

## ACCESS TO HEALTHY, CLEAN, AND FAIR FOOD – An exploratory study of the Maltese scenario

*President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society - Malta, Vincent Caruana*

- **Scale of activity:** Nationwide (Qualitative Research)
- **Actor/s:** Researchers, Producers, Consumers, Food vendor.
- **State of the activity:** finished 2018
- **Keywords.** access to food, healthy, clean, fair



### Summary

**Background:** Malta, like the rest of Mediterranean Europe, faces a dramatic shift away from the traditional Mediterranean diet as the global food industry has removed prior barriers to food choice while introducing new ones pertaining to an overall loss in the varieties of crop and livestock. As rates of obesity and other non-communicable diseases continue to rise, understanding accessibility towards a healthy diet becomes crucial. The terms 'healthy', 'clean', and 'fair' have been defined within the context of sustainability, given that food accessibility is ultimately tied to the wellbeing of both the individual and their various environments.

**Research question:** Can good quality, healthy and clean food be also fair, i.e. at a price accessible to low income consumers, without compromising on fair conditions and a decent pay for producers?

### Description of activities

**Data collection:** A qualitative research paradigm was chosen and conducted over four phases including semi-structured interviews of experts and stakeholders in the food sector, ethnographic market observations on consumer food choices, interactions with staff and family members, and individual physical behaviour, market interventions recording observations of consumers approaching the pop-up healthy foods stand run by a small catering, focus groups with 1/ farmers 2/ female consumers.

### Outlook

**Main findings:** Two theoretical concepts emerged from thematic analysis: internal (personal) factors and external (environmental) factors, which were further broken down into major themes: money, attitude, economy, education, information, and culture. The identified themes revealed several gaps in communication, including between farmers

and consumers, media and academics. Another gap exists between what professionals in the food sector believe on consumer food choice and the observed behaviour of the consumers themselves. Time is seen as a significant barrier to engaging with healthy, clean and fair foods, especially in the realm of home-cooked meals. Additional barriers may include the presence of information overload, information vacuums and anxiety, although some forms of observed anxiety are positive and lead to good decision-making in relation to food choice.

**Main recommendations:** More research needs to be done on the disconnect between consumer and farmers, common misperceptions and subjective ideas behind healthy, clean and fair foods, and whether information overload, information vacuums and anxiety pose a significant threat to food choice and accessibility. Several research-in-action studies proposed, which also aim to explore consumer food valuation. Given that the effectiveness and limitations of government food-related policies are not well understood, and that mere information-giving does not automatically lead to positive behaviour change among consumers, it is imperative that any future research and actions consider involving all pertinent players, integrate evaluation processes, and plan for sustained infrastructural, capacity-building and policy strategies.

The full report is available at: [link](#)

Further research in the area is envisaged during 2019.

### Source and contact

**Information gathered at:** [the 2nd Herb Gathering \(27-29 April 2018\), RO](#)

**Organisation:** President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society

**Contact:** Vincent Caruana

**E-mail:** [censuemergency\[@\]gmail.com](mailto:censuemergency[@]gmail.com)

**Website:** <http://pfws.org.mt/>

**Available at:** Forum Synergies' website -> [link](#).

