

TLITE: MINIMALLY PROCESSED VEGETABLES: CONSUMER PROFILE, CONSUMPTION HABITS, PERCEPTIONS OF MICROBIOLOGICAL RISK AND LABELING.

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ABSTRACT:

The consumption of minimally processed vegetables (MPV) has grown in the world due to the lifestyle of consumers characterized by reduced time in food preparation and a growing demand for fresh and healthy foods. This study aimed to characterize the profile of consumers of minimally processed vegetables, analyzing their consumption habits and perceptions of microbiological risk, in addition to verifying the adequacy of the labeling of these foods sold in Brazil, in view of current regulations. Data collection on MPV consumption were performed through an online questionnaire, consisting of 27 questions, with anonymous participation, through Google® Forms. The questions were divided into categories related to the individual, the habit of consuming fresh and minimally processed vegetables and the perception of microbiological risk associated with the consumption of MPV. To assess the information contained in the labeling of minimally processed vegetables, a checklist was drawn up based on current Brazilian standards. In total, 1,510 people answered the questionnaire, with a majority participation of people from the Southeast region, females and aged between 26 and 40 years old. Of the participants, 45.4% claimed to consume MPV, and the determining factors for consumption were practicality (77.8%) and speed of preparation (50.7%). The factors that limited consumption were the discredit in the hygiene of the product (64.4%) and the high price (50.0%). As for the microbiological perception of consumers, 49.1% of respondents disagree that MPV are totally free of pathogenic microorganisms and agree that they may be involved in foodborne disease outbreaks. Assessing the irregularities present on the labels, 94.6% of the brands presented at least one item in non-compliance with the legislation. Among the items with the highest number of irregularities are the absence of quantity in household measure, the country or municipality of origin and the non-specification of the presence or absence of gluten. Although the MPV market is growing in Brazil, the high price of these products limits their acquisition. Even among participants who buy these products, there is no complete consumer confidence in their microbiological quality. As for labeling, almost all brands analyzed had at least one irregularity, which could compromise consumer confidence in the labels of these foods.

Keywords: Vegetables; Consumption; Microbiological risk; Food labeling.

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