CONSUMERS ATTITUDES TOWARDS FOOD SAFETY IN LITHUANIA

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Attitude toward food safety has been settled a short time ago however it is essential in the developed society. Food, food production and distribution to consumers are strictly controlled recently as consumers get only safe, high quality and useful for health food and food products. Research revealed that 91.5 % of consumers always or most of the time buy food products in supermarkets. Even 69.3 % of consumers always are interested in expiry date of food. Mostly respondents (75.6 %) referred that freshness of food product is the most relevant indicator when choosing foodstuff. Only 1 % of consumers do not pay attention to this indicator. Research showed that 89.3 % of consumers purchased unsafe foodstuff one or few times. Third (28 %) of questioned consumers revealed that just returned unsafe food product to the seller. However only 8.4 % of consumers seek the help, appeal to the State Food and Veterinary Service (SFVS), State Consumer Right Protection Authority (SCRPA) or directly inform unsafe foodstuff producer.

Key words: Consumer, food products, food safety

Introduction

The development of the food industry led produce of new kinds of foodstuffs to meet rising consumer’s demand. Currently, there are many various animal and vegetable foods in the market [1]. Modern consumer can not imagine life without supermarkets and full shelves of various food products, except the countries suffering from deprivation of food. Wide range of products gives consumers the possibility to choose, but occurs a problem that, people lose among a multiplicity of products [2, 3]. Customers are tricked by incorrect information of television advertisements, newspapers, online articles, intentional campaign by traders, discounts and sales [4].

Attitude towards food safety was formed relatively recently and is an important factor in developed society. Nowadays food, food production, handling, supply to consumers is strictly controlled. It is seek the food and food products reach consumers safe, good quality and beneficial for health [5].

Today's consumers are very pernickety; they place particular emphasis on their health. Consequently, the food manufacturers and suppliers are required to produce high quality food with a minimum of materials, which are harmful to health, in the product, and to declare accurate and not confusing information on the product label [6].

The objective of this research was to investigate consumer’s attitude towards food safety and collect objective information for promotion of safe food production and consumption.

Research methods

Data was collected through a survey of 434 consumers, who were randomly recruited at shopping areas, universities and public places in Lithuania. The sample included 325 females (74.9%) and 109 males (25.1%) of different age and education.

A standardized questionnaire was used collect information about factors influencing consumer’s food products choice, consumer’s attitude towards food safety and food safety control in Lithuania.

Results and discussion

Results from our study clearly indicated that consumers mostly or always buy food products in supermarkets (often 60.4 %, always 31.1 %), sometimes at the market or small shops (respectively 69. 6 and 69.9 %), but rarely or do not buy at all directly from the farmers (respectively 36.4 and 56.4 % of respondents).
When choosing food products consumers always or often pay attention (91.9%) to the shelf-life of foodstuff (Fig. 2). The results show that the product price, and discount promotions advertised by traders are key indicators that determine consumer interest in the proposed food. Questioned consumers indicated that always and frequently (77.2%), or at least sometimes (20%) draws attention to the price. Research showed that more than half (64%) of respondents always and often interested in the discounts.

Even the 322 respondents indicated food freshness as the most relevant indicator for choice of food product. Only for 1% of consumers the freshness is not the main indicator influencing their choice (Fig. 3).

Survey showed that the product taste and aroma mostly attract 86% of consumers to choose product (Fig. 3). Furthermore, before buying food consumers ascertain if product contain GMOs. The majority of respondents (75.3%) stated always and frequently pays attention that GMOs are not in the products they buy. Only 16% of survey participants ascertain that sometimes, and 8.6% of respondents do not care.

Consumers are interested in synthetic food additives in foodstuffs and their negative effect on organism. More than half of respondents indicated that buy products with less amount of food additives, and only 9% of consumers pay no attention to it.

Despite scrupulous selection of foodstuff, consumers sometimes purchase unsafe food (tainted food, bad taste and flavour, bad consistence food or food caused sickness). Research showed that 89.3% of consumers purchased unsafe foodstuff one or few times. More then four percent of respondents purchase unsafe food product often, and only 6.5% of consumers declared that never had purchased product caused them sickness.
It is surprising that the majority of consumers (62 %) purchased unsafe food, do not look for help and eliminate the unsafe product (Fig. 5). Third (28 %) of questioned consumers revealed that just return unsafe food product to the seller. However, only 8.4 % of consumers seek help, contact the SFVS (4.9 %), consumer protection organizations (0.8 %) or directly inform unsafe foodstuff producer (2.7 %).

Results from our study indicated low activity of consumers purchased unsafe food product. The reason of consumers’ passivity to inform controlling authorities may be due to reluctance to improve consumers’ rights or possibilities to report complaints. More than half of respondents (57.3 %) consider that food safety control in our country only satisfactory. A quarter of respondents consider that control is bad, and only 18.2 % and 1.2 % of survey participants consider it a good and excellent, respectively.

Conclusions

Research showed that consumers scrupulous select foodstuffs. They always read information on food product label and concern about food expiry date (91.9 %), composition (68 %) and producer (55.7 %). Food freshness (96 %), taste and aroma (86 %), less amount of food additives (67 %), no GMOs in product (75.3 %) are the main indicators attracting to choose foodstuff. Despite that consumers sometimes purchase unsafe food, which cause them food borne illness. Our study showed that 89.3 % of consumers purchased unsafe foodstuff one or few times. However, only 8.4 % of consumers seek help, contact the SFVS (4.9 %), consumer protection organizations (0.8 %) or directly inform unsafe foodstuff producer (2.7 %).
References


