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Food Safety in Georgia

[June – October]

2010

This report includes the interviews and focus groups carried out in Georgia to gain greater insight into how food safety issues affect people. CRRC-Georgia, in collaboration with Mercy Corps and GDGI, conducted qualitative research on food safety in Georgia, focusing on the views of retailers, producers and consumers in the meat and dairy sub-sectors. We hope that this research will offer a more nuanced understanding of food safety in the country as well as lead to greater debate, development and research.

***Views from retailers,
producers & consumers in
Tbilisi & Akhaltsikhe***

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Introduction

In order to get insights into consumer knowledge, awareness, demands and purchasing practices with regard to the quality, safety and hygiene of dairy and meat products in Georgia, the Caucasus Research Resource Center–Georgia (CRRRC), in cooperation with Mercy Corps and GDCI, undertook a study on consumer drivers in the meat and dairy sub-sectors in Georgia.

The research contained two main components: 1) an analysis of consumer attitudes toward food safety, quality and hygiene; and 2) an analysis of retailers' attitude toward the same issues.

Concerning public awareness, the first component, CRRRC explored the following issues:

- the public's assessment of food safety in Georgia;
- people's purchasing practices regarding meat and dairy products;
- determinants of purchasing practices;
- the public's understanding of food quality, safety and hygiene;
- perceptions of the risks associated with food safety; and
- the public's understanding of consumer rights.

Concerning retailers, the second component, CRRRC centered on:

- an assessment of the existing national policies on food safety;
- attitudes toward food safety policy;
- challenges and opportunities of dairy and meat product retailers regarding food safety;
- retailers' understanding of consumer demand; and
- retailers' understanding of their rights.

In total, one pretest and seven focus groups were held, five in Tbilisi and three in Akhaltsikhe. Each focus group included about 10 participants. The retailer analysis consisted of 12 participants.

The FG discussions incorporated several themes within three main sections: general perceptions; safety, quality and hygiene; and legal rights. This report is divided into six main parts:

- The retailer personal interviews are summarized, with brief illustrative quotes to highlight the participant's answers. The full discussions then follow.
- For the Tbilisi Center and Outskirts FGs, a summarizing comparison is given, highlighting some of the major differences in the participants' answers, and is then followed by the full discussions.
- The Tbilisi Income FGs also offer a comparison of the different answers between the two income groups, prefacing the entire discussions which then appear.
- The Akhaltsikhe Urban and Rural Consumers FGs include a comparison between the two, i.e. urban and rural participants, as well as the full discussions.
- The Akhaltsikhe Rural Producer FG is summarized, using selected quotes from participants, while the discussions directly follow it.
- The final sections contain the methodology and the FG question-guides.

CRRRC, Mercy Corps and GDCI hope that this research will provide a better indication of the views on food safety in Georgia. It is also hoped that this research will serve as a baseline for further evidence-based research and policy development on food safety issues in the country.

Retailer Analysis: Summary

Experience & routine

Most of the retailers have significant experience in selling meat and dairy products, with Goodwill the only retailer who imports from abroad. Most of the major retailers said they have a similar process for checking and certifying their products in relation to health and safety. By contrast, smaller retailers, like market sellers, often cited the reputation of the source from which they buy their products from as a fundamental factor rather than formal checks and certificates. Personal trust and loyalty is also more important to market sellers than it is for larger retailers.

Customers

Most retailers, regardless of size or location, mention factors such as price and the quality of products as the main reasons why they have repeat customers. Only a market seller from the outskirts mentioned the act of necessity when considering why a person would return: "Customers come back because dairy and meat products are a necessary part of their diet."

Almost all retailers stated uniformly that should a customer return after becoming sick by eating one of their products they would reimburse them and then contact the supplier regarding the complaint. Interestingly, one meat retailer felt that this scenario would not be possible should the product have already fulfilled the required safety checks. "I have never had a case when a customer complained; it's impossible for it to happen after receiving the vet's certificate."

Responsibility

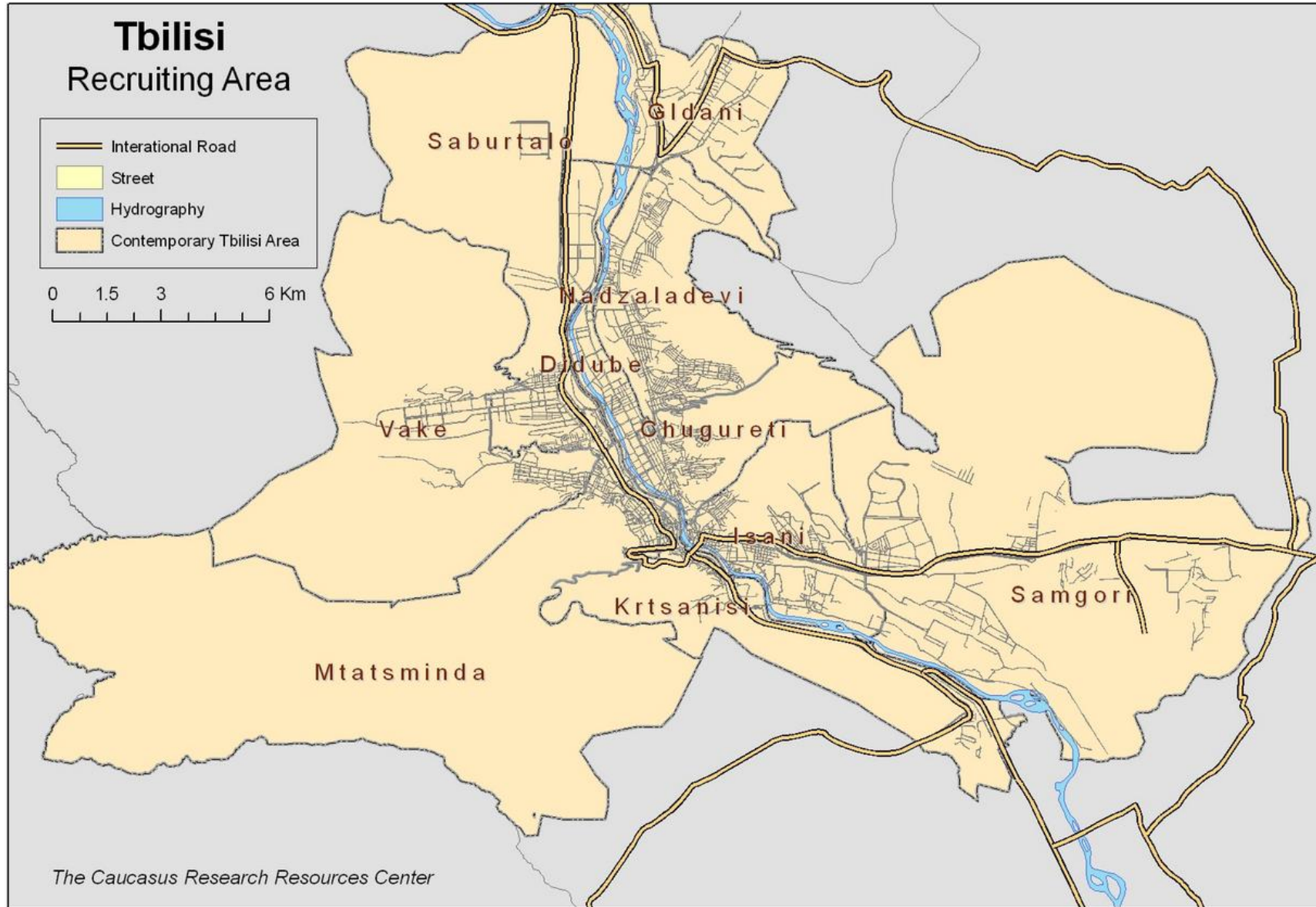
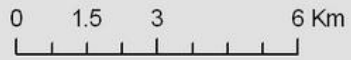
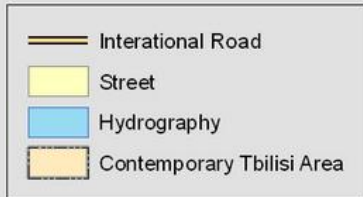
Many in both large chains, including both Populi and Goodwill, and those in the small retailer category regardless of location felt that sole responsibility vis-à-vis food safety rests with the producers. However, some others felt that the producer is responsible to the store and that the store is, in turn, responsible to the customer. One market seller in the centre absolved all responsibility by stating: "A producer is the only person who should be held responsible. They have to ensure the quality and safety of the production. In our market, a product does not go bad unless it was contaminated beforehand."

Hygiene

Many of the retailers mentioned general cleanliness, with a particular focus on refrigerators and the control of temperatures when storing food, as the main method of ensuring good hygienic practices. Moreover, none of the retailers, with one exception, was aware of any legal obligations concerning food hygiene.

Tbilisi

Recruiting Area



Tbilisi Retailer Discussions

Retailer Analysis Participants

	Name	Location	Address	Date
1	Goodwill	Tbilisi	Didi Dighomi district	July 29, 2010
2	Populi	Tbilisi	Gldani District, a/micro Khizanishvili street	July 29, 2010
3	Ioli	Tbilisi	18 Bakhtrioni Street	July 30, 2010
4	Nikora	Tbilisi	53 Saburtalo street	July 30, 2010
5	Supermarket	Tbilisi outskirts I	Gldani District, a/micro, Khizanishvili Street	July 29, 2010
6	Supermarket	Tbilisi outskirts II	Didi Dighomi, 4 Petsitsi Street	July 29, 2010
7	Supermarket	Tbilisi center I	15 Vazha Pshavela Street	July 30, 2010
8	Supermarket	Tbilisi center II	14 Shartava Street	July 30, 2010
9	Matchakhela	Tbilisi	16 Marjanishvili Street	August 4, 2010
10	Shemoikhede Genatsvale	Tbilisi	5 Chkheidze//Marjanishvili Street	August 4, 2010
11	Beef seller	Tbilisi Central market	Deserter Market, 133 Tsinamdzhvrishvili Street	July 31, 2010
12	Cheese seller	Tbilisi Central market	Deserter Market, 133 Tsinamdzhvrishvili Street	July 31, 2010

Q1. How long have you been selling dairy/meat products?

Most of the retailers have substantial experience of selling meat and dairy products.

- *“Goodwill was established in 2005 and has 5 years of experience selling meat and dairy products.” (Goodwill)*
- *“It has been one year since Populi has started to sell meat and dairy products at this branch.” (Populi, Gldani)*
- *“Ioli has sold meat and dairy product for five years, since it was open.” (Ioli)*
- *“Ten years.” (Nikora)*
- *“Ten years.” (Market, Center, I)*
- *“Ten years.” (Market, Outskirts, I)*
- *“One year.” (Market, Center II)*
- *“Five years.” (Market, Outskirts, II)*
- *“Twenty years.” (Meat retailer)*
- *“Ten years.” (Cheese retailer)*
- *“Seven years.” (Matchakhela)*
- *“Five years.” (Shemoikhede Genatsvale)*

Q2. Where do you usually get your products from?

Goodwill is the only one who imports products from abroad. Chain stores such as Populi, Ioli and Nikora have their own factories and sell their own products. As for the central markets and those in the outskirts (small supermarkets), they get products from local companies, mainly through distributors. As for the Bazroba (the marketplace), retailers get their products from farmers; and as for the café/restaurants, they both use the Bazroba and individual farmers as their source for meat and dairy products.

- *“The main providers are distributors, as well as local and foreign producers.” (Goodwill)*
- *“The main provider is Populi headquarters.” (Populi, Gldani)*
- *“Usually the distributor brings products to us. If not, we go to the producer company ourselves to get it.” (Ioli)*
- *“From the Nikora factory.” (Nikora)*
- *“Through distributors.” (Market, Center, I)*
- *“Through distributors.” (Market, outskirts, I)*
- *“Through distributors.” (Market, Center II)*
- *“Through distributors.” (Market, Outskirts, II)*
- *“I get the meat I sell from an individual in the village.” (Meat retailer)*
- *“I get cheese from an individual, a family [business].” (Cheese retailer)*
- *“We get our products from Bazroba (market), from the same person.” (Matchakhela)*
- *“We have a contract with the producer – we order and then they deliver. Sometimes we bring products from the market as well.” (Shemoikhede Genatsvale)*

Q3. How do you select the source? [Follow-up: site-visits, supporting documentation; vet checking, lab, check? Do you usually buy from the same source? Do you make a request for the certificate? Is their certificate reliable?]

There is a similar pattern with all of the retailers: before starting cooperation, retailers visit the producer companies, check their certification and start cooperating. This is the only time they see the certificate. Future cooperation then depends on trust and cooperation records.

Goodwill and Shemoikhede Genatsvale have a product policy whereby they check the product twice: once at the producer company, and then all of the meat and dairy products undergo a lab check at the marketplace within Goodwill and Shemoikhede Genatsvale.

Chain stores (Populi, Ioli and Nikora) get their products from their headquarters (production factory) all the time, and respondents generally trust the certificate from these stores.

- *“Before making any agreement, Goodwill representatives visit providers, and request certificates, which have vet and lab qualifications. But this is not the end – Goodwill does the second check once the product reaches Goodwill. There is a quality control service there. Only after a visit from the new vet and a lab analysis the product will be considered ready for sale.” (Goodwill)*
- *“The products are always checked in the laboratory at the Populi headquarters, which also choose the providers [i.e. the sources]. After the check, headquarters give out the certificate, which we trust.” (Populi, Gldani)*
- *“As Ioli is a chain, we do not choose producers, but we get our products from Ioli, where it goes through a veterinary inspection and lab analysis. The sole indicator of quality is the certificate which is presented by the producer company, and we trust them.” (Ioli)*
- *“We do not choose a provider since we get all of the products from Nikora. All the products undergo a vet and lab check, and receive a certificate which we trust. A Nikora certificate is ‘watertight’.” (Nikora)*
- *“We choose the source according to the trust in and the reputation of the brand. Before we start cooperation, we visit those companies. As far as I know, those certifications are not requested any longer, so I do not ask for them, and no one actually shows it to me.” (Market, Center, I)*
- *“As a rule, we get in touch with well-known companies. When new companies contact us, we ask for certificates from the beginning. And these companies probably visit the vet and do the lab analysis; otherwise they would not be able to earn their right to produce those products.” (Market, Outskirts, I)*
- *“Some company representatives come to our shop, introduce their company and products and show their certificates. I take into consideration how well known their company is and how much people like them. Only after this we start cooperating with that company... There are cases when we would like to have some products from this or that company; we search for their contact information, get in touch and ask them to send a representative. After that the only type of the document we get is a waybill.” (Market, Center II)*
- *“We choose our source depending upon how well known they are, and whether we trust them or not. We check out their certificate from the beginning, and we never request any subsequent certificates.” (Market, Outskirts, II)*
- *“Mostly I use the same source: I go to the village, the village vet checks the meat and issues a ‘Form-2’. Then the same product is checked by a vet at the Bazroba. Form-2 is the only document which makes meat suitable for sale; it is more [important] than a certificate.” (Meat retailer)*
- *“I usually go to a family and I know that their product is good, I trust them. As I trade outside the Bazroba, I am not required to have a certificate. No one asks for it and I myself do not ask the producer for certification.” (Cheese retailer)*

- *“We go and buy the products we need ourselves. After getting them, our expert checks them. Moreover, these days no one will let you sell products inside the Bazroba without a lab inspection.” (Matchakhela)*
- *“Initially we go to visit, and before any agreement, we ask for the veterinarian and laboratory results. This is a necessary measure, to be on the safe side. On the other hand, all products go through a lab analysis at our place. Quality creates trust and continues cooperation. When the quality is good, there is no need to change the source.” (Shemoikhede Genatsvale)*

Q4. Have you gained regular customers for dairy and meat products that come back to your place for the same product? Why do you think they come back?

All of the retailers mention that they have regular customers. People go back to the chain stores because of the trust toward their brand name and good service. All of the supermarkets and individual retailers at the market mention price as one of the important factors why people return.

- *“People come with their families to Goodwill. People come back because of good service, comfort, and also because we have a wide range of products.” (Goodwill)*
- *“We do have regular customers and the reason they come back is good service and the quality of products and their price. We also have sales on many of these (meat and dairy) products.” (Populi, Gldani)*
- *“We have regular customers and they return because of the trust they have in our company and because of the quality of our products.” (Ioli)*
- *“The reason people come back to our store is trust – trust in our brand.” (Nikora)*
- *“We do have returning customers, and the reason they come back is quality, price, tidiness and geographical convenience.” (Market, Center, I)*
- *“We have regular customers, despite the fact that we are located next to Populi. The reason they come back is that we have the same variety and assortment as Goodwill or Populi. Our customers appreciate the quality and the price of the product purchased at our store.” (Market, Outskirts, I)*
- *“People come back because of the service and quality.” (Market, Center II)*
- *“Customers come back because dairy and meat products are a necessary part of their diet.” (Market, Outskirts, II)*
- *“I have a contract with a restaurant, which is a regular purchaser. They really like our product quality and price.” (Meat retailer)*
- *“I have regular customers who come back because of the quality and price.” (Cheese retailer)*

Q4. Follow-up: Do you go to the same producer/retailer? Why?

- *“We always buy products from the same source because of the quality and price.” (Matchakhela)*
- *“We go back to the same source because of quality. Price is secondary in this regard.” (Shemoikhede Genatsvale)*

Q5. What questions do they usually ask regarding the product [origin; freshness; taste; price]? How often do you check whether the date of the product you sell has expired? What do you do with those expired products?

The answers to what questions customers usually ask varied across the retailers. Some people ask how fresh a product is, while some ask about the price – especially when it is not indicated on the product, and because prices change often.

- *“If people see new a company at the market, they ask for origin and quality. Price and validity are already indicated on the product.” (Goodwill)*

- *“Mainly customers are interested in a product’s ingredients, whether is it natural or not. The rest is indicated on the shelf.” (Populi, Gldani)*
- *“New customers are the ones who usually ask questions – whether the product is fresh and tasty. The rest, such as price, is provided on the product, so we do not get this question asked.” (Ioli)*
- *“The main question is about price, as prices change very often. The rest they know – we never have an old product.” (Nikora)*
- *“They check whether the product is fresh or not.” (Market, Center, I)*
- *“Customers do not ask questions as all the information is provided on the shelves.” (Market, Outskirts, I)*
- *“They ask whether the product is fresh or not and also they ask about price, because prices change every week, if not every day.” (Market, Center II)*
- *“They would like to know whether a given product is fresh or not.” (Market, Outskirts, II)*
- *“Customers want to know if meat is fresh, if it is beef or another kind of meat, whether it has been frozen and the price.” (Meat retailer)*
- *“Customers wonder whether cheese is fresh or not, fatty or not, tasty or not, and also ask about price.” (Cheese retailer)*

Q5. Follow-up: What kind of questions do you usually ask when buying meat and dairy product?

- *“I ask whether the product is fresh or not; you can easily notice according to the meat’s color and smell; meat should not be frozen. As for dairy products, we taste it, and if we like it, if the product is natural, we buy it. The price should also be reasonable.” (Matchakhela)*
- *“I usually ask whether it is fresh or not. If it’s possible, mostly at the Bazroba, I taste it.” (Shemoikhede Genatsvale)*

Q6. If a customer comes with the complaint that he or she has gotten food poisoning because of the product purchased at your place, or if the product turned out to be contaminated, what do you do?

In the event that a customer complains that he or she has gotten food poisoning from the product purchased at their place, or if a product was contaminated, all of the retailers say they would make sure that the customers are satisfied. They would apologize and return their money. After this, the retailers would go back to the producer, inform them and ask them to remedy the situation in the future.

- *“We have not had this kind of incident yet. If this happens we would help the customers and reimburse their costs only if we knew for sure that the product was purchased at our place. After this, we would address the producers.” (Goodwill)*
- *“If a customer comes with a complaint, we get in touch with our headquarters, which gets back to the producer.” (Populi, Gldani)*
- *“In case of a customer complaint, I get the product back [from the customer] and return the money, apologize and then I would show this product to the distributor, so that he took the complaint into consideration, ensuring that the same incident is not repeated.” (Ioli)*
- *“We apologize and then send the information to the factory.” (Nikora)*
- *“First, I make sure that the product was purchased at our place, then return money, and get the product back. Afterwards, I get in touch with the provider and ask them to correct whatever went wrong.” (Market, Center, I)*
- *“If the product was contaminated, or someone got poisoned, we get in touch with the provider.” (Market, Outskirts, I)*

- *"I contact the provider, call and inform them, and then give their contact information to the customer." (Market, Center II)*
- *"If the product was contaminated, or someone got poisoned, we take the product back, return the money and get in touch with the provider to replace all of the products received that day with new ones." (Market, Outskirts, II)*
- *"I have never had a case when a customer complained; it's impossible for it to happen after receiving the vet's certificate." (Meat retailer)*
- *"I have never had such a case because I always try to sell good quality cheese so that customers come back." (Cheese retailer)*
- *"In the event that a person complains, I would clear it with the chef and also with our food expert." (Matchakhela)*
- *"We have not had such a case yet, but if a customer complains, we would reimburse him, clear it with the chef as well as the producer." (Shemoikhede Genatsvale)*

Q7. Who is responsible for the safety of food once it gets delivered to your shop? [Follow-up: Government, Ministry of Agriculture, Shop, Producer/Processor/Manufacturer, Farmer (producer of raw materials), or Purchaser]

Many retailers think producers are responsible for food safety, as products in theory should not go bad provided all the appropriate measures are taken at their supermarkets or stores. However, they claim that the retailers assume part of the responsibility once the food products arrive at their stores. According to some participants, the chain of responsibility is said to look this: the producer is responsible to the retailer, and the retailer responsible to the customer.

At the marketplace, individual meat and cheese retailers think retailers are responsible to the customers, but also that a farmer is responsible before it gets to the retailer.

Restaurants say that purchasers are responsible for the food, that is, that they should procure good products, and then make sure they keep them well.

- *"The producer is responsible." (Goodwill)*
- *"The producer." (Populi)*
- *"The producer is responsible, because our store guarantees safety; although the store is responsible to the customers, as they depend on us, and we depend on the producer – this is kind of a chain." (Ioli)*
- *"Both the store and producers are responsible: a store should not receive a bad product, and the company should not produce it. After the product gets to us [the store], we become responsible." (Nikora)*
- *"Both the store and producer are responsible – a customer does not have an opportunity to express their dissatisfaction to the producer; we have to be responsible to them. In fact, we follow all the safety norms very closely. It's important to know what kind of product you bring in to the store, and it's not a question of how to take care of an already spoiled product." (Market, Center, I)*
- *"A store is responsible to the customer, and the producer is responsible to the store. I doubt there are still stores that do not have the means to keep products safe. There might be very few cases when, because of the carelessness of the retailer, something went bad, like if he switched off the fridge or placed the product in the wrong place. But, of course, this is not done on purpose. More responsibility still goes to the producer." (Market, Outskirts, I)*
- *"A producer is the only person who should be held responsible. They have to ensure the quality and safety of the production. In our market, a product does not go bad unless it was contaminated beforehand." (Market, Center II)*
- *"The producer is responsible, as we all adhere to food safety standards." (Market, Outskirts, II)*

- *“The seller or retailer is responsible as he needs to be in charge of food safety.” (Meat retailer)*
- *“A farmer [i.e. producer] is responsible, but the retailer is responsible to the customer.” (Cheese seller)*
- *“The one who buys the product is responsible – in our case, our expert [buyer].” (Matchakhela)*
- *“In our case, the purchaser is responsible. A product undergoes a proper inspection, and one should not make any mistakes. And once the [purchaser] buys it, he should guarantee its quality.” (Shemoikhede Genatsvale)*

Q8. Do you usually get any specific requirements from the producers regarding food safety assurance? (Storage conditions, control expiry dates, labeling)

Big chain markets such as Populi, Ioli and Nikora receive regular spot-checks and supervision from their headquarters/providers. No other places have any special requirements set by the producers, though sometimes distributors ask to place their products together.

- *“There are no requirements from any distributor or from any producer on food safety, nor vice versa. We require from them good quality products.” (Goodwill)*
- *“We have special requirements set by the producers: twice a day they check how we work, train us and give corrections as a warning.” (Populi)*
- *“We get constant spot-checks. Supervisors come to the store from Ioli to check refrigerators, for example, and they regulate prices and labeling. You will not be able to see any outdated product. These kinds of spot-checks happen daily.” (Ioli)*
- *“We are advised about the rules on how to keep the products, expiry dates, labeling... If we make even one mistake, we are fined.” (Nikora)*
- *“We do not have any inspection from the providers.” (Market, Center, I)*
- *“Producers do not give us any specific requirements, as those requirements are already set at the market.” (Market, Outskirts, I)*
- *“Producers do not request anything, but they ask us not to put different company products together; in case the provider company provide us with inventories, such as a fridge, we are not allowed to put any other products into it but theirs.” (Market, Center II)*
- *“There are no requirements from them. Our store deals with it.” (Market, Outskirts, II)*
- *“We set requirements ourselves. The cook has to follow food safety norms strictly – i.e. how to keep the products and in what conditions.” (Matchakhela)*
- *“Producers do not have any requirements; once the product gets to our place, the producer is no longer responsible.” (Shemoikhede Genatsvale)*

Q9. What are the hygienic measures that you apply in order to ensure the food you sell is safe?

Most of the retailers state that cleaning refrigerators and controlling the temperatures in them as their main hygienic measures to ensure food safety.

- *“We make sure all of the machines that ensure food quality work properly; we keep everything clean and control the temperatures in the refrigerators.” (Goodwill)*
- *“We try to keep the inventory clean.” (Populi)*
- *“We keep to all hygienic measures that are required of us: we clean everything and make sure the fridges work properly. The customer first and foremost pays attention to tidiness. Also, it’s important that the products are placed on the shelves in an attractive way.” (Ioli)*
- *“We regulate temperatures in the fridges, making sure everything is clean.” (Nikora)*
- *“In order to ensure food safety, we keep the fridges clean, regulate the temperature and receive inspection.” (Market, Center, I)*

- *“Cleanliness comes first. We clean the shelves, put the products in a way so that they look attractive to the customers.” (Market, Outskirts, I)*
- *“We keep products in the fridge, control the temperature and clean the fridges. The main hygienic measures are keeping the machinery clean and in good working order.” (Market, Center II)*
- *“Our hygienic measures are to keep the inventory clean and make sure they work properly.” (Market, Outskirts, II)*
- *“We clean the fridges and make sure they work properly, and we control the temperature.” (Meat retailer)*
- *“Cleanliness, and we keep [dairy and meat products] in good condition.” (Cheese retailer)*
- *“Hygienic measures include food processing and preservation, cleaning the inventory, placing products in the fridge and regulating the temperature, throwing away the remains of food, cleaning the kitchen – all sanitary measures.” (Matchakhela)*
- *“Food processing and preservation, cleaning the inventory, placing the products in the fridge and temperature control are our hygienic measures.” (Shemoikhede Genatsvale)*

[Follow-up: According to your observation, how do people usually choose their dairy/meat products? Have purchasing requirements changed over the last five years?]

Out of twelve retailers, only the Goodwill representative mentioned that people demand more quality food nowadays, and usually purchase food in bigger amounts than they did before. The rest of the retailers claim demand never changes and that customer demands are all the same.

Most of the supermarkets and large chain stores mentioned that customers are very much influenced by advertising. They tend to buy products that are well advertised and famous. However, one of the retailers in the city center mentioned that one of the most frequently asked questions is whether there are any new products from new companies.

The factors such as the price and freshness of the product were mentioned as one of the most frequently asked questions.

Individual retailers at the market say people’s requirements do not change. Customers choose meat according to its color, and they buy cheese mostly after they taste it.

- *“Right away, customers check out the product visually. They usually buy brands, i.e. what is famous and tested, and they look at the expiry dates, labels and ingredients, while the last one [they check] is the price. Their demands have changed; they tend to buy better quality and greater amounts of products, to keep them in reserve.” (Goodwill)*
- *“People usually choose dairy and meat products based on how they look. They pay attention to packaging, brand, the expiry dates – their demands do not change.” (Populi)*
- *“Customers buy products that are well advertised – as if they have tunnel vision for that specific product.” (Ioli)*
- *“Customers choose products depending upon the price. They all know about the reliable quality that we provide.” (Nikora)*
- *“Customers mainly choose well-known companies. Commercials also influence their choice: they may not know the quality and have never tasted it, but they get all necessary information from the commercial and then desire to try it right away.” (Market, Outskirts, I)*
- *“Customers choose dairy and meat products based on how fresh they are. They are usually interested in whether we have something new, i.e. from a new company. Lately, people have started to complain about Santé and Ecofood; there have been cases when expiry dates are fine, but, when they opened the product two hours after purchase, the product turned out to be spoiled.” (Market, Center II)*

- *“We do not observe our customers, so I cannot tell how they choose dairy and meat products.” (Market, Outskirts, II)*
- *“Customers choose meat visually, according to its color.” (Meat retailer)*
- *“Customers’ purchasing habits have not changed: they mostly taste cheese before buying. If they like it they get it; if not, they do not get it. That’s why they do not have many demands.” (Cheese retailer)*

[Follow-up: Who are the most demanding customers? (Gender, financial status, age)]

Many of the retailers mentioned that they perceive both men and women customers as demanding, usually those above the age of 40, assessed as being from the middle- or upper middle classes.

At the restaurants, both Matchakhela and Shemoikhede Genatsvale claimed that they thought women above the age of 40 from the perceived middle- and upper-classes are more pretentious.

One meat retailer said men above 30 are the most demanding customers.

- *“Both men and women, young and old, are equally demanding. Especially those who are in a better financial situation – those are mainly our customers in general.” (Goodwill)*
- *“Both men and women are demanding. In particular, middle-aged people, between 30-50 and those who have high income.” (Populi)*
- *“Men and women are equally demanding; some men can be worse than women in having pretensions. Middle-income people are hesitant – they know that dairy and meat products are necessary to get, but they cannot afford them. The most pretentious customers are older people, over 40 years of age.” (Ioli)*
- *“Usually women are more demanding, over 50 years old. Lately, teenagers are also very active. Those with a high income are pretentious; they are always in a hurry and ask for a high level service and attention.” (Nikora)*
- *“It’s fifty-fifty; both men and women are pretentious, mostly people above 50 and with higher income. A villager never has pretensions – whatever he can afford he gets, and does not care about quality.” (Market, Center, I)*
- *“Both sexes are demanding, especially those above 40 and with high income.” (Market, Outskirts, I)*
- *“Women are more pretentious, those between 30 and 50 years of age and with a high income. They look for the best product with the best price, and that’s why they demand quality food.” (Market, Center II)*
- *“All of the customers are the same; I cannot distinguish them by age or sex.” (Market, Outskirts, II)*
- *“Males are more demanding, above 30 and with a high income. A villager watches every penny, so they cannot afford buying meat at a price of ten lari.” (Meat retailer)*
- *“Both gender representatives are my customers, everyone is different. Mostly high-income people are more demanding.” (Cheese retailer)*
- *“Women are more demanding, above 40, middle-class representatives.” (Matchakhela)*
- *“Women are more demanding, above 40, upper-class representatives.” (Shemoikhede Genatsvale)*

[Follow-up: How do you find out about purchasing-behavior and the demands of your customers? How do you adjust your behavior to changing demands?]

Chain supermarkets find out about customers’ behavior and demands through their consultants, who themselves deal with customers directly. Moreover, the Nikora representative mentioned trainings where staff learns how to deal with customer demands and regulate the situation accordingly.

At the small markets, shop sellers are the ones who find out about customer behavior and demands and how to deal with them.

Individual retailers at the marketplace have closer relations with their customers, who sometimes even call them on the phone, asking about the product. The retailers are always keen to please them and try to have a variety of products available.

At the restaurants, the service staff receives information about customer behavior and demands, and usually apologizes and tries to neutralize any difficult situation through conversation.

- *“Consultants usually provide us with information about customers’ behavior and demands, as they deal with them directly. There is also a book where customers can share their opinions, e.g. what they liked and what they did not like, and can express any dissatisfaction, etc.” (Goodwill)*
- *“Customers express their demands to the consultants, who then come to us with the comments, at which point we can take them into consideration.” (Populi)*
- *“The customer is always right. We take information from them very seriously.” (Ioli)*
- *“Our customers have Nikora’s phone numbers, so that they can call anytime. We have constant trainings on how to receive customer demands and deal with the situation accordingly.” (Nikora)*
- *“We personally listen to the customer’s demands, take them into consideration and help them.” (Market, Center, I)*
- *“Sometimes consultants or sometimes customers tell me about their demands directly; they request a bigger variety of products in this store.” (Market, Outskirts, I)*
- *“I find out about dissatisfaction from the shop sellers. Sometimes people want to talk to me directly. In this case, I have to explain everything to them in detail, try to calm them down and treat them politely.” (Market, Center II)*
- *“I receive information about customers’ behavior and demands from the shop sellers, and try to react adequately; I receive all those demands with a smile and solve any problems with a smile again.” (Market, Outskirts, II)*
- *“My regular customers sometimes call me on the phone when they have some requirements or demands; I try not to disappoint them. Their demands are the same all the time.” (Meat retailer)*
- *“I usually get information about customers’ behavior and demands from the service staff; if necessary I talk to them personally and try to address any dissatisfaction they may have.” (Matchakhela)*
- *“I usually get information about customers’ behavior and demands from the service staff; if necessary I talk to them personally. Such cases are rare, and we usually apologize and try to improve quality of our service or products.” (Shemoikhede Genatsvale)*
- *“I always try to please my customers. I try to have variety of products – salty, without salt, etc.” (Cheese retailer)*

Q10. What are the mechanisms for addressing customer complaints regarding food safety (if any)?

Most of the retailers do not currently enforce any formal mechanisms in order to address customer complaints. Goodwill and Populi are the ones who seem to have a more formalized system in place for receiving customer complaints. Supermarkets tend to deal with customer complaints on a case-by-case basis.

- *“Consultants undergo regular trainings. We also conduct mystery shopping in order to test consultants. In this way we try to improve the quality of our service.” (Goodwill)*
- *“We keep a record of complaints, and we also have a hotline number. There are also forms to fill out, where people can express their opinions, their dissatisfaction or satisfaction, write down advice, and then drop those papers into a Populi box.” (Populi)*

- *"There are no mechanisms; we can only apologize and make sure it does not happen anymore." (Ioli)*
- *"We keep a record for the complaints." (Nikora)*
- *"We do not have any special mechanism; I receive complaints and help my clients as much as I can." (Market, Center, I)*
- *"We apologize, take the product back, give the money back and exchange the same product with the producer." (Market, Outskirts, I)*
- *"I received complaints personally and pass them on to the producers." (Market, Center II)*
- *"I act as I deem appropriate. I solve problems without any conflict." (Market, Outskirts, II)*
- *"No mechanisms." (Meat retailer), (Cheese retailer)*
- *"No mechanisms. If a customer does not like a dish, we prepare a new one." (Matchakhela)*
- *"We keep a book in which customers can share their opinion and give advice. We take them into consideration and try to improve our service. Sometime we deal with complaints face-to-face." (Shemoikhede Genatsvale)*

Q11. Are you aware of any current/pending laws or legal obligations or regulations concerning the safety/hygiene of food? If yes, tell us about it.

With one exception, none of the retailers have any information on legal obligations or regulations regarding food safety and hygiene.

- *"No information." (Goodwill)*
- *"No information." (Populi)*
- *"No information." (Ioli)*
- *"No information." (Nikora)*
- *"No information." (Market, Center, I)*
- *"No information." (Market, Outskirts, I)*
- *"No information." (Market, Center II)*
- *"No information." (Market, Outskirts, II)*
- *Standards: one should keep meat in the fridge, define expiry dates. Sanitary checking cannot be made at the shop without a court decision, the date of which was extended up to 2011. Frozen meat does not need a Form-2. Retailers outside the market do not have any limitations. (Meat retailer)*
- *"No information." (Cheese retailer)*
- *"No information." (Matchakhela)*
- *"No information." (Shemoikhede Genatsvale).*

Tbilisi Center/Outskirts: Comparison

General Perceptions (Section 1, Q1-7)

Where people buy meat products, and why

Whereas some participants from both the center and the outskirts groups said they buy meat from supermarkets like Goodwill, only people in the outskirts group stated that they purchase meat elsewhere, such as at the market or from shops owned by friends or acquaintances. In explaining their preferences on where to buy meat, participants in the center group spoke of the close proximity of the supermarkets to their homes, and the perceived better quality of products. One woman said, “I think that the meat is fresher in the supermarket.” By comparison, a man in the outskirts group explained his choice thus: “My friend has a special shop where he sells meat, and I know he wouldn't lie to me about its quality.”

Checking the label

While commenting on whether they read the product labels, all the participants in the city group said that they do not. “It's not just us,” said a man in the city group, “no one reads them.” By comparison, however, there were a few in the outskirts group who claimed that they normally do read labels, to ascertain whether the product was made from fresh milk or milk powder, for instance.

Safety, Quality & Hygiene (Section 2, Q8-16)

Concerns growing over time

Overall, people from both the center and the outskirts groups claimed to be more concerned about the food they eat now, compared with five years ago. Generally, however, those in the center FG arguably expressed more concern than did those in the outskirts group. In particular, some younger participants felt that they have become more concerned as they have grown older.

Expiry dates

In discussing whether they check the expiry dates when purchasing products, nearly all of the FG participants in both groups said that they do, and that it is important. Nevertheless, a few in the center group indicated that they do not check the expiry dates because they “trust” the store, the seller and the producer.

Trying new products

It was only a few center FG participants who claimed they would buy cheaper products, of which they were unsure of the quality and producer, in order to try and compare them with those products with which they are familiar and like.

Places where products are kept in the best conditions

In general, those in the outskirts group said more often that supermarkets keep food products in better hygienic conditions than other places do. Those in the center group named other places where conditions are the best, such as production factories and, as some center FG participants said, “At home with the family.”

Main hygiene concerns

Whereas center participants claimed that cleanliness is first and foremost important in relation to storing and handling food meat and dairy products, those in the outskirts group cited other factors: packaging, product-testing and expiry dates written clearly on the label.

Legal Rights (Section 3, Q17-21)

Product recall

While considering the scenario of a potentially harmful dairy or meat product loose on the market, it was only some in the center group who stated that the Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Affairs should be held responsible for alerting the public and recalling the product. All other participants indicated that “the government” should be held responsible.

Tbilisi Center & Outskirts: Discussions

Tbilisi Center & Outskirts: FG Composition

Tbilisi FG Participants: Center group. Gender – mixed, age – mixed.

Male, 28, single, lawyer, poet, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group
Male, 25, single, energy engineer, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group
Female, 55, married, biologist, employed, Tbilisi, center group
Male, 56, married, auto engineer, employed, Tbilisi, center group
Male, 36, single, painter, self-employed, Tbilisi, center group
Female, 23, single, economist, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group
Male, 23, single, tourism manager, student, Tbilisi, center group
Female, 24, single, lawyer, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group
Female, 19, single, economist, student, Tbilisi, center group
Male, 21, single, chemical metallurgy and technology, student, Tbilisi, center group

Tbilisi FG Participants: Outskirts group. Gender – mixed, age – mixed.

Female, 57, married, economist, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group
Male, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group
Male, 28, married, secondary education, employed, Tbilisi, outskirts group
Female, 28, single, doctor, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group
Female, 41, married, doctor, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group
Female, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group
Female, 28, married, doctor, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group
Female, 55, married, nurse, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group
Female, 38, married, employed, Tbilisi, outskirts group
Male, 62, married, chef, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group

Section 1: General Perceptions

Q1. Approximately how often does your household buy meat and/or dairy products?

In both the center and outskirts groups, the participants said that they buy meat and dairy products very often.

- *"I buy meat and dairy products very often." (Male, 28, single, lawyer, poet, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"I buy dairy products very often, as well as meat." (Female, 55, married, biologist, employed, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"I have a child, so I need both dairy products and meat." (Female, 28, married, doctor, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*

Q2. From where do you most frequently buy meat? [A neighbor/friend, the market, the super market] Why?

In both focus groups the participants said that they mostly buy meat and dairy products in the supermarkets.

- *"In the supermarket." (Male, 23, single, tourism manager, student, Tbilisi, center group), (Male, 56, married, auto engineer, employed, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 28, single, doctor, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Female, 55, married, nurse, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*
- *"In Goodwill." (Male, 25, single, energy engineer, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group)*

In the outskirts group some people said they buy meat in the market from an acquaintance or from a friend's store.

- *"In the market. We have an acquaintance there." (Female, 28, married, doctor, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*
- *"My friend has a special shop where he sells meat, and I know he wouldn't lie to me about the meat's quality." (Male, 62, married, chef, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*

As for why they prefer buying meat in the supermarkets, the Tbilisi center group said that the main reason is that the supermarkets are closer to their houses than the market. They also think that buying meat in the supermarket is safer.

- *"It is closer to me." (Male, 28, single, lawyer, poet, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"I think that the meat is fresher in the supermarket." (Female, 55, married, biologist, employed, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"It is safer, and plus, I don't have to go far away." (Male, 56, married, auto engineer, employed, Tbilisi, center group)*

Q3. From where do you most frequently buy dairy products [neighbor/friend, the market, the supermarket]? Why?

Almost everybody in both groups said they buy dairy products in the supermarkets or in the stores.

- *"In the store." (Female, 19, single, economist, student, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 38, married, employed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Male, 21, single, chemical metallurgy and technology, student, Tbilisi, center group), (Male, 23, single, tourism manager, student, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"In the supermarket." (Female, 28, married, doctor, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Male, 28, married, secondary education, employed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Male, 62, married, chef, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*

Only a few people in each group said that they sometimes buy dairy products from private individuals, who often sell *matsoni* [yogurt] on the street or in the courtyard.

- *"I buy matsoni from individual sellers." (Female, 55, married, biologist, employed, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"Yes, it is possible [buying the products from villagers]." (Female, 28, married, doctor, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Female, 23, single, economist, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group)*

Q3. Follow-up: What is important for you when deciding from where to buy meat/dairy products?

Trust is the main reason participants prefer to buy dairy products in the supermarkets and stores. They say that they cannot trust those private sellers who come to their courtyards and sell products. Instead, they are sure that in the supermarkets everything is fresh and safe to eat, and one is able to see the expiry date on the products. The participants said that they are not sure how private sellers make their products, or whether they were fresh or not – when the products sit all day in the sun, for instance.

- *"I don't know how [the private seller] makes the product." (Male, 28, single, lawyer, poet, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"They have the product sitting all day in the sun." (Male, 25, single, energy engineer, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"In the supermarket you can see the expiry date." (Male, 25, single, energy engineer, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 41, married, doctor, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Female, 28, married, doctor, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*
- *"I trust the supermarkets more." (Female, 55, married, nurse, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*

By contrast, one participant who said she buys dairy products from private sellers claimed that she trusts them more, and that the milk, from which *matsoni* is made, is natural and therefore better.

- *"I know a man who brings matsoni to the store every morning. He doesn't carry it all day in the sun and I think that the milk is natural and thus better." (Female, 55, married, biologist, employed, Tbilisi, center group)*

Q4. After deciding on where to buy the product, what is important in making your final decision to buy a specific meat/dairy product?

The participants of the both focus groups said that the price, trust, quality, expiry date and hygienic conditions are the most important factors for deciding whether to buy specific meat or dairy products.

- *"The price [is important] and you should trust the company itself." (Male, 28, single, lawyer, poet, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"Hygiene." (Female, 19, single, economist, student, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 28, married, doctor, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*
- *"The quality." (Female, 55, married, biologist, employed, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 57, married, economist, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*
- *"The expiry date." (Male, 62, married, chef, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group),*

Q4. Follow-up: Packaging, Branding, Labeling (ingredients), Advertising, Use-by/sell-by date, "Organic"

Both center and outskirts focus groups' participants said that the packaging of the products is very important. Everybody said that they almost never read the labels of the products. Some participants think that advertising can have an influence on their choices, sometimes subconsciously. Others think that advertising has absolutely no influence on them. Some said that they pay attention to the brand names, while others think that as long as the product is good, it does not matter which brand it is. All participants said that it is very important to pay attention to the use-by/sell-by dates. In both groups

the participants said that it is very hard to identify organic products so they have to trust the producers.

- *"Yes, definitely [packaging]." (Male, 28, single, lawyer, poet, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 19, single, economist, student, Tbilisi, center group), (Male, 25, single, energy engineer, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 57, married, economist, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Female, 55, married, nurse, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*
- *"I never read the label [ingredients]." (Female, 23, single, economist, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Male, 28, single, lawyer, poet, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"No, advertising has no influence on me." (Male, 28, single, lawyer, poet, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Male, 25, single, energy engineer, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Male, 21, single, chemical metallurgy and technology, student, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 28, married, doctor, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*
- *"It [advertising] works subconsciously." (Male, 28, single, lawyer, poet, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"Yes, advertising influences me very much." (Female, 38, married, employed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Male, 28, married, secondary education, employed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*
- *"Yes, of course I pay attention to which brand the product is." (Female, 57, married, economist, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Female, 55, married, nurse, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Male, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*
- *"I don't pay attention to the brand. Most important is that the product should be fresh." (Female, 28, married, doctor, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Female, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*
- *"Yes, I pay attention to the sell-by dates." (Male, 23, single, tourism manager, student, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 55, married, biologist, employed, Tbilisi, center group), (Male, 21, single, chemical metallurgy and technology, student, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"It is very hard to identify if the product is organic or not." (Male, 28, single, lawyer, poet, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 24, single, lawyer, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Female, 41, married, doctor, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*
- *"You have to trust the producer." (Male, 25, single, energy engineer, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Male, 28, married, secondary education, employed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Female, 28, single, doctor, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*

Q5. Does it matter for you whether the dairy product is produced from raw milk or milk powder? Why? Do you read the label to find out this information?

In both focus groups the participants said that it matters to them whether the product is produced from raw milk or milk powder. The reasons, they said, are that raw milk is more natural, it is organic and the taste is different.

- *"Of course it matters. I prefer products to be made from raw milk." (Female, 23, single, economist, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"It really matters; milk powder has a different taste." (Female, 55, married, nurse, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*
- *"Raw milk is more natural." (Male, 25, single, energy engineer, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"Village products are organic." (Female, 19, single, economist, student, Tbilisi, center group)*

Almost everybody in both groups said that they never read the labels of the products before they buy them so as to find out if it is produced from raw milk or milk powder.

- *"I don't read it." (Male, 25, single, energy engineer, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 23, single, economist, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Male, 28, married, secondary education, employed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*
- *"And it's not just us: no one reads them." (Male, 25, single, energy engineer, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group)*

Some participants from the outskirts group said that they often read the labels before they buy the dairy product.

- *"Of course I read it." (Female, 55, married, nurse, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*
- *"I read it sometimes." (Female, 28, single, doctor, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*

Q6. If you had had to buy milk from your neighbor who has a cow or from a supermarket at the same price, which one would you choose? Why?

Participants from both groups said that they would buy milk from the neighbor in this case, because it is natural, one can tell if the cow is healthy and because, as two said, they don't like milk powder.

- *"From the neighbor." (Male, 36, single, painter, self-employed, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 23, single, economist, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 55, married, biologist, employed, Tbilisi, center group), (Male, 56, married, auto engineer, employed, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Female, 41, married, doctor, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Male, 62, married, chef, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*
- *"Because the milk is natural." (Male, 56, married, auto engineer, employed, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 38, married, employed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Female, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*
- *"You can see whether the cow is healthy." (Female, 55, married, biologist, employed, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"Because we don't like milk powder." (Male, 25, single, energy engineer, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 55, married, nurse, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*

Only one woman from the outskirts group said that she prefers from the supermarket because she doesn't like the taste of the natural milk.

- *"I wouldn't buy from the neighbor. I don't like the natural milk." (Female, 57, married, economist, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*

Q7. Who usually buys the meat/dairy products in your family?

In both groups it was obvious that in the participants' families mostly men buy meat whilst women buy dairy products.

- *"I mostly buy meat." (Male, 56, married, auto engineer, employed, Tbilisi, center group), (Male, 23, single, tourism manager, student, Tbilisi, center group), (Male, 62, married, chef, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*
- *"I buy dairy products and men buy meat." (Female, 55, married, nurse, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*

Section 2: Safety, Quality & Hygiene

Q8. In your opinion, what is safety in relation to meat/dairy products?

The participants of both center and outskirts groups noted that safety of meat and dairy products for them means that they are fresh, tested clinically, should not be outdated, not put in the freezer, and should not make you sick.

- *"The product should not be old." (Female, 23, single, economist, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 28, married, doctor, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Female, 57, married, economist, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*
- *"It should not be outdated." (Female, 24, single, lawyer, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Male, 28, single, lawyer, poet, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"It should be clinically tested." (Female, 55, married, biologist, employed, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"It should not be put in the freezer." (Female, 55, married, biologist, employed, Tbilisi, center group), (Male, 25, single, energy engineer, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"It should not make you sick." (Female, 19, single, economist, student, Tbilisi, center group), (Male, 62, married, chef, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Female, 55, married, nurse, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*

Q9. Are you more or less concerned about the food you eat now than you were five years ago? Why?

In both focus groups most of the participants said that they are more concerned about the food they eat today than five years ago. Among the reasons mentioned for this were pollution and the fact that five years ago there were not as many brands or such a variety of choice among producers.

- *"Yes." (Female, 19, single, economist, student, Tbilisi, center group), (Male, 23, single, tourism manager, student, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 23, single, economist, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 55, married, nurse, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*
- *"As time passes, nature and the air become more polluted." (Male, 28, single, lawyer, poet, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"Five years ago there was little choice." (Male, 25, single, energy engineer, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 19, single, economist, student, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 28, married, doctor, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Female, 41, married, doctor, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*

Some participants from both groups said that they are concerned about the food today the same amount as they were five years ago.

- *"In my opinion five years does not change anything." (Male, 25, single, energy engineer, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"It's the same now." (Male, 28, married, secondary education, employed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*

Young participants of the Tbilisi center focus group said that they are more concerned today because they are now adults.

- *"I am more aware now that I am older, and therefore more concerned." (Female, 23, single, economist, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Male, 21, single, chemical metallurgy and technology, student, Tbilisi, center group), (Male, 23, single, tourism manager, student, Tbilisi, center group)*

Q10. When buying meat (beef and pork) and cheese, do you usually ask to see the product certification?

Everybody from the center and the outskirts groups stated that they never ask for the certificate. One woman said that she did not know that she could ask for the certificate.

- *"No." (Male, 25, single, energy engineer, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 23, single, economist, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 24, single, lawyer, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 19, single, economist, student, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 28, married, doctor, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Female, 38, married, employed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Male, 28, married, secondary education, employed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Female, 41, married, doctor, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*

- *"I didn't know that I could ask for the certificate." (Female, 23, single, economist, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group)*

Q10. Follow-up: Why not? Do you assume that they are certified? How reliable is their certificate?

All participants trust the sellers and assume that the product is certified, or sometimes they see the certificate on the wall or the counter, or they see a stamp on the product itself. When it comes to cheese, as one participant said, it is enough just to taste it in order to understand if it is good or bad.

- *"I just trust them." (Male, 28, single, lawyer, poet, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Male, 25, single, energy engineer, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 55, married, nurse, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Male, 28, married, secondary education, employed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*
- *"I have seen the certificate on the counter." (Male, 28, married, secondary education, employed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Male, 56, married, auto engineer, employed, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"I have seen the stamp on the meat." (Male, 28, married, secondary education, employed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Female, 28, single, doctor, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group),*
- *"You can taste the cheese and tell if it is good or bad." (Male, 28, single, lawyer, poet, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group)*

Q11. Do you usually look at expiry dates? How much do expiry dates influence your choice of dairy/meat products?

The participants from both groups said that they usually look at expiry dates on the product, if it is written, before they buy it. Everybody agreed that the expiry dates are very important.

- *"Yes, I look at it." (Male, 28, single, lawyer, poet, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 19, single, economist, student, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 55, married, nurse, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Male, 28, married, secondary education, employed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Female, 28, married, doctor, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*
- *"It is very important." (Female, 24, single, lawyer, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"Yes, it influences the choice." (Female, 55, married, nurse, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Male, 28, married, secondary education, employed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Female, 28, married, doctor, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*

Some participants of the Tbilisi center group talked about trust again. They said that they do not need to look at the expiry date because they trust the store, the seller or the producer itself.

- *"I trust the store." (Male, 56, married, auto engineer, employed, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"I trust the seller." (Male, 25, single, energy engineer, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"I trust the producer." (Female, 19, single, economist, student, Tbilisi, center group)*

Q12. What assurance would you need to recognize that the product is safe?

Mostly the participants named expiry date and color of the product as the number one sign to see if the product is safe.

- *"The color." (Female, 23, single, economist, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"The expiry date." (Male, 25, single, energy engineer, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 28, single, doctor, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*

Several participants from the Tbilisi outskirts group purported that it is all about trust. They trust the producer or the seller and this is enough.

- *"I trust the producer." (Female, 41, married, doctor, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*
- *"I trust the seller." (Male, 62, married, chef, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*

Some participants think that there is no way people can be sure about the safety of the product. The only way is to eat it.

- *"There is no way." (Male, 28, single, lawyer, poet, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"Not until you eat it." (Male, 56, married, auto engineer, employed, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"Often it happens that I look at the expiry date and buy it, only to discover at home that it is not good." (Female, 28, married, doctor, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*

Q13. Do you think that there is enough information on food safety? How would you find more easily information about the safety of the product you buy?

The participants do not think that there is enough information on food safety. The participants think that the easiest way to get this information is reading the ingredients on the label, looking at the expiry date or creating of some kind of customer hotline. Asking the seller is also an option, they said.

- *"No." (Female, 38, married, employed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Female, 55, married, nurse, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*
- *"Reading the ingredients." (Male, 21, single, chemical metallurgy and technology, student, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"Expiry date." (Female, 23, single, economist, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"People say there will be some kind of hotline." (Male, 28, married, secondary education, employed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*
- *"The seller can give you advice." (Male, 21, single, chemical metallurgy and technology, student, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 28, married, doctor, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*

Q14. Let's imagine that you can choose between two seemingly similar meat/dairy products. One of them has been produced by a producer you are familiar with and you know that is of good quality. The other one is cheaper but it is produced by a producer you have no knowledge of, and you are not sure about the quality. How would you handle this situation?

In both groups the participants had different opinion. Half of them said that they would buy the familiar product and the other half said that they would buy and try the new, unfamiliar one.

- *"I would buy the one I am familiar with." (Male, 25, single, energy engineer, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 23, single, economist, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 38, married, employed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Male, 62, married, chef, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*
- *"I would buy the new one and try it." (Female, 55, married, biologist, employed, Tbilisi, center group), (Male, 21, single, chemical metallurgy and technology, student, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 28, married, doctor, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Male, 28, married, secondary education, employed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*

In the Tbilisi center group the participants also had an idea: buying both products to compare them and see which one is better.

- *"I would buy both and compare them." (Female, 19, single, economist, student, Tbilisi, center group), (Male, 28, single, lawyer, poet, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group)*

Q15. How do you get information on the reliability of the product's origin?

The participants said that, first of all, close acquaintances should give advice regarding the product, or somebody who has already tasted it. Sometimes the seller can also suggest what is better. And, of course, advertising plays a role, and works subconsciously.

- *"People who are close to me should advise me regarding the product." (Female, 23, single, economist, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Male, 56, married, auto engineer, employed, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 38, married, employed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*

- *"The seller should tell me that it is good." (Male, 21, single, chemical metallurgy and technology, student, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"Somebody who has already tasted it should recommend it to me." (Female, 19, single, economist, student, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"Advertising works subconsciously when deciding upon a product's reliability." (Male, 28, single, lawyer, poet, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"By way of advertisement." (Female, 57, married, economist, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*

Q16. In your opinion, in which places are products kept in better hygienic conditions?

In the Tbilisi center group the participants named the supermarkets, flagship stores and production factories as the places which have better hygienic conditions. Also some participants said that the products made at home are better, but only in cases where you know who the person is.

- *"Probably in the supermarket." (Male, 28, single, lawyer, poet, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"In the flagship store." (Female, 24, single, lawyer, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"In the production factory." (Male, 21, single, chemical metallurgy and technology, student, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"At home with the family." (Male, 36, single, painter, self-employed, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 19, single, economist, student, Tbilisi, center group)*

In the outskirts group the participants only talked about big supermarkets, like Populi and Goodwill.

- *"In the supermarket." (Male, 28, married, secondary education, employed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Female, 57, married, economist, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*
- *"In the big supermarkets like Populi or Goodwill." (Female, 28, married, doctor, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Female, 38, married, employed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Male, 28, married, secondary education, employed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*

Q16. Follow-up: What are the hygienic concerns that you have in relation to meat/dairy products?

The Tbilisi center group named three main factors most important concerning the hygiene of food products: the cleanliness of the person who makes the product, cleanliness of the place where it is made and the cleanliness of the place where it is sold.

- *"First of all, the cleanliness of the person who makes the product and the place where it is made" (Female, 23, single, economist, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"The place where it is sold." (Female, 19, single, economist, student, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"The cleanliness in general." (Male, 21, single, chemical metallurgy and technology, student, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 24, single, lawyer, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group)*

The outskirts group talked more about the importance of the testing, packaging and expiry dates of the products.

- *"In the supermarket the products are tested." (Female, 55, married, nurse, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*
- *"They are packaged." (Female, 41, married, doctor, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*
- *"The expiry dates are written on them." (Male, 62, married, chef, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*

Section 3: Legal Rights

Q17. Has it ever happened to you when you purchased meat/dairy product and when you got home you realized the product you just bought is contaminated; what have you done in this situation?

In both focus groups some of the participants said that they had never experienced such a situation. The rest, who said that they have found out that the product was spoiled after buying it, claimed that they had returned the dairy products but not meat. Some of the participants said that they just threw the product away.

- *"I have never had such situation." (Female, 55, married, biologist, employed, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 23, single, economist, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 19, single, economist, student, Tbilisi, center group), (Male, 62, married, chef, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*
- *"I throw the product away." (Male, 21, single, chemical metallurgy and technology, student, Tbilisi, center group), (Male, 23, single, tourism manager, student, Tbilisi, center group), (Male, 28, married, secondary education, employed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*
- *"How can you return the meat? I don't think that it is possible." (Female, 28, married, doctor, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*

Q18. In these scenarios, how would you feel about buying a similar product from the same producer/shop in the future?

Almost everybody said that they would not go in that same shop/store anymore. Only a few participants said that they would go in the same shop but would not buy the same products.

- *"No." (Female, 24, single, lawyer, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Male, 21, single, chemical metallurgy and technology, student, Tbilisi, center group), (Male, 28, married, secondary education, employed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Female, 55, married, nurse, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*
- *"I would go to the same shop but would not buy the same product." (Female, 23, single, economist, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 28, married, doctor, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Female, 24, single, lawyer, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group)*

Q19. And what if you bought a meat/dairy product and it seems like there is nothing wrong with the product but you became sick after eating it? What would you do in this situation?

In both groups one part of the participants said they would return to the store and inform them that their product made them sick, as well as to try to receive compensation for the expenses. But they would not attempt to sue the store or the producer. On the other hand, the second part of the participants thought that going and telling the store that the product made them sick does not make any sense, it is better to go to the doctor.

- *"I would make them compensate me for my expenses." (Male, 21, single, chemical metallurgy and technology, student, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"I would not sue them." (Male, 25, single, energy engineer, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Male, 28, single, lawyer, poet, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"I would go to the store and tell them." (Female, 24, single, lawyer, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 55, married, nurse, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*
- *"I would go to the doctor." (Male, 36, single, painter, self-employed, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"I would call the ambulance." (Male, 62, married, chef, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*
- *"Telling them does not make any sense." (Female, 55, married, nurse, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Female, 28, single, doctor, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*

Q20. Who is responsible for food safety in the market, in the shop, individual retailer, producer, (local/national) government?

In both groups the participants said that, first of all, the government should be held responsible for food safety. But it also matters whence you buy the product: if in the market, then the director of the market should be held responsible; if in the supermarket, then the director of the supermarket; and if you buy something privately from someone, then that person should be held responsible for providing a safe product. Some people named the producer and the seller as the people who are responsible for food safety.

- *"The government." (Female, 19, single, economist, student, Tbilisi, center group), (Male, 25, single, energy engineer, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Male, 62, married, chef, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Female, 38, married, employed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Female, 41, married, doctor, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*
- *"The producer." (Female, 23, single, economist, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Male, 28, married, secondary education, employed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*
- *"The seller." (Female, 24, single, lawyer, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"The director of the market." (Male, 21, single, chemical metallurgy and technology, student, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 19, single, economist, student, Tbilisi, center group)*
- *"If you buy it privately then the person from whom you bought it." (Male, 25, single, energy engineer, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 28, married, doctor, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Female, 55, married, nurse, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*
- *"The supermarket director." (Male, 56, married, auto engineer, employed, Tbilisi, center group)*

Q21. If there were a problem with milk/meat and people began to get sick, who should be responsible for alerting the public and recalling the product?

Everybody from both the center and the outskirts groups said that only the government is responsible for alerting the public and recalling the product in such a situation.

- *"The government." (Female, 19, single, economist, student, Tbilisi, center group), (Male, 56, married, auto engineer, employed, Tbilisi, center group), (Male, 25, single, energy engineer, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Male, 28, married, secondary education, employed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Female, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, outskirts group), (Female, 38, married, employed, Tbilisi, outskirts group)*

In the Tbilisi center group some participants also named the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia as an institution that should be held responsible in this situation.

- *"The Ministry of Health." (Male, 25, single, energy engineer, unemployed, Tbilisi, center group), (Female, 19, single, economist, student, Tbilisi, center group)*

Tbilisi Income Groups: Comparison

General Perceptions (Section 1, Q1-7)

Where people buy and why

Participants from both income groups say that they buy dairy products more often than meat products. However, high-income participants claimed they usually buy meat from stores and supermarkets, whereas low-income participants said they buy their meat mainly from the markets.

High-income participants explained why they choose to buy meat from stores: the high level of trust they have in the stores, the acquaintances they have in the stores telling them the meat is fresh and, as one woman remarked, “I don't trust the market because they do not put the meat in the refrigerator.” By contrast, the low-income participants' logic for buying meat from the market was the greater variety of products from which to choose.

Nearly all of the participants in the two groups said they buy their dairy products from supermarkets and stores, which they said carry low fat, tasty and clean products. However, one in the high-income group stated that he buys from a woman who brings products from her village when she passes by his yard.

Why people choose to buy certain products

Most of the participants, both high- and low-income, said they prefer to buy local products rather than foreign ones imported from abroad. Many in the low-income group said that branding, taste and quality were significant factors for them when choosing which products to buy. Most in the high-income group, however, claimed that the way the products are packaged is important.

Most in the high-income group said they did not usually check product labels to see if it is organic or not. A few in the low-income group, however, said that checking for the “organic” label was important.

Safety, Quality & Hygiene (Section 2, Q8-16)

Available information on food safety

While commenting on whether there is sufficient information on food safety available to the public, those in the high-income group said that there was enough, on television and the Internet, for instance, as well as by word-of-mouth. By comparison, the participants in the low-income group answered in a different way. They claimed that they would have to taste the food itself in order to ascertain its quality, which suggests these participants were less concerned with what sort of information is available to them.

On trying out new products from unfamiliar producers, but which are cheaper, most participants in both groups asserted that they would only buy those with which they are already familiar. However, a few in the low-income group said that they would like to try new products, regardless of whether they had any knowledge of the producer. No one in the high-income group said they would do this.

Tbilisi Income Groups: Discussions

Tbilisi Income Groups: FG Composition

Tbilisi FG Participants: High-income group. Gender – mixed, age – mixed.

Male, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group
Female, 41, married, geographer, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group
Male, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group
Male, 18, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group
Male, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group
Female, 34, married, musician, conductor, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group
Male, 42, single, technical engineer, employed, Tbilisi, high-income group
Female, 23, single, psychologist, employed, Tbilisi, high-income group
Female, 42, single, PR manager, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group
Male, 21, single, student, Tbilisi, high-income group

Tbilisi FG Participants: Low-income group. Gender – mixed, age – mixed.

Male, 34, married, physical education specialist, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group
Female, 18, single, student, Tbilisi, low-income group
Female, 38, single, manager, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group
Female, 19, single, student, Tbilisi, low-income group
Female, 27, single, diplomat, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group
Male, 30, single, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group
Female, 60 married, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group
Female, 60 married, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group
Male, 31, single, journalist, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group
Male, 44, married, building engineer, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group

Section 1: General Perceptions

Q1. Approximately how often does your household buy meat and/or dairy products?

Most of the participants in both focus groups said that they buy dairy products more often than meat.

- *"I buy these products regularly, but dairy products more often." (Male, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Male, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 19, single, student, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Male, 44, married, building engineer, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Female, 23, single, psychologist, employed, Tbilisi, high-income group)*
- *"I buy mostly milk." (Female, 41, married, geographer, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group)*
- *"I buy meat and dairy products regularly." (Female, 42, single, PR manager, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group)*

Q2. From where do you most frequently buy meat [neighbor/friend, the market, the supermarket]?

The participants of the high-income group said that they buy meat and dairy products in the supermarkets and stores.

- *"In the store." (Female, 34, married, musician, conductor, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Male, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 42, single, PR manager, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group)*
- *"In the supermarket." (Male, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group)*

The participants of the low-income group said that they mainly buy the meat in the market, though one said that she buys other meat products they buy in the supermarkets.

- *"I buy the meat in the market, but I also buy some other meat products in the supermarket." (Female, 38, single, manager, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Male, 44, married, building engineer, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"In the market." (Male, 34, married, physical education specialist, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*

The main reason mentioned by the high-income group participants was that they have an acquaintance in the store who always tells them if the meat is fresh. They said they don't trust the sellers at the markets, because they don't put the meat in the refrigerator.

- *"There is my acquaintance who tells us if the meat is fresh and new." (Female, 42, single, PR manager, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Male, 18, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group)*
- *"I trust the stores more." (Female, 41, married, geographer, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group)*
- *"I do not trust the market because they do not put the meat in the refrigerator." (Female, 34, married, musician, conductor, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group)*

The main reason for the low-income group is that in the market there is more choice. Some participants think that in the market the products are better.

- *"There is a bigger choice of products." (Male, 34, married, physical education specialist, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Male, 31, single, journalist, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Male, 44, married, building engineer, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"I think that I can buy a better product there." (Female, 38, single, manager, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*

Q3. From where do you most frequently buy dairy products? [A neighbor/friend, the market, the super market] Why?

Both high- and low-income group participants said that they buy dairy products in the supermarkets and stores. Only one man from the high-income group said that his family buys *matsoni* [yogurt] from the lady who comes to their yard regularly from the village.

- *"In the store." (Female, 42, single, PR manager, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 34, married, musician, conductor, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income g), (Male, 30, single, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"In the supermarket." (Male, 21, single, student, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 42, single, PR manager, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Male, 18, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Male, 31, single, journalist, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Male, 34, married, physical education specialist, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Female, 38, single, manager, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"I buy from one woman who comes to my yard." (Male, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group)*

The participants said that in the supermarkets these products are low fat, standardized, clean, tasty, well packaged and the expiry dates are checked.

- *"It is low fat." (Female, 34, married, musician, conductor, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group)*
- *"They are standardized." (Male, 21, single, student, Tbilisi, high-income group)*
- *"They are cleaner." (Female, 18, single, student, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Male, 30, single, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"They are tasty." (Male, 44, married, building engineer, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"The expiry dates are checked." (Female, 19, single, student, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"They are well packaged and I trust [their quality]." (Male, 34, married, physical education specialist, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*

Q4. After deciding from where to buy the product, what is important for your final decision to buy a specific meat/dairy product? [Follow-up: Origin, Branding, Packaging, Price, Labeling (ingredients), "Organic".]

In both focus groups the participants said that the origin of the products is very important. They prefer to buy Georgian products rather than imported products. They think that Georgian products are better. Many also said that branding is important. In the high-income group the participants said that packaging is very important.

- *"I prefer to buy local products." (Male, 31, single, journalist, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Female, 34, married, musician, conductor, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Male, 18, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 18, single, student, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Female, 38, single, manager, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"Of course [branding] is important." (Male, 18, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 19, single, student, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Female, 60, married, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Male, 34, married, physical education specialist, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"The packaging is important." (Male, 21, single, student, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 34, married, musician, conductor, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 42, single, PR manager, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Male, 42, single, technical engineer, employed, Tbilisi, high-income group)*

In the low-income group the participants said that neither packaging nor the price is important. The most important is the taste and quality when you buy meat or dairy products because the packaging and the price do not differ much.

- *"The packaging is almost the same. The taste is different." (Female, 19, single, student, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"Almost all products have good packaging." (Female, 38, single, manager, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"The prices are the same." (Male, 31, single, journalist, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Female, 19, single, student, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"The taste and the quality." (Female, 18, single, student, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"The taste is important." (Male, 34, married, physical education specialist, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Male, 44, married, building engineer, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*

In the low-income focus groups there were several participants who said that whether the products are organic or not definitely matters, whereas only one in the high-income group spoke likewise.

- *"Yes." (Female, 42, single, PR manager, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Male, 34, married, physical education specialist, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Female, 18, single, student, Tbilisi, low-income group)*

In the high-income group some of the participants said that they often do not read the labels to check to see if the product is organic or not. One participant thought that imported products are organic.

- *"I rarely pay attention to that." (Female, 23, single, psychologist, employed, Tbilisi, high-income group)*
- *"I never read it." (Female, 42, single, PR manager, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group)*
- *"I think that imported, foreign products are organic." (Male, 18, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 23, single, psychologist, employed, Tbilisi, high-income group)*
- *"I don't think so." (Female, 34, married, musician, conductor, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 42, single, PR manager, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group)*

Q5. Does it matter for you whether the dairy product is produced from raw milk or milk powder? Why? Do you read the label for finding out this information?

In both groups the participants stated that it matters whether products are produced from raw milk or milk powder.

- *"Yes, of course [it matters]." (Male, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Male, 18, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 38, single, manager, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Male, 34, married, physical education specialist, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"I prefer to buy matsoni which is produced in the factory rather than in the village [from raw milk]." (Male, 18, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group)*
- *"I prefer village products. I don't like the milk powder." (Female, 34, married, musician, conductor, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group)*

In the high-income group the participants said that they look at the label but mostly they look because of the expiry dates. In low-income group the participants also said that they almost never look at the label for this information.

- *"I look only at the expiry dates." (Male, 42, single, technical engineer, employed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 42, single, PR manager, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Male, 21, single, student, Tbilisi, high-income group)*

- *"I don't read it." (Male, 31, single, journalist, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Male, 44, married, building engineer, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Female, 18, single, student, Tbilisi, low-income group)*

Q6. If you had had to buy milk from your neighbor that has a cow and a supermarket at the same price, which one would you choose? Why?

In both focus groups, younger participants (ages 18–30) said that they would buy the milk in the supermarket because they don't like raw milk's taste. Older participants (31+) said that they would buy from the neighbor because the raw milk is more natural and better.

- *"In the supermarket." (Male, 18, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 23, single, psychologist, employed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 19, single, student, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"I only drink packaged milk." (Male, 18, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group)*
- *"I cannot drink raw milk. I do not like it." (Male, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group)*
- *"I would rather drink the milk powder in the water than the raw milk." (Female, 19, single, student, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"From the neighbor." (Female, 42, single, PR manager, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 41, married, geographer, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 34, married, musician, conductor, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 60, married, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Male, 34, married, physical education specialist, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Male, 31, single, journalist, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"It is more natural." (Female, 42, single, PR manager, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 38, single, manager, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"Because it is real milk." (Female, 60, married, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*

Q7. Who usually buys meat/dairy product in your family?

- *"My father buys the meat." (Male, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 18, single, student, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"Sometimes me, sometimes my father." (Male, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group)*
- *"My mother buys these products." (Female, 27, single, diplomat, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"I buy both, meat and dairy products." (Male, 18, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 34, married, musician, conductor, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 38, single, manager, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Female, 60, married, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*

Section 2: Safety, Quality & Hygiene

Q8. In your opinion, what is a safety in relation to meat / dairy products?

In both groups the participants' opinion on safety in relation to meat and dairy products centered on, firstly, the product itself: that it does not hurt people and that it does not make people sick. In addition, they said that it should be healthy, tested, the expiry dates should be checked, and that it should be organic and should not contain harmful substances.

- *"That it does not hurt you." (Male, 18, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Male, 31, single, journalist, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Male, 44, married, building engineer, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*

- *"That it does not make you sick." (Female, 38, single, manager, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Female, 60, married, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"That it does not contain harmful substances." (Male, 31, single, journalist, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"It should be organic." (Female, 60, married, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"The expiry dates should be verified." (Female, 41, married, geographer, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group)*

Q9. Are you more or less concerned about the food you eat now than you were five years ago? Why?

Most of the participants of both groups said that they are concerned more about food today than five years ago. In both high- and low-income groups, the young participants said that five years ago there were too young to worry about food safety. Some participants said that nothing had changed in the past five years and that they are as concerned as they were before.

- *"Today." (Female, 23, single, psychologist, employed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Male, 18, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 34, married, musician, conductor, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 41, married, geographer, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Male, 31, single, journalist, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Female, 60, married, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Female, 18, single, student, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"The same." (Female, 42, single, PR manager, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 60, married, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"Because 5 years ago I was too young too care about this issue." (Male, 18, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 23, single, psychologist, employed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Male, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Male, 21, single, student, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 19, single, student, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Female, 18, single, student, Tbilisi, low-income group)*

Q10. When buying meat (beef and pork) and cheese, do you usually ask for the certification of the product?

In both focus groups the participants said that they do not ask for the certificate, especially when they buy products in the supermarket or in the store. Only one participant from the high-income group said that his family members always ask for the certificate.

- *"No." (Female, 42, single, PR manager, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Male, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Male, 42, single, technical engineer, employed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 38, single, manager, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Female, 60, married, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"It depends on where you buy the product. In the market they should have the certificate, but not in the supermarket." (Male, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group)*

Q10. Follow-up: Why not? Do you assume that they are certified? How reliable are their certificates?

All participants said that it is not necessary to ask for the certificate in the stores and supermarkets because the products there are already checked. In addition, one can see the stamp or the certificate on the wall or on the counter and that's enough, according to most. Others said that they trust the sellers, though one participant said that the certificates should not be trusted.

- *"It is not necessary to ask for the certificate in the supermarket." (Male, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 34, married, musician, conductor, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 42, single, PR manager, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Male, 31, single, journalist, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*

- *"The certificate is there on the counter." (Male, 18, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 60, married, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"The meat should have a stamp on it." (Male, 30, single, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Male, 34, married, physical education specialist, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"I do not trust the certificate." (Male, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Male, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Male, 30, single, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*

Q11. Do you usually look at expiry dates? How much expiry dates influence your choice of dairy/meat products?

All participants said that they always look at the expiry dates. With meat products, some said, it is enough to look at it: by color and visual appearance one can tell if it is good.

- *"Yes, always." (Male, 31, single, journalist, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Male, 34, married, physical education specialist, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"By visual appearance you can guess." (Female, 38, single, manager, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"The meat should be pink." (Male, 31, single, journalist, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*

Q12. What assurances would you need to recognize that the product is safe?

In both groups the expiry date was named as the number one assurance regarding product safety. The participants also named brands, conditions of storage and appearance.

- *"Expiry date." (Female, 34, married, musician, conductor, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 19, single, student, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"Both expiry dates and visual appearance." (Male, 44, married, building engineer, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"The brand." (Female, 42, single, PR manager, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 19, single, student, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"The conditions of storage." (Male, 21, single, student, Tbilisi, high-income group)*

Q13. Do you think that there is enough information about food safety? How would you find more easily information about the safety of the product you buy?

The high-income group participants think that information on food safety is available on TV and the Internet, or that one can ask one's acquaintances as well.

- *"On the Internet." (Male, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group)*
- *"On TV." (Female, 23, single, psychologist, employed, Tbilisi, high-income group)*
- *"From acquaintances." (Male, 18, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group)*

In the low-income group, the participants think that unless tasted, one cannot tell if a product is safe or not.

- *"Unless I eat it, how can I know if it is good or not?" (Female, 19, single, student, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Male, 31, single, journalist, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Female, 27, single, diplomat, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Female, 18, single, student, Tbilisi, low-income group)*

Q14. Let's imagine that you can choose between two seemingly similar meat/dairy products. One has been produced by a producer you are familiar with and you know that is of good quality. The other one is cheaper but produced by a producer you have no knowledge of, and you are not sure about the quality. How would you handle this situation?

Most of the participants said that they would buy the product which is familiar.

- *"The familiar one."* (Female, 42, single, PR manager, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Male, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 34, married, musician, conductor, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Male, 42, single, technical engineer, employed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Male, 31, single, journalist, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Female, 60, married, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Male, 34, married, physical education specialist, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group)

In the low-income group some participants said that they would buy the new, unfamiliar product and taste it.

- *"I would try the new one."* (Female, 38, single, manager, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Female, 27, single, diplomat, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group)

Q15. How do you get the information about the reliability of the product origin?

- *"Friends, neighbors and good acquaintances."* (Male, 42, single, technical engineer, employed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Male, 18, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Male, 34, married, physical education specialist, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group)
- *"Advertising."* (Female, 41, married, geographer, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 42, single, PR manager, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 23, single, psychologist, employed, Tbilisi, high-income group)

In the low-income group some participants think that the quality of all products today is the same.

- *"The quality of all products is the same."* (Male, 30, single, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Female, 27, single, diplomat, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group)

Q16. In your opinion, products purchased at which place has better hygienic conditions?

Both high- and low-income group participants said that products bought in the supermarket or in the store are kept in better hygienic conditions than products purchased in the market.

- *"In the supermarket."* (Female, 23, single, psychologist, employed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 42, single, PR manager, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 38, single, manager, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Female, 60, married, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Male, 31, single, journalist, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group)
- *"In the store."* (Female, 19, single, student, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Female, 27, single, diplomat, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group)

Q16. Follow-up: What are the hygienic concerns that you have in relation to meat/dairy products?

For the participants of both groups the most important is where and how the product is kept. Also how it is packaged and if it is in the refrigerator.

- *"The conditions of storage."* (Male, 31, single, journalist, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Male, 30, single, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Female, 41, married, geographer, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 23, single, psychologist, employed, Tbilisi, high-income group)
- *"The packaging."* (Female, 23, single, psychologist, employed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Male, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group)

Section 3: Legal Rights

Q17. Has it ever happened to you that when you purchased meat/dairy products you have got home and realized that the product you just bought is contaminated; what have you done in this situation?

Half of the participants said that they had experienced such an incident. Most of them returned the product and bought a new one or took their money back. Some said that they just threw the product away. A few claimed that they have never had such incident.

- *"Yes." (Male, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 27, single, diplomat, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Male, 21, single, student, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 19, single, student, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Male, 31, single, journalist, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"No." (Female, 41, married, geographer, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 34, married, musician, conductor, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 60, married, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"I threw the products away." (Male, 31, single, journalist, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"I returned it." (Male, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Male, 21, single, student, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 27, single, diplomat, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Female, 60, married, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Male, 44, married, building engineer, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*

Q18. In these scenarios, how would you feel about buying a similar product from the same producer/shop in the future?

Some participants said that they wouldn't buy the product of the same producer but would go to the same store, while some said that they would buy the same producer's product but not in the same store. Other participants said that they would buy same product in the same store anyway.

- *"Not in the same store." (Male, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 19, single, student, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"Not from the same producer." (Female, 42, single, PR manager, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group)*
- *"I would buy the same product again anyway." (Male, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 34, married, musician, conductor, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Male, 31, single, journalist, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*

Q19. And what if you buy a meat/dairy product and it seems that nothing is wrong with the product but you get sick after eating it. What would you do in this situation?

Almost everybody said that they would go to the seller or to the manager and tell them what happened. Some of the participants said that they would ask for compensation. Some agreed that they would not be able to prove anything.

- *"I would go there and reprimand them." (Female, 42, single, PR manager, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group)*
- *"I would go and tell the manager." (Female, 23, single, psychologist, employed, Tbilisi, high-income group)*
- *"I'd try to get the compensation." (Male, 21, single, student, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 19, single, student, Tbilisi, low-income group)*
- *"I would insult the person who sold it to me." (Male, 44, married, building engineer, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Male, 31, single, journalist, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group)*

- "How can you prove it?" (Male, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group)
- "We cannot do anything." (Female, 42, single, PR manager, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group)

Q20. Who is responsible for the safety of food in the market, in the shop; individual retailer, producer, (local/national) government?

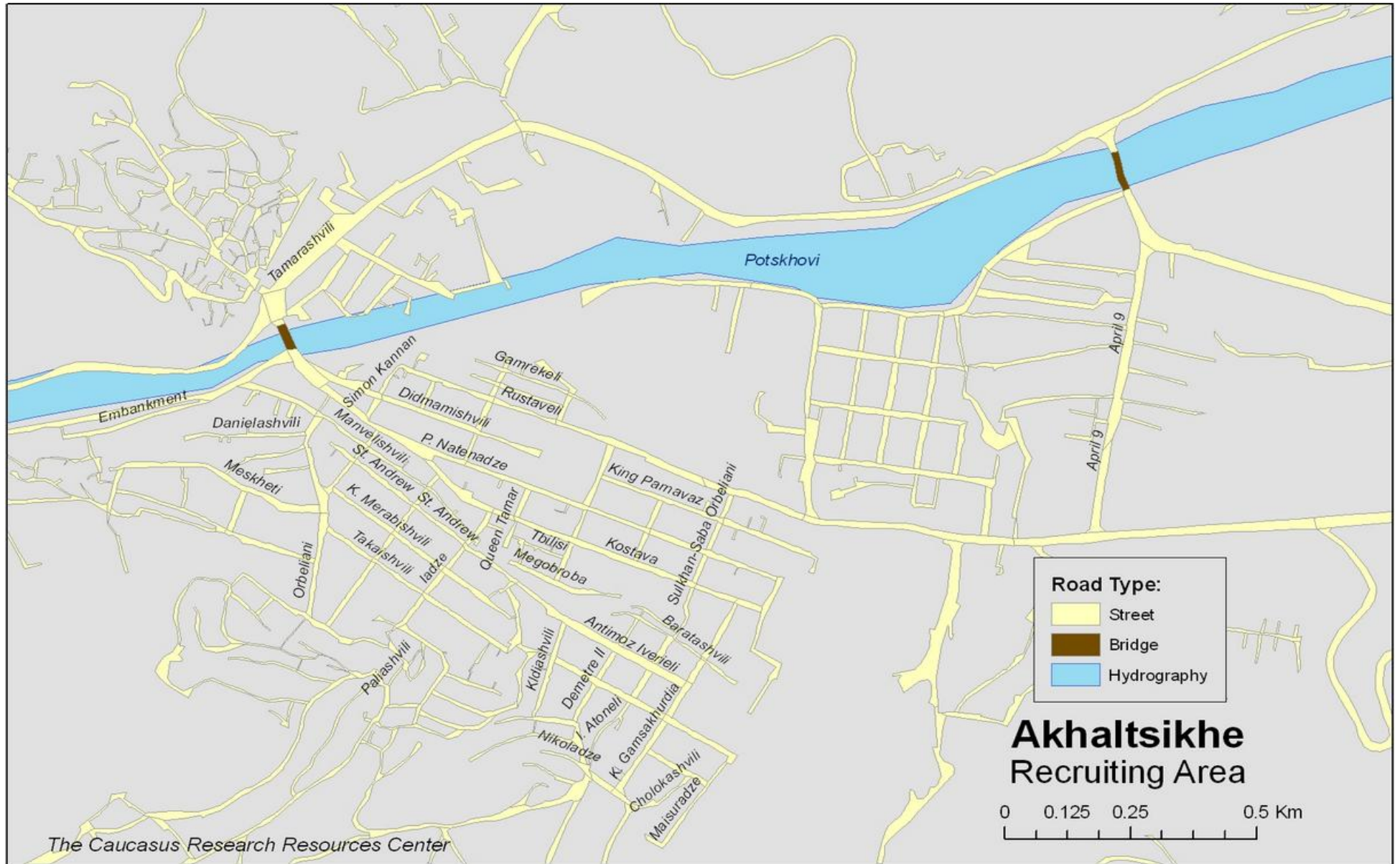
The participants of both focus groups said that the government, the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs, and the producer are responsible for food safety. In the market the responsibility is with the director of the market, a few said. According to others, if one buys something from a neighbor then the neighbor is responsible for everything.

- "The producer." (Female, 42, single, PR manager, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Male, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 34, married, musician, conductor, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Male, 34, married, physical education specialist, employed, Tbilisi, low-income group)
- "The market administration." (Male, 31, single, journalist, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group)
- "The government." (Female, 41, married, geographer, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Male, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Male, 42, single, technical engineer, employed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 19, single, student, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Male, 30, single, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group)
- "Both [producer and the government]." (Male, 18, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group)
- "Ministry of Health." (Female, 27, single, diplomat, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Male, 31, single, journalist, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group)
- "The neighbor." (Male, 30, single, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Female, 42, single, PR manager, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Male, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group)

Q21. If there is a problem with the milk or meat and people have started getting sick, who is responsible for alerting the public and recalling the product?

All participants think that the government, the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs, and the Ministry of Agriculture are responsible for alerting the public in such situations.

- "The government." (Male, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Female, 42, single, PR manager, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (female, 34, married, musician, conductor, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Male, 31, single, journalist, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Female, 19, single, student, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Female, 60, married, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group)
- "The Ministry of Health." (Female, 60, married, unemployed, Tbilisi, low-income group), (Male, 19, single, student, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Male, 21, single, student, Tbilisi, high-income group)
- "The Ministry of Agriculture." (Female, 42, single, PR manager, unemployed, Tbilisi, high-income group), (Male, 42, single, technical engineer, employed, Tbilisi, high-income group)



Akhaltsikhe Rural/Urban Consumers: Comparison

General Perceptions (Section 1, Q1-5)

How, where and why people buy

The FG participants in the urban group said that they buy dairy and meat products more often, compared with those in the rural group. The urban group also mentioned that they buy dairy products more often overall than they buy meat ones. People in the rural group noted that they own cows and therefore often make their own dairy products; many of them also said they rarely buy meat, with one woman remarking, "Depends on guests. We mainly buy meat when we have guests."

Most of the rural FG participants said they buy meat and dairy products at the market, if they do not already produce the product for themselves. Only one rural participant said she used to buy meat products at the Nikora, a chain grocery store. In contrast to the rural FG participants, more urban ones said they more often buy meat and dairy products from grocery stores, although some did note that they sometimes bought these products at the market or, as one woman in the urban group said, "I buy milk when they [the milk vendors] bring it to my yard and sell it there."

Reflecting upon what determines their final decision to buy a particular product, there were only urban FG participants who said that they check the expiry dates on the product. The rural consumers said they did not check for this, and focused more on the product's quality and taste.

Safety, Quality & Hygiene (Section 2, Q6-16)

Concerns over quality

Most of the participants are more concerned about the quality of products now than they were five years ago. Whereas the rural consumers more often mentioned their concerns that cattle are no longer vaccinated against disease, the urban participants claimed that fewer organic products are currently available today, and another urban consumer said, "We are more concerned today. The quality used to be higher before. Unless you buy [food] from an acquaintance, there is a big chance that you will get spoiled products." However, one in the urban FG stated that she feels better about buying products today than she did five years ago.

Sources of information

Whereas urban consumers cited taste, advertising and salespeople as sources of information on a product's reliability, rural consumers stressed that they took a more communal approach in this regard. They said that they often talk to neighbors, friends or relatives who are able to recommend the quality and reliability of food products. One woman in the rural FG put it this way: "Sometimes we neighbors go shopping together and advise each other about which products to buy."

Legal Rights (Section 3, Q17-21)

Taking action

Rural consumers were the only FG participants to say they have taken products which were spoiled back to the store where they bought them. By comparison, those in the urban FG claimed that they were either too embarrassed or, essentially, could not be bothered to return the spoiled product. Said one man in the urban FG: "What can you do? I once bought cheese from an acquaintance, but he deceived me. He gave me one type of cheese to taste and then sold me another one. I threw it away in its plastic bag. I did not say anything to the salesperson, but I never buy anything from him now."

Akhaltsikhe Rural & Urban Consumers: Discussions

Akhaltsikhe Rural & Urban Groups: FG Composition

Akhaltsikhe FG Participants. Rural consumers group. Gender - mixed. Age - mixed.

Male, 27, single, civil engineer, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group

Female, 22, single, historian-archaeologist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group

Female, 48, married, economist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group

Female, 51, divorced, homemaker, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group

Male, 25, married, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group

Male, 42, married, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group

Female, 18, student, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group

Female, 50, married, economist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group

Female, 58, married, pharmacist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group

Female, 47, married, veterinarian, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group

Akhaltsikhe FG Participants. Urban consumers group. Gender - mixed. Age - mixed.

Female, 54, married, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group

Female, 31, married, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group

Female, 51, married, homemaker, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group

Male, 41, married, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group

Male, 60, married, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group

Male, 64, widowed, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group

Male, 41, single, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group

Female, 33, single, journalist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group

Female, 22, married, hairdresser, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group

Section 1 General Perceptions

Q1. Approximately how often does your household buy meat and/or dairy products?

The participants living in rural areas buy meat and dairy products less often than those the urban consumers, or not at all, as most of them have cows and produce dairy products for themselves. As for meat products, they buy them once a week or less often, or on special occasions when they have guests.

- *"I don't buy dairy products, as I have a cow and we produce [dairy products] for ourselves. We buy meat once a week." (Female, 58, married, pharmacist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"We do the same [agreeing with the above statement]." (Female, 47, married, veterinarian, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"We have a cow and we produce enough milk and cheese for ourselves." (Female, 47, married, veterinarian, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"I rarely buy meat." (Male, 42, married, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"Depends on guests. We mainly buy meat when we have guests." (Female, 58, married, pharmacist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"We have enough livestock, and we do not need to buy either milk or cheese." (Female, 18, student, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"Sometimes we buy meat once a week, and sometimes less often. We do not buy sausages at all." (Female, 47, married, veterinarian, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"We buy meat once every two weeks." (Female, 51, divorced, homemaker, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*

As for the urban participants, they buy both meat and dairy products more often than the rural consumers, and, overall, buy dairy products more often than meat products.

- *"I like dairy products very much, and I eat them frequently, at least three times a week." (Female, 54, married, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"I like dairy products and buy them every day, but I don't like meat." (Male, 41, single, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"We consume dairy products almost on every second or third day." (Male, 64, widowed, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"I buy dairy products twice or three times a week." (Male, 41, married, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"Generally, we consume dairy products three times a week, and meat once a week." (Female, 31, married, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*

Q2. From where do you most frequently buy meat [neighbor/friend, the market, the supermarket]? Why?

Most of the rural participants said they buy meat products in the markets, with one claiming she used to buying it at Nikora, a chain store, though that specific shop in her neighborhood was later closed down.

- *"My mother buys meat at the market." (Female, 18, student, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"In our family, whoever goes to market buys meat." (Male, 25, married, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*

- *"Those [of our family] who happen to go to the market [buy meat]." (Male, 27, single, civil engineer, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"I buy meat in the Akhaltsikhe market." (Female, 48, married, economist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"I mainly buy meat in the shop at the market's entrance." (Female, 58, married, pharmacist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"Previously, I used to buy meat at Nikora, but I think it's now been closed. I liked that grocery store very much, as well as the quality and level of service there." (Female, 47, married, veterinarian, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*

The urban participants buy meat in the market or in the grocery stores. One participant noted that she only bought meat from groceries where it was stored in a refrigerator.

- *"I buy meat at the market." (Male, 60, married, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"Sometimes at the market and sometimes at the grocery store." (Male, 64, widowed, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"I buy meat from grocery stores, where it is kept in a refrigerator." (Female, 31, married, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*

Q3. From where do you most often buy dairy products [neighbor/friend, the market, the super market]? Why?

The rural participants produce dairy products for themselves and buy only ice cream in grocery stores.

- *"I don't buy dairy products at all." (Female, 50, married, economist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"I produce cottage cheese at home." (Female, 58, married, pharmacist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"We buy only ice cream in grocery stores." (Female, 58, married, pharmacist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*

Some of the urban participants buy or prefer to buy dairy products from grocery stores, since they think the products they sell are cleaner and of better quality. One of them, though, buys milk from vendors who bring milk to her yard, and yet another one says her family does not buy cheese at all.

- *"In the grocery. I believe that the products there are clean and kept in good conditions." (Female, 51, married, homemaker, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"The products in the grocery stores are of better quality." (Female, 22, married, hairdresser, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"It would be better if there were a specialized store for meat and dairy products." (Female, 33, single, journalist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"I buy milk when they [milk vendors] bring it to my yard and sell it there." (Female, 54, married, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"No, we don't buy cheese." (Female, 22, married, hairdresser, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*

Q3 Follow-up: What is important for you when deciding from where to buy meat/dairy products?

The rural participants attach key importance to quality and cleanliness of the products. They think it is safer to buy meat products in markets, since the market management would not allow their sale without having examined them.

- *"Of course, the quality." (Female, 58, married, pharmacist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"I buy at the market, as they check the quality." (Female, 47, married, veterinarian, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"Cleanliness, of course." (Female, 58, married, pharmacist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"The fact that the meat is on the counter in the market makes me think that it has been examined and I am secure from poisoning." (Female, 50, married, economist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*

The urban participants pay much attention to the hygienic conditions, quality, and price of the products, as well as to the salespeople who sell them.

- *"Of course, it is important that the store's environment is clean... The service level and the preparation and cutting of meat [are important]." (Female, 22, married, hairdresser, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"It is important that the salesperson is clean and handles the meat with clean hands." (Female, 31, married, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"Quality, of course." (Female, 22, married, hairdresser, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"When we buy once and we don't like the taste, we never buy the same product." (Female, 54, married, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"Of course, the price." (Male, 64, widowed, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"Price." (Female, 33, single, journalist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*

Q4. After deciding from where to buy the product, what is important for your final decision to buy a specific meat/dairy product?

For both groups of participants, quality, hygienic conditions, and taste are of the greatest importance when choosing the products. However, one of the rural participants mentioned that packaging was also important.

- *"Cleanliness, of course." (Female, 58, married, pharmacist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"Packaging is of great importance." (Female, 58, married, pharmacist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"Taste is very important." (Female, 22, single, historian-archaeologist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"Taste." (Female, 22, married, hairdresser, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"It should be clean and of high quality." (Female, 51, divorced, homemaker, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*

- *"First of all, quality. Quality implies that the products are fresh and clean." (Female, 22, married, hairdresser, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*

Q4 Follow-up: Origin (e.g. imported, from village, from relatives/or known producers etc) branding, packaging, price, advertising, use-by/sell-by date, visual appearance (visible contamination).

In the urban participants' opinion, packaging and advertising are less important, because, as they put it, consumers eat the product itself, not its packaging. They said that although advertising could get people to buy a product once, if they did not like its taste, they would not buy it again. The urban participants, unlike the rural ones, pointed out that they examined the use-by date of products.

- *"I eat the food, not its packaging." (Male, 41, single, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"The most important thing is taste. Whichever brand it is, if you don't like the taste of the product, you will never buy it again." (Female, 31, married, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"If we buy [a product] once and don't like it, we never buy it again." (Female, 54, married, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"I may buy [a product] once because of the advertising, but if I don't like it, I will not buy it again." (Female, 33, single, journalist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"Of course, we check the use-by date." (Male, 64, widowed, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"Yes, of course, at first I check the use-by date." (Female, 54, married, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"I have never read it [the use-by date]." (Female, 47, married, veterinarian, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"No, I don't check the expiry date." (Female, 22, single, historian-archaeologist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"No, I have not checked the use-by date." (Male, 42, married, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*

Q5. Does it matter for you whether the dairy product is produced from raw milk or milk powder? Why? Do you read the label in order to find out this information?

For the participants it is very important that dairy products be made from raw milk, not from milk powder. They believe that the products made of raw milk are safe and vital for one's health.

- *"With raw milk. It should be good and of high quality. Why would we want bad products?" (Female, 50, married, economist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"I believe that products made of raw milk are safe and necessary, which I would not say about milk powder." (Female, 58, married, pharmacist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"Products should be made with raw milk; otherwise, they won't be organic." (Female, 54, married, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"Of course, [from raw milk] because raw milk is full of healthy ingredients and calories." (Male, 64, widowed, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*

Section 2: Safety, Quality & Hygiene

Q7. In your opinion, what is a safety in relation to meat/dairy products?

Safety, in the opinion of the participants, means that meat/dairy products will not poison or harm consumers.

- *"Not getting food poisoning." (Female, 51, married, homemaker, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"When the product is not harmful and neither you nor your family members are harmed by this product." (Male, 60, married, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"When they don't harm your health." (Male, 27, single, civil engineer, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*

Q8. Are you more or less concerned about the food you eat now than you were five years ago? Why?

Most of the participants are more concerned about the quality of products now than they were five years ago. Whereas the rural consumers more often mentioned that cattle are no longer vaccinated against disease, the urban participants cited fewer organic products available today, and a lower degree of quality. However, one of the urban participants stated that she feels better about buying products today than she did five years ago.

- *"Of course, now. Now almost all products are contaminated." (Female, 50, married, economist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"Five years ago, cattle vaccination was still conducted with the assistance of the state. Nowadays, no vaccination is conducted, and we are afraid that the livestock may be infected." (Female, 48, married, economist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"The main problem is that cattle are not vaccinated now. This used to be a must before." (Female, 22, single, historian-archaeologist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"We have a veterinary doctor in our village, and we buy medicines with our money and get him to vaccinate the cattle in order to prevent the danger related to infected livestock." (Female, 58, married, pharmacist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"We are more concerned today, five years ago, there were more organic products." (Female, 54, married, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"We are more concerned today. The quality used to be higher before. Unless you buy [food] from an acquaintance... there is a big chance that you will get spoiled products." (Female, 51, married, homemaker, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"I would say just the contrary, five years ago dairy and meat products were less reliable. I don't know what the reason is. Either the villagers have changed their tactics, because the demand for quality products has increased, or there are some other reasons. The fact remains that our yogurt [matsoni] vendor who used to mix milk powder into the sour milk doesn't do so anymore, and he delivers cheese made of unskimmed milk." (Female, 31, married, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*

Q9. When buying meat (beef and pork) and cheese, do you usually ask for the certification of the product?

None of the participants asks for certificates and licenses when buying meat and cheese. One of them even said she did not think such certificates were available in the region.

- *"We don't ask whether the product has the quality certificate." (Male, 41, married, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"I don't think there is anything like that here, and no one asks about it." (Female, 31, married, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"We always buy both meat and cheese at the market, and they have neither a quality certificate nor a license." (Female, 22, married, hairdresser, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"Never." (Female, 50, married, economist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"I don't." (Female, 18, student, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*

Q10. Do you usually look at the expiry dates? How much do the expiry dates influence your choice of dairy/meat products?

Some participants sometimes look at the expiry dates, depending upon where they buy the product, but others said that they never do so.

- *"No, never." (Female, 54, married, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"Sometimes, it depends where I buy this product." (Female, 31, married, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*

Q11. What assurance would you need to recognize that the product is safe?

[The moderator did not ask this question.]

Q12. Do you think that there is enough information about food safety? How would you find more easily information about the safety of the product you buy?

The urban participants pointed out that there was a center for food safety (the National Service of Food Safety, Veterinary and Plant Protection), but also that it did not provide consumers with any information. Both the urban and rural participants said they could not get such information from anywhere.

- *"No, I cannot get such information at all." (Female, 22, single, historian-archaeologist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"[We cannot get such information from] from anywhere." (Female, 18, student, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"[Such information is not available] from anywhere." (Female, 54, married, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"There is a center for food safety, but they never disseminate any information." (Female, 31, married, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*

Q13. Let's imagine that you can choose between two seemingly similar meat/dairy products. One has been produced by a producer you are familiar with and you know to be of good quality. The other one is cheaper but produced by a producer you have no knowledge of, and you are not sure about the quality. How would you handle this situation?

Some of the participants stated that they would be willing to try the new product at least once and then decide whether to continue buying it or not, with one of them saying he would taste it at the store to see what it was like. One of the rural participants observed that higher prices were signs of higher quality, but another said the price might be decisive in making this decision.

- *"I would first taste the new product, and if I liked it, I would buy it regularly afterwards." (Female, 48, married, economist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*

- *"In my opinion, when the price is higher, the quality is better as well, and when the price is lower, the quality may also be lower." (Female, 50, married, economist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"I would taste the product [at the store] to find out what it is like." (Male, 42, married, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"The price may be decisive." (Female, 51, divorced, homemaker, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"I'd taste it at least once to find out what it is like." (Female, 33, single, journalist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"I would taste it at the store first, before buying it." (Female, 22, married, hairdresser, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)"*
- *"I would buy it once, and if I didn't like, I'd go back to the products I know and like." (Female, 22, married, hairdresser, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*

Q14. How do you get information about the reliability of a product's origin?

The urban participants receive such information from salespeople and ads, as well as from their own experience of consuming a certain product. The rural participants said they do not know the origin of the products they buy and just take a chance. They say they receive information from their relatives or neighbors, and sometimes they have no information on food safety when they buy products.

- *"If we have tasted it once, [we know where it is from]. There is no other information available, except for ads." (Female, 22, married, hairdresser, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"One may ask the salesperson which village the cheese is from. If you trust the products from that village... then everything is OK." (Male, 41, single, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"We take a chance... We don't know. We just buy it." (Female, 48, married, economist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"Sometimes we neighbors go shopping together and advise each other about which products to buy." (Female, 47, married, veterinarian, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"We get advice from a neighbor and we trust him." (Male, 42, married, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"If my friends or relatives have tasted and recommended it, it means that the product is good and I buy this product. They also tell me where to buy it." (Female, 48, married, economist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*

Q15. In your opinion, the product purchased at which place has better hygienic conditions? [Follow-ups: For factories, homemade products, supermarket, products sold in the streets, what are the hygienic concerns that you have in relation to meat/dairy products?]

Most urban participants said the products purchased in groceries have better hygienic conditions. They pointed out that products bought in the streets were dusty and harmful for health.

- *"Of course, in a store." (Female, 33, single, journalist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"Of course [agreeing with the above statement], not in the street." (Female, 22, married, hairdresser, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"Probably in grocery stores." (Male, 41, single, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*

- *"First of all, dust concerns me [in relation to products purchased in the street]... It is harmful to one's health." (Female, 22, married, hairdresser, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*

Section 3: Legal Rights

Q16. Have you ever purchased meat/dairy products only to realize when you got home that the product(s) was spoiled? What did you do in this situation? Did you bring it to the attention of the storeowner or manager? If so, were you satisfied with their response?

Most of the urban participants have had similar cases with different products. Some of them have immediately thrown away the spoiled products, as they felt embarrassed to return the products or thought the store would not take them back. Others have returned the products and received their money back.

- *"We have had many such cases, but we have never returned the products, as it felt embarrassing." (Female, 54, married, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"We were ashamed to return the products." (Female, 54, married, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"What can you do? I once bought cheese from an acquaintance, but he deceived me. He gave me one type of cheese to taste and then sold me another one. I threw it away as it was in the plastic bag. I did not say anything to the salesperson, but I never buy anything from him now." (Male, 64, widowed, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"They [salespersons in an unspecified grocery store] sold me spoiled sausages, and I packed them in a plastic bag and took it back to the grocery. They took them and gave my money back." (Female, 47, married, veterinarian, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*

Q17. In these scenarios, how would you feel about buying a similar product from the same producer/shop in the future?

The participants state that they would never buy products from the salesperson that has deceived them, as they no longer trust him/her.

- *"I no longer trust them, and I will not buy their products anymore." (Female, 31, married, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"I reprimand them, and I will do so again." (Female, 54, married, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*

Q18. And what if you buy a meat/dairy product and it seems to nothing wrong with the product but you get sick after eating it. What would you do in this situation?

[The moderator did not asked this question.]

Q19. Who is responsible for the food safety in the markets and in the shops, individual retailers, producer, (local/national) government? If you buy some milk from your neighbor, for example.

According to the urban participants, the government, as well as the store's management and owners, should be responsible for food safety. One of the participants also observed that there should be a special law on food safety. The rural participants said that the government, food producers, and the

National Service of Food Safety [within the Ministry of Agriculture] should take responsibility for food safety issues.

- *"Perhaps it's the government that should be responsible." (Female, 33, single, journalist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"The government should have passed a law on food safety." (Female, 31, married, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"The store's management should be responsible." (Female, 33, single, journalist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"The owner of the store or the market." (Female, 31, married, employed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"The government." (Male, 42, married, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"There should be a service that bears responsibility." (Male, 42, married, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"Those who produce them [the products] should be responsible." (Female, 58, married, pharmacist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"The food safety service." (Male, 27, single, civil engineer, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*

Q20. If there were a problem with milk/meat, for instance, and people began to fall ill, who is responsible for alerting the public and recalling the product?

In general, the rural participants were unaware of a body responsible in such situations. They put this responsibility on the head of the village council, saying that he should demand solutions from the higher levels of government. One of them mentioned sanitary-epidemiological stations that existed in the Soviet period and expressed regret that they were abolished. The urban participants put this responsibility on the government and producers themselves.

- *"First of all, the head of the village, and then he should demand response from higher above in the government." (Male, 42, married, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"Previously, there were the sanitary-epidemiological stations which inspected everything. Now no such stations operate. That's why I don't know [who is responsible]." (Female, 58, married, pharmacist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"You know what? You [addressing the moderator] probably know this better than we do, because we are sitting at home and are unaware of anything." (Female, 50, married, economist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural consumers group)*
- *"The government... There should be respective bodies." (Female, 54, married, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*
- *"First of all, the producers themselves should warn of this danger." (Male, 41, single, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, urban consumers group)*

Akhaltsikhe Rural Producers: Summary

General Perceptions (Section 1, Q1-2)

Products people make, and where they sell them

The participants said that they mostly produced cheese and other agricultural products, such as cottage cheese and meat, which they sold in the market. While many said they often sold their products in their villages and at the markets in Akhaltsikhe and Borjomi, one woman noted, “We produce cheese, but we cannot make enough of it to sell at the market. We mainly make it for the family.”

Safety, Quality & Hygiene (Section 2, Q3-12)

Quality products

For many participants, safety in relation to meat and dairy products means allowing the cattle to graze free range in mountain pastures, and having a vet inoculate them. “We send them to the mountains,” said one woman, “and in the autumn they return to the village. In the mountain pastures the cattle get good nourishment and gain weight; and the dairy products and meat are also delicious and organic.” In addition, processing the meat correctly and hygienically is also of paramount importance to food safety.

While some participants said they trust in the certification process to which meat producers and sellers are suppose to be subject, there were more who answered that they were skeptical of this process. One woman claimed, “I have no confidence in this certification process.” Another man said, “there is a category of people who, in order not to incur a big [financial] loss, sell meat outside the market at reduced prices. It is possible that such contaminated meat is sold outside the market.”

Changes in food safety over the past five years

People stated that food safety standards have changed over the past five years, namely as a result of better veterinary services and genetically modified food, the latter, one said, is a potential threat to people’s health. According to another person, “I think the demand [for greater food safety] has changed; nowadays, we have a lot of genetically modified food, and people talk a lot about them.”

In fact, many participants spoke at length of the measures which they themselves carry out to ensure that they produce safe products. They said it was important to inoculate cattle against diseases, as well as to have all the meat they produce inspected. It also seemed that the participants felt they had to take such responsibilities upon themselves, for, as they noted, the special veterinary services formerly responsible for food safety no longer exist. One woman summarized the current situation: “We had a large veterinary center in our village in Atskuri which served Tkemala and eight other villages. One center served eight villages, and even that has now been abolished.” And, indeed, many called for re-establishing these centers so that people can obtain more information on food safety issues.

Legal Rights (Section 3, Q13-16)

Food products

Most participants, who said they had learned how to produce and store food from family traditions, found it hard to imagine that the products they themselves could be bad and could make their customers sick. When asked to reflect upon such a situation and what they would do if the customer returned claiming he or she fell ill because of the food, some people claimed that they would not be able to return any money. One woman said, “In this case, that person [claiming to be ill from my food] would have to prove that he or she got sick because of my product.”

Akhaltsikhe Rural Producers: Discussions

Akhaltsikhe Rural Producers: FG Composition

Akhaltsikhe FG Participants. Producers Group. Gender - mixed. Age - mixed.

Female, 39, married, teacher, employed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group

Male, 30, single, architect, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group

Female, 53, married, teacher, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group

Male, 35, married, secondary education, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group

Male, 51, married, historian, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group

Male, 25, single, economist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group

Female, 27, single, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group

Male, 35, married, secondary education, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group

Female, 45, married, teacher, employed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group

Female, 62, widow, teacher, employed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group

Section 1: General Perceptions

Q1. Which dairy and meat products do you produce and who are your major customers?

The participants said that they mostly produced cheese and other agricultural products, such as cottage cheese and meat, which they sold in the market. One of the respondents pointed out that she could not produce enough cheese to sell in the market, and she only made it for her family.

- *"We produce cheese, but we cannot make enough of it to sell at the market. We mainly make it for the family." (Female, 62, widow, teacher, employed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"We produce cheese and also sell it in the town." (Female, 45, married, teacher, employed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"We produce all kinds of agricultural products – both cottage cheese and meat." (Male, 35, married, secondary education, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"We produce meat, and we also sell cattle." (Male, 51, married, historian, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*

Q2. Where do you sell the products you produce?

Most participants pointed out that they sold their products in their villages or in the Akhaltsikhe and Borjomi markets. One of them said that producing and selling cheese was a seasonal business which depended on the yield of milk, and another noted that she sold cheese through her relative's shop in Tbilisi.

- *"Our main customer is the Borjomi market." (Male, 35, married, secondary education, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"We mainly produce cheese and sell it in the Borjomi market, but we do it seasonally, when the yield of milk is high." (Male, 35, married, secondary education, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"I produce cheese and send it to Tbilisi to my sister-in-law who has her own shop and sells it there." (Male, 51, married, historian, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"We only produce cheese and sell it in our own village." (Female, 39, married, teacher, employed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*

Section 2: Safety, Quality & Hygiene

Q3. In your opinion, what is safety in relation to meat and dairy products?

It was pointed out that the safety of meat and dairy products is closely connected to different issues, such as providing cattle with proper nourishment, processing products correctly and inoculating and caring for cattle by way of a special veterinary service. The participants also said that it was important to let the cattle graze the cattle in the fields, rather than in the garden.

- *"It's very important to let the cattle graze in the fields, instead of grazing it in the garden." (Female, 45, married, teacher, employed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"So we send them to the mountains, and in the autumn they return to the village. In the mountain pastures the cattle get good nourishment and gain weight; and the dairy products and meat are also delicious and organic." (Female, 62, widow, teacher, employed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"Safety means healthy meat. It automatically implies the processing technology of products. The cleaner this process is, the safer and organic the product will be." (Male, 51, married, historian, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"The cattle are checked and inoculated by way of a special veterinary service. When we send the cattle to the mountains, they have already been inoculated." (Female, 62, widow, teacher, employed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*

Q4. Out of every 10 meat sellers, how many do you think go through the certification (checked by a veterinarian)?

- *"Nowadays all of them do so." (Male, 51, married, historian, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"Perhaps all of them." (Male, 25, single, economist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"At least nine out of ten are checked." (Male, 25, single, economist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"All the ten of them." (Male, 35, married, secondary education, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"I think eight out of ten do so." (Female, 39, married, teacher, employed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*

Q4. Follow-up: How reliable is the certificate?

Some participants said they trusted the certification process, but others expressed doubts, saying that sometimes even those who had the certificates sold contaminated meat, which could be due to mistakes in the checking process. It was also pointed out that some people sell meat cheaper outside the market, without having it certified, and the risk of buying contaminated meat was thus higher in such cases.

- *"Sure, I trust it." (Male, 51, married, historian, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"I think I trust it. What else can we do?" (Female, 62, widow, teacher, employed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"Yes, of course, yes." (Female, 27, single, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"I have no confidence in this certification process." (Female, 45, married, teacher, employed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"I cannot say for sure whose fault it is and who gives certificates when they shouldn't be given, but the fact remains that contaminated cattle are sold." (Male, 35, married, secondary education, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"It is checked, but something may be omitted." (Female, 53, married, teacher, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"What is sold in the market is checked, but there are some people... who don't want to work in the market and prefer selling it cheaply to the people... In the market, meat is either checked on the place by the market's veterinarian or sent to a lab, but there is a category of people who, in order not to incur a big [financial] loss, sell meat outside the market at reduced prices. It is possible that such contaminated meat is sold outside the market." (Male, 35, married, secondary education, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*

Q5. What do the customers usually consider important when making their decision to buy products? How do you distinguish your product against others?

The participants named a number of factors determining customers' decisions, such as the appearance, quality, taste and price of a product, as well as a seller who takes proper hygiene into consideration, good storage conditions and service.

- *"Good looks can be the most misleading... The bad appearance of a product can turn a customer off even if it's very delicious... Making a decision, a customer first looks at the appearance of a product... A good appearance and a clean seller are, of course, very important." (Male, 25, single, economist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"Once I witnessed a meat seller say to a customer: 'First wash your hands before you touch it.' " (Male, 51, married, historian, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*

- *"Quality, of course." (Male, 25, single, economist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"Taste." (Female, 39, married, teacher, employed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"Storage – how and where the product is kept." (Male, 35, married, secondary education, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"Service." (Male, 35, married, secondary education, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"Of course, customers also pay attention to the price." (Male, 25, single, economist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*

Q5. Follow-up: How important is it for your customer to know how fresh the product you sell is?

- *"Certainly it's important." (Male, 30, single, architect, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"Yes, of course." (Male, 35, married, secondary education, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"Sure it's important." (Female, 53, married, teacher, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*

Q6. Do you think that the demand for the food safety has changed over the last five years?

The participants said that the demand for food safety had increased over the last five years and that all kinds of products were checked and registered, which did not happen previously. They also mentioned genetically modified products, and one said he was concerned about this issue.

- *"I think the demand has changed; nowadays, we have a lot of genetically modified food, and people talk a lot about them." (Female, 45, married, teacher, employed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"Yes, it has certainly changed. I think everything has improved, and they pay attention to everything. Veterinary inspection has become much better. Previously, neither meat nor other products went through the checking procedure." (Female, 27, single, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"These genetically modified products are harmful to people's health." (Male, 25, single, economist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*

Q7. What kind of measures do you usually take to ensure your products are safe (especially dairy products)?

Participants noted that the health, proper care and inoculation of the cattle were the most important determinants of food safety.

- *"First of all, the most important principle is that cattle, with which products are made, should be healthy." (Male, 25, single, economist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"We vaccinate cattle and take the meat to be inspected." (Male, 35, married, secondary education, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"First of all, inoculation and specific care, and then observing hygiene in the process of making the food products." (Female, 27, single, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*

Q8. Whose responsibility is to inform producers about food safety measures/legislation/regulations/obligations?

The participants said that no organization was responsible for these issues. They also mentioned a veterinary center that had such responsibilities previously but no longer exists.

- *"That service doesn't exist anymore." (Female, 62, widow, teacher, employed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*

- *"Yes, it is true..." (Male, 30, single, architect, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"No one [is responsible]." (Female, 53, married, teacher, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"We had a large veterinary center in our village in Atskuri which served Tkemala and eight other villages. One center served eight villages, and even that has now been abolished." (Female, 62, widow, teacher, employed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*

Q8. Follow-up: How would you like to learn more about food safety issues or about how to ensure that food is safe?

The participants said they would like to have an organization, like the abolished veterinary centers, which would perform these functions.

- *"It is necessary to create an organization like that veterinary center." (Male, 30, single, architect, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"There should be a veterinary center, like the one that served these eight villages and had one veterinarian and two assistants." (Female, 62, widow, teacher, employed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*

Q9. What has been the main challenge to selling homemade products, in this case, dairy products and beef?

The participants named the difference between the producers' and second-hand sellers' prices as the main problem. They said that producers had to sell most of their products to second-hand sellers who sold them at higher prices.

- *"They are not sold as they should." (Male, 25, single, economist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"There are differences in prices." (Male, 35, married, secondary education, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"The products mainly fall to the hands of second-hand sellers. Ninety-nine percent of the producers cannot sell so many of their products on the market as second-hand sellers do. That's why a producer is compelled to give his products to a second-hand seller who sells them at higher prices." (Male, 35, married, secondary education, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*

Q10. Who are your competitors? What do you need in order to compete with them? What should be done to help you become more competitive and who should help you with that?

The participants said they considered any person or organization which sells products as their competitor, especially factories. One stressed the necessity of special centers which would be responsible for both checking the products and selling them, and, thus, help the producers become more competitive.

- *"Sure, I consider all who have or sell any product as my competitor." (Male, 30, single, architect, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"We need those centers that would check agricultural products and take decisions on which product is better. Each village would want to become more competitive and to compete with others." (Male, 30, single, architect, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"There should be some kind of link between production and consumption, and this link will help us, the producers, to settle a lot of the problems we have in selling our products more easily." (Female, 62, widow, teacher, employed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"Our main competitor is the factory, and it is quite a mighty competitor, because if we take into account human psychology, people always think that everything is made well in a factory and that everything else is second-rate." (Female, 27, single, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*

Q12. Can hygiene be improved and who should help you with that?

Some participants said that hygienic conditions should be ensured by the special centers that have been abolished. Others pointed out that they themselves could create proper hygienic conditions.

- *"Again and again, those veterinary centers which have been abolished would have been able to be responsible for hygiene, but nowadays such centers no longer exist." (Female, 62, widow, teacher, employed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"One should create hygienic conditions oneself." (Male, 25, single, economist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*

Section 3: Legal Rights

Q13. Let's imagine the following scenario: You sell some meat or dairy product and the customer, after buying the product, realizes that it is spoiled (or he or she became sick). What would you do if the customer brings the product back to you?

Some participants found it hard to believe that such a thing could happen. They were sure of the safety of their products. Some declared that a customer couldn't prove that their product had harmed him, yet one of them said she would not be able to prove her products were not to blame. They also added that they wouldn't be able to return the money, because it would already have been spent.

- *"It is impossible." (Female, 27, single, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"I am so sure of the quality of my products that it cannot happen to me." (Male, 35, married, secondary education, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"I wouldn't be able to prove that my product had nothing to do with it." (Female, 27, single, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"I would not be able to return the money." (Male, 35, married, secondary education, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"I wouldn't be able to return the money, because it would already have been spent." (Female, 27, single, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"In this case, that person would have to prove that he or she got sick because of my product." (Female, 39, married, teacher, employed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*

Q14. Who is responsible for the safety of food in the market, in the shop; individual retailer?

Some participants thought that it was the sanitary inspection service and veterinary doctors that were responsible for food safety in the markets and shops. Others put the responsibility on the producers and retailers.

- *"The sanitary inspection service." (Male, 30, single, architect, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"No, the veterinary doctor." (Female, 53, married, teacher, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"The producer." (Female, 27, single, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"The retailer who sells the product should take the responsibility for the product quality. He shouldn't sell products of poor quality." (Male, 35, married, secondary education, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*

Q15. Where did you learn how to produce or store the dairy and meat products properly?

All participants declared that they had learnt it in their families.

- *"My grandmother taught it to me." (Male, 25, single, economist, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*

- *"In my family." (Female, 27, single, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*
- *"From the family." (Male, 35, married, secondary education, unemployed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*

Q16. Are you aware of the law on food safety and quality? If yes, what is its expected impact on you once its relevant clauses are enforced? How will you prepare for that?

One of the participants declared that she taught herself this at school, and that this knowledge had had a positive influence on the quality of her own products.

- *"I teach it myself at school and I already know what kind of product I should produce not to harm anybody – either my family or other people." (Female, 62, widow, teacher, employed, Akhaltsikhe, rural producers group)*

Conclusion

In this report, we have shed light on the issues of safety, quality and hygiene of meat and dairy products in Georgia. The importance of this issue cannot be understated: both meat and dairy products are mainstays of the Georgian diet and the quality and reliability of the products is an issue that reaches everyone living in Georgia, regardless of where they live, their profession, gender or many other considerations that often divide social research studies. It is an issue of public health, and understanding the attitudes of both consumers and retailers toward these issues is essential in better addressing the needs of the population with regard to meat and dairy products.

This study has undertaken various focus groups of producers and consumers in Tbilisi and Akhaltsikhe, as well as personal interviews with retailers in Tbilisi, exploring a wide range of issues connected to food safety. On the side of consumers, there was an assessment of food safety, buying practices, perceptions of health risks and consumer rights on the side of the consumers and on the side of retailers, their attitudes about national policies on food safety, understanding of consumer demand, their experiences with these issues and understanding of their own rights.

The consumer groups revealed that the participants had very little understanding or knowledge of hygiene or food safety, and primarily judged places according to general cleanliness and use of refrigerator. Also, consumers were reluctant to try new products, even if they were cheaper, because of their strong preference for familiar brands of products. The most significant findings on the side of the producers was in the rural Javakheti group. In this group, the participants revealed that they were aware of and accepted responsibility for the safety and hygiene of their food but stated that they do everything properly and that the problem lies with the consumers, who are careless and neglect to check labels and expiration dates. They were also interested in getting more information on food safety.

The results of one-on-one interviews with retailers have shown that larger retailers have more or less a uniform method of checking their products for safety, and only smaller retailers relied on trust and reputation for such concerns. There was also a consensus that the responsibility for food safety rests with the producers, and that if people were to become sick from the products, that they would reimburse them and contact the producer. The findings did show, however, a widespread lack of knowledge about hygiene and other regulations on all sides. While there is an absence of well-established safety standards with regard to food, there are some regulations in place particularly for supermarkets, and even administrators at supermarkets were not aware of them. An increased effort to make food safety and hygiene regulations known and enforced could have a significant effect on improving these issues.

CRRRC, Mercy Corps and GDCI's research on meat and dairy product safety serve as a good baseline study and a good starting point in understanding how retailers and customers alike view issues concerning meat and dairy product health risks in Georgia. It also highlights some gaps where further research can be carried out, such as in the field of understanding meat certification regulation and where policy change or enforcement can improve such public health needs. Other qualitative and quantitative measures that could be representative of the whole population would be highly helpful in being able to make policy recommendations on this important issue.

Methodology

CRRC used a combination of face-to-face in-depth interviews and focus group research for this specific project.

Seven focus groups and one pretest were conducted with dairy and meat consumers and producers in Tbilisi and Samtskhe-Javakheti region. The discussions were held between July 20 and July 30 in Tbilisi and Akhaltsikhe.

In Tbilisi, CRRC conducted one pretest and four focus groups based on the following criteria:

Focus group participants were selected according to their income level and location. One focus group consisted of high-income earners, and one of lower-income earners. Moreover, one group consisted of participants living in downtown Tbilisi, and the other involved participants from Tbilisi outskirts.

- Focus group I – Higher income group
- Focus group II – Lower income group
- Focus group III – Downtown Tbilisi group
- Focus group IV – Tbilisi district's group

In the Samtskhe-Javakheti region, CRRC conducted three focus groups based on the following criteria:

In Samtskhe-Javakheti (S/J), CRRC separated rural from urban areas, and conducted one focus group in Akhaltsikhe consisting of consumers only; one focus group in rural area, which involved dairy and meat products consumers only; and another focus group again in rural area, which included dairy and meat product producers.

- Focus group I – Akhaltsikhe consumers' group
- Focus group II – Rural S/J consumers' group
- Focus group III – Rural S/J producers' group

A full recruitment strategy can be seen in the annex to the report.

To understand dairy and meat product retailers' attitudes toward food safety, quality and hygiene, CRRC also conducted face-to-face in-depth interviews with 12 retailers in Tbilisi. These 12 retailers included larger chain stores; small supermarkets, both in the center and outskirts of Tbilisi; restaurants; and individual meat and cheese retailers.

The retailer and focus group discussion/interview guides were developed by CRRC together with Mercy Corps and GDCL.

FG Question-Guides

Consumers Focus Group Guide

Welcome to our group discussion on your views and attitudes about the safety and quality of meat and dairy products in Georgia. We appreciate your taking the time to share your valuable insights with us.

My name is ____ and I am the director/employee/moderator of Caucasus Research Resource Centers. I will be moderating our discussion today, and I look forward to spending the next two hours with you.

I want to stress that CRRC is a non-political, non-governmental, non-profit, research institution. We invite you to come visit us in Tbilisi or look at our web page to find out more about us.

As you see, there is a camera in the room. This camera is just for our internal reports and will not be shared with anyone else.

Today's discussion is part of a series of discussions we are conducting in Tbilisi and Samtskhe-Javakheti region to better understand people's views on meat and dairy products' safety, quality and hygiene issues.

Before we begin our discussion, I would like you to sign a Confidentiality agreement. I want to stress yet again that what you say in this room is completely confidential. You can see that you are given cards with "Respondent X", so that no one can actually link your name to anything you say.

[Go over/have people sign the confidentiality agreement]

Now we will begin our group discussion. Before we begin, I want to establish some guidelines for this conversation. Each of your thoughts is valuable to us and we want to hear them. Please help us do so by following these guidelines:

- Please turn off your phone or turn it onto silent.
- Please speak one at a time.
- Please keep your responses as brief as possible. I will ask you to cut short your comments if we need to move on.
- Please do not dismiss or judge what other people say. Focus instead on your own experience and opinion.
- Please avoid profanity or derogatory terms.
- Please be candid. There are no right or wrong answers or opinions.
- Please remember that what is said in this room is confidential.

Any questions?

Let's begin!

[Basic introductions: Go around and have everyone state their age, occupation, and family background]

Section 1: General Perceptions:

1. Approximately how often do you (your household) buy meat and/or dairy products?
2. From where do you most frequently buy meat? [A neighbor/friend, the market, the super market] Why?
3. From where do you most frequently buy dairy products? [A neighbor/friend, the market, the super market] Why?

[FOLLOW-UP: What is important for you when deciding from where to buy meat / dairy products?]

4. After deciding from where to buy the product, what is important for your final decision to buy a specific meat / dairy product?

[FOLLOW-UP:

- Origin (e.g. imported, from home area, from relatives/or known producers etc)
- Branding
- Packaging
- Price
- Labeling (ingredients)
- Advertising
- Use-by/sell by date.
- Visual appearance (visible contamination)
- “Organic” [PROBE: definition]
-

+ “why” question]

5. If you had had to buy e.g. milk from your neighbor that has a cow and a supermarket and the price is the same, which one would you go for? Why?
6. Who usually buys meat / dairy product in your family?

Section 2: Safety, Quality and Hygiene

7. In your opinion, what is a safety in relation to meat / dairy products?
8. Are you more or less concerned about the food you eat now than you were five years ago? Why?
9. When buying meat (beef and pork) and cheese, do you usually ask for the certification of the product?

[FOLLOW-UP: Why yes? why no? Do you assume that they are certified? How reliable are their certificate?]

10. Do you usually look at expiry dates? How much expiry dates influence your choice of dairy/meat products?
11. What assurance would you need to recognize that the product is safe?
12. Do you think that there is enough information about food safety? How would you find more easily information about the safety of the product you buy?
13. Let’s imagine that you can choose between two seemingly similar meat / dairy products. One of them has been produced by a producer you are familiar with and you know that is of good quality. The other one is cheaper but it is produced by a producer you have no knowledge of but you are not sure about the quality. How would you argue in this situation?
14. How do you get the information about the reliability of the product origin?
15. In your opinion, the product purchased at which place has better hygienic conditions?
[FOLLOW UP: in factories, home made products, supermarket, products sold in the streets?

FOLLOW UP: What are the hygienic concerns that you have in relation to meat/dairy products?]

Section 3: Legal Rights

16. Has it ever happened to you when you purchased meat / dairy product and when you got home you realized the product you just bought is contaminated; what have you done in this situation? Did you bring it to the attention of the store owner or manager? If so, were you satisfied with their response?
17. In these scenarios, how would you feel about buying a similar product from the same producer/shop in the future?
18. And what if you buy a meat/dairy product and it seems to nothing wrong with the product but you get sick after eating it. What would you do in this situation?
19. Who is responsible for the safety of food in the market, in the shop; individual retailer, producer, (local/national) government? E.g. if you buy some milk from your neighbor...
20. Scenario: if there is a problem e.g. with milk/meat and people have started getting sick, who is responsible for alerting the public and recalling the product?

Producers Focus Group Guide

Welcome to our group discussion on your views and attitudes about the safety and quality of meat and dairy products in Georgia. We appreciate your taking the time to share your valuable insights with us.

My name is ____ and I am the director/employee/moderator of Caucasus Research Resource Centers. I will be moderating our discussion today, and I look forward to spending the next two hours with you.

I want to stress that CRRC is a non-political, non-governmental, non-profit, research institution. We invite you to come visit us in Tbilisi or look at our web page to find out more about us. As you see, there is a camera in the room. This camera is just for our internal reports and will not be shared with anyone else.

Today's discussion is part of a series of discussions we are conducting in Tbilisi and Samtskhe-Javakheti region to better understand people's views on meat and dairy products' safety, quality and hygiene issues.

Before we begin our discussion, I would like you to sign a Confidentiality agreement. I want to stress yet again that what you say in this room is completely confidential. You can see that you are given cards with "Respondent X", so that no one can actually link your name to anything you say.

[Go over/have people sign the confidentiality agreement]

Now we will begin our group discussion. Before we begin, I want to establish some guidelines for this conversation. Each of your thoughts is valuable to us and we want to hear them. Please help us do so by following these guidelines:

- Please turn off your phone or turn it onto silent.
- Please speak one at a time.
- Please keep your responses as brief as possible. I will ask you to cut short your comments if we need to move on.
- Please do not dismiss or judge what other people say. Focus instead on your own experience and opinion.
- Please avoid profanity or derogatory terms.
- Please be candid. There are no right or wrong answers or opinions.
- Please remember that what is said in this room is confidential.

Any questions? Let's begin!

[Basic introductions: Go around and have everyone state their age, occupation, and family background]

Section 1: General Perceptions:

1. Which dairy and meat products do you produce and who are your major customers?
2. Where do you sell the products you produce?

[FOLLOW-UP: Larger chain stores, smaller groceries, market or individual customers, factory; restaurants, traders]

Section 2: Safety, Quality and Hygiene

3. In your opinion, what is a safety in relation to meat / dairy products?
4. Out of 10 meat sellers, how many do you think go through the certification (vet. checking)?

[FOLLOW-UP: If the participants do not answer 10 out of 10, then why don't they certify?]

[FOLLOW-UP: How reliable is the certificate?]

5. What do the customers usually consider important when making their decision to buy product? How do you distinguish your product against others?

[FOLLOW-UP: How important is it for your customer to know how fresh in the product you sell?]

6. Do you think that the demand for the food safety has changed over the last five years?
7. What kind of measures do you usually take to ensure your products are safe? (Especially dairy products)
8. Whose responsibility is to inform producers about food safety measures/legislation/regulations/obligations?

[FOLLOW-UP: How do you get the information about food safety?]

[FOLLOW-UP: How would you like to learn more about food safety issues or about how to ensure that food is safe?]

9. What has been the main challenge with selling home made products – this case dairy products and beef? What is the major obstacle?
10. Who are your competitors? What do you do to compete with them? What should be done to help you become more competitive and who should help you with that?
11. Can hygiene be improved and who should help you with that?

Section 3: Legal Rights

12. Let's imagine the following scenario: You sell some meet / dairy product and the customer after buying the product realizes that it is contaminated (or got sick). What would you do is the customer brings back the product to you?
13. Who is responsible for the safety of food in the market, in the shop; individual retailer?
14. Where did you learn how to produce or store the dairy and meat products properly?
15. Are you aware of the law on food safety and quality? If yes, what is expected impact on you, once its relevant clauses are enforced? How will you prepare for that?

[INTERVIEWER NOTE – follow up: no direct impact because the law is inapplicable to small producers; indirect impact due to supermarkets imposing requirements towards their suppliers].

Retailers Interview Guide

1. How long have you been selling dairy/meat products?
2. Where do you usually get your products from?
3. How do you select source?

[FOLLOW-UP: site-visits, supporting documentation; vet checking, lab, check?]

Do you usually buy from the same source? Do you request for the certificate? Is their certificate reliable?

4. Have you gained regular customers for dairy and meat products that come back to your place for the same product? Why do you think they come back?
5. What questions do they usually ask regarding the product [origin, fresh or not; tasty; price]? How often do you check whether the date of the product you sell has expired? What do you do with those expired products?
6. If a customer comes with a complaint, that s/he has got poisoned by the product purchased at your place, or if the product turned out to be contaminated, what do you do in that case?
7. Who is responsible for the safety of food once it gets delivered to your shop?

[FOLLOW-UP:

- *Government*
- *Ministry of Agriculture*
- *Shop*
- *Producer/Processor/Manufacturer*
- *Farmer (producer of raw materials)*
- *Purchaser]*

8. Do you usually get any specific requirements from the producers regarding food safety assurance? (storage conditions, control expiry dates, labeling – indication producer details)
9. What are the hygienic measures that you apply in order to ensure the food you sell is safe?

[FOLLOW-UP: According to your observation, how do people usually choose their dairy/meat product? Have purchasing requirements changed over the last five years?]

[FOLLOW-UP: Who are the most demanding customers? [Gender, financial status, age].

[FOLLOW-UP: How do you find out about purchasing behavior and demands of your customers? How do you adjust your behavior to changing demands?]

10. What are the mechanisms receiving and responding/reacting to customer complaints regarding food safety (if any)?
11. Are you aware of any current/pending laws/legal obligations or regulations concerning the safety/hygiene of food? If yes, tell us about it.