



## Article

# The Role of Marketing in Shaping the Development of the Market of Organic Farming Products in Poland

Magdalena Sobocińska <sup>1,\*</sup>, Krystyna Mazurek-Łopacińska <sup>1</sup>, Stanisław Skowron <sup>2</sup>, Andrzej Graczyk <sup>3</sup> and Karol Kociszewski <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Marketing Research, Faculty of Management, Wrocław University of Economics and Business, 53-345 Wrocław, Poland; krystyna.mazurek-lopacinska@ue.wroc.pl

<sup>2</sup> Department of Strategy and Business Planning, Faculty of Management, Lublin University of Technology, 20-618 Lublin, Poland; s.skowron@pollub.pl

<sup>3</sup> Department of Ecological Economics, Faculty of Economics and Finance, Wrocław University of Economics and Business, 53-345 Wrocław, Poland; andrzej.graczyk@ue.wroc.pl (A.G.); karol.kociszewski@ue.wroc.pl (K.K.)

\* Correspondence: magdalena.sobocinska@ue.wroc.pl

**Abstract:** The natural environment is one of the areas of sustainable development. The implementation of the goals of sustainable development is associated with the creation of conditions supporting ecological behaviours as well as the greening of consumption. It cannot be ignored that the implementation of behavioural marketing concepts contributed to the development of excessive consumerism, whereas the use of marketing innovations by enterprises with high strategic potential and dominant market position often translated into shortening product life cycles. In this context, there arises a research question concerning the role that marketing has to perform nowadays, and the challenges to its concept, resulting from sustainable development. The paper is based on literature studies and the results of an empirical research that was performed on a sample of 140 entities shaping the offer of organic farming products in Poland. The study included both organic farming entities and entities dealing with the distribution of organic farming products in Poland. The goal of the paper is to show the role of marketing as a multi-paradigmatic concept in shaping the development of the market of organic farming products in Poland. The analysis of the research results aimed at identifying the reasons for introducing organic farming products by distributors into their offer, as well as showing the nature of the relationships between producers and distributors of organic farming products in Poland. The analysis of the research results shows that the relationships between producers and distributors of organic farming products in Poland are perceived by both parties as long-term and based on trust. Special attention is also paid to the hierarchy of factors stimulating the development of sales of organic farming products in Poland. Identification of stimulants for the development of the market of organic farming products indicates the great importance of marketing in this area because the main factors of development of this market are of marketing nature or are inherently related to marketing.

**Keywords:** marketing concepts; ecological marketing; green marketing; sustainable development; organic farming products; relationships between producers and distributors of organic farming products



**Citation:** Sobocińska, M.; Mazurek-Łopacińska, K.; Skowron, S.; Graczyk, A.; Kociszewski, K. The Role of Marketing in Shaping the Development of the Market of Organic Farming Products in Poland. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 130. <https://dx.doi.org/10.3390/su13010130>

Received: 28 November 2020

Accepted: 22 December 2020

Published: 25 December 2020

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## 1. Introduction

The pursuit of economic development is accompanied by the search for ways to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and the spread of low-carbon energy sources, the implementation of new production and distribution methods, as well as stimulating changes in lifestyle and consumption. The activity of market entities today should primarily respond to the challenges related to the care for the natural environment and human health. Respect-

ing these fundamental values is at the heart of the sustainable development strategy, the implementation of which requires adequate, coordinated actions of all economic entities [1].

Problems related to the condition of the natural environment and climate change therefore imply the emergence of new approaches to business and cause consumer awareness and responsible consumption to become increasingly important. They include many different forms of behaviour, reflected among others in the rejection of mass and excessive consumption, the lack of acceptance for products with a high negative impact on the natural environment as well as the preference for green products and products, the sale of which is also conducted for social purposes [2].

It is also inherently related to the RealFooding movement, which focuses on promoting a healthy diet, abandoning heavily processed foods and ensuring that the consumer has true and detailed information about the ingredients of the product [3,4]. Social media can be used to promote these values [5].

In the context of these challenges, a question arises about the role that marketing has to fulfil in terms of assumptions and principles of sustainable development, which is a process aimed at satisfying the aspirations of the current generation in a way that allows the implementation of the same aspirations for the next generations [6,7].

The scientific discourse in the field of marketing went through various development stages, among which distinguishing the research field and its formalisation, as well as the formation of the marketing paradigm, and then the fragmentation of the mainstream and the emergence of new concepts of marketing which should be indicated [8,9]. The genesis of marketing in terms of academic knowledge is associated with the development of publications on the sphere of distribution [10] and identifying it, as is the case in the first definition formulated by the American Marketing Association (AMA), an organisation having a significant impact on the development of marketing thought [11], taking actions related to the flow of goods and services in distribution channels.

When analysing the development of marketing, it should be noted that the concepts of marketing are models of marketing activity of market entities, which are expressed in the sphere of science and constitute the basis for the implementation of projects of various marketing solutions into business practice. The development of marketing concepts is expressed through the emergence of new, different from the case of the classic concept of marketing, methods of defining the entities, role and goals of marketing, as well as efficiency criteria, business model, marketing environment, resources and competences, as well as the place of marketing in business management concept [12]. New approaches to marketing result from the high volatility and complexity of the environment, and the growing role of the consumer on the market. The ongoing reevaluation in the sphere of the role of tangible and intangible resources of the enterprise, including marketing resources, expressed in the growing importance of the latter is also important.

The research field was defined, and the aim of the paper was formulated while recognising the research gap in light of the conducted literature studies concerning the approaches to the use of marketing by distributors of organic farming products in Poland, and the nature of their relationships with organic food producers.

The purpose of the paper is to show the role of marketing as a multi-paradigmatic category in shaping the development of the organic farming market in Poland. Special attention is devoted to the concepts of ecological marketing, green marketing, and sustainability marketing as well as their relations with strategic marketing and relationship marketing. The contribution to the theory and the reduction in the research gap results from the ascertainment that the surveyed distributors see marketing as an opportunity to shape the development of the market of organic farming products, but now they are closer to the assumptions of green marketing rather than to organic marketing. The formulated purpose of the paper is cognitive in nature, but its implementation allowed for the formulation of practical implications and indication of the need to shift the focus in the approach to marketing among the surveyed entities shaping the commercial offer in the field of organic

farming products in Poland, so that its application was more consistent with the concept of ecological marketing than it is now the case with the concept of green marketing.

The originality of the conducted research results from the fact that marketing and its significance in the development of the organic farming market in Poland are shown in the context of the multi-paradigmatic nature of marketing, and not a set of marketing tools. This aims to show the approach to the implementation of marketing concepts used by the surveyed entities shaping the offer of organic farming products in Poland.

It should be emphasised that the implementation of the assumptions of marketing concepts oriented on natural environment protection can be considered in terms of autotelic and instrumental values that support the achievement of business goals. Regardless of the premises for implementing these concepts, it is important that ecology is becoming a factor that integrates innovativeness and quality, and that taking into account environmental and social conditions at individual stages of managing customer value and contributing to the development of sustainable consumption is the essence of marketing in the context of implementing the principles of sustainable developments, even though this does not equally apply to all environmental marketing concepts.

The formulated goal of the paper required the implementation of a research procedure based on the literature studies and the implementation of empirical quantitative research, both among the producers and trade companies having organic farming products in their offer. The conducted empirical research was largely exploratory. The choice of the research method was affected by the nature of the formulated purpose of the research, and the selection of the research technique (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI)), and above all, by the respondents' specificity and the acceptability of this technique by managers and entrepreneurs [13]. Apart from the introduction, the structure of the paper includes the following parts: literature review, materials and methods, results of empirical research and discussion, as well as conclusions, that present the limitations of the conducted research procedure and directions of further research in the field of the issues discussed in the paper.

## 2. Literature Review

Taking into account the purpose of the paper, it should be emphasised that the development of marketing in the scientific dimension is evidenced by the emergence of many of its paradigms and concepts, including the classic concept of marketing, the concept of strategic marketing, relationship marketing, as well as marketing concepts oriented on natural environment protection, among which the concept of ecological marketing, the concept of green marketing and sustainability marketing should be indicated. In order to show the differences observed between individual concepts, it is necessary to present the assumptions of the classic concept of marketing. In the classic concept, significant distinguishing features of marketing include the pursuit of satisfying the needs of customers and creating their satisfaction, which provides the basis for achieving the company's goals [14]. The development of the classic concept of marketing can be seen in strategic marketing. The sources of inspiration providing the basis for the development of the strategic marketing concept are seen in strategic management, in M. Porter's competition model [15]. In this stream of considerations on the role of marketing, there is a belief that its use is one of the methods of competition. When comparing the primary concept of marketing and strategic marketing, it should be noted that, while in the case of the classic concept of marketing the goal is to satisfy the needs and satisfaction of buyers, in the concept of strategic marketing, the goal is to win the target market and gain a competitive advantage thanks to a properly designed strategy.

On the other hand, in the concept of relationship marketing, there has been a departure from the strategic way of thinking about the functioning of the company in terms of competition, typical of marketing, in favour of thinking about cooperation. Although this is accompanied by a return to the category of customer satisfaction in the marketing discourse, the classic concept of marketing cannot be equated with the concept of

relationship marketing, as these are two different paradigms. In relationship marketing, there is a change in the standpoint which is expressed in replacing thinking about marketing in terms of a single transaction with thinking about marketing in terms of creating and developing ties and partnership relations with market participants. Thus, loyalty, partnership, company ties with other entities forming the relationship network, as well as interactive communication and advanced knowledge about the client have been the distinguishing features of the concept of relationship marketing. At the same time, it should be added that the networks of relations are created between the company and its customers as well as suppliers, intermediaries, co-operators, competitors, and potential and current employees [16–18]. Marketing in relational approach is defined as the process of identifying and creating, as well as maintaining and strengthening long-term relationships with customers and other market participants in a profitable manner so that the goals of these participants are achieved [17]. There are many models, approaches and attitudes regarding relationship marketing. Their creators are represented, among others, by such authors as: E. Gummesson [19], E. R. Morgan, S. Hunt [20], M. Christopher, A. Payne, D. Ballantyne [16], P. Doyle [21]. It is typical of these models that they enrich the scientific discourse not only with the categories of the company's relations with customers, but also with relations with other entities operating within the supply chain. What is important in these relationships is not only the issue of their durability, but also the level of trust that they provide.

The existence of a large variety of research traditions, which concern both the conceptual area, theoretical assumptions, and the methods of conducting research is a characteristic tendency at the present stage of development. This also applies to the way of perceiving the role of marketing in terms of the principles of sustainable development and opportunities, and the motives of stimulation of ecologisation in the sphere of consumption. This means adopting an attitude towards the world which is expressed by consumption-related behaviour that is consistent with the principles of environmental protection [22]. Ecologisation is associated with the achievement of higher stages of consumption development. It is related to the transition from the post-Engel phase, in which Engel's law is no longer working, because the increase in income does not affect the level of spending on food, to the phase which is characterised by a relative increase in expenditure on food in conditions of income growth. This applies to buying certified organic food which is characterised by a relatively higher price than conventional food [23,24]. This results from the increase in spending on organic food, which is characterised by relatively higher prices than food that does not have organic certificates. Ecologisation of consumption manifests itself not only in the acquisition and consumption of ecological products, but also in the transition from ego-rationality to eco-rationality, economical, rational use of consumer goods, reducing or abandoning the consumption of goods that are characterised by a high absorption of non-renewable land resources, purchasing goods that do not generate a large amount of post-consumer waste, waste segregation and its recycling, extending knowledge in the field of environmental protection, active participation of buyers in organising cooperatives co-created by consumers and farmers, engaging in activities conducted by environmental movements, replacing car transport with cycling as well as using second-hand products and passing them on to other buyers [25]. Sharing economy and related consumption behaviours supporting efficient use of resources have great potential in implementing the concept of sustainable development [26].

Greening in the case of food consumption is also reflected in considering the so-called food miles, i.e., the distance the food travels before it reaches the consumer, in the process of making buying decisions, [27]. Reducing food miles leads to using less gasoline, means lower transportation costs, and it also facilitates keeping food fresh and nutritious. It allows for monitoring production as well as controlling where exactly the food comes from. The concept of food miles is analysed in the literature on the subject in terms of a wide range of determinants and entities involved in the food supply chain. In the discourse focused on this issue, the analyses are expanded from sustainable agricultural production

systems to food distribution and retail systems, in order to develop optimal solutions in the field of food transport that would well serve the implementation of the concept of sustainable development [28].

The application of a marketing approach which is based on the desire to meet the needs of buyers requires considering the specificity of behaviour of organic products consumers. The analysis of the literature shows that the consumers of organic products are a heterogeneous group in terms of demographics and behaviour [29]. The literature on the subject emphasises the role of ecological awareness as a factor motivating consumers towards pro-ecological behaviour. It is shaped in a complex process influenced by factors of various nature, including among others psychological determinants, social norms, state regulations, but also marketing activities [30,31]. A higher level of ecological awareness translates into greater involvement in purchasing ecological products. The frequency of purchasing organic food is correlated with environmental awareness, knowledge about organic food and an altruistic attitude [32].

However, it should be noted that although consumers often express positive attitudes towards sustainable development and ecological products and feel concerned about the condition of the natural environment, this does not always translate into their purchasing behaviours [33]. This is confirmed by the results of research concerning consumer behaviour from various countries, including Great Britain, Belgium, and Sweden [29,34–36]. This means that there is sometimes a gap called “green purchasing contradiction” between positive attitudes towards the environment and ecology, and the actual behaviour reflected in purchasing organic products. In this context, the role of marketing, the use of which should consequently contribute to reducing the identified discrepancy between attitudes and behaviours and translate into an increase in the share of purchases of organic products in total buying is revealed. Changes in understanding and meaning attributed to marketing in the cross-section of selected concepts are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Changes in understanding and meaning of marketing in cross-section of selected concepts.

Concept Type	Distinguishing Features and Ways of Interpretation i	Selected Authors
Classic marketing concept	<p>The following features are the marketing attributes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- creating the market, forecasting the demand</li> <li>- meeting customer needs and creating satisfaction</li> <li>- achieving the goal of the organisation and maximising profit</li> <li>- applying marketing instruments, including product development, pricing policy, as well as distribution and promotion</li> <li>- management process</li> </ul>	<p>C.I. Boveé, E.F.L. Brech, H. Davidson, P.F. Drucker, M.J. Etzel, P. Kotler, T. Levitt, W.J. Stanton, J.V. Thill, B.J. Walker</p>
Strategic marketing concept	<p>The elements that constitute the concept of strategic marketing include the follow:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- business entity management</li> <li>- competitive position</li> <li>- competitive advantage</li> <li>- competition</li> <li>- market opportunities and threats</li> <li>- strategy, marketing goals</li> <li>- target market and market segmentation</li> <li>- offer positioning, perception maps</li> <li>- achievement of market goals</li> <li>- market share as a marketing effect, and profit as the company’s primary goal</li> <li>- anticipating changes taking place in the enterprise and its environment</li> <li>- long-term management</li> </ul>	<p>D.F. Abell, H.I. Ansoff, R. Biggadike, J.D.W. Cravens, J.J. Lambin, G.J. Pearson, F.E. Webster</p>

Table 1. Cont.

Concept Type	Distinguishing Features and Ways of Interpretation i	Selected Authors
Relationship marketing concept	<p>The features that distinguish relationship marketing from other concepts include the following categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- maintaining and strengthening the relationship with the client</li> <li>- establishing relations</li> <li>- building partnership relations with market participants, including among others, customers, suppliers, influential institutions, potential and current employees</li> <li>- customer loyalty</li> <li>- costs of acquiring and retaining a client</li> <li>- quality and customer service</li> <li>- customer satisfaction, which determines the company's relationship with the buyer as a result of marketing</li> </ul>	D. Ballantyne, L.L. Berry, J. Capulsky, M. Christopher, C. Grönroos, E. Gummesson, A. Payne, M. Wolf
Ecological marketing concept, green marketing concept, sustainability marketing	<p>The discourse in the field of ecological marketing, green marketing and sustainability marketing is inherently related to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- sustainable development and the implementation of its goals</li> <li>- positive impact of marketing on the environment</li> <li>- environmental awareness of consumers and business</li> <li>- green consumers</li> <li>- creating environmentally friendly products</li> <li>- eco-labels</li> <li>- green advertising</li> </ul>	G.S. Dominguez, G. Fisk, K.E Henion

Source: Own case study based on: [16–18,37–42].

The emergence of such concepts as: ecological marketing, green marketing and sustainability marketing is an expression of the penetration of ideas and values related to sustainable development and ecology into marketing [42–44]. Although the number of publications in this field has been growing in recent years, referring to the history of marketing thought, it can be noticed that the interest in environmental issues in marketing has its roots in a systemic approach to marketing. In this approach, emphasis is placed on recognising the relationship between the macro and micro-environment of the enterprise as well as the relationship between the economic, social, and environmental system and enterprises, consumers, and the state [45]. The interest of marketing in environmental issues is also reflected in publications on the already discussed ecologisation of consumption, its humanisation and related consumer development in the social, intellectual, and moral dimensions, as well as in publications indicating the need to abandon the purchase of useless products [46]. It is equally important that in the area of marketing, attention was focused on the costs for society resulting from excessive consumption [47,48] and to demarketing activities aimed at limiting the demand [49]. It should also be added that the development of the scientific discussion on responsible consumption as the basis for building a marketing strategy was accompanied by paying attention to the issue of reducing resource waste and the scope of managerial freedom in the face of increasing environmental constraints [50]. Furthermore, the changes in the way of thinking about marketing and its functions were affected by the circular economy idea [51,52], according to which monitoring the product path from its production to consumption is the subject of marketing interest. Thanks to considering environmental protection issues at the stage of product design, production, delivery, use and disposal, marketing can not only support the

achievement of the company's goals, but also be used in solving problems of the natural environment, and contribute to improving the quality of life.

The concepts of ecological marketing and green marketing are consistent, but not to the same extent, with the assumptions of social and humanistic orientation. The conducted literature review shows that the presented relations between marketing and problems of the natural environment have been considered for many years and are have a multidimensional nature. On the one hand, as in the case of the concept of ecological marketing, the role of marketing in solving environmental problems is emphasised, and on the other, as is the case with the concept of green marketing, environmental issues are treated as an area of a competitive battle [48].

On the other hand, in the concept of sustainability marketing, a departure from the transactional approach, typical of classic marketing, in favour of relationships can be found. According to this concept, marketing involves creating and strengthening sustainable relationships with customers, and the social and natural environment. Just like in relationship marketing, in the case of sustainability marketing, a long-term perspective is adopted. However, sustainability marketing is more macroeconomic in nature than relationship marketing [53]. Such an approach is related to the perception of consumers as active individuals who satisfy their needs not only by purchasing products, but sometimes also by deconsumption. It is worth adding, however, that deconsumption may be a consequence of the reorientation of consumers' life strategies and changes occurring in their value systems, e.g., being tired of competing for new consumer goods, and may also result from the desire to stand out in the consumer society [54].

It is worth noting that the implementation of marketing concepts that should contribute to the implementation of assumptions of sustainable development requires the use of modern solutions that support obtaining data and reducing the information gap related to the functioning of organic product markets and, consequently, allows for an effective impact on the attitudes and behaviours of consumers of organic products. Solutions developed within digital marketing can be applied for this purpose. They are based on Search Engine Optimization (SEO), Search Engine Marketing (SEM), Big Data, Data Mining, Artificial Intelligence. Social media listening is also of great significance, as it is an automated research on trends in social networks [55]. Increasing the scope of use of new information and communication technologies in building knowledge about the market of organic products is a response to the ongoing transformation of physical markets into databases. This is reflected in the concept of technological determinism, which emphasises that the implementation of technology causes changes that go beyond the scope of its functioning [56,57].

When analysing the relationships between the concepts of marketing, it is necessary to indicate the existence of relationships between the concepts of marketing focused on environmental issues and the concept of strategic marketing, and the concept of relationship marketing [58–61]. In this context, the following research questions arise:

P1: What factors influence the introduction of organic farming products to the commercial assortment in Poland?

P2: What is the nature of the relationship—in the context of their durability and level of trust—between producers of organic food and distributors of this food in Poland?

P3: What factors stimulate the development of sales of organic farming products in Poland and what is the role of marketing in this context?

### 3. Materials and Methods

The conducted literature review revealed the existence of a research gap and the need to answer the formulated research questions. This resulted in empirical research conducted in 2019, which covered 140 entities shaping the offer of ecological products in Poland. Endeavouring to design the research properly, and then to implement it and interpret the results, a literature query in the field of marketing research was conducted. Consequently, it allowed the selection of the appropriate research method and technique,

that were adequate from the point of view of research issues and the specificity of the respondents [62–65].

A positivist approach was applied, the features of which include the creation of empirical knowledge, objectivity, verificationism, quantification, coherence and the use of statistical data analysis, as well as discovering and explaining regularities, and prediction of the phenomena [66].

The conducted empirical research was focused on the identification of factors influencing the introduction of organic farming products to the commercial assortment, the types of relationships between producers and distributors of organic food in Poland, the identification of the factors stimulating the development of sale of these products and consequently, the determination of the role of marketing in shaping the development of this market in Poland. Primary research of a quantitative nature was performed as part of the research project “Development of supply on the market of organic agricultural products in Poland-economic and managerial aspects”.

The following hypotheses were formulated in the research procedure:

**Hypothesis 1 (H1).** *The opinions of customers are of great importance among the factors influencing the introduction of organic farming products to the commercial assortment in Poland, which proves the marketing orientation of distributors.*

**Hypothesis 2 (H2).** *The relationships between producers and distributors of organic food in Poland are durable and based on trust.*

**Hypothesis 3 (H3).** *Marketing activities as well as demand conditions that depend on marketing are of great importance in the hierarchy of factors stimulating the development of sales of organic farming products in Poland.*

The quantitative research was conducted on a nationwide sample of entities shaping the offer of organic farming products. When designing the studies, it was determined that they would be non-exhaustive. Random stratified selection was used as the basic method of selection of the entities for the research. From the point of view of the respondent groups, the study covered: 65 organic individual farms of above 1 ha (Utilized Agricultural Area-UAA) which pursued production activities and 75 distributors of organic farming products. Considering the multitude of distribution channels of this type of products, the survey was attended by people managing such entities as: wholesalers, hypermarkets and supermarkets, convenience stores, local stores, specialist stores with organic products, marketplaces, and online stores. In terms of the number of employees, the surveyed distributors included both micro and large entities. The surveyed entities were also diversified in terms of the length of their functioning on the market. Entities with a short history of operation on the market (up to 5 years) constituted 25.3% of the research sample, and older entities, operating for over 20 years—13.3% of the surveyed distributors of organic farming products. On the other hand, taking into account the size of the town in which the entity dealing with the distribution of organic farming products has its location, it should be added that entities located in cities up to 50 thousand residents represented the largest group. Their share in the studied population was 34.7%. The structure of the sample, including its most important characteristics, is presented in Table 2.

Considering the scope of the research, as well as the type of respondents and the nature of their work, the computer assisted telephone interview (CATI) technique was selected. This technique allowed for the adjustment of the interview date to the respondent’s preferences. Following the standards of marketing research performance [67], the anonymity of the study was ensured to create comfort for the respondents. When designing the research tool, the principles regarding the correct order of asking questions were observed, so as to move from the easiest to the more difficult ones, maintain the relationship between the questions, as well as stimulate the respondent’s interest. The questions were formulated in the way that was understandable to the respondents and did not suggest answers. In



the case of questions containing many categories of answers, randomisation was used in order to eliminate the influence of the order of appearing answers on the obtained results. In accordance with the principles of conducting marketing research, the actual research was preceded by a pilot study. The research tool testing was also performed by phone. In order to professionalise the data collection process, the technical implementation of computer-assisted telephone interviews using a standardised questionnaire was entrusted to a research agency. This agency has a database of entities conducting business activity in Poland. This database has been divided into levels depending on the type of commercial activity. The entities that participated in the study were randomly selected from the individual levels if they met the condition of selection (filtering question) regarding the availability of organic farming products in the offer.

**Table 2.** Characteristics of the research sample concerning distributors of organic food.

Description	Distribution of Responses
Distributor type	multi-branch wholesaler—2.7%, organic food wholesaler—10.7%, hypermarket—5.3%, supermarket—21.2%, convenience store—6.7%, local store—6.7%, specialist store with organic products—28.0%, a stand at the marketplace—6.7%, online store—12.0%
Number of employees	a self-employed sole trader, or a company employing up to 9 people—57.3%, a company employing 10 to 49 people—38.7%, a company employing more than 50 people—4.0%
Years of the company's operation	up to 5 years—25.3%, over 5 to 10 years—29.3%, over 10 to 20 years—32.1%, over 20 years—13.3%,
Voivodeship	Lower Silesian: 12.0%, Kuyavian-Pomeranian: 2.7%, Lublin: 4.0%, Lubusz: 4.0%, Łódź: 12.0%, Lesser Poland: 5.3%, Masovian: 12.0%, Opole: 4.0%, Podlaskie: 4.0%, Pomeranian: 5.3%, Silesian: 17.4%, Holy Cross: 1.3%, Warmian-Masurian: 2.7%, Greater Poland: 9.3%, West Pomeranian: 4.0%
Size of the town/city	village—17.3%, a city up to 50,000 inhabitants—34.0%, a city with 50,000–200 thousand inhabitants—24.0%, a city with over 200 thousand. Inhabitants—24.0%

Source: Own case study based on CATI questionnaire interviews.

The questionnaires were subject to formal verification, which consisted of checking the completeness of the obtained answers, and the content-related verification, which was related to the logical analysis of the provided answers.

#### 4. Results

The analysis and interpretation of the results of the quantitative research conducted among producers and distributors of organic farming products was subordinated to research questions and hypotheses. From the point of view of recognising the hierarchy of factors influencing the introduction of organic farming products to the commercial product range in Poland, it is important to distinguish those of a business nature from those related to corporate social responsibility and seeing marketing as an opportunity to solve problems related to environmental protection.

For this purpose, single-sample median tests were performed using the Wilcoxon signed-rank test. The cut-off value of 4 was adopted as neutral for the 1–7 scale (1 means that a given factor is considered to a small extent, and 7 to a significant extent), if the categories for which the median exceeds 4 should be assessed highly, i.e., as factors significantly affecting the introduction of organic farming products to the commercial range. In this study, the following hypotheses were adopted for individual response categories:

$$H_0: Me(i) \leq 4$$

$$H_1: Me(i) > 4$$

where  $i$  is the factor number.

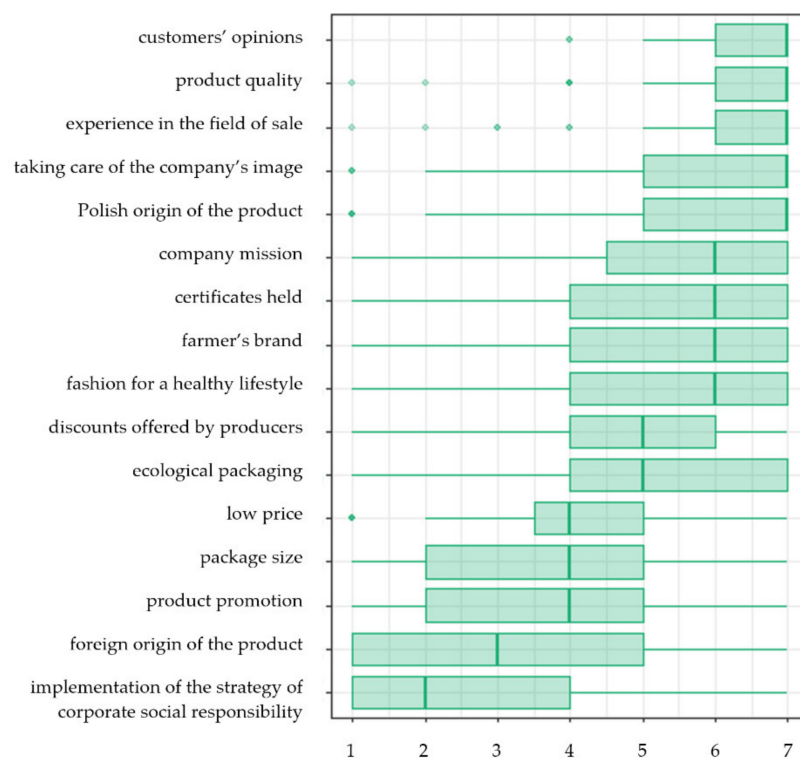
Table 3 summarises the factors that may affect the introduction of organic farming products to the commercial range, along with the calculated probability coefficients.

**Table 3.** The significance of factors influencing the introduction of organic farming products to the commercial offer in Poland—results of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test.

Factors Influencing the Introduction of Organic Farming Products to the Commercial Range	<i>p</i> -Value
customers' opinions	<0.01
product quality	<0.01
experience in the field of sale	<0.01
taking care of the company's image	<0.01
Polish origin of the product	<0.01
Farmer's brand	<0.01
discounts offered by producers	<0.01
certificates held	<0.01
company mission	<0.01
fashion for a healthy lifestyle	<0.01
ecological packaging	<0.01
low price	0.017
package size	0.583
product promotion	0.914
foreign origin of the product	0.952
implementation of the strategy of corporate social responsibility	1.000

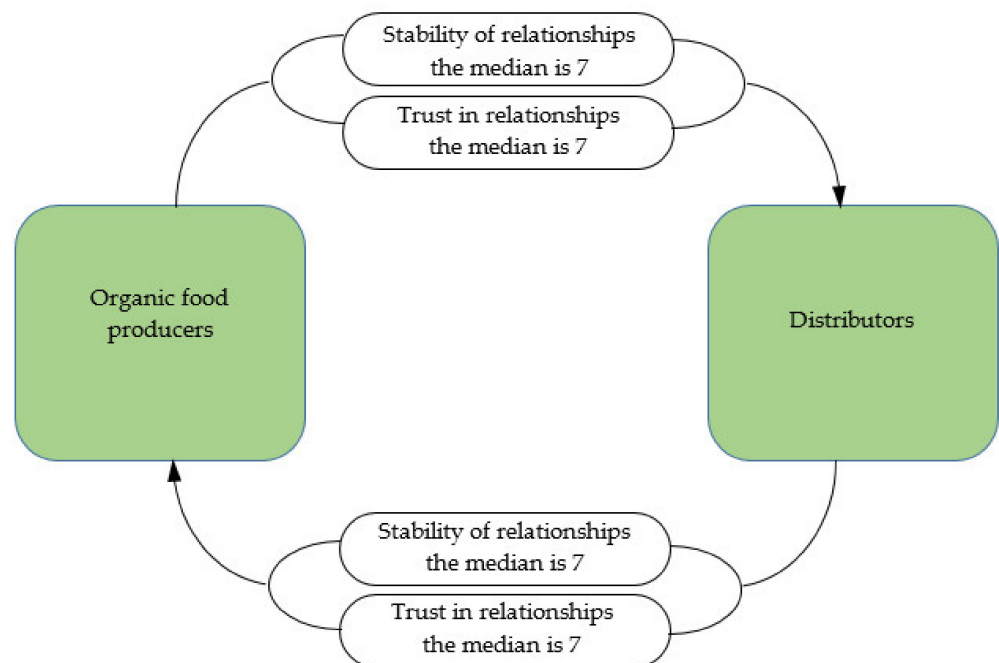
Source: Author's own elaboration.

Conducted studies show that the marketing concepts are of great importance when introducing organic farming products to the commercial assortment. The results of the survey conducted among distributors and presented in Figure 1 show that in the hierarchy of importance of factors influencing the introduction of organic farming products to the commercial range of products, customer feedback is the highest. The median for this factor on a seven-point scale reached the value of 7.

**Figure 1.** Hierarchy of factors influencing the introduction of organic farming products into the assortment (N = 75). Source: Author's own elaboration using R program.

The surveyed people managing commercial companies are also largely guided by the high quality of organic farming products (the median is 7), as well as sales experience in this area (the median is 7) and the need to care for the company's image (the median is also 7). Such a hierarchy proves that the basis for making decisions related to the development of the commercial assortment in the field of organic farming products are much more of a market and marketing nature than of adopting a socially responsible attitude character. Moreover, it should be noted that when introducing organic farming products to their product range, the managers of trade companies were least guided by the implementation of the corporate social responsibility strategy (the median is 2). A graphic illustration of the hierarchy of factors influencing the introduction of organic farming products to the commercial assortment is shown in Figure 1.

Considering the identified research gap, it is also important to answer the question about the nature and durability of relations between distributors and producers of organic food. The analysis of the results of quantitative research conducted both among organic individual farms and distributors allowed to state that the relationships in the opinions of both these groups are generally characterised by durability and a high level of trust occurring in them. This is proved by the fact that on the seven-point scale of assessing the durability of these relationships, both in the opinions of organic food producers and distributors of this food, the median is 7. At the same time, the respondents also highly assess the level of trust in these relationships. The perception of mutual relationships is similar. In this case, the median for the relationship with respect to the level of trust expressed by the distributors of organic food products is 7. Additionally, in the case of organic food producers, the median for trust in relationships with distributors is 7. This is illustrated in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** The perception of the nature of the relationships between producers (N = 65) and distributors (N = 75) of organic food in the opinion of both groups. Source: Author's own elaboration.

Analysing the nature of the relationships between producers and distributors of organic food in Poland, median tests were conducted for single samples using the Wilcoxon signed-rank test. As before, the cut-off value of 4 was assumed to be neutral for the 1–7 scale and it was found that values above 4 should be perceived as high, i.e., indicating a high level of persistence and trust in these relationships. In this study, the following hypotheses were adopted for the individual categories of responses:  $H_0: Me(i) \leq 4$  and

$H_1: Me(i) > 4$  (where  $i$  is the type of relationship). In all four cases the significance of the  $p$ -value reached levels  $< 0.01$ . Therefore, the hypothesis  $H_0$  should be rejected and, consequently, it should be assumed that all kinds of relations are assessed highly.

In order to empirically verify the importance of marketing in shaping the development of the market of organic farming products in Poland, the stimulants of this market development should also be referred to. The conducted survey shows that people managing commercial companies offering organic farming products perceive the determinants of the development of this market in Poland through the prism of the factors that are both directly and indirectly dependent on them.

As with the  $H_1$  hypothesis, single-sample median tests were performed using the Wilcoxon signed-rank test. The cut-off value of 4 was consistently adopted as neutral for the 1–7 scale (1 means that a given factor stimulates the development of sales of organic farming products to a small extent, and 7 that to a significant extent), if the categories for which the median exceeds 4 should be assessed highly, i.e., factors that largely stimulate the development of sales of organic farming products in Poland. In this study, the following hypotheses were adopted for individual response categories:

$$H_0: Me(i) \leq 4$$

$$H_1: Me(i) > 4$$

where  $i$  is factor number.

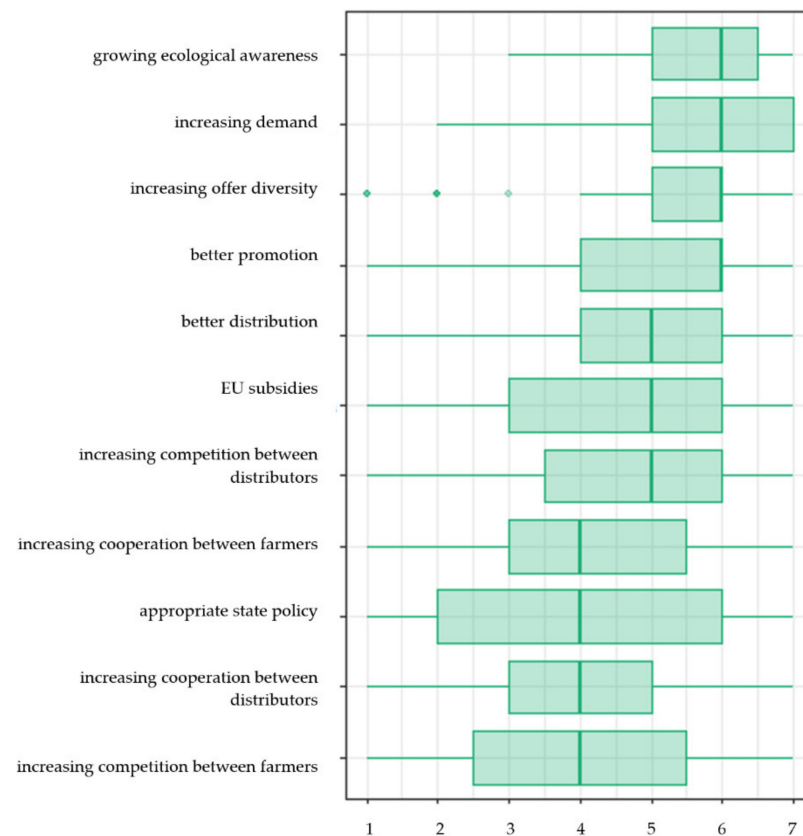
Table 4 shows the factors stimulating the development of sales of organic farming products in Poland along with the calculated probability coefficients.

**Table 4.** Significance of factors stimulating the development of sales of organic farming products in Poland—results of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test.

The Factors Stimulating the Development of Sales of Organic Farming Products in Poland	$p$ -Value
growing ecological awareness	$< 0.01$
increasing demand,	$< 0.01$
increasing offer diversity	$< 0.01$
better promotion	$< 0.01$
better distribution	$< 0.01$
EU subsidies	$< 0.01$
increasing competition between distributors,	0.015
increasing cooperation between farmers	0.221
increasing cooperation between distributors	0.325
appropriate state policy	0.327
increasing competition between farmers	0.482

Source: Own case study.

The conducted tests show that the categories related to marketing activities, as well as the demand conditions dependent on marketing, are of great importance as factors stimulating the development of sales of organic farming products in Poland. The results of the survey conducted among distributors, presented in Figure 3, indicate that especially important factors stimulating the development of sales of organic farming products in Poland include: growing environmental awareness of consumers, as well as growing demand. The median for these factors on a seven-point scale was 6.



**Figure 3.** The importance of factors stimulating the development of sales of organic farming products in Poland (N = 75). Source: Author's own elaboration using R program.

These are stimulants inherently related to consumer education in the field of ecology, but also to marketing, the use of which aims at shaping consumer attitudes and behaviour. Moreover, it should be indicated that promotional activities and programs in the field of corporate social responsibility [68] have great potential from the point of view of increasing the environmental awareness of consumers.

The next two important factors stimulating the development of sales of organic farming products in Poland are not only related to marketing like the previous two, but also determine the essence of using marketing tools and activities.

These factors include increasing the diversity of the offer of organic farming products (median is 6) and better promotion of these products (median is 6). On the other hand, the median for the category of better distribution of organic farming products was 5. Thus, the results of the research revealed that the decision-makers in the market entities offering organic farming products see opportunities for the development of this market in increasing the effectiveness of marketing activities. It should be added that, consequently, it may translate into an increase in the environmental awareness of consumers and the demand for these products as, according to the respondents, they are the most important determinants for the development of the organic farming market.

The analysis and interpretation of the correlation between the ratings given by distributors to individual factors stimulating the development of the market of organic farming products in Poland revealed several significant correlations characterising the perception of factors stimulating the development of the market of organic farming products (see Table 5).

**Table 5.** Spearman's rank correlation between factors stimulating the development of sales of organic farming products in Poland.

Stimulants of the Development of the Market of Organic Farming Products	Growing Ecological Awareness	Increasing Demand	Increasing Offer Diversity	Better Distribution	Better Promotion	EU Subsidies	Appropriate State Policy	Increasing Cooperation between Farmers	Increasing Competition between Farmers	Increasing Cooperation between Distributors	Increasing Competition between Distributors
growing ecological awareness	1.000 **	0.419 **	0.623 **	0.382 **	0.376 **	0.035	0.016	0.250 *	0.142	0.275 *	0.166
increasing demand	0.419 **	1.000 **	0.514 **	0.264 *	0.134	-0.052	-0.138	0.207	0.065	0.168	0.027
increasing offer diversity	0.623 **	0.514 **	1.000 **	0.432 **	0.355 **	-0.064	0.007	0.355 **	0.092	0.292 *	0.121
better distribution	0.382 **	0.264 *	0.432 **	1.000 **	0.658 **	0.122	0.327 **	0.321 **	0.131	0.217	0.142
better promotion	0.376 **	0.134	0.355 **	0.658 **	1.000 **	0.032	0.101	0.279 *	0.121	0.347 **	0.041
EU subsidies	0.035	-0.052	-0.064	0.122	0.032	1.000 **	0.592 **	0.413 **	0.201	0.196	0.207
appropriate state policy	0.016	-0.138	0.007	0.327 **	0.101	0.592 **	1.000 **	0.400 **	0.433 **	0.207	0.212
increasing cooperation between farmers	0.250 *	0.207	0.355 **	0.321 **	0.279 *	0.413 **	0.400 **	1.000 **	0.464 **	0.660 **	0.312 **
increasing competition between farmers	0.142	0.065	0.092	0.131	0.121	0.201	0.433 **	0.464 **	1.000 **	0.461 **	0.424 **
increasing cooperation between distributors	0.275 *	0.168	0.292 *	0.217	0.347 **	0.196	0.207	0.660 **	0.461 **	1.000 **	0.312 **
Increasing competition between distributors	0.166	0.027	0.121	0.142	0.041	0.207	0.212	0.312 **	0.424 **	0.312 **	1.000 **

\*  $p$ -value < 0.05; \*\*  $p$ -value < 0.01.

Source: Author's own elaboration. The following should be indicated among them: the respondents who attributed high importance to the factor of increasing the environmental awareness of consumers also highly rated the importance of the factor of increasing the diversity of the offer of these products (Spearman's rank correlation coefficient 0.623). At the same time decision-makers in companies offering organic farming products, while pointing to the great importance of increasing the diversity of the offer, noticed a chance for the development of this market as a result of growing demand (Spearman's rank correlation coefficient 0.514). From the point of view of the purpose of the paper, it is important that there are also correlations between high scores given to such factors as better promotion of organic farming products and their better distribution (Spearman's rank correlation coefficient 0.658). Once again, this proves the attribution of a great importance to marketing in shaping the development of the organic farming market in Poland. It should also be considered as a manifestation of the market orientation of the surveyed trade companies. The picture is complemented by the fact that there is also a correlation between ascribing high importance to cooperation between distributors by some of the respondents and, at the same time, attaching high importance to cooperation between farmers of organic production (Spearman's rank correlation coefficient 0.660).

Moreover, it is symptomatic that the respondents who gave high importance to the factor of EU subsidies also attached high importance to the appropriate state policy in terms of stimulating the development of the market of organic farming products (Spearman's rank correlation coefficient 0.592). Therefore, it can be concluded that although, in the opinions of the respondents, the importance of these factors as stimulants for the development of the market of organic farming products is of less importance, according to some respondents, there is a need to shape the development of this market not only through strictly marketing activities, but also through activities implemented at the EU level and government level.

## 5. Discussion

When discussing the results of the conducted empirical study and the results of the analysis of literature studies, it should be noted that the dual nature of approaching

environmental protection issues in marketing is proved by the fact that among the factors influencing the introduction of organic farming products into the commercial offer, there are factors of both social nature related to the implementation of the corporate social responsibility strategy, as well as those with a much more business-related dimension. However, in the light of the conducted tests on the factors influencing the introduction of organic farming products to the commercial offer by the surveyed distributors in Poland, it should be stated that the implementation of corporate social responsibility is of the lowest importance, in contrast to such market and marketing categories as customer opinions, high quality of organic farming products, sales experience in this area, or the need to care for the company's image.

The analysis of the results of the empirical research conducted among the managers of commercial companies that offer organic farming products is the basis for answering the first research question P1. Due to the lack of grounds to reject H1, it is true that customer feedback is especially important among the factors influencing the introduction of organic farming products to the commercial range of organic farming products in Poland. It proves the marketing orientation of distributors.

In light of the analysis of the results, it should be noted that the organic food distributors participating in the study are more interested in meeting customer needs and promoting their company in the context of ecology than in a social approach aimed at improving the natural environment. Their activities are therefore closer to the idea of green marketing than to ecological marketing [69,70]. The obtained results also indicate that the distributors of organic farming products in Poland participating in the study adopt an exogenous, customer-oriented perspective. Implementing market orientation and taking customer opinions into account in the decision-making processes regarding the offer requires knowledge of the market, as well as having the ability to sense and react to market changes [71].

At the same time, it should be noted that marketing concepts are not implemented in their pure form. On the one hand, manifestations of thinking typical of strategic marketing can be found in the functioning of market entities shaping the offer of organic farming products, and on the other hand, in many aspects, the operation of these entities is consistent with the assumptions of relationship marketing. It is symptomatic that the surveyed distributors of organic farming products in Poland perceive an opportunity to develop sales of these products to a greater extent in the increase in competition between distributors rather than in cooperation between them. This proves that the assumptions of strategic marketing and competition are reflected in the perception of factors stimulating the development of sales of organic farming products. In the light of the theoretical considerations and the analysis of the results of empirical research, it should also be pointed that the assumptions that distinguish the concept of relationship marketing [18], are especially close to entities creating the offer of organic farming products in Poland, because in the opinions of the respondents, the relationships between producers and trade companies offering organic food are characterised by a high level of persistence and trust in these relationships. It is important that both groups of entities rate these relations similarly (the median is 7). The obtained results allow to formulate the answer to the second research question P2. Because there were no grounds for rejecting H2, it is true that the relationships between organic food producers and distributors in Poland are solid and based on trust. Considering the high level of trust observed in these relations, which is a significant resource according to the resource theory of the enterprise [72], it can be predicted that these relations will be retained in the future.

This is very important because trust, stimulating the development of cooperation and entrepreneurship, is the basis for creating social capital [73], and market entities operating within the network of relations are able to achieve more in a situation in which they demonstrate that they are trustworthy and trust others than while operating in similar networks, but not expressing mutual trust [74].

Consequently, the results of the performed empirical study mean that the role of marketing in shaping the development of the organic farming product market is significant, because the surveyed distributors recognised growing environmental awareness dependent on marketing activities and growing demand as important factors in the development of this market. The factors that stimulate the development of this market, which are inherently related to marketing, are also of great importance. These are such categories as increasing the variety of the offer and better promoting organic farming products. This is the answer to the research question P3. Due to the lack of grounds for rejecting H3, it is true that marketing activities as well as demand conditions that depend on marketing are of great importance among the factors stimulating the development of sales of organic farming products in Poland. The results of the study conducted among the distributors of organic farming products in Poland are consistent with the results of other studies, which also indicate that the development of this market depends on minimising mental barriers and the need to stimulate the ecological awareness of Polish consumers understood in the context of knowledge about the environment and mutual relationships between nature and people, as well as the positive attitude of the consumer towards the natural environment [75]. The success of marketing in solving environmental problems and implementing the idea of sustainable development requires perceiving environmental problems as a starting point for marketing processes and approaching the company as part of a wider socio-ecological system. This means paying a lot of attention to the effects of production, distribution, and consumption behaviours in marketing [76].

It should be noted among the implications of the concept of sustainable development for environmentally-oriented marketing activities, that marketing should be approached as a strategy, not as a tactic and perceived not as one of the company's areas of activity, but as part of a larger whole that affects the natural environment. In addition, the use of technology that causes the least negative effects on the environment is as important as reducing the harmful impact of products offered by producers and distributors on the environment. It should also be noted that including ecological solutions in marketing activities requires cooperation with entities from the environment [77]. The essence of marketing in the context of the implementation of the principles of sustainable development consists in considering environmental and social determinants at individual stages of managing value for the customer and contributing to the promotion of sustainable consumption.

## 6. Conclusions

The potential of marketing in solving problems resulting from the deteriorating condition of the natural environment is huge and is inherently associated with the possibility of shaping the attitudes and behaviours of consumers supporting sustainable development and the hierarchies of consumer values, in which care for the natural environment is of high importance. The development of marketing concepts related to the natural environment, such as green marketing or ecological marketing, confirms that it is becoming an important method and part of solving problems related to environmental protection [48]. The real contribution of marketing to solving problems resulting from excessive exploitation of the natural environment will be determined not only by the increasing scope of implementation of the principles of ecological marketing or green marketing, but also by limiting marketing activities stimulating the development of consumerist attitudes [69].

### 6.1. Theoretical and Practical Implications

The contribution to the theory resulting from the implementation of the purpose of the paper consists in the ascertainment that the distributors participating in the empirical study see marketing as an opportunity for the development of the organic farming market in Poland. This especially results from the need to raise the environmental awareness of Polish consumers and stimulate demand using effective marketing programs. Considering that marketing is a multi-paradigmatic concept and its relationships with the concept of sustainable development are complex, it should be emphasised that marketing concepts



are not implemented by distributors of organic farming products in Poland in a pure form and the categories typical of strategic marketing are observed in their way of thinking about marketing and relationship marketing at the same time.

The reduction in the research gap also results from the recognition that the surveyed distributors of organic farming products in Poland are closer to the assumptions of green marketing rather than to organic marketing.

The practical implications of the conducted research procedure are related to the indication of the need to shape a business culture in Poland based on sustainable development and the shift of the emphasis in approaches to marketing, so that its application is more compatible with the concept of ecological marketing than it is now the case with green marketing concept. This requires changes in the approach to solving environmental problems and paying more attention to the long-term perspective related to the intergenerational requirement of sustainability in the approach to business.

### *6.2. Limitations and Future Research*

Bearing in mind that each research procedure has its limitations, it is necessary to indicate the need to expand its scope and identify the motives for introducing organic products into the commercial offer, or the nature of relations between producers and distributors of these products in countries at different stages of socio-economic development among the directions of future research on the role of marketing in shaping the development of markets of organic farming products. The limitation of the conducted research is its national, not international scope, as well as the size of the sample, which allows for analyses in the context of the entire studied group of entities, but without the possibility of making detailed analyses in sections taking into account the type of entity dealing with the distribution of organic farming products in Poland. Another limitation is the inclusion of distributors of organic farming products in Poland without taking into account those retailers that do not have these products in their offer. Investigating the next group and identifying the reasons why some food distributors in Poland only have conventional food in their offer and do not expand their assortment with organic farming products, would have great cognitive and application value, expressed in determining activities aimed at minimising barriers to the distribution of organic farming products in Poland. It would also be interesting to recognise the differences in the sphere of the role attributed to marketing in stimulating the development of the market of organic farming products by entities shaping this offer in the countries characterised by a culture where care for the natural environment is highly regarded and actions are taken to maintain harmony between the natural environment and people, as well as in countries where cultural and mental conditions do not stimulate the development of pro-ecological behaviours, because according to the anthropocentric model, people and their needs rather than sensitivity and concern for the natural environment are placed at the centre. This would allow the research field to be expanded to include the role of universally understood culture in shaping the development of the organic products market.

It is also important to recognise in the future the scope of application of the concept of green marketing and organic marketing among distributors of organic farming products in different countries, considering a wide range of cultural and economic determinants. This would allow for the identification of factors supporting the development of attitudes and conduct in business that foster a genuine business commitment to solving environmental problems and allow the reconciliation of profit making with sustainable consumption, which is one of the pillars of sustainable development.

Another direction of future research is to repeat the measurement on a similar sample in Poland in order to identify changes in the factors influencing the introduction of organic farming products into the commercial range, or regarding the nature of the relationships between producers and distributors of this food. It would also be reasonable to recognise the role assigned to marketing by producers and distributors of organic products from industries other than food. This would allow for showing the importance of marketing

in shaping the development of the organic products market, considering the specificity of the industries. Another important direction of further quantitative research in this area is its implementation among buyers of organic food and recognition of how they evaluate the offer and conducted marketing activities in this area, as well as whether and how the COVID-19 pandemic influences changes in the behaviour of consumers of organic farming products. The study of consumer behaviours and their needs and expectations with regard to the marketing dimensions of the offer of organic farming products in Poland is consistent with the principles of implementation of marketing concepts in which the consumer is the focus. Understanding their changing motivations, attitudes and behaviours, also related to the pandemic, would allow to broaden the knowledge about consumers of organic farming products in Poland and to define the trends of further marketing activities.

**Author Contributions:** The concept of the paper: M.S., K.M.-Ł. and S.S.; project of research on organic farming distributors: M.S. and K.M.-Ł.; organic farmers research project K.K. and A.G.; research implementation M.S., K.M.-Ł., K.K. and A.G.; analysis of results M.S. and K.M.-Ł.; writing—original draft preparation M.S.; writing—review and editing, M.S., K.M.-Ł. and S.S.; All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This paper was financed by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education in Poland under the programme “Regional Initiative of Excellence” 2019–2022 project number 015/RID/2018/19 total funding amount 10 721 040.00 PLN.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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