



The profile of Italian consumers of animal-friendly foods

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INTRODUCTION

- Increased awareness of European citizen towards animal welfare, encouraged the development of policies aimed to improve the living conditions of the farmed animals. To increase consumers' awareness and reduce information distortion, the hypothesis of a common European label based upon a unique welfare certification scheme is presently under investigation.
- The implementation of animal welfare policies involves an economic effort by farmers. Such costs need to be acknowledged by the market. Otherwise, the risk would be an increase of the production costs for European farmers without a parallel increase in the consumers' awareness.

OBJECTIVES

The aim of the present study was to investigate how consumers' knowledge and perception of farming conditions can influence the consumption behavior of "animal friendly" products.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Our research is based on 335 consumer face to face interviews, conducted near and within supermarkets and hypermarkets in Bologna (North-Italy) and in its province. The data collected were analyzed using a cluster analysis

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample (in %)

Sex		Age					Household size (members)						Education					Employment					Annual income per household					
Female	Male	18-29	30-39	40-65	more than 65	1	2	3	4	5	6	Elementary school	Junior High School	High school	University degree (3 years)	University degree (5 years)	Employee	Freelance	Retired	Housewife	Unemployed	Student	< 10000 €	11000 - 20000 €	21000 - 35000 €	36000 - 50000 €	51000 - 75000 €	> 75000 €
62%	38%	24%	14%	51%	11%	19%	24%	24%	26%	5%	2%	3%	9%	47%	12%	29%	47%	14%	16%	5%	3%	15%	6%	18%	32%	17%	17%	10%

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

- The effects that direct cognition attained through farm visits had on consumers' perception of animal welfare differed across different species.
- Only 36% of the sample declared to have visited a farm. Most of them (50%) had visited cattle farms, but only 5% of consumers had visited intensive swine farms (Figure 1).
- The visit to cattle farms contributed to improving their perception of cattle welfare, but the experience of pig farms didn't modify their perception of swine welfare (Figure 2).
- Cluster analysis identified four homogenous groups of consumers (clusters) defined by the variables considered most representative in the explanation of the phenomena investigated. Groups were called: 1) "Sensible and aware consumers" (36%); 2) "Disinterested consumers" (36%); 3) "the experts" (6%) and 4) "unconcerned consumers" (25%).

Direct experience of farms

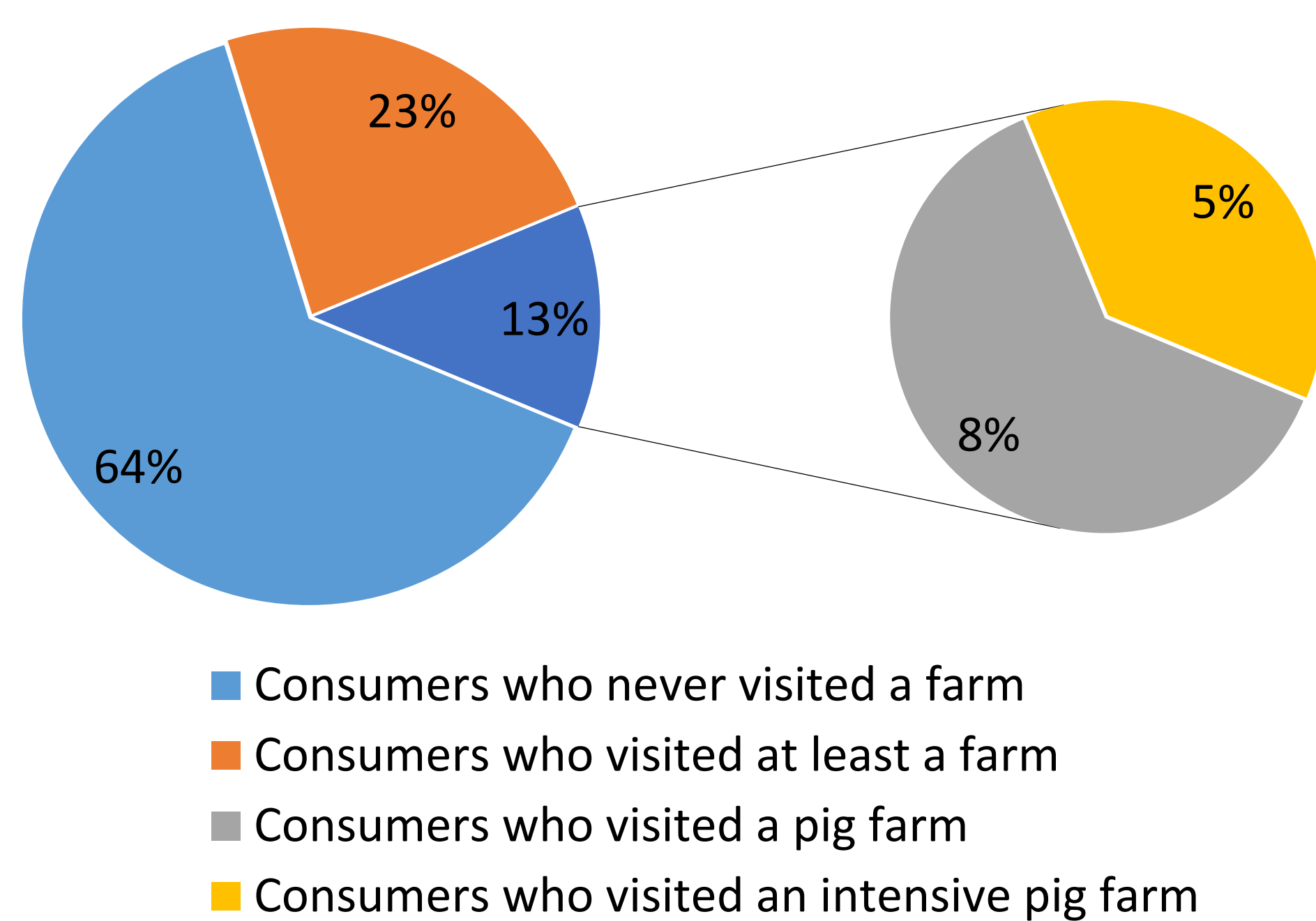
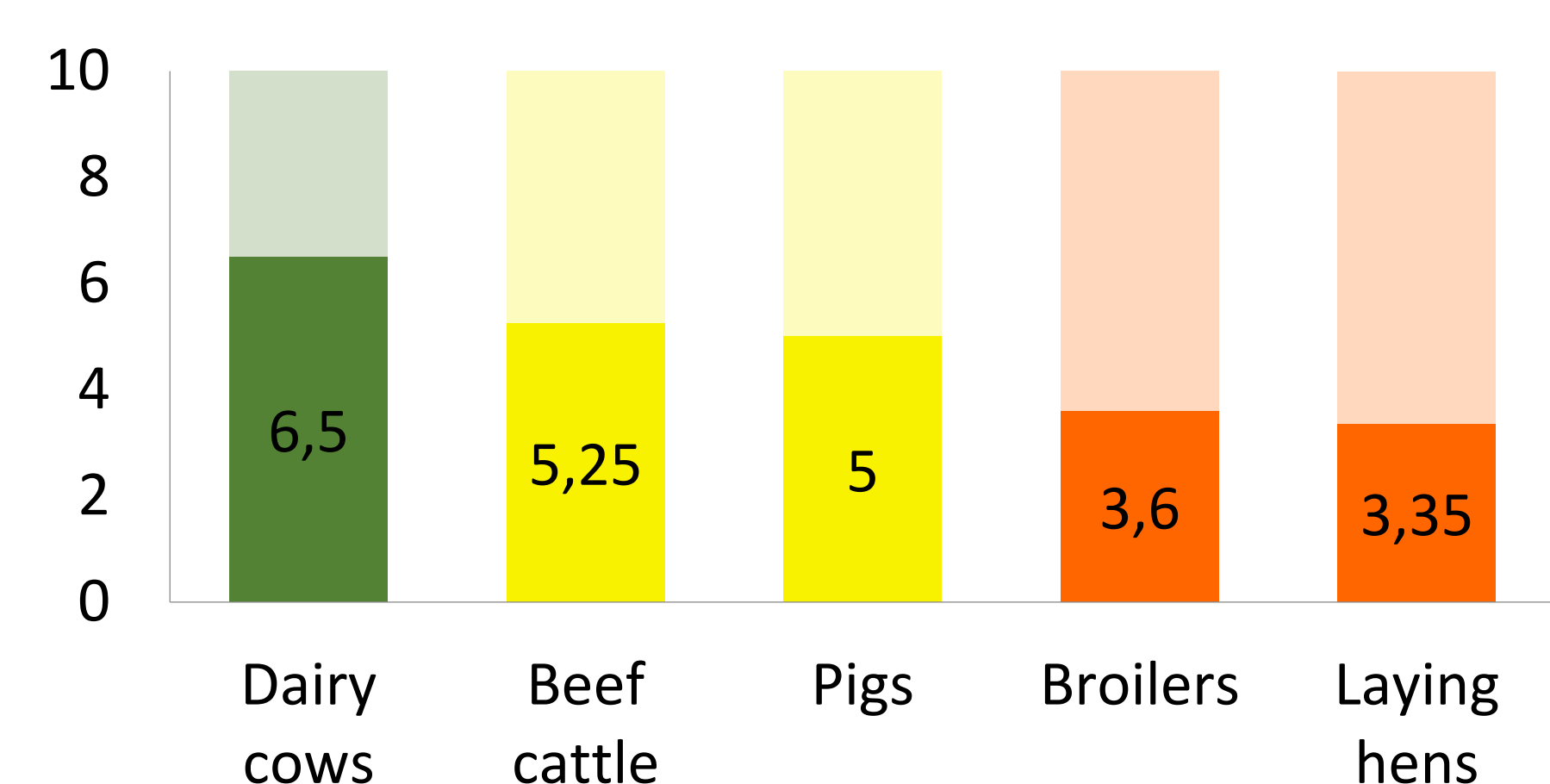


Figure 2: Animal welfare level attributed by consumers to different farmed species (on a scale from 1=poor welfare to 10=optimal welfare)



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1. Sensible and aware consumers (36%)

- mainly women (75%)
- well-informed about animal welfare and protection
- believe to be responsible, as consumers, of the welfare of farmed animals
- would like to buy animal-friendly foods and would pay a high premium price (between 10 and 20%), but declare to be not able to recognize them
- think that animal friendly foods are more ethical and greener than conventional products
- have never visited a food-producing farm (indirect knowledge)

2. Disinterested consumers (36%)

- show no interest in the issue of animal welfare
- poor (or none at all) knowledge about the issue
- are not interested in animal-friendly products and not willing to pay a premium price for them
- have never visited a farm or heard about animal welfare before the interview
- are not aware of the existence of any policy on animal protection
- don't seek for information about animal welfare
- no awareness of the impact of their purchasing choices on animal welfare
- unanimously believe that animal friendly foods are not greener than conventional products

3. The Experts (6%) few, but very specific characteristics in common

- have previously visited intensive farms at least three times for work
- are mainly men (90%), workers in animal production, agriculture or veterinarians
- show knowledge and proximity to the animal production sector
- judge favourably the amount of resources allotted by the Common Agricultural Policy to animal welfare
- unanimously choose as the most important factors
 - the availability of space
 - the absence of mutilations
- attribute high level of welfare to the bovine specie (8/10 for cattle and 10/10 for dairy cows).

4. Unconcerned consumers (25%)

- heterogeneous group
- have visited a farm at least once (intensive, extensive and/or agritouristic)
- partial information, retrieved from friends and relatives
- believe organic productions are not respectful of animal welfare (low level of information, sceptical attitude towards organic products)
- choose as the most important factor comfort during transport (possible influence of media)
- are aware of their role and their responsibility towards the welfare of farmed animals but do not have a consistent purchasing behaviour

CONCLUSIONS

The first group represents an important market segment for "animal friendly" products. Therefore, the possibility to recognize the presence of an ethical added value is indispensable both to help the consumer to identify the "animal friendly" products and for raising animal welfare level above the minimum mandatory requirements.