Food safety and organic foods are two issues that are gaining momentum among consumers and that retailers, wholesalers and producers will have to address in one way or another in their produce selections and marketing programs. Customers can now find 250 to 400 items in the produce department of an average supermarket. Fresh vegetable per capita consumption was about 79 pounds in 1987 and total fresh fruit consumption was about 98 pounds.

Customers are asking what chemical pesticides were used in cultivating that produce and what residues might be remaining that can adversely affect a consumer’s health, both in the short run and the long run.

The public seems to be increasingly suspicious of the credibility of government regulations and legislation. Thus, additional information is needed by all levels in the produce marketing and production systems.

There are indications that there is a segment of the consumer market that wants to buy organic produce and may be willing to pay somewhat higher prices in the belief that they are getting safer and more nutritious food than that which is not organically grown. The organic movement is of concern not only to consumers but also to supermarkets, wholesalers, health food stores, produce trade associations, and, of course, producers.
It is estimated that organic produce has about a 3 percent market share in the produce department, but there seems to be growing interest.

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To better understand consumer attitudes and activities toward fresh produce in the marketplace—in particular for organically grown produce.

2. To determine consumer opinions concerning food safety.

3. To determine consumer opinions concerning reduction in risks of produce grown conventionally and who should coordinate that effort to reduce the risk.

4. To determine consumers’ willingness to pay for organically grown produce.

A consumer mail questionnaire will be used to determine Delaware consumer opinions concerning the above issues. The work is to be completed at the end of 1990.