

Friday, December 03, 2010

Food Safety in Georgia: views from retailers, producers and consumers in Tbilisi and Samtskhe-Javakheti

What do consumers in Tbilisi and Samtskhe-Javakheti think about food safety and hygiene of dairy and meat products in Georgia? What are their purchasing habits and how do they choose place and product? Are the consumers aware of their rights and responsibilities? How do producers and retailers understand consumer demands and how do they respond to those demands?



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 (CRRC), in cooperation with Mercy Corps and GDCI, undertook a study on what drives consumer preferences in the meat and dairy sub-sectors in Georgia.

This study included 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.

A final report (in English) and a summary in a PowerPoint format (in Georgian) are available at the CRRC [website](#).