In 1990, an article about the theoretical foundations of the ØKO foods-project was published in this journal. Now, three years later, it seems appropriate to inform, again in this journal, about the insights into Danish consumers’ reasons for buying and non-buying organic food products, gained during the project term (1990-1992). The focus will be on the estimation results of the model which guided the study. Concluding remarks emphasize the need for a concerted action of consumers, producers, and governmental authorities if "sustainable development" is the overall societal objective.

1. The environmental crisis and green consumerism

Environmental issues have been among the top ten political topics for almost two decades. What has been called the environmental crisis is in fact mainly a crisis of the modern consumption society, or, in other words, Homo economicus has become the greatest danger to the survival of Homo sapiens: Most of the relentless consumption indicative of Western society is ignorant consumption as environmentally unethical products and services are often created in response to expected consumer demand for convenience, greater availability, and lower prices. Such production and demand have fostered product proliferation, excessive packaging, pollution, and waste of natural resources (Muller/Taylor 1991). Thirty to forty percent of the strain on the environment is directly caused by private households (Berger 1991).

Concern about environmental issues has created demand for environmentally-friendly products and led to a flood of activity aimed at the green consumers.

In the context of foods, these consumers have become aware of the interrelations among environmental pollution, type of agricultural production and food contamination, and have realized that many of the food products they buy are produced at nature’s expense by exploiting soils, polluting water, and degrading cattle to meat-producing machines. They are called here ØKO-foods consumers, with \"ØKO\" standing for the Danish abbreviation of ecology. As an analogy to the environmentally concerned consumer (Balderjahn 1985), s/he can be defined as a person who knows that the production, distribution, use, and disposal of food products lead to external costs, and who evaluates such external costs negatively, trying to minimize them by her/his own behaviour.

However, information about these specific consumers and this specific market seems to be at best ambiguous, at least in Denmark. The central purpose of the ØKO foods-project was therefore to increase knowledge about consumer behaviour in the ØKO foods-market and to assess the factors which make consumers prefer organic foods. The Danish Ministry of Agriculture decided to support a scientific study in this area within its research programme on food products 1990-94. This led to the formation of the ØKO foods-project with the main objective of enhancing consumers’ choice in the food market through: (1) assessing product characteristics relevant for consumers’ evaluation of organically versus conventionally grown foods in order to shape products’ appearance according to consumers’ requirements, and (2) providing food policy makers with advice on which aspects to focus on when designing information campaigns related to organic foods.

Theoretical background and the project’s outline as well as results from pretest studies have been described elsewhere (Grunert 1990; Grunert/Kristensen 1991; Kristensen/Grunert 1991), and will therefore be mentioned here only briefly.
2. The model and its main constructs

In order to identify the constructs and their causal relationships relevant for ØKO foods-consumption, a heuristic model was designed by taking into account recent research results from different countries. The model consists of two parts separated by a dotted line. Above the line is the micro part of the model - a value-attitude-behaviour hierarchy and the socio-economic situation - and below the macro part - the market situation. This distinction is important from an econometric point of view when it comes to sampling and estimation of the full model.

The model emphasizes the influence of psychological variables on the buying of organic foods by proposing a value-attitude-behaviour hierarchy. This emphasis reflects the assumption that the buying of organic foods is motivated by a number of factors of both personal and societal relevance that go beyond economic utility considerations: Consumers usually have to pay more for these products, and this willingness for financial sacrifice presupposes, inter alia, knowledge about and a perception of the seriousness of environmental problems, combined with a high degree of perceived consumer effectiveness and internal attribution of responsibility.

Values are abstract social cognitions and serve as blueprints from which attitudes and behaviour are derived. They are known to be related to certain consumption behaviour aspects, mainly in an indirect way. Attitudes are regarded as a mediator between abstract cognitions and specific behaviour. In this model, it is assumed that environment-related attitudes determine the perception and evaluation of product characteristics which in turn influence more specific attitudes towards conventional and organic foods. The dependent variable has been termed „buying behaviour” to indicate that the focus is not only on demand as such, but on several aspects characterizing ØKO foods-consumption such as experiences with products, frequency of buying, and shopping place.

![Diagram of the ØKO foods-project model](image_url)