



## How COVID-19 is changing our shopping behaviour

Have you also cooked more frequently since the COVID-19 pandemic started and used healthy organic grocery much more often? Congratulations, you are completely in line with the trend, as a study of the German Agricultural Market Information Company (AMI) shows: Since the first lockdown from March 2020 to November 2020, private households' expenses in Germany for grocery such as organic meat and poultry increased by more than 50%. In contrast, the change in sales increase for the complete foods industry for both product categories was only at 20%. That is not only a positive development for the organic foods industry, animal welfare and environmental protection, but also for you and your mental health.

Scientists of the Australian University of Queensland and the University of Washington published a meta-analysis in the journal "The Lancet" in October 2021 stating that the number of mental illnesses has immensely increased worldwide due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, there were an estimated 53 million of cases of severe depressive disorders and 76 million of cases of anxiety disorders, all because of the COVID-19 crisis – making an increase by 28% and 26% respectively. For Germany, the scientists found a growth rate of almost 17% for both disorders. A recommendation often made by experts to prevent mental problems during the pandemic is to stick to a mindful and healthy diet. Many people seemed to follow this recommendation especially at the beginning of the pandemic, as the high increase in demand for organic grocery proves.

### COVID-19 makes more people choose organic grocery

In the past two years, restaurants and canteens were at least partially closed in Germany for several months. But people need to eat – whether there is a dangerous coronavirus out there or not. This is why it is not surprising that consumers spent around 13% more money for food in retail since the beginning of the lockdown in March 2020 until November 2020. For organic fresh produce, sales were about 24% higher on a year-on-year basis.

But why did the organic sector grow so much stronger than the total foods industry? The German Association of Organic Farmers, Food Processors, and Retailers (BÖLW) established market structures as one of the reasons:

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In 2019, out-of-home food made up around 27% of the total foods special market, while it was only 11% for the organic market. So this means that households invested the organic sales share of 27% at which they used to eat out of home, for example, in restaurants or canteens, in food to eat at home in 2020, opting more often for organic products. In addition, the pandemic made people even more demanding in terms of sustainability and healthy diet.

### **Healthy diet for a healthy mind**

“We are completely convinced that many people are concerned about the way they consume and eat especially in times of the pandemic. People wish to eat more regional, climate- and animal-friendly food,” young entrepreneurs Sarah Ehrich and Oliver Frank agree in an interview with sustainability blogger Julia Eckebrecht. The food journalist and the music manager for German stars such as Blumfeld, Tocotronic or Bela B. have made their dream of their own organic grocery store come true amid the COVID-19 pandemic and despite the economically uncertain times. In early 2021, they opened a convenience shop, whose range of products is actively influenced by members and customers. One of them is the already mentioned blogger, who does not use social media for reasons of mindfulness and writes the blog [junieundich.de](http://junieundich.de) about sustainable consumption and healthy lifestyle. “The fact that certain grocery has a proven positive impact on mental health is undisputed,” she says. “It stimulates production of neurotransmitters serotonin, dopamine and norepinephrine, which regulate our physical wellness, happiness, stress levels or mood. The messengers, which are particularly important in stressful times such as a pandemic, can mostly be found in plant-based foods, which are even more valuable for health when they are produced according to strict organic criteria.” This type of conscious diet seems to become increasingly popular and be one of the few positive effects of the rather terrible pandemic.

### **COVID-19 in 2022: How it will evolve**

We are currently in what might be the most critical phase of the whole COVID-19 pandemic and hope for it to end very soon. At this stage, the question pops up how things will evolve. The German Association of Organic Farmers, Food Processors, and Retailers thinks to know how: Since organic foods are associated by customers with animal welfare, health and

Nürnberg, Germany 15.–18.2.2022

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into organic into natural beauty

sustainability – and rightfully so –, organic foods will continue to be an important issue for people despite or even due to the pandemic. The future purchasing behaviour will depend on the purchasing power and the priorities of each household in addition to the aspects of sustainability mentioned. So let's hope we can soon prevail over the coronavirus not only to relief mental stress but to continue transforming the foods industry into one that will also be good for our grandchildren.

*BIOFACH 2022 – the world's leading exhibition for organic food – takes place from 15 to 18 February 2022 in the Nuremberg exhibition centre:  
[www.biofach.de](http://www.biofach.de)*

