CONSUMER AWARENESS, PERCEIVED BARRIERS AND MARKET POTENTIAL OF AFRICAN CATFISH (*Clarias gariepinus*): EVIDENCE FROM A MULTI-COUNTRY SURVEY

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Background

African catfish *(Clarias gariepinus)* is a fast-growing and technologically attractive aquaculture species with considerable potential for further market development in Europe and neighbouring regions. Its biological characteristics, suitability for intensive farming systems and year-round production make it relevant for the diversification of aquaculture supply. However, the commercial success of African catfish depends not only on production efficiency, but also on consumer familiarity, perceived safety, trust in the product, market availability and acceptance of specific product forms. As a relatively unfamiliar species in many markets, African catfish may face barriers related to low awareness, limited retail visibility and uncertainty about its origin, sensory qualities and culinary use.

Objective

The objective of the study was to assess consumer awareness, market contact and purchase experience with African catfish across eight countries. The study also aimed to identify the main perceived barriers and purchase motivators, as well as preferred product forms. Particular attention was paid to whether limited demand results from actual product rejection or rather from low familiarity, insufficient availability and lack of consumer information.

Methods

A quantitative consumer survey was conducted using the CAWI method in October–November 2023 among adult consumers in Poland, Ireland, Greece, Spain, Lithuania, Romania, Serbia and Israel. Each national sample included approximately 1,000 respondents and was structured to reflect key sociodemographic characteristics, including age, gender, region and type of place of residence. The questionnaire covered previous awareness and purchase experience, factors that could encourage purchase, preferred product forms and reasons for reluctance. Data quality procedures included checks of completeness, logical consistency and correct functioning of questionnaire filters.

Main finding

African catfish appears to face primarily a market visibility and familiarity problem rather than strong consumer rejection. Across countries, many respondents had not encountered the product in shops or restaurants, while only a relatively small share declared previous purchase experience. At the same time, potential interest was associated with practical and trust-building factors, including attractive price, availability in regular shopping locations, convenient processing forms, information on culinary preparation, health benefits, origin and production method. This suggests that consumer reluctance may often reflect uncertainty and lack of exposure rather than a fixed negative attitude towards the species.

Conclusions

Market development strategies for African catfish should focus on increasing retail and food-service visibility, improving consumer recognition and communicating clear product benefits. Convenient formats, especially fresh fillets, smoked products and ready-to-use processed forms, may help reduce barriers to trial. Communication should address origin, production system, safety, culinary use and health-related attributes, while avoiding excessive technical detail. Overall, the results indicate latent market potential for African catfish, provided that the product is made more visible, understandable and easy to use for consumers.

Fig. 1 Awareness and purchase experience of African catfish by country

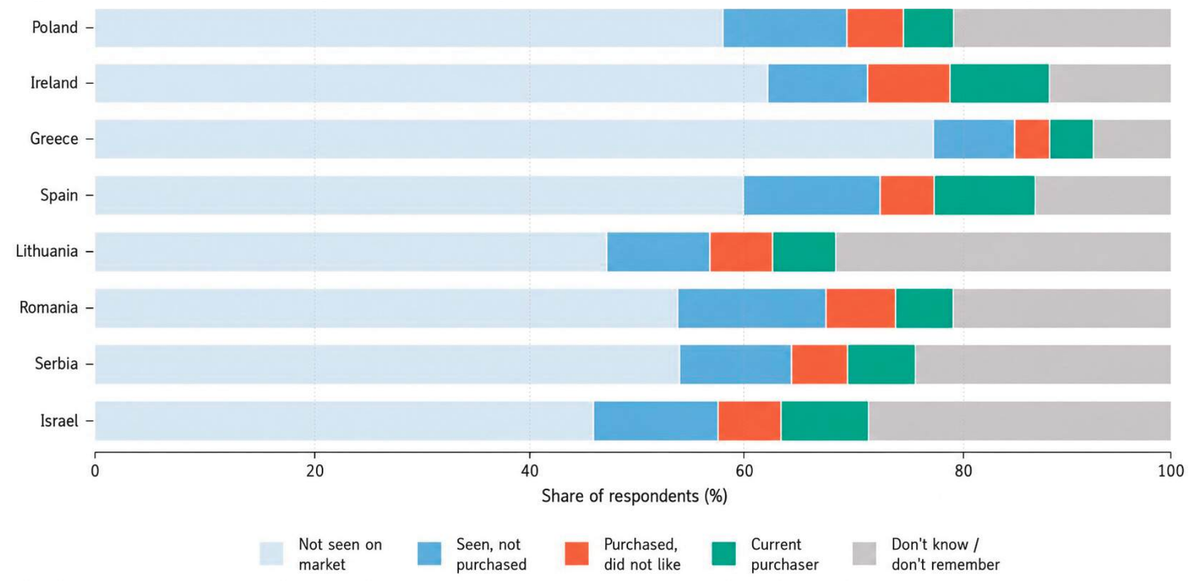


Fig. 2 Consumer motivators to buy African catfish by country

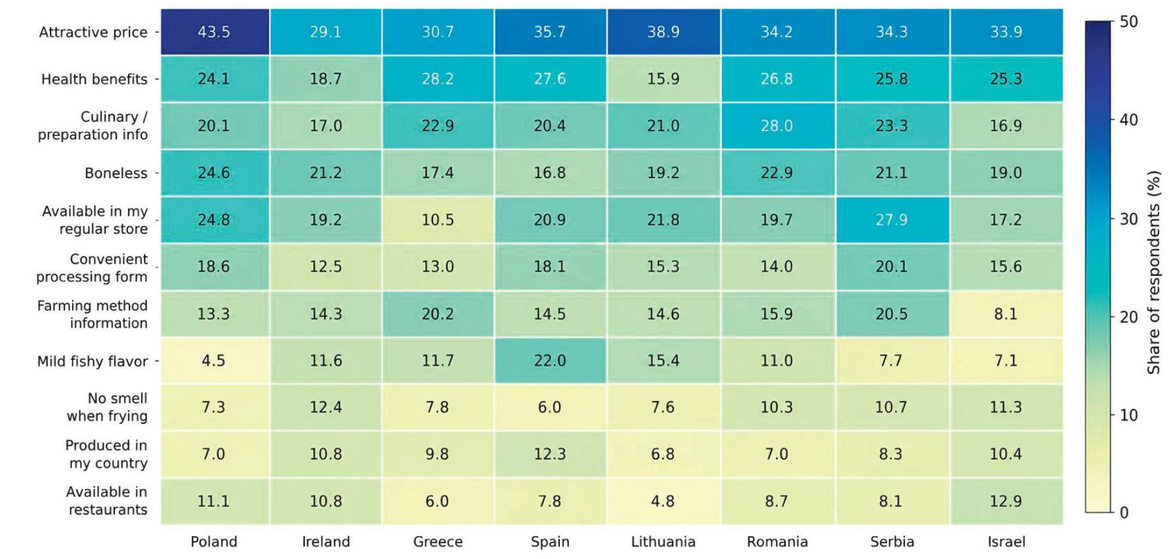


Fig. 3 Preferred African catfish product forms by country

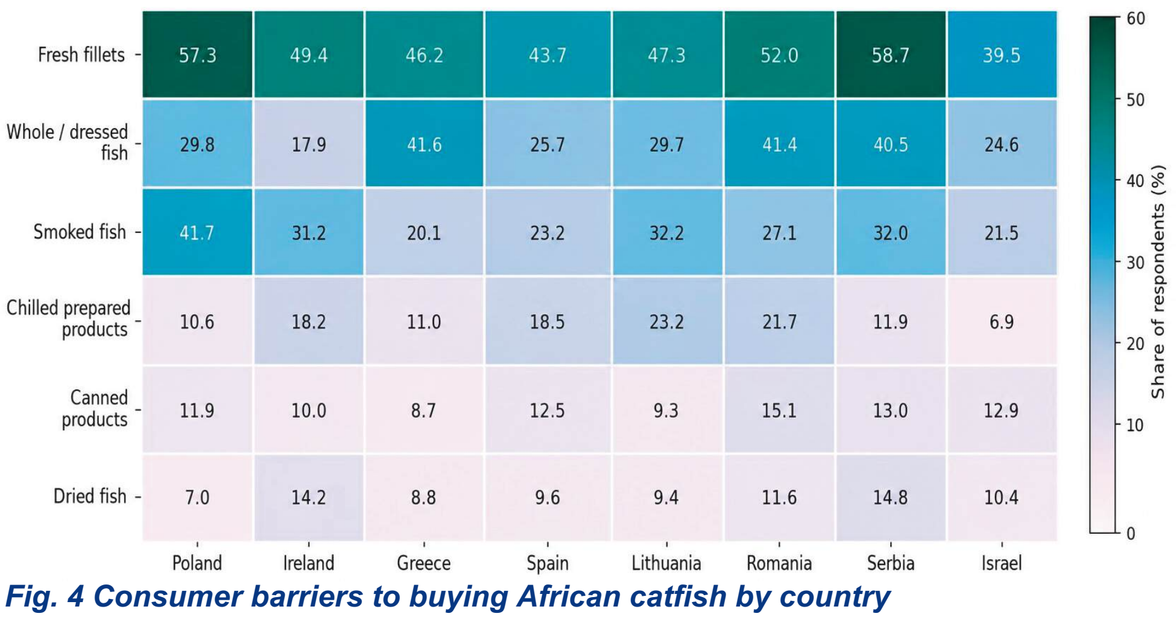


Fig. 4 Consumer barriers to buying African catfish by country

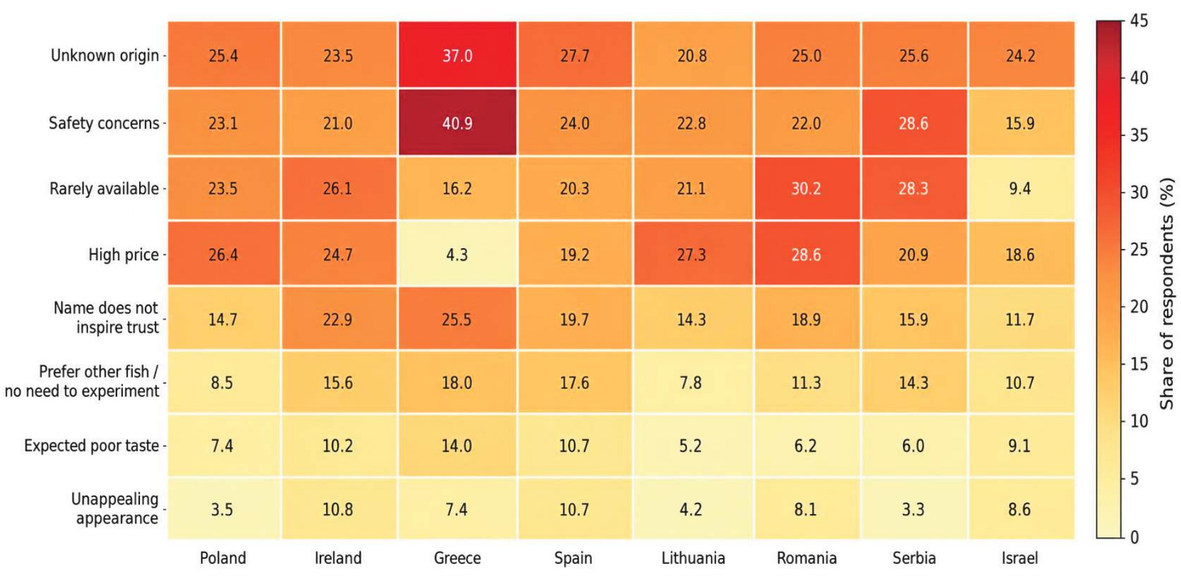


Fig. 5 Recommendation: Market pathway for African catfish

