

ANALYZING PERCEPTIONS ON QUALITY AND SAFETY OF FROZEN FOODS WITH BALKAN CONSUMERS: THE CASE OF ALBANIA AND KOSOVO

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ABSTRACT

Freezing technology is one of the most well-established long-term preservation techniques to produce high-quality, nutritious foods with prolonged shelf-life. Frozen food is a significant section of the global food market experiencing rapid growth that represents an alternative to small producers in developing countries to add value to their products in a competitive market. However, unfairly frozen foods are often considered less qualitative than fresh produce, although studies have shown that some frozen foods have higher nutritional values than fresh products. This study analyses two Balkan countries' consumer behaviour, perceptions, and attitudes towards frozen foods. Three hundred eighty questionnaires have been developed (182 from Kosovo and 198 from Albania). The results show that Kosovo consumers generally show a higher positive attitude toward frozen food than Albanian consumers. Albanian consumers prefer fresh food instead of frozen food due to food safety issues. The lack of trust in food safety institutions is expressed with concerns on the conditions of the frozen chain applied both on the imported or domestic frozen products.

Similarly, the findings show Albanian consumers will pay 40% more than the baseline price to get fresh products instead of frozen, while Kosovo consumers will pay 30%. Additional studies are needed to explore if the lack of trust in food safety institutions inhibits the successful development of frozen food in Albania and Kosovo. In both countries, the public policy should help the consumers have a deeper knowledge of the qualities of the frozen products and, on the other side, boost these activities to increase the farmers' incomes.

Key words: Frozen food, Quality, Safety, Consumer perception, Balkans