

Consumer Acceptance and Willingness to Pay for Blueberry Products with Non-Conventional Attributes

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August 2008

As American consumers are increasingly conscious about their diet, and publications on the relationship between health and food consumption are becoming more popular, healthy food, such as fruits and vegetables may see great market growth. Among them, blueberries have been commonly associated with the image of healthy food. Given the increasing expenditure on fresh and processed blueberries by American consumers, it is important to understand how consumers prefer and value various attributes across different blueberry products. New trends in consumer demand highlight the significance of several attributes not conventionally analyzed in food consumption/production. In this analysis, three non-conventional attributes are considered: organic, locally-grown, and sugar-free. Consumer acceptance and willingness to pay (WTP) for these attributes associated with six familiar processed blueberry products was examined through an in-store stated choice survey. The six products are: blueberry jam, blueberry lime-jam, blueberry muffin mix, blueberry fruit rollups, blueberry vinegar, and blueberry raisinetes.

Results indicate that consumers are generally enthusiastic about these three features. The study finds strong evidence that consumers differ in terms of preferences and WTP for various attributes for a particular product; preferences are quite different across product categories; and consumer personal characteristics play a major role in preferences and WTP. For the surveyed consumers, a locally-grown label receives the most support across the three attributes considered as evidenced by high WTP across different consumer profiles and product categories. Being organic may attract certain consumers but is not as broadly valued. While sugar-free may be a valuable feature to some consumers for some products, it may also be associated with negative values in some product categories.

Equipped with the knowledge of consumer WTP, this study may assist more precise cost and benefit analysis of a value-added strategy. The type of information revealed in this study may also help blueberry processors and retailers. A sensible marketer may consider marketing strategies that are well-tailored to different consumers in different market channels and may adjust that distribution and merchandising strategy across product categories.