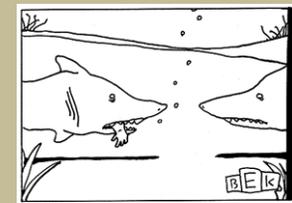




Survey of Local Food Purchasing Among Households in the Chippewa Valley

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"I'm trying to eat more locals."

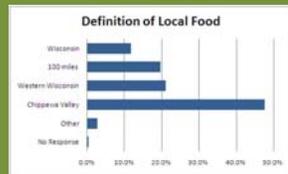
Introduction

In Western Wisconsin there is a strong push to develop a more robust local/regional food system, for economic development as well as for environmental and health reasons. The Chippewa Valley Center for Economic Research and Development has begun to investigate the demand side of market by conducting several surveys of local food purchasing behavior.

This poster focuses on household behavior asking families about how much and what kinds of foods they purchase locally as well as where they buy foods locally. In addition, we ask about the actual and perceived benefits and limitations of purchasing local food products.

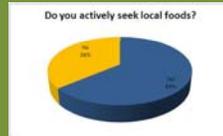
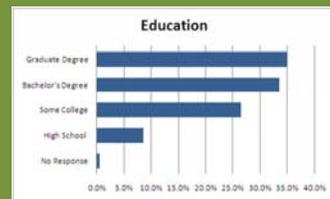
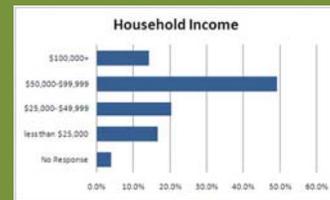
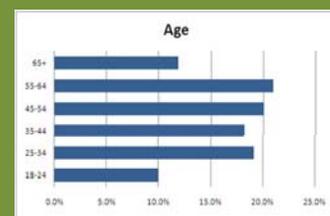
Over the summer of 2008 we conducted an online survey of household food consumption in Chippewa, Dunn, and Eau Claire counties. To encourage participation we distributed flyers at public venues and through mail. We also raised awareness through telephone calls and the local media. After about four months, 220 surveys were completed.

Defining Local

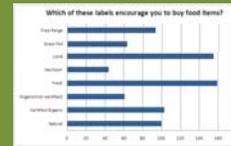
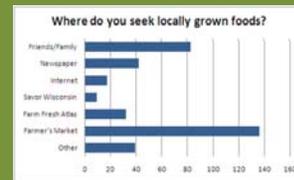


At the beginning of the survey we asked respondents to define what local food meant to them. However, for the purposes of our survey we define local as coming from within 150 miles.

Characterizing Households



Seeking Local Foods



We noticed a high interest in local food from our survey respondents. Around 2/3 of them said that they actively seek local foods. However, only 1/3 said it is easy to find local food at their grocery store. Because of this most people shop for local food at farmer's markets. Most respondents agreed that they would buy more local food if it was easier to find and more convenient.

Limitations and Benefits



Discussion

Survey respondents in our sample expressed a high degree of interest in local foods with about 2/3 saying they actively sought to purchase local items. However, of those that seek to purchase local food 2/3 reported that local items were not easily found at their normal grocery store. This is significant because the majority of our respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they would buy more local food if it was labeled as local and/or if it were available where they normally shop. Not surprisingly our data shows more local food purchasing during the summer and fall months as compared to winter or spring. In line with this

result is that farmers' markets were by far the most common source of local food purchases. Of particular interest was the amount of local food purchasing that respondents reported during the summer and fall. Specifically, over 160 people reported spending at least 6% of their food budget on local items while over 60 of these people reported spending at least 20% locally. At first we were concerned that this result was due to the rather high income and education level among our sample. However, we did not find any differences in local food purchasing behavior between those with low and high income.

There was significant agreement among all respondents regarding the benefits of purchasing local food. The most commonly reported benefits were supporting local farmers/economy as well as the freshness of local foods. In fact, freshness was also very important to people when asked about product and store features that are attractive to them when they shop for food. Seasonality was the most significant factor in limiting people's ability to purchase local foods. As stated earlier, convenience and location were also limiting factors. Household income does not appear to be a limitation, but price was a greater

concern for those with low income. There are several promotional initiatives underway in Western Wisconsin regarding local foods including the Farm Fresh Atlas and the Wisconsin Local Food Challenge. However, awareness and participation for these initiatives was very low, even among active local food seekers. For example, less than half of the 140 respondents who actively seek local foods reported being familiar with the Farm Fresh Atlas. We are very encouraged by these results concerning the high degree of interest in local food purchasing and the apparent success of area farmers'

markets. Our results strongly suggest that there is room for improvement in terms of labeling local items as local and also increasing access to local products in conventional grocery stores where most people shop. Similarly, there appears to be an opportunity in marketing food items as fresh and local.