perception so as to increase potential sales in the domestic market. Consumers are both quality conscious and price sensitive (Manohar *et al.* 2012) ^[9]. These findings are supported by the study conducted by concluded that vegetables followed by fruits and beans are the most preferred and highly demanded the commodities at present and the price of vegetables specially the leafy ones are higher than other normal vegetables. But, quality characteristics affect consumers' preferences for organic products; with the most important including health and nutritional value, taste, and fresh and general appearance (Chandrashekar 2014) ^[5]. As India is always an agricultural hub so organic farming is much crucial for India today. There is a lack of authenticated labelling creates distrust among the customer. High pricing for some organic product is out of reach of common man. Least variety creates dissatisfaction among the customer. Customer ignorance about its availability (Patnaik 2018) ^[12]. The most of the respondents buy organic food products only sometimes and frequency of purchase is weekly. The consumers are willing to pay premium prices upto 5 % more (Bharathi *et al.* 2014) ^[3]. The most important reasons for not purchasing organic products among regular organic food consumers were price, insufficient availability and the quality of the product. The

results indicate that the relevance of reasons varies from product to product and according to shop types (Buder *et al.* 2014) [4]. The most prominent one being that organic food consumers feel the need to consume nutritious food as a result of which they turn towards organic food products. Further, we found out that organic food products are currently considered to be a premium good as a result of which it is should be mostly targeted towards the upper middle classes. Lack of information and awareness about the differentiation between organic and conventional products has a significant impact on the purchase intentions (Munshi *et al.* 2020) [10]. The consumer's interest and preference towards organic products has been increased nowadays. Therefore consumer's levels of preference towards organic products are due to nutrition, health benefits and palatable etc. Ayswarya and Vasanthi (2018) [2].

Conclusion

The study on urban household perceptions towards organic food products in Kanpur Nagar reveals a nuanced understanding of consumer attitudes and behaviours. While there is a growing awareness of the health benefits associated with organic food, several obstacles hinder its widespread adoption. The high cost of organic products and their limited availability are the primary barriers identified. Households with higher socio-economic status, particularly those with greater income and educational levels, are more likely to purchase organic food, driven by a desire for healthier and more sustainable living. However, the broader population's understanding of the environmental benefits of organic farming remains insufficient. To bridge this gap, it is imperative to implement targeted awareness campaigns that educate consumers about the environmental advantages of organic products. Additionally, policy measures such as subsidies for organic farmers and initiatives to improve the availability and affordability of organic food can significantly boost its consumption.

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