



ENABEL - TDC

Responsible consumption

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iVOX



België
partner in ontwikkeling

About the study

The Trade for Development Centre (TDC), a programme of Enabel, the Belgian development agency, supports and promotes various forms of fair and sustainable trade and coordinates the Fair Trade Week.

In that context, TDC commissioned a quantitative survey on the knowledge, attitudes, perceptions and purchasing behaviour of the Belgian population in five product categories:

- Fair trade products
- Ecological products
- Ethical products
- Organic products
- Local products

The purpose of the study is:

- To map the knowledge, attitudes and behaviour of the Belgian population with regard to responsible consumption.
- To study the differences and similarities in this area between the five product types mentioned, looking for possible synergies.
- To formulate recommendations to raise awareness among the Belgian population and to stimulate responsible consumption and the purchase of these products, based on those synergies.

The study consists of an online survey conducted by research agency iVOX on behalf of the Trade for Development Centre (Enabel) between 26 July and 19 August 2019 in a proportionally stratified random sample of 3,000 Belgians over the age of 16, representative in terms of language, gender, age and education. The maximum margin of error for 3,000 Belgians is 1.65% (95% confidence interval). Five socio-demographically identically composed groups of 600 respondents were each asked part of the questionnaire about one of the five product types that are the subject of the study. The maximum margin of error for 600 respondents is 4%.

Key findings

1. **Responsible consumption** is mainly associated with buying **seasonal products and local products** on the one hand and with **reusing and reducing packaging and waste** on the other. The link with ecological products and fair trade products and especially with organic and ethical products is made less than with local products from the short chain.
2. According to 2 out of 3 Belgians, more **responsible consumption** is needed, which indicates a **collective basis and awareness**. Less than half are convinced that individual purchasing behaviour has a real impact. One in three Belgians believes that the primary responsibility lies with the consumer, but reference is also made to both the government and the producers and distributors.
3. Spontaneous awareness of or **familiarity with ethical and ecological products is rather low**. Even after definition, these product types remain the least clearly defined.
4. Quality, price and health take precedence in purchasing decisions and choices. The **typical distinguishing features** of fair, ethical, ecological, organic and local products have a **relatively similar importance**.
5. **Local products** have the strongest and **most pronounced identity**. The concept of 'ethical' is less well known and is partly contained in 'fair'. The environmental aspects of 'organic' overlap with 'ecological', but 'organic' also evokes the connotation of healthy and seasonal local products, albeit at a relatively high price.
6. The **specific products (coffee and the like) associated with fair products are reasonably similar to those associated with ethical products**. A similar overlap can be seen in the specific products associated with **local products on the one hand and with organic food products** on the other hand. Ecological products also include non-food products, in contrast to the other product categories, in which the Top 3 always consists of food products.

7. **Local products** have a **better image than other product types**, especially thanks to the **price-quality ratio, credibility and assumed impact**. In these three areas, organic products have the most negative perceptions, although they score best in terms of health and varied offering.
8. **Belgians indicate they most often buy local products**, followed by organic and ecological products, and then fair trade and ethical products. Satisfaction with local products is also higher than with all other product categories. Young people say they buy more ecological products, older people more often buy local products and fair products.
9. **Certification by labels** does not immediately encourage people to buy, but it is an important **means of verification** that ensures more certainty and recognisability of the products.
10. The price is mainly a threshold for the purchase of organic products and, to a lesser extent, fair trade products. For local products, greater choice and availability would be an incentive, for the other product types primarily a **lower price but also more guarantees about the impact**. The more local the product, the greater the incentive to buy organic, ecological, fair and ethical products.
11. When choosing between the five product categories, **local products** are by far the **most important** for Belgians. Young people say they attach more importance to ethical and ecological issues than older people, while for the older age group it is mainly the local aspect and also fair trade that is relatively more important.
12. In general, there is a **division** between **organic and ecological products** on the one hand and **fair and ethical products** on the other hand, but local products are the preferred choice of Belgians.

Some key figures

- When asked about the significance of responsible consumption, in addition to 'less packaging/waste' (46%), it is mainly the purchase of seasonal products (49%) and local short-chain products (39%) that is mentioned, much more than the purchase of fair trade products (15%) and ecological products (15%) and especially of organic products (9%) and ethical products (6%).
- 66% of Belgians, young and old, agree with the statement that we will have to live and consume differently for the benefit of future generations. However, just under half (46%) are convinced that individual buying and consumption behaviour can make a difference and has an impact on the environment and climate or on the living conditions of farmers, workers and producers.
- A minority of Belgians (37%) indicated that their purchases take account of the conditions in which products are made. 6 out of 10 Belgians (59%) confirm they are more aware than before of the circumstances in which some products are made.
- Just under half of Belgians (49%) say it is important to be able to buy fair trade products, with a significant difference between the under-35s (46%) and the over-55s (54%).
- 42% of young people (<35 years old) consider 'expensive' to be a description applicable to fair trade products, which is twice as much as the over-55s (21%).
- 32% of young people (<35 years old) disagree with the statement that buying fair trade products is good for the environment. Only 15% think it is. With older people, this is the opposite. 36% of people over 55 think that buying fair trade products is good for the environment, 17% think it is not.
- The 3 most important drivers that would encourage people to buy fair trade products (more often) are: a lower price, 'if they were also local (from short chains)' and guarantees about the real impact.
- Slightly less than 2 out of 3 Belgians (63%) say they feel they have done a good deed by buying local products, 60% really think they can make a difference this way, for the other product types this is less than half.

- 70% of Belgians say that buying local products is good for the environment, which is higher than for buying ecological (62%) and organic (52%) products; for fair trade products it is 25%, for ethical products 36%.
- 7 out of 10 Belgians indicate that they consider organic products to be too expensive, while 2 out of 3 non-buyers consider the price to be the main threshold for buying these products.
- Compared with other product types, a larger proportion of consumers (38%) tend to perceive 'organic' as a 'marketing trick' to sell more.
- Attention to animal welfare is more an ethical than an ecological issue: it is strongly identified with ethical products as a characteristic. This complements the definition of ethical products proposed in this study, which explicitly links this product category to respect for the fundamental rights of workers defined by the International Labour Organization.
- 25% of Belgians say that labels on products encourage them to buy, 31% say the opposite, 44% answer neutrally or don't know.
- Half of consumers think that there are so many labels that they don't know what they all stand for and therefore don't pay attention to them (any more).
- 54% of people who buy fair trade products indicate that they use certification as a means of ensuring that they are fair trade products.
- The willingness to pay extra compared with 'normal' products is highest for local (51%) and fair (47%) food products, and lowest for cosmetics, beauty and personal care products whether they be fair trade, ecological, etc. (25% to 30%) and for organic textile products (26%).

Conclusions

Responsible consumption is mainly associated with buying seasonal products and local products on the one hand and with reusing and reducing packaging and waste on the other. The link with ecological products and fair trade products and especially with organic and ethical products is made less than with local products from the short chain.

For Belgians, **responsible consumption** mainly means buying **seasonal products (49%) and local short-chain products (39%)** on the one hand and **reducing packaging and other waste (46%)** and reuse (circular economy) (29%) on the other. It also means opting for sustainable products that last a long time (28%). The link with buying ecological products (15%) and fair trade products (15%), and especially with organic products (9%) and ethical products (6%), is made less.

- **Young people** tend to emphasise **ecological aspects** and associate responsible consumption relatively more with less packaging/waste, more recycling and reuse and with buying organic and ecological products, while **older people** associate it relatively more with buying **local and seasonal products**, with products that **last a long time** and with **fair trade**.
- When it comes to responsible consumption, French-speakers are more likely to think of consuming less and buying organic products and especially local short-chain products, while Dutch-speakers are more likely to make the link with ecology and sustainability.

According to 2 out of 3 Belgians, more responsible consumption is needed, which indicates a collective basis and awareness. Less than half are convinced that individual purchasing behaviour has a real impact. One in three Belgians believes that the primary responsibility lies with the consumer, but reference is also made to both the government, the producers and distributors.

Belgians indicate that they are most concerned about their personal health (84%), purchasing power (78%) and well-being (76%), and about the environment/climate (75%), to a greater extent than about poverty (56%) and inequality (65%) in the world and the consequences of globalisation (55%).

Two out of three Belgians (66%) think that **consumption behaviour and our lifestyles should be different and more responsible**, but **less than half (46%)** are convinced that

their purchasing behaviour has an impact on the environment or on the living conditions of producers/workers. Only 37% indicate that they actually take production conditions into account when making purchases (37%), although almost 6 out of 10 Belgians confirm that they are more aware than in the past of the conditions under which some products are made.

- Older people (43%) see responsible consumption more than young people (24%) as the **consumer's responsibility**.
- For French-speakers, it is rather the responsibility of the consumer and the government, while Dutch-speakers place the responsibility relatively more often with the producers and distributors.

Spontaneous awareness of or familiarity with ethical and ecological products is rather low. Even after definition, these product types remain the least clearly defined.

70% to 80% of Belgians say they know what fair trade, organic and local products mean. There is much less clarity and familiarity with the product categories **'ecological' (38%) and especially with 'ethical' (28%)**, of which an almost as large group (30%) indicates that they have never heard of it before. After presenting a definition of ethical products in the questionnaire that explicitly links this product category to respect for the fundamental rights of workers defined by the International Labour Organization, 7 out of 10 Belgians (72%) indicate that their idea was consistent with this definition. However, even after presenting all the product definitions, the order of awareness of, familiarity with or clarity about the product types remains the same: (1) local products (with 83% finding it clear what is meant), (2) organic products (80%), (3) fair trade products (76%), (4) ecological products (66%) and (5) ethical products (56%).

- The product definitions are generally clearer for the younger age groups. Only for local products there is no age difference in terms of clarity.
- Dutch-speakers find it clearer what is meant by fair trade/fair products and organic products, French-speakers what is meant by ethical products and ecological products.

Quality, price and health take precedence in purchasing decisions and choices. The typical distinguishing features of fair, ethical, ecological, organic and local products have a relatively similar importance.

Not taking price into account, Belgians say they take the most account of the **shelf life of products (59%)** and of **quality and health aspects (48% and 39% respectively) when shopping**, much more than local production/short chain (22%), ecological aspects (respect for the environment: 17%) or fair trade (respect for the living conditions of producers and workers: 15%).

- In comparison with young people (who say they focus more on quality aspects), **older people** more often state they consider **the shelf life and impact of products on health**, but also **local production and fair trade**.
- French-speakers indicate less than Dutch-speakers the shelf life and quality of products and more other aspects such as health, ecology, local production and fair trade.

When asked about the relative importance of 23 different characteristics of products when purchasing them, it appears that **quality attributes** (taste, design, freshness, shelf life, etc.) are by far the most important (8.6/10), followed by **price** (8.1) and the **health aspect** (8.0). After this Top 3, most attention is paid to seasonality (7.4), the absence of pesticides and chemicals (7.3), a clear origin (7.1) and respect for the environment and natural resources during production (7.0). With scores from 6.4 to 6.9 out of 10, the **differences between various other aspects related to fair, ethical, ecological, organic and local products are not so great**. The fact that producers and workers (should) receive a correct remuneration or price that allows them to live in dignity, for example, has the same weight as 'production with attention to animal welfare' and 'little or no packaging' (6.9/10 each time).

Local products have the strongest and most pronounced identity. The concept of 'ethical' is less well known and is partly contained in 'fair'. The environmental aspects of 'organic' overlap with 'ecological', but 'organic' also evokes the connotation of healthy and seasonal local products, albeit at a relatively high price.

Despite the rather limited differentiation in the importance of the characteristics in product purchases, there are quite clear associations between a large part of the characteristics and one or more product types.

Local products seem to have the **strongest and most pronounced identity**. **Local production** in the immediate vicinity / in Belgium / in the country of purchase, coupled

with direct sales without intermediaries (**short chain**), is typical of what is meant by 'local products'. In addition, there is a strong association with **seasonality** and local products are the only product type that is perceived as **rather cheap**. Local products are also seen as high quality, healthy and to a certain extent environmentally friendly (little packaging, smaller ecological footprint) and fair (respect for the living conditions of small-scale producers).

Fair products and ethical products have a great deal of common ground in people's perception, although account must be taken of a lower level of awareness or familiarity with the concept of 'ethical'. Production with **respect for human rights** is, partly because of that, even more strongly linked to fair trade than to ethical production. A **correct remuneration or pricing**, an **improvement in the living conditions of small producers**, and **origin from the third world** complete the top associations with fair trade. **Fair trade products** are considered **rather expensive** and share the awareness of certification labels with the category of organic products. **Ethical products** have, except for the link to **codes of conduct** of producers, a striking association with **attention to animal welfare**. Animal welfare is seen more as an ethical issue, not an ecological one. Production with respect for the environment and natural resources is also seen as a characteristic of ethical products.

In people's perceptions, **ecological products and organic products** also appear to be fairly close to each other, because they **overlap** in perceived characteristics with everything that has an **environmental impact**: both the typical characteristics of organic farming (no pesticides, no GMOs, no irradiation, no preservatives) and of ecologically/environmentally friendly production and consumption (respect for the environment and natural resources, reusable or recyclable raw materials and materials, reduced packaging, small ecological footprint) are considered characteristic of both product types. More than with the other product types, there is one characteristic that dominates the **organic products**, namely the **absence or quasi-absence of pesticides or other chemical products**. Compared with ecological products, organic products are **to a greater extent perceived as healthy, seasonal and of relatively good quality**, aspects that this product type therefore has more in common with **products of local origin**. Organic products, however, are clearly struggling with a **high price perception**.

The specific products (coffee and the like) associated with fair products are reasonably similar to those associated with ethical products. A similar overlap can be seen in the specific products associated with local products on the one hand and with organic food products on the other hand. Ecological products also include non-food products, in contrast to the other product categories, in which the Top 3 always consists of food products.

Coffee, chocolate/cocoa and cereal products (corn, rice, quinoa, etc.) are the typical products associated with **fair products** but also, albeit less pronounced, with **ethical products**. The Top 4 in fair trade products is completed by tea, in ethical products by clothing and textiles.

Regarding **organic products** people think primarily of vegetables (80%) and fruit (65%), followed by dairy products (eggs) (47%), milk and cheese products (35%), meat (30%) and potatoes and cereal products (both 27%). When it comes to **local products**, people primarily (also) think of vegetables (74%) and fruit (60%). Furthermore, with local products, **the same product types** are seen as with organic products, although the association is stronger: milk and cheese (56%), eggs (54%), potatoes (54%) and meat (52%). Only cereal products (4%) are excluded from the list.

All these products that are seen as local and organic are also seen as the most important **ecological products**, but to a lesser extent: vegetables (45%), fruit (35%), dairy and meat (20%) and cereal products (25%). However, ecological products often also include maintenance and cleaning products (24%) and, to a lesser extent, clothing and textiles (17%) and cosmetics and personal care products (13%). While local products and organic products focus on 7 products, **the range of products considered to be ecological is much broader and also includes various non-food products.**

Local products have a better image than other product types, especially thanks to the price-quality ratio, credibility and assumed impact. In these three areas, organic products have the most negative perceptions, although they score best in terms of health and varied offering.

The general attitudes towards the five product types differ significantly. Belgians are most positive towards **local products (8.0/10)**. Ethical products (7.3) and ecological products (7.2) score averagely. **Fair trade products (6.9) and organic (6.8) products** raise relatively more resistance.

The (perceived) higher prices partly explain this, certainly in the case of organic products. Nearly 7 out of 10 Belgians find **organic products too expensive**, for ecological and fair trade products, this is about 1 in 2. While **organic and ecological products**, on the other hand, are often deemed to be of **at least equivalent quality** as ‘ordinary’ products, **people are more doubtful about this with fair trade products and ethical products**. As a result, each of these product types loses against **local products** on the valuation of price and quality – together with health the key drivers in purchasing behaviour – and on the eventual perception of **good value for money**.

Organic products are the most positively evaluated in terms of both breadth and variety of the range and impact on health, but clearly give the consumer the least **feeling of doing a good deed** by buying them (36%). That feeling is much stronger **for local products (63%) and for fair trade products (51%)**. Similarly, 70% of Belgians agree that buying local products is good for the environment, which is more than for buying ecological products (62%) and organic products (52%). The assumed impact of local products is significantly higher than that of any of the other products: **60% of Belgians say that by buying local products they can make a real difference**. Fair trade products (62%) and, to a much lesser extent, ethical products (43%) score best as a category of products whose purchase is important for producers and workers in the South, but when it comes to the **interests of farmers and producers in Belgium** both types of products (32% and 36% respectively) are outperformed by ecological products and organic products (both 43%) and in particular vis-à-vis **local products (82%)**.

People find **local products and, to a lesser extent, fair products more credible** (no marketing or sales tricks) **than ecological, organic and ethical products**. A larger number of people have no opinion about the latter product category because they are less familiar with this concept. Fair trade products and organic products are easier to recognise than ethical products and ecological products. Opinions are divided about the recognisability of local products. Local products would also be purchased more if they were more readily available, more accessible, with a wider range and more choice. The study also implicitly shows that there is a need to **broaden the offering or range of fair trade products**. 27% of Belgians agree with the statement that there is a wide and varied range of fair trade products, but 26% do not think so, 27% respond neutrally and 19% say they cannot judge this.

Finally, it is interesting to note that 53% of consumers do not agree with the statement ‘I generally do not like the taste or looks of local products as much as “normal” products’. This is 41% for organic products and 35% for fair trade products. In general, only 15% of Belgians agree with the statement that products from one of the five categories are less tasty or appealing than ‘normal’ products.

Belgians indicate that they most often buy local products, followed by organic and ecological products, and then fair trade and ethical products. Satisfaction with local products is also higher than with all other product categories. Young people say they buy more ecological products, older people more often buy local products and fair products.

Local products are bought most often: 60% of Belgians buy them **at least once a month**. Following at a distance are **organic products (42%)** and **ecological products (32%)**. **Fair products (22%)** and **ethical products (20%)** are bought less frequently.

- Local products are significantly more often purchased by older age groups. In addition, young people are more likely to buy ecological products and older people are relatively more likely to buy fair products.
- French-speakers indicate that they purchase each of the five types of products more frequently than Dutch-speakers.

The **satisfaction with those purchases** is significantly **greater when purchasing local products (8.2/10)** than when purchasing the other product types (approx. 7.3/10).

Chocolate, cocoa and coffee are the most frequently purchased **fair trade** products (29% and 26% respectively of Belgians over the last 12 months) and **ethical** products (20% and 19% respectively). **Fruit, vegetables and eggs** are the leaders in both **ecological** products (36%, 32% and 23%), **organic** products (49%, 45% and 38%) as well as **local** products (62%, 54% and 48%).

Organic products are most commonly of all product types bought in the **supermarket** (75%); ethical (46%) and local (43%) products the least. Only local products are bought more often through other channels (farm, local market, etc.) than at the supermarket.

Certification by labels does not immediately encourage people to buy, but it is an important means of verification that ensures more certainty and recognisability of the products.

Certification by labels or independent bodies is less important (6.1/10) than most other product characteristics in purchasing decisions. They don't directly encourage people to buy: 24% of Belgians agree that, for example, if they see a fair trade label on a product, it encourages them to buy that product, 33% disagree with this statement, 31% respond neutrally and 13% have no opinion on this. Approximately half of the Belgians think that labels offer useful information, but an equally large group states they **can't see the wood for the trees**, which seems to undermine the value of the labels.

However, according to this study, labels and certifications still come first as a means for the consumer to ensure that a product is 'ethical', 'organic', etc. Labels and certifications are the most commonly **used means of verification** for organic products (59%) and fair trade products (54%). Only in the case of local products is another means of verification, i.e. direct sales at the producer's premises (56%), more often used as a means of verification than labels and certifications (28%). For organic and ecological products, the information on the composition of the product on the label is also very important (used by almost 1 in 3 buyers).

The price is mainly a threshold for the purchase of organic products and, to a lesser extent, fair trade products. For local products, greater choice and availability would be an incentive, for the other product types primarily a lower price but also more guarantees about the impact. The more local the product, the greater the incentive to buy organic, ecological, fair and ethical products.

For the purchase of **fair trade products (42%) and especially organic products (66%)**, the **price perception is the most important threshold** for not buying these kinds of products, or not buying them more often. Lack of **trust** also plays a role, especially for **organic, but also ecological and fair trade products**. For **local products, availability and variation of the range** are a relatively important threshold, but it is the only product type for which the impact (social or otherwise) is not actually called into question.

A **lower price** is a key driver in encouraging consumers to buy products, especially with **organic products (58%) and ecological products (43%)**, while availability (31%) and choice (22%) play a relatively large role in local products. More guarantees about the impact apply for all product types (except local products), while **the local character can potentially boost the sales of each of the other product types**. The 'ecological' aspect is questioned the most: 26% would feel stimulated if there were **greater certainty** about the **ecological** content of a product. An **accredited label** would be most likely to support sales of **ethical** products, the type of product with which consumers are least familiar. More information and promotion could particularly support the sale of ethical, ecological and local products. In the end, only a small group of Belgians (about 11%) indicate that nothing would convince them to buy this type of product.

The **willingness to pay extra** (on average 12% to 13%) is **highest among local (51%) and fair (47%) food products**, and the lowest in cosmetics and beauty and personal care products (25% to 30%, whether organic, ethical, etc.) and in organic textiles (26%).

When choosing between the five product categories, local products are by far the most important for Belgians. Young people attach more importance to ethical and ecological issues than older people, while for the older age group it is mainly the local aspect, and also fair trade, that is relatively more important.

The respondents consider it important that the products they can buy are first of all 'local' followed by 'ecological', rather than 'organic', 'ethical' and 'fair' (the last three are on an equal footing in this respect). In concrete terms, 70% of Belgians think it is important that they can buy local products, 60% that they can buy ecological products, and 50% that they can buy organic, fair and ethical products.

- Older people consider it more important than young people that they can buy local products and, to a lesser extent, fair trade products.
- French-speakers systematically consider it more important than Dutch-speakers to be able to buy these products for each of the five product types.

In case of an explicit ranking according to importance, **(1) local products** stand out; half of the Belgians think this is the most important of the five product types. This is followed by **(2) ecological products and organic products**, and **(3) fair products and ethical products**.

- Young people indicate that they attach more importance to ethical and ecological products, while older people tend to consider local products and fair trade products more important.
- The fact that products are organic is relatively more important for French-speakers; ethical and ecological products are ranked as more important among Dutch-speakers.

In general, there is a division between organic and ecological products on the one hand and fair and ethical products on the other hand, but local products are the preferred choice of Belgians.

Both in terms of product characteristics as well as specific product types and purchasing thresholds, this study provides clear indications of the **synergies** between ‘**organic**’ and ‘**ecological**’ on the one hand, and between ‘**honest**’ and ‘**ethical**’ on the other hand.

In terms of awareness or familiarity, attitudes, image and perceptions, concrete purchasing behaviour and assumed impact, local products score best. **In fact, highlighting the local aspect seems to be a good way to support the purchase of the other product types.**

- A division seems to be that the organic-ecological aspect is relatively more in line with the younger age group, while the older age group is the main supporter of local products and, to a lesser extent, fair trade products.
- In addition, there are important differences in emphasis between Dutch- and French-speakers. The first group seems to be more pragmatically led by price-quality aspects, the second group more open in attitude and behaviour towards forms and products of responsible consumption.

Recommendations

**‘We really must do something about our consumer behaviour! But me too?’
People need to be made more aware of the impact they can have as individuals.**

On the basis of the study, we find that people are collectively aware of the importance of responsible consumption for their own and future generations, and that a large majority (75%) indicate that they are concerned about environmental pollution and climate change. However, a minority (46%) is convinced that individual buying and consumption behaviour can make a difference and has an impact on the environment and climate or on the living conditions of farmers, workers and producers.

To raise people’s awareness and encourage more responsible consumption, it will therefore be necessary to convince them that we also have a responsibility as individual consumers and, above all – on the basis of there being strength in numbers – can contribute to a better society with respect for people and the environment. The fact that almost half of young people (47%) say they talk in their social environment about the things they can do themselves to make the world a better place, indicates that there is a basis to substantiate this conviction.

**‘Is this really going to make a difference? I don’t know either.’
There is a need for greater certainty and clarity on the impact of product choices.**

A condition is, however, that sufficient clarity is created about the impact of individual purchasing and consumption behaviour: what is the concrete impact of the choices I make as an individual, and in particular when those choices are shared by a large group of individuals?

Another condition is that sufficient certainty must be offered about the impact of these choices: what guarantee do I have as a consumer that the product I purchase is indeed ecological, ethical, etc. and does indeed have a positive impact on the environment or on the living conditions of the people who produce it?

This study shows that – in addition to price – a lack of certainty, recognisability, credibility and trust are an important barrier to making more responsible choices.

‘Labels are handy, but I can’t see the wood for the trees.’ A clearer framework of definitions, labels and certifications is needed.

For those who want to buy responsibly, labels and certifications are important: they ensure recognition. There is room for improvement in this area, as almost 40% of consumers believe that ethical and ecological products are difficult to recognise and distinguish from ‘ordinary’ products, while the identification of local products is also often a problem. Local products would also be purchased more if they were more readily available, more accessible, with a wider range and more choice.

According to consumers, young and old, labels and certifications are by far the most important means of verifying whether the products they buy or want to buy are fair, ethical, organic or ecological. The problem here is that half of Belgian consumers think there are so many labels that they can no longer see the wood for the trees and therefore pay less or no more attention to them. For the youngest age group this percentage (55%) is significantly higher than for the older generation (47%).

To respond to the lack of guarantees, clarity and recognisability, it is therefore necessary to critically evaluate and address the sheer multitude, not to mention proliferation, of labels and certifications. If not, they’re in danger of losing value.

In addition, it is of course also important for people to know exactly what local, ecological, organic, fair and ethical products stand for. The study shows that the state of this knowledge is actually not too bad: 95% of Belgians say they have already heard about fair trade products, while 70% say they know what they stand for.

However, ecological and, above all, ethical products are an exception. When ethical products – rather narrowly – are defined as ‘manufactured with respect for the fundamental rights of workers (freedom of association, safety, hygiene, no discrimination, etc.), as defined by the International Labour Organization’, only 56% indicate that it is clear what kind of products are meant.

‘Why should I pay a higher price for a product that might not be better?’ A better price-quality ratio (and perception thereof) can stimulate non-buyers.

Honest and ethical products are a little lower in the ranking according to the importance of the product types themselves. Nevertheless, the typical, distinctive characteristics of fair, ethical, ecological, organic and local products appear to be relatively equivalent in terms of importance for the consumer. For example, there is no evidence to suggest that respect for the environment and climate is an aspect that systematically outweighs respect for working conditions and human rights in product purchases.

Buyers of fair trade, ethical, ecological, organic and local products also attach significantly more importance to all characteristics than non-buyers, except in terms of quality aspects (equally important for buyers and non-buyers) and price (more important for non-buyers). People who buy X (e.g. fair trade products) are often people who also buy Y (e.g. ecological products). The correlation in purchasing and purchasing frequency is strongest between fair trade and ethical products, between organic and ecological products and between ethical and ecological products and is weakest between local and each of the other products.

Price is the main threshold for buying the proposed product types, especially when it comes to organic and fair trade products. Lower prices could tempt non-customer groups, but may not be realistic. Nevertheless, there seems to be a general perception or assumption that fair trade, ethical, organic and ecological products are always more expensive than 'ordinary' products, without always being accompanied by better quality or a guaranteed social impact.

This makes it all the more important to highlight the other two main determinants of product choices as assets of these products, namely quality aspects (taste, design, freshness, shelf life, etc.), which are especially important for young people, and the positive impact on personal health, which is especially important for older people. Fair trade (and ethical) products score less well in both areas – perception of quality and health compared with 'normal' products – than local, organic and ecological products.

'I prefer to buy products from my neighbourhood, this is best for me and for everyone.' To stimulate responsible consumption, a local approach is very important.

The study shows that a local approach is important in relation to impact and in raising awareness about responsible consumption. The 'local' aspect, certainly by the older generation, is itself almost seen as a kind of guarantee for quality products that are produced with respect for the environment, the producer, and one's own health.

When asked about the meaning of responsible consumption, apart from reuse and less packaging and waste, the survey respondents most often referred to buying seasonal products (49%) and local short-chain products (39%), and much less to buying fair trade and ecological products and especially to organic and ethical products.

However, it is important to underline that responsible consumption does not have the same meaning for young and old. People over 55 associate it more strongly with local

products, but also with fair trade products. Young people link responsible consumption to a greater extent to ecological aspects of production and consumption. Particularly for younger people, fair trade products are not yet directly associated with responsible consumption. This means that, to encourage the purchase of fair trade products, a dual strategy could be followed (see below).

‘Fair trade? That's all about the small farmers in our country, right?’ Fair trade products can be stimulated by strengthening the local aspect.

In terms of awareness or familiarity, attitudes, image and perceptions, concrete purchasing behaviour and assumed impact, local products clearly score best. In fact, highlighting the local aspect seems to a good way to support the purchase of the other product types. By paying attention to or emphasising the local character, the relatively strong associations and perceptions of local products can radiate through cross-fertilisation and synergy onto fair trade products, among other things. Just think of characteristics such as: seasonality, good quality at a reasonable price, products that are good for your health, products that are environmentally friendly to a certain extent (low packaging, a small ecological footprint).

In other words, the better image of local products in terms of value for money, credibility and assumed impact (and guarantees thereof) on both people's own wallets and personal health, as well as on the environment, people and society, can support fair trade, and seems particularly important in encouraging older age groups to buy fair trade products.

The link between fair trade and production in Belgium is not much made at present, while geographical proximity is an important purchasing factor and, as the study shows, production in Belgium is far more important in purchasing choices and decisions than originating from the South. We need to look at how the local aspect can be more and better integrated into fair trade, for example by investigating whether and how local ingredients in fair trade products can be combined with ingredients from the South.

At the same time, it is necessary to raise consumer awareness about the situation of (e.g. small) Belgian farmers, who do not always receive a fair price for their products, i.e. a price that covers their production costs, can avert impending bankruptcy and enable them to live in dignity and worry-free conditions. The fact that, according to this study, local products are highly regarded as fair in terms of respect for the living conditions of small-scale producers is an important basis for building on the social awareness of this issue.

‘Fair and ecological go hand in hand.’ Use ecological arguments to get young people interested in fair trade products.

Young people associate fair trade products to a greater extent than older people with certification by the Fairtrade label, with ‘expensive’ but also with ‘quality’. They say they buy fair trade products less often than the older generations, but buy ecological products more frequently. In general, they also make a stronger link between ecology and responsible consumption.

In general, the study shows that an ecological outlook is more in keeping with the younger age group.

What is striking is that only 15% of young people agree with the statement that buying fair trade products is good for the environment, compared with 36% of the over-55s. Young people do not make the link between fair trade products and environmental impact. Emphasising environmental and climate aspects that are important to (a large proportion of) young people, such as the absence of pesticides, respect for the environment and natural resources, little or no packaging and waste, use of reusable or recyclable raw materials, no irradiation and no preservatives, could encourage the sale of fair trade products. Sensitivity (again especially among young people) to the ethical component, such as attention to animal welfare, can also play a role in this.

‘The Worldshop: that’s more than just coffee and cocoa from the South.’ Take fair trade out of its cocoon, broaden (the perception of) the concept and the range.

64% of Belgians say they have bought fair trade products in the last 12 months, 22% would do so monthly. Fair trade products, however, seem to be strongly identified with specific products such as coffee and chocolate, which come from third world countries and are more expensive than ‘normal’ products. The question should be raised as to whether fair trade should not break out of this ‘cocoon’, by establishing a stronger link with local production/small producers in Belgium. And whether the fair trade market couldn’t be broadened by a stronger focus on products other than traditional fair trade products. These could be vegetables, for example, classic products in which local and ecological aspects can also be emphasised, but possibly other less obvious types of product as well.

The study also implicitly shows that there is a need to broaden the offering or range of fair trade products. 27% of Belgians agree with the statement that there is a wide and varied

range of fair trade products, but 26% do not think so, 27% respond neutrally and 19% say they cannot judge this.

'It says "organic" on everything these days, but the only thing you can be sure of is the price.' Be attentive to strengthening the expensive price perception of organic and fair trade.

Organic products have in common with local products – especially in the field of fruit and vegetables – that they are regarded as seasonal, healthy and of high quality. However, they have a public image problem in terms of price perception and credibility, with many people (38%) interpreting 'organic' as a sales trick. It is important to be aware of this. Fair trade products are also considered to be rather expensive, but they score much better in terms of credibility.