

THE MILLENNIALS' PURCHASING BEHAVIORS AND HOME FOOD MANAGEMENT PATTERNS IN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABLE FOOD CONSUMPTION

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Abstract. This study investigates pro-environmental behaviors of the Millennials (Generation Y) in the area of grocery shopping, in-house food management and consumption. Data was collected using CATI methodology among 124 young people belonging to the Millennial generation (born between 1977 and 1994), residents of the eight largest cities of the Polish Mazowsze Region. Results demonstrated that consumers were not homogenous in terms of environmental consciousness, however, generally were aware of various negative consequences of in-house food consumption practices. Despite this, during grocery shopping the majority of respondents focused on the determinants typically linked to food (taste, quality, healthy eating), not their environmental and social values. Additionally, they did not express readiness to make their diets more sustainable and decrease consumption of meat (half of the group) and other animal products ($\frac{2}{3}$ of respondents). Millennials accept sustainable products and services if they are directly beneficial to them (fitness, health, economics, convenience) and suit their preferences and expectations.

Keywords: Millennials, consumer behavior, sustainable food consumption, food market, innovations

INTRODUCTION

The inevitable need to comply with the rules of sustainable development has become a major challenge for the whole food market (Reisch et al., 2013). As defined by FAO, sustainable diets are those with low environmental

impacts which contribute to food and nutrition security and to healthy life for present and future generations. Sustainable diets are protective and respectful of biodiversity and ecosystems, culturally acceptable, accessible, economically fair and affordable; nutritionally adequate, safe and healthy; while optimizing natural and human resources (FAO, 2011).

In the 2000s, many research and policymaking institutions have focused their work on implementing sustainable food consumption patterns and making consumer behavior more environmentally responsible. However, only a slow increase of awareness level was observed among the food chain actors. The Millennials (also referred to as Generation Y) demonstrate a specific set of behaviors in the area of nutrition and food purchasing habits. According to Topper (2015), a research agency, “Millennials” mean people born between 1977 and 1994 who currently are 22–39 years old. Another leading provider of global business intelligence and market analyses, Euromonitor International (2015), uses a slightly narrower age interval (people currently aged 26–35). Generation Y represents a sizable group, ranging from 11% of the population in ageing Japan, to 18% in more youthful markets, such as Vietnam and South Africa, or even 31% in extreme cases such as the UAE where a large group of working age expats reside. The millennial population is the highest in India, at 209 million, followed by China at 193 million, and the US, at 43 million. The author’s own calculations based on the

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Demographic Yearbook of Poland 2016 (GUS, 2016) demonstrate that there are around 10.45 million Millennials in Poland, representing 27% of the population according to Topper definition, and 6.75 million (18%) according to Euromonitor International.

For many young adults, health and food freshness have become priorities. Whether at home or out and about, they follow a “gourmet” way of thinking: they enjoy cooking, do not trust big producers, drive the immediate consumption trend and use different channels of food sales (Despain, 2016; Sloan, 2015; Topper, 2015). According to research, Millennials develop new solutions that increase the availability of fresh, local, natural and unprocessed (or slightly processed) products. They also search for foods that are ethnical, organic and which fulfill social and environmental standards (Verain et al., 2015). It remains crucial to understand the factors that determine the consumption patterns of Polish urban Millennials and to find out if they are ready to purchase products out of concern for the growing environmental and health challenges.

FOOD MARKET INNOVATIONS IN SUPPORT OF SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION

For a growing number of consumers, natural, healthy and attentive nutrition and the elimination of processed products from their diets are an important part of their lifestyle. In response, other food chain actors introduce innovative products and new distribution options.

These new consumer needs are being noted by producers and are becoming an incentive to introduce innovative products addressing those needs. Global companies undertake reformulation activities and increase the share of natural products with improved nutrient profiles. The market offer of certified products compliant with global standards such as Fair Trade, Rainforest Alliance, MSC or EU quality assurance schemes is also expanding.

As shown by the analysis of the Polish market, nearly all industry sectors have prepared some options for sustainability-oriented consumers trying to replace meat with protein-rich vegetal products, such as pulses, groats and other whole-grain products, nuts and seeds. In the case of the cereal market, innovation has taken place through the revitalization of ancient grains (amaranth, millet, quinoa, sorghum, teff) and old varieties of wheat

(spelt, emmer, kamut, einkorn), with no or low levels of gluten and more minerals than common cereals. In the case of the breakfast cereals market, new products such as goji berry, acai berry, blueberry and mulberry (referred to as superfruits) have been introduced. While offering smaller quantities of sweet additives and more health-promoting ingredients, they are less processed and less crunchy. Also, there are granola products with such ingredients as inulin, beta-glucan and omega-3 fatty acids. On the sweet and salty snacks market, innovations have emerged in the form of super bars, rich in protein, complex carbohydrates, fruits (incl. superfruits), nuts and seeds, sweetened with natural honey or stevia, strengthened with vitamins and healthy minerals. On the oils' market, unconventional raw materials are being used, such as pumpkin seeds, nuts (hazelnuts, walnuts, macadamia, pine, coconuts), cedar, avocado, rice and safflower.

In Poland, according to a forecast by Euromonitor International, the value of gluten-free products' market in 2016 will amount to PLN 121.9 million which is 23% more than in 2010. Globally, the market has increased by almost 75% (Szczepańska, 2016). What needs to be noted is that such products are sold both by wholesalers and catering businesses, including hotels and other tourist facilities. Last but not least, an important enhancement of the product range is noticeable in the legumes market, including several varieties of beans, lentils, chickpeas, broad beans and ready-to-eat products such as hummus, bean brownies and cupcakes, sold in stores and catering outlets together with other components of Arabic or Indian cuisines (such as falafel or dhal).

Consistent with the sustainable diet concept, the so called “breakfast markets” and “bio bazaars” are becoming increasingly popular in big Polish cities such as Warsaw (Żoliborz and Fabryka Norblina), Katowice (Huta Baildon) and Gdańsk (Młode Miasto). Local food systems and short supply chains are another sustainable innovation in the distribution of food. They can be organized as direct sales by individuals, collective direct sales or partnerships. An interesting example of such distribution is Grupa Odrolnika, a local farmers association active in Rzuchowa, located in Dunajec-Biała (Pogórze area, Małopolska region), which established a Local Product Center in 2015. The objectives of the Center include linking local producers and consumers who are interested in organic and traditional foods. Whether onsite or online, such products may be purchased directly from

the farmers at low prices (ENRD, 2012; OdRolnika, n.d.). In big cities, consumers establish food cooperatives in order to make joint purchases from proven small farmers and processors, or from foreign providers of local and traditional food.

Another innovation in support of the sustainable development concept is Pola, a mobile app (<https://www.pola-app.pl>) for tracing the product's origin. By scanning the bar code with a mobile device, the users may check if the producer is a Polish company, if the goods are manufactured in Poland and if they meet the sustainable diet principles. Yet another form of this lifestyle is eco-parenting, a microtrend that has recently emerged in Poland. This style of parenting involves feeding children natural, seasonal, unprocessed and preferably organic foods. Nutritarianism, an attitude based on the conviction that people should eat high-fiber, nutrient-dense foods that contain the highest amount of nutrients (including vitamins, minerals and bioactive compounds) per calorie, while avoiding calorically dense products, is also becoming increasingly popular in Poland.

PURPOSE AND METHODS

The purpose of the study was to identify if the behaviors of surveyed Millennials (Generation Y) in the area of grocery shopping and home food management promote sustainable food consumption.

Data was collected using a computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) system in January 2014. A sample of 600 participants was randomly selected from the eight largest cities (population over 50,000) of the Mazowsze region, based on the quota method. The sample was representative of the population of particular cities, including Warsaw.

The selection criterion for the presented study was the participants' year of birth. Data was included in the analysis if the respondent was born between 1977 and 1997. Hence, a valid sample of 124 participants was collected (Table 1).

The research tool was a standardized interview questionnaire. Participants were asked to evaluate the environmental impact of their home food consumption

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the population surveyed (N = 124)

Tabela 1. Charakterystyka społeczno-demograficzna badanej populacji (N = 124)

	Cluster 1 Skupienie 1 (%)	Cluster 2 Skupienie 2 (%)	Total – Ogółem		<i>p</i> -value* Wartość <i>p</i> *
			n	%	
Cluster size – Wielkość skupień	65	35	124	100	
Gender – Płeć					
male – mężczyźni	48	49	60	48	0.990
female – kobiety	52	51	64	52	
Age (years) – Wiek (lata)					
21–30	40	55	46	37	0.139
31–37	60	45	54	63	
Education level – Poziom wykształcenia					
secondary school and below średnie i niższe	29	45	41	33	0.62
bachelor's degree, master's degree and above wyższe wszystkich stopni	71	55	83	67	

* Significance level set at 5%.

Source: own research.

* Próg istotności na poziomie 5%.

Źródło: badanie własne.

practices (such as waste segregation, reducing food waste and losses, etc.) and to rate the importance of the 14 food choice determinants on a five-point interval scale ranging from “not important” (score = 1) to “very important” (score = 5). Six of them were related to behaviors characteristic of sustainable consumption. The respondents were also asked if they would be willing to change their diet by making it more sustainable. The reply options for this question were: “yes” (score = 1) or “no” (score = 2).

The data was analyzed with the use of IBM SPSS. Descriptive statistics were used to report percentage and mean values and make cross-tabulations with chi-square statistics in order to verify the equal distributions between categorical variables. A factor analysis based on the Varimax Method (with Kaiser’s normalization) was used as the clustering method. The K-means cluster

analysis, with initial cluster centers resulting from the hierarchical procedure, was performed in order to identify the consumer clusters, based on the respondents’ evaluation of the environmental impact of their home food consumption practices. As calculated in the analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) index and the Bartlett’s test index were 0.7 and 0.00, respectively, which suggests there was enough items for each factor.

RESULTS

Many Millennial respondents declare being aware of the fact that home food management and consumption have an adverse environmental impact (Fig. 1). Almost all of them (98% of total replies were “very important” or “quite important”; mean $\bar{x} = 4.8$) agreed that limiting food waste and losses as well as segregation of waste

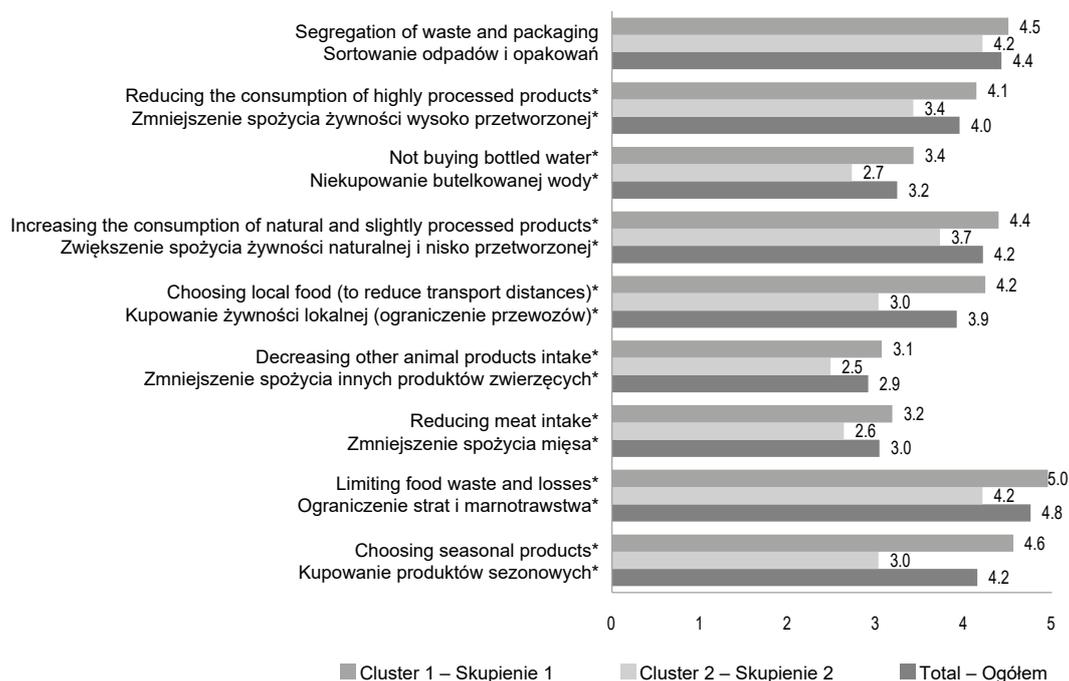


Fig. 1. The respondents’ assessment of the environmental impact of their home food consumption practices (mean values using a 5-grade scale, with 1 as “not important” and 5 as “very important”)

*Denotes statistical significance at 5%.

Source: own research.

Rys. 1. Ocena oddziaływania na środowisko zachowań związanych z konsumpcją żywności w gospodarstwach domowych (średnie w 5-pkt. skali, gdzie 1 – „nieważne”, 5 – „bardzo ważne”)

*Oznacza istotność statystyczną na poziomie 5%.

Źródło: badanie własne.

and packaging (91%, $\bar{x} = 4.4$) has a strong effect on environmental protection. Slightly less of them believed the following behaviors to be “very important” or “quite important” for the welfare of the environment:

- choosing seasonal food (87%, $\bar{x} = 4.2$)
- increasing the consumption of natural and slightly processed products (85%, $\bar{x} = 4.2$)
- purchasing local food in order to reduce transport distances (77%, $\bar{x} = 3.9$)
- reducing the consumption of highly processed products (73%, $\bar{x} = 4.0$).

The lowest awareness of environmental impacts was reported in the case of the following actions: reducing meat intake (44%, $\bar{x} = 3.0$), reducing the intake of other animal products (39%, $\bar{x} = 2.9$) and not buying bottled water (51%, $\bar{x} = 3.2$).

However, these results slightly differ by gender and age group. Women were more aware of the negative environmental impact of highly processed products ($p = 0.007$), meat ($p = 0.01$) and animal products consumption ($p = 0.037$). Those aged 31–37 knew more of how important it is to buy local food in order to reduce their environmental footprint, unlike younger respondents (21–30 years old). Surprisingly, the level of education did not influence the respondents' awareness of the environmental impact of their home food consumption practices.

As the abovementioned subjects were grouped by environmental awareness, the majority of them (65%, defined as “Cluster 1”) were more eco-conscious in terms of home food consumption practices.

Most of the Millennials in this cluster (with the total share of “very important” or “quite important” ratings ranging from 100% to 80%) declared that buying seasonal products ($\bar{x} = 4.6$; $p = 0.00$), reducing food waste and losses ($\bar{x} = 5.0$; $p = 0.00$), purchasing local food in order to limit transport distances ($\bar{x} = 4.2$; $p = 0.00$) as well as increasing the consumption of natural and slightly processed food ($\bar{x} = 4.4$; $p = 0.00$) and decreasing the consumption of highly processed products ($\bar{x} = 4.2$; $p = 0.01$) leads to the reduction of home food management's adverse environmental impact. In this cluster, there were more respondents than in cluster 2 (the less environmentally aware) claiming that such behaviors as not buying bottled water ($\bar{x} = 3.4$; $p = 0.014$) and decreasing the consumption of other animal products ($\bar{x} = 3.2$; $p = 0.038$) are “very important” or “quite important” for the environment. Note also that the relatively low mean

values of grades attributed to these behaviors suggest that consumers are not aware that animal production involves high greenhouse gas emissions and contributes to climate change.

Both consumer segments were highly aware of the need to recycle and segregate waste (the share of “very important” and “quite important” replies was beyond 90%; $\bar{x} = 4.5$ and 4.2; $p = 0.124$). This could be explained by universal education regarding these matters and by economical aspects.

In order to determine to what extent does the environmental awareness in the area of home food management affect the choice of food, the respondents were asked to identify the criteria they find important when grocery shopping (Fig. 2). The data collected shows that the most important determinants of choice (the share of “very important” and “quite important” replies ranged from 100% to 90%) were the taste, food quality, healthy diet, and food safety. A high percentage (85%) of the Millennials covered by this study also considered the prices to be “very important” or “quite important.” This confirms that Generation Y consumers, though environmentally aware, make their purchasing decisions based on typical criteria of food choice while not being strongly preoccupied with environmental issues. On the other hand, it should be recognized that numerous respondents believed the following four factors involved in environmentally-friendly attitudes to be “very important” or “quite important”: environmental protection (80%), cultivation methods, animal breeding and food processing (79%), organic production (65%) and the ability to return or recycle packaging (63%). Also, many respondents recognized the importance of other responsible purchasing behaviors: 83% try to choose local/Polish food (in order to support domestic producers), 76% check whether ethical standards are complied with in the food chain. Despite high levels of declared environmental awareness, only 60% of the group admitted that buying local/Polish food in order to limit transport distances was “very important” or “quite important” for them. When shopping, half of the group surveyed take into account the information on compliance with other standards (for example, fish originating from sustainable fisheries) and pay attention to quality assurance certificates specified on the packaging (PDO, PGI, TSG, etc.). This suggests that, in general, the surveyed group of Millennials do not pay much attention to labels on the food products.

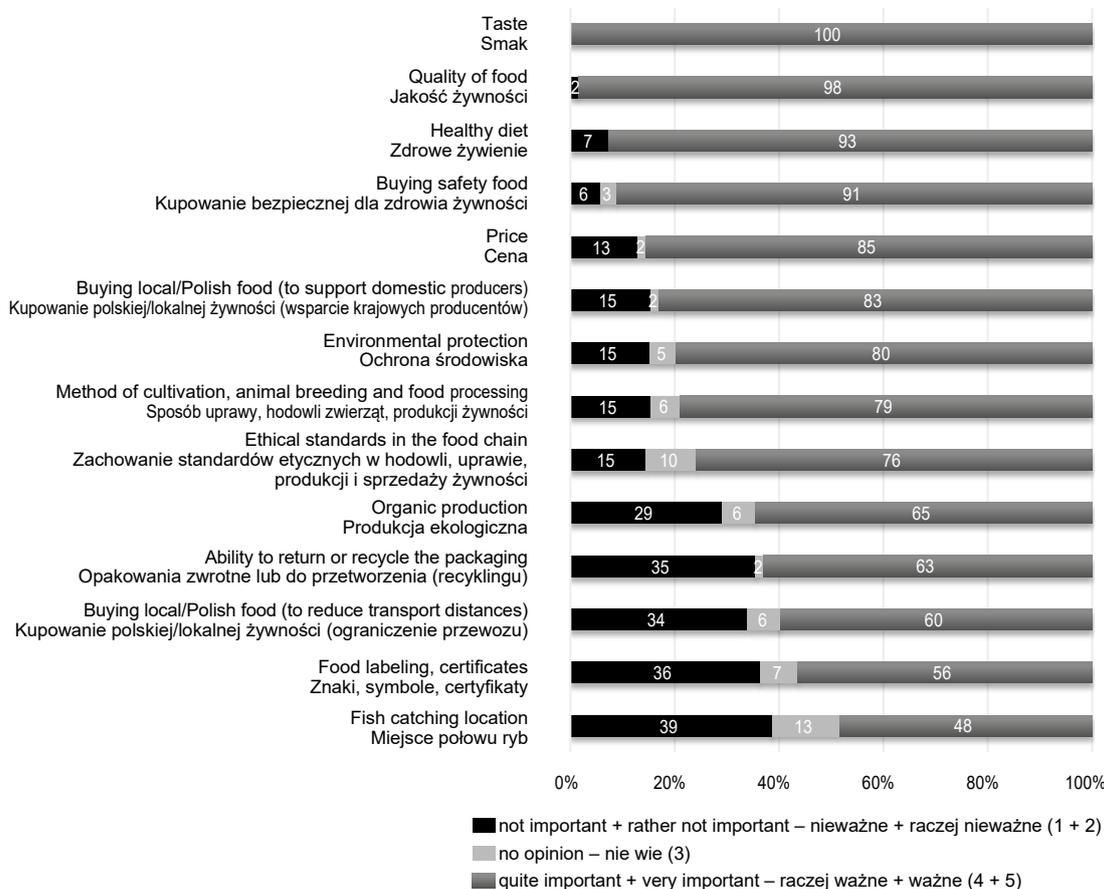


Fig. 2. Factors affecting the consumers' food choice

Source: own research.

Rys. 2. Czynniki wyboru żywności podczas zakupów
Źródło: badanie własne.

As shown by data analysis, the importance of food choice determinants depends on the respondent's gender, age and education level. Women declared to perform a more thorough selection process when shopping and to pay more attention to: healthy diet (\bar{x} for women: 4.4; \bar{x} for men: 4.2; $p = 0.049$); price (\bar{x} for women: 4.3; \bar{x} for men: 3.8; $p = 0.016$); certificate labels (\bar{x} : 3.5 and 3.0; $p = 0.016$); fish catching location (\bar{x} : 3.5 and 2.9; $p = 0.025$) and ethical standards in the food chain (\bar{x} : 4.1 and 3.7; $p = 0.040$).

Among older Millennials (31–37 year-old), more consumers were willing to choose food products based on such criteria as: local/Polish origin (the mean for respondents aged 31–37 was 4.3; for respondents aged

20–30: 3.8; $p = 0.00$); environmental protection ($\bar{x} = 4.2$ and 3.5; $p = 0.00$); method of cultivation, animal breeding and food processing ($\bar{x} = 4.1$ and 3.6; $p = 0.00$), observance of ethical standards in the food chain ($\bar{x} = 4.1$ and 3.7; $p = 0.040$), ability to recycle or return the packaging ($\bar{x} = 3.7$ and 3.0; $p = 0.00$), fish catching location ($\bar{x} = 3.7$ and 2.6; $p = 0.00$) and organic production ($\bar{x} = 3.6$ and 3.1; $p = 0.00$). In comparison, younger consumers (aged 21–30) paid more attention to the taste of products, the main determinant of their food choices (\bar{x} for the group of 21–30 year-old: 4.9; for the group of 31–37 year-old: 4.7; $p = 0.00$). Compared to high school graduates or consumers with lower education levels, respondents with higher education levels pay much more

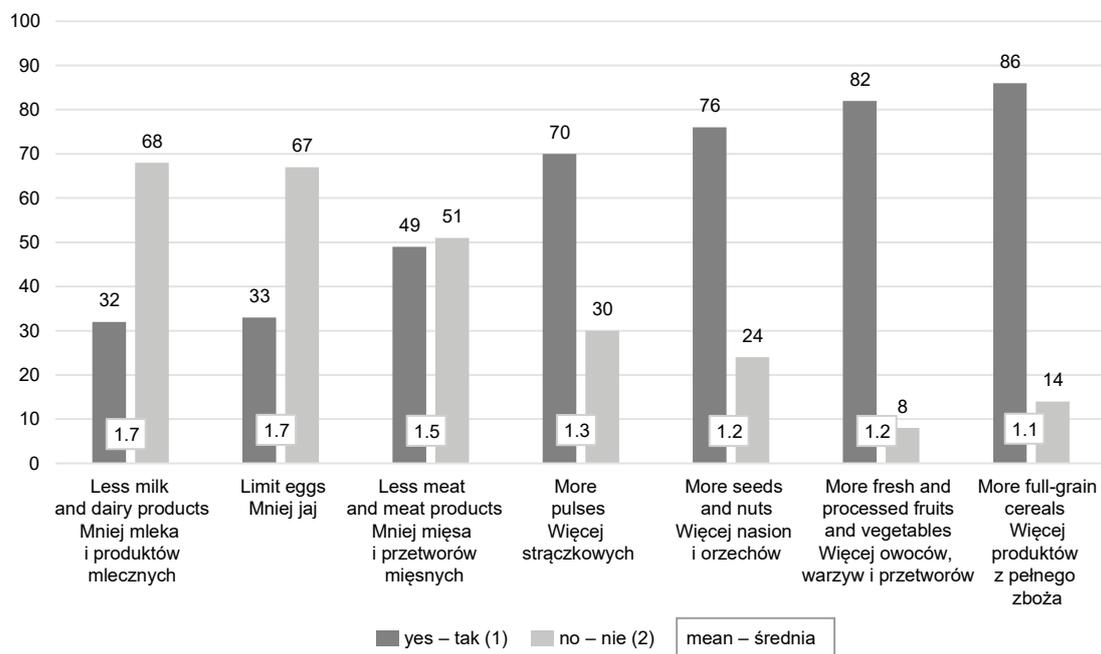


Fig. 3. Consumers' readiness to change their eating habits by moving towards a more sustainable diet
Source: own research.

Rys. 3. Gotowość zmiany sposobu żywienia na bardziej zrównoważony
Źródło: badanie własne.

attention to purchasing food that is safe for their health ($\bar{x} = 4.5$ and 4.1 ; $p = 0.047$).

The cluster analysis of the identified consumer segments showed that key determinants of food choice such as taste, product quality and price, and healthy diets are important for both of them and no statistically significant differences exist between the two. However, respondents from the “more eco-conscious” Cluster 1 paid more attention to sustainable behaviors, including buying local/Polish food (reducing transport distances) and taking environmental protection into consideration.

Respondents were asked to declare if they were ready to change their eating habits and move towards a more sustainable diet because of the need to protect the environment (Fig. 3). Most of the Millennials surveyed were ready to increase their consumption of vegetable products; 80% of them declared to be ready to enhance their diet with whole grain products as well as with fresh and processed fruit and vegetables. A slightly smaller percentage admitted that they would increase

their consumption of seeds and nuts (76%) and the use of legumes in their meals (70%).

On the other hand, it is clear that most of the consumers (about 2/3 of the sample) were not willing to reduce their milk, dairy products and egg consumption levels. Half of the group surveyed were not ready to reduce the quantities of meat and meat products in their everyday diet although breeding and meat processing are a great burden for the environment. These results are consistent with those obtained by other authors (Rothgerber, 2014; Dagevos and Voordouw, 2013). The readiness to change diets varies by gender and education level. Readiness to reduce the consumption of meat (\bar{x} for women: 1.3; \bar{x} for men: 1.8; $p = 0.000$) and meat products (\bar{x} for women: 1.6; \bar{x} for men: 1.8; $p = 0.025$) was more frequently declared by women. Reluctance to reduce egg consumption was declared more often by respondents with higher education levels than by less educated respondents (\bar{x} for higher education 1.7; other education levels: 1.5; $p = 0.040$). Note also that the environmental awareness of Millennials covered by this study did not

have a statistically significant impact on the readiness to change their eating patterns and make their diets more sustainable.

FINAL REMARKS AND CONCLUSIONS

The analysis showed that the Millennials (Generation Y) surveyed strongly believe that responsible consumer behavior on the food market and responsible home food management are a way to protect the environment. This concept and those needs are known to and supported by most of the respondents. At the same time, all activities which, while being beneficial to the environment, can improve the respondents' own financial situation and result in savings (due to reduced waste, losses, cheaper transport) or health improvement (due to consumption of more natural, seasonal and less processed products) are seen as important.

It can be assumed that if environmentally-friendly behaviors were not related to personal benefits, young consumers would pay more attention to the determinants which are more advantageous to them, e.g. better ease of use, as in the case of bottled water purchase. This attitude is more important among men and the younger Millennials (21–30 year old).

In practice, irrespective of the declared level of environmental awareness in the home food management practices, most of the Millennials surveyed made their shopping decisions based on the product's elementary features and functionality while not taking into consideration its ecological or social values. Millennials in big Mazovian cities buy food primarily in order to address their own needs rather than to protect the environment. As they look at the quality, price and additional benefits, they can be referred to as pragmatic or smart shoppers. Also, as shown by the results of this study, a gap exists between the respondents' environmental declarations and their readiness to change their habits, especially as regards animal products, considered to be nutritionally valuable. This finding can be generalized across the whole urban Polish population. As pointed out by Vogel (2005), consumers will buy a greener product only "if it does not cost more, comes from a brand they know and trust, can be purchased at stores where they already shop, does not require a significant change in habits to use, and has at least the same level of quality, performance, and endurance as the less-green alternative."

It appears that the Millennials covered by this study want to be seen as modern, environmentally aware and responsible food consumers. Although they declare to find it important how food is produced, they fail to notice relevant quality labels/certificates and do not ask themselves whether the food packaging is recyclable. The declarations on their readiness to shift towards more sustainable eating habits are ambiguous. Generation Y consumers would readily increase their consumption of plant-derived products without reducing the intake of animal products. The declared changes would result in increasing food consumption, which is an unfavorable development from the environmental and health perspective. The consumers' reluctance to reduce the share of animal products in their diets is a significant barrier for implementing the principles of sustainable food consumption.

It could be concluded that the Millennials accept sustainable products and services if resulting in direct benefits (fitness, health, economic profits, convenience) and suitable for their diverse preferences and expectations. Innovative products and services developed and marketed in line with sustainable consumption rules may encourage Millennials to make a shift in their food choices towards more sustainable diets. However, as they seem to be rather "traditional" in their way of perceiving food products, it is important to strengthen the environmental message. This can be done with marketing techniques emphasizing that consuming such products is beneficial not only to the environment but also to the buyers themselves.

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ZACHOWANIA ZAKUPOWE I GOSPODAROWANIE ŻYWNOŚCIĄ W DOMACH POKOLENIA MILLENNIALSÓW W KONTEKŚCIE ZRÓWNOWAŻONEJ KONSUMPCJI

Streszczenie. Prezentowane badania dotyczyły środowiskowych zachowań konsumentów z pokolenia Millenialsów (pokolenia Y) przy zakupach żywności, gospodarowaniu nią w domach i konsumpcji. Dane zebrano metodą CATI wśród 124 młodych osób, urodzonych między 1977 a 1994 rokiem, mieszkających w ośmiu największych miastach województwa mazowieckiego. Badania wykazały, że choć respondenci charakteryzowali się różnym poziomem świadomości środowiskowej, na ogół zdawali sobie sprawę z różnych negatywnych konsekwencji postępowania z żywnością w domach i jej konsumpcji na środowisko naturalne. Mimo tego podczas zakupów spożywczych większość kierowała się determinantami typowymi dla produktów żywnościowych, takimi jak smak, jakość, oddziaływanie prozdrowotne, a nie względami środowiskowymi czy społecznymi. Respondenci ponadto nie wyrazili gotowości zmiany sposobu żywienia na bardziej zrównoważony, zarówno przez ograniczenie spożycia mięsa (połowa grupy), jak i innych produktów zwierzęcych (2/3 badanych). Millenialszi zadeklarowali akceptację dla produktów i usług właściwych dla zrównoważonej konsumpcji, o ile te oznaczałyby dla nich bezpośrednie korzyści (lepsza kondycja fizyczna, zdrowie, oszczędność, wygoda) oraz odpowiadałyby ich preferencjom i oczekiwaniom.

Słowa kluczowe: Millenialszi, zachowania konsumentów, zrównoważona konsumpcja żywności, rynek żywności, innowacje

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