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<td>Should I stick a label on organic wine or not? Results from a Swiss experiment.</td>
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**I want to submit an abstract for:**

Conference Poster Session

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**Keywords**

Wine, consumers, tasting, organic production, labeling, influence, information

**Research Question**

Is a wine hedonically evaluated differently by consumers when it carries an organic label?

**Methods**

The study was conducted as an experiment in a tasting setting with consumers who were told that they were tasting either an organically produced or a conventionally produced wine.

**Results**

The same wine was rated significantly lower when it was labeled organic than when it was said it stems from conventional production.

**Abstract**

Consumers are highly influenced in their hedonic evaluation of foods and beverages by the information provided (e.g., Poelman et al., 2008). Past research shows that this also occurs in the domain of wine. In one study, for example, it was shown that disclosing Parker points before drinking wine considerably affected the rating in the direction of the points (Siegrist & Cousin, 2009). Another study found similar effects by disclosing the price of a wine, although only for high prices and only for women (Almenberg & Dreber, 2011). The present study continues this line of research and investigates the effects of disclosing viticulture information, i.e., conventional versus organic viticulture.

A total of 38 participants (mostly staff from the university) were invited for a blind wine tasting. The average age was M = 37.87 years (SD = 11.15), and 22 of them were female. Most participants drink wine once or twice a week (34.2%). About one in four drinks more regularly (3-4x per week, 21.1%; 5-6x per week, 5.3%). Another quarter enjoys wine one to three times a month (23.7%), and a smaller proportion of participants consumes it less than once a month (15.8%). Participants were asked to taste four wines, two white wines and two red wines. For each color, they were told that, of the two comparable wines, one was produced conventionally, the other one organically. Therefore, participants thought that they were about to taste two different wines when actually, it was the same wine for each color. For the white wine a Vieux Murets, Johannisberg du Valais, AOC 2013 was
chosen, which sells at CHF 9.45 per bottle; for the red wine a Pasas Monastrell, Viñas Viejas, Jumilla, DO 2011 was selected, which sells at CHF 11.50 per bottle. The piece of information provided was counterbalanced, i.e., half of the participants were told the first sample was conventionally produced; the other half was told the first sample was organically produced. For the analyses, the data were collapsed, as no order effects were found. The order of the color of the wine was kept stable, i.e., participants always started with the two white wines followed by the two red wines. The wines were served in black glasses at a temperature of 13°C for the white and 18°C for the red wine. Water was also available to neutralize the taste. Participants were instructed to taste the wines sequentially without going back. This was done to prevent participants from realizing that the same wine was used for the two samples. The tasting was run in a sensory lab containing 10 cubicles. The hedonic ratings were given by drawing a cross on a line of 10 cm with the ends labeled “I don’t like it at all” and “I like it very much”. After the tasting, a short questionnaire was handed out, which included questions about wine consumption and organic production as well as participants’ socio-demographics.

The hedonic ratings of the wines were analyzed using a repeated measures ANOVA with two within-subjects factors. The first factor was the color of the wine (white versus red), and the second factor was the piece of information provided (conventional versus organic). The main factor of color (F(1,36) = 15.33, p < .001) as well as the main factor of viticulture (F(1,36) = 6.41, p < .05) were both significant. No interaction was observed (F(1,36) < 1). More specifically, the white wine was rated higher (M = 6.02) than the red wine (M = 4.26), and most interestingly, wines supposedly stemming from conventional production were rated higher (M = 5.40) than those supposedly originating from organic production (M = 4.88). These results remained the same even when controlling for the proportion of organic wine participants usually consume. No matter whether participants are used to drink a lot of organically produced wine or none at all, they all rated wine that was labeled organic lower than wine that was not.

This research provides another example of how much consumers are influenced by the information given. Participants tasted the same wine twice, and only the viticulture information differed. This piece of information made participants experience the wines differently. In the case of wine, it seems that an organic label does not help to improve its perceived quality, as participants rated these wines lower. Usually, people equate organic with more healthy. Therefore, an organic label works well with foods that are supposed to be healthy, e.g., fruits and vegetables. Wine is primarily a luxury beverage that is consumed to enjoy and socialize, and thus does not have to be, or perhaps should not be, too healthy. This could be why an organic label on a bottle of wine does not improve, but instead impedes its hedonic rating. Participants’ prior experience with drinking organic wine did not change this pattern. This seems a bit strange. One would expect that people who voluntarily drink organic wines in their homes would like these wines. One possible explanation could be that they have a favorite organic brand they drink at home and the sample that was provided during the tasting was less preferable, resulting in a low rating. The supposedly conventional wine, on the other hand, was not compared with that favorite organic brand, but was evaluated on a more general level, therefore receiving a higher rating. Of course, this is quite speculative and clearly more research is needed before reaching a final conclusion.

References