Wheat Landraces and Gender Perspectives in Turkey: Consumer Expectations, Concerns and Willingness to Pay

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Executive Summary

The consultant (female, Ph.D.) carried out six focus groups with women in Turkey: one in Tokat (May 16, 2019), two in Balıkesir (May 23, 2019), one in Istanbul (June 29, 2019) and two in Ankara (July 18 and July 19, 2019). A total of 40 participants were recruited. Only the participants in Balıkesir were paid in cash for their time because they traveled from suburbs of the town to the focus group location. The meetings were carried out in accessible public space in Balıkesir, Istanbul and Tokat, as well as at private houses in Ankara.

In addition, a face-to-face survey was conducted with 25 consumers in Istanbul who attended a public lecture organized by the Bakers Collective (Kolektif Fırın), a recently established initiative for home and artisan bakers. The consumers also participated in a Q&A session with the consultant. Ten of these participants were female and 15 were male. These participants were more aware of wheat landraces and could name multiple wheat varieties beyond *siyez*. However, there was not a major difference with the focus group results in terms of household budget spent on food, places where consumers shop for food, where they get their information on clean and healthy food or how they consume wheat and wheat products.

All focus groups were carried out in Turkish, audio recorded and then transcribed. The Q&A session and the surveys were also in Turkish. The quotes in the report are translated by the consultant. No participant dropped out of the study.

Some of the characteristics of focus group participants are as follows:

- The youngest participant in the focus groups was 19 years old, the oldest was 74.
- Except for three participants, all focus group participants were married.
- 32.5% of participants were in the age group of 36-45, and 30% were in the age group 46-55, making majority of the participants (62.5%) ages 36-55.
- All but one participant reported their income: 15 of them (38%) have a monthly income of 1,500-2,500 TL (250-417 USD). This income is in the income band of minimum wage set in Turkey: Minimum monthly wage in Turkey, as of 2019, was 2,558 TL (total), and 2020 TL (net), equivalent to 427 USD (total), and 337 USD (net).
- 41% of participants spend 100-1,500 TL of their household budget on food. This is followed by 28% of participants who spend 500-999 TL of their household budget on food.

Some of the findings are as follows. The quotation marks are used to highlight some of the codes used by the researcher in the qualitative analysis.

- Participants shopped for food mainly from supermarkets, local markets (pazar, organik pazar, köy pazarı) and, in Istanbul, from food cooperatives.
- Participants were generally aware of wheat landraces, and used different words to define them: “atalık” (ancestor), “orijinal (original),” “siyez,” “Anadolu (Anatolian),” “memleketimin buğdayı” (wheat coming from a respondent’s hometown).

- Participants consumed wheat products mainly as bread. About one-third of participants said they have recently diversified their bread to include sourdough, village and whole breads, but the price margins of these bread varieties and their taste expectations still facilitate them to choose the breads they are familiar with. Whereas several consumers in Balıkesir expressed a strong preference for their "köy ekmeği" (round, cooked preferably in wood-fired, stone oven, about 1 kg), several consumers in Ankara preferred "bazlama" (thinner, round bread like an English muffin, about 300-400 grams each, cooked on a stove top). In general, bread has emerged as part of "local identity," "an indispensable item" in their diet.
- A majority of the participants stated that they receive information about healthy eating and wheat from TV and the internet, followed by friends and neighbors.
- Participants stated that they prepare at least one homemade food item with wheat on their own: The variety of home-made wheat products include tarhana, erişte (noodles) and bread as well as other food items including jam, pickles and yoghurt.
- Whereas several participants have tried "siyez" at least once, they were also concerned about how expensive it is, how "it is produced everywhere" and "sold everywhere," and how they cannot trust the products sold in the markets "without certification."
- A majority of participants were concerned about the health of their families due to the "extensive use of chemicals," "hormones," and "genetically engineered organisms" in agricultural production. Whereas some participants expressed disappointment that "nothing grows without chemicals," others were concerned about the expansion of markets that claim to sell "natural" food without regulation.
- Several participants expressed a general lack of trust to the agrifood system and its actors. Interestingly, at least one-fourth of participants were dubious of "organic" products, despite a knowledge of "the need for extensive monitoring" for organic certification. This lack of trust coincided with a lack of trust in the state and its offices, producers, the markets and the government.
- Whereas several participants complained about price premiums of organic food and free-range food, several others also expressed a "willingness to pay more" for clean and good food.

There are different markers used by participants for good and clean food, from seasonality to taste. A majority of participants also chose the food from their local markets (or originating in their environs) as healthy, good and clean food.