

# Retailers' and consumers' perceptions about the Zero Residue stone fruit: trends and barriers in the European market

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## Context

- ❖ Nowadays, the risk of dietary exposure to pesticide residues in food is of much concern. Consumers demand high quality and healthy products without pesticides; therefore, supermarkets have reacted on this and force suppliers to adopt sustainable production methods
- ❖ The term Zero Residues (ZR) refers to an agricultural production method that aims to achieve products with levels of residues below the detectable analytical threshold (0,01 ppm)
- ❖ Contrary to "organic foods", for which only the use of natural pesticides and bio-pesticides is allowed, the ZR methodology relies on responsible pest management practices of natural and/or chemical pesticides to achieve a healthy final product.
- ❖ Co-financed by the LIFE+ program of the European Union, the ZERO RESIDUES project aims to improve the sustainability and quality of stone fruit production (cherry, peach, apricot, paraguayo and nectarine) to create a more competitive and healthier sector

## Objectives

The main goal of this research was to get some clues about the potential and limitations of the Zero Residue (ZR) stone fruit in the European market. A group of ten fruit experts (producers, retailers, suppliers...) and 480 consumers were interviewed to give their responses to the main question:

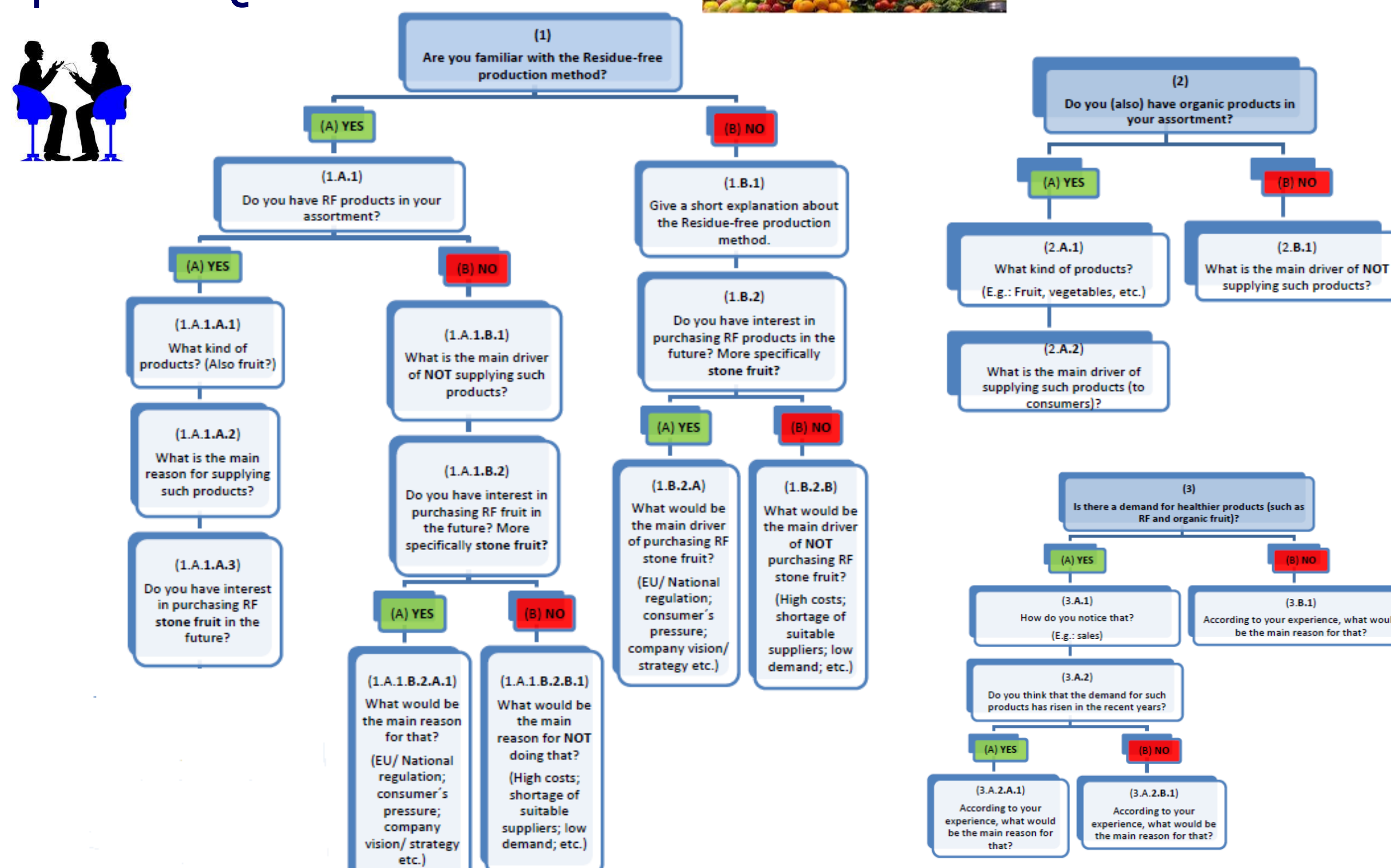
*"What is the perception of the introduction of ZR stone fruit in the European market for fruit purchasers and experts?"*

## Materials & Methods

- ❖ Field research carried out throughout ten interviews (both personal and telephonic) to experts (producers, distributors, retailers and agricultural consultants) between September 2013 and January 2014. Interviews lasted between 8 and 24 minutes
- ❖ The interviews were done in the "original" language of the respondents and subsequently translated to English
- ❖ Additionally, a group of 480 consumers were interviewed about their buying habits, assumptions and general beliefs towards the ZR stone fruits in comparison to conventional and organic products
- ❖ Consumers' interviews were made on the frame of the 2013 edition of "The Night of Researches" taking place in Zaragoza (Spain)



## Expert's Questionnaire



## RESULTS

### Summary of experts' and consumers' perceptions about ZR fruit

POSITIVE ASPECTS	NEGATIVE ASPECTS
Future of RF market perceived as positive	Consumers are not really aware about RF products
Trend towards residue-free is increasing	Perception problems when compared to conventional
Retailers want to avoid scandals	RF products perceived as expensive
Demand for safer products is growing	Buyers not willing to pay more for RF products
Retailers are requiring safer products from suppliers	RF production method not expected to be imposed
Purchasers and producers interested in RF fruit	
RF: good argument to become a preferred supplier	
EU regulation regarding pesticides expected to become stricter	

## CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

This study provides a first insight into the perception of consumers and retailers about stone fruits yielded by a new production methodology (ZR), half-way between the conventional and the organic. Some potential barriers to overcome and a number of trends should be taken into account:

- ❖ Nowadays, all experts interviewed agree that Zero Residue stone fruit can already work well as a business-to-business (B2B) argument, in the sense that a ZR certificate guarantees always lower risks to retailers as conventional fruit
- ❖ When selling the ZR stone fruit, the buyers should be properly informed about the ZR production method:
  - What it exactly means
  - What are the differences and similarities with other methods, such as organic
  - What are the advantages (and possible disadvantages)
- ❖ It should be made very clear that the price for the ZR stone fruit will remain the same as for the conventional fruit. That is of great importance, since residue-free products are initially perceived as expensive and buyers are not willing to pay more for such products
- ❖ The importance and need of a residue-free production method should be promoted in the stone fruit supply-chain
- ❖ The ZR production method is not expected to be imposed in the future by purchasers, as long as it is not imposed by law. That means that for the time being it will probably be treated as an alternative production method and not as a substitute of the conventional method.
- ❖ The trend towards residue-free is increasing, creating a good opportunity for producers with a ZR certificate to become a preferred fruit supplier. Possible arguments are:
  - Demand for safer products is growing
  - Food safety is of much concern nowadays
  - EU regulation regarding pesticides is expected to become stricter



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