

## What nudges consumers towards organic food? A lab-in-the-field experiment in Bolivia

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Expanding the demand for organic food in developing countries, especially in local markets frequently used by middle and low-income families, is an objective to improve the diets for these consumers and support smallholders. To determine how best to encourage the purchase of organic food, we implemented a novel framed field experiment to identify which messages are the most effective in promoting the substitution of conventional (non-organic) food for more organic food in street markets in Cochabamba, Bolivia. We set up a small stall exclusively for the experiment, where participants (local consumers) could select organic and conventional (non-organic) food. The first treatment only emphasized the physical appearance and the place of origin of the available options presented in the stall, organic and conventional. This first message played the role of a placebo treatment. The second treatment explained and showed a color scale (i.e., traffic light scheme), which rated foods by their proximity to organic production standards. The three remaining treatments also used the color scale. Still, they added messages that stressed the negative consequences of consuming conventional foods on the health (treatment 3), the environment (treatment 4), or both (treatment 5).

Our outcome of interest was the average basket's organic score. The most effective treatment was treatment 5, which increased the organic score by 17.35 percentage point above the placebo treatment. However, most of the effect came from the color scale alone; health and environmental messages had a mild contribution. Further, we found that socio-demographic characteristics could change the effectiveness of the treatments. Consumers with young children and without prior knowledge of organic food responded more to the color scale with respect to the other treatments. On the other hand, the health and environmental messages mattered the most for the most educated people, especially those with healthier habits. The color scale was as effective as the placebo treatment for this group, suggesting they may use origin and appearance as thumb rules to identify organic food when not labeled.

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