

CONSUMERS' PERCEPTION ON SAFETY OF VEGETABLES AND WILLINGNESS TO PAY FOR SAFE VEGETABLES

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Safety of vegetables must be highly concerned because it occupies a major share of the daily meal by providing vitamins, minerals and other essentials. This study was carried out with the view of assessing the consumers' perception on safety of vegetables in Anuradhapura metropolitan area and their willingness to pay (WTP) for safe vegetables. The WTP of consumers is evaluated using random samples of 50 consumers from three market strata; retail shops, super markets and periodic markets. The relationship of amount of WTP and socio economic characteristics is established using a probit model.

About 80% consumers of super markets category are concerned highly about the safety of vegetable products. The consumers from the stratum of periodic markets also show higher concern on safety of vegetable (72%) while it is low in the stratum of normal retail shops (20%). In super markets, all have a WTP while it is 84% in periodic markets and 64% in retail shops. In super markets, 48% consumers are willing to pay a 20% additional premium, 32% consumers are willing to pay a 40% additional premium, 20% consumers are willing to pay a 60% additional premium over the prevailing market price. In periodic markets, 71.43% consumers are willing to pay a 20% additional premium, 23.81% consumers are willing to pay a 40% additional premium, 4.76% consumers are willing to pay a 60% additional premium over the prevailing market price. In retail shops, 75% consumers are willing to pay a 20% additional premium, 25% consumers are willing to pay a 40% additional premium over the prevailing market price. A positive relationship between WTP and monthly household income is observed ($p < 0.05$).

The results indicate that consumers concern on safety is very high, and on the average the WTP is relatively high. Steps have to be taken to ensure food safety and a separate market window could be established to provide quality assured vegetables to consumers.

Key words: Perception, Vegetable safety, Willingness to pay