PRACTICE ABSTRACT № 1

Using Q-methodology for assessing the potential of product labels to communicate their positive impacts on ecosystem services in agricultural production

Product labels are used as a means to inform consumers about the various dimensions of food production, processing and distribution in order to allow them to make informed food choices in line with their values and preferences. So far, it has not been investigated how labels can be used to stimulate the provision of ecosystem services along the value chain by informing consumers about more environmentally beneficial agricultural production practices.

Q-methodology is a powerful interview-based approach combining quantitative and qualitative elements to reveal subjectivity in values and preferences. It is applied to elicit different stakeholders' perceptions which can inform label design. In the Contracts2.0 project, Q-interviews will be conducted in Germany, Spain and Poland with food producers, retailers and organic food associations to gain their expert knowledge. The exploratory interviews will build the basis for a bigger and country-wide consumer survey to broadly assess consumer preferences for label design planned for.

Q-interviews are commonly conducted face-to-face and in person. However, due to COVID-19 related meeting restrictions, we had to switch to phone-interviews, sending out the necessary materials in advance to participants, which works rather well so far!

Author(s)

Christoph Schulze

Margarethe Schneider

Contacts

christoph.schulze@zalf.de

Country/Region

Germany
Spain
Poland

Co-design of novel contract models for innovative agri-environmental-climate measures and for valorisation of environmental public goods

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The development and application of a Q-study follows a clear protocol to elicit stakeholders' perspectives. First, the research question is formulated. Based on the question, the so-called "concourse" is defined, covering the entire breadth of the debate, which conventionally is done by extensive literature review and expert interviews. This is followed by formulating concise opinion statements and selecting relevant stakeholders. The stakeholders are then approached in individual interviews, where they are asked to state their level of (dis)agreement to the pre-defined statements by sorting them into a grid provided by the researcher. Strong disagreement is shown by weighting a statement by -5, whereby strong agreement with 5, with the option to place each two cards on -5 and 5, three on -4 and 4 and so on.

Finally, all interviews are quantitatively compared through factor analysis and qualitatively interpreted through content analysis. The outcome are factor discourses, which each represent a unique social perspective. These perspectives provide information on consensus or conflicts concerning the topic.
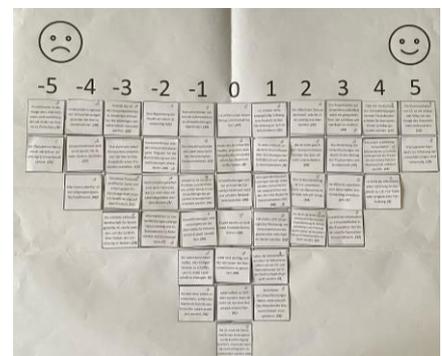
Top: Materials sent out to participants in advance to prepare for the Q-interview. Bottom: Statements sorted into the Q-grid.

ABOUT CONTRACTS2.0

May 2020

Contracts2.0 aims to develop innovative contract-based solutions, which increase the motivation for farmers and land managers to produce more environmental public goods and allow them to reconcile the profitability of their farms with sustainability objectives. To do so, 28 research and practice partners closely cooperate to co-design and evaluate the novel contracts. Lessons learned from successfully tested contracts will also provide support for policy makers on local, national and EU-Level.

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✉ contact@project-contracts20.eu

Research partners

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