

Consumer Attitudes & Preferences Toward Sustainability vs. Shopping Behaviors

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INTRODUCTION

Research indicates that telling consumers to shop more sustainably is not an effective strategy for promoting change (Wallis et al., 2021). Rather, sustainability increases when people experience shared awareness, connection, and responsibility with their communities (Evans et al., 2017). Yet, people's support for sustainability does not always translate into sustainable behaviors (Soron, 2010).

This study explores the relationship between consumers' preferences toward sustainability and their behaviors.

- **Research Question 1:** Is a person's awareness about environmental issues related to their preferences toward sustainability?
- **Research Question 2:** Is a person's level of connection related to their sense of responsibility to behave sustainably?

METHODS

- 1500 surveys were distributed to Dunn and Barron County. 146 were completed and returned (Dunn = 75, Barron = 52). 14 were eliminated leaving a final sample size of 132. Participants were between the ages of 21 and 92 ($M = 60$).

Survey questions were combined into scores to create the following variables:

- **Awareness:** knowledge about the environmental impact of consumer behaviors and farming practices.
- **Sustainability:** preferences and purchasing tendencies for sustainably and locally sourced foods.
- **Connection:** level of connection to one's community, environment, and local farmers.
- **Responsibility:** level of responsibility to contribute to reducing water pollution and behave more sustainably.

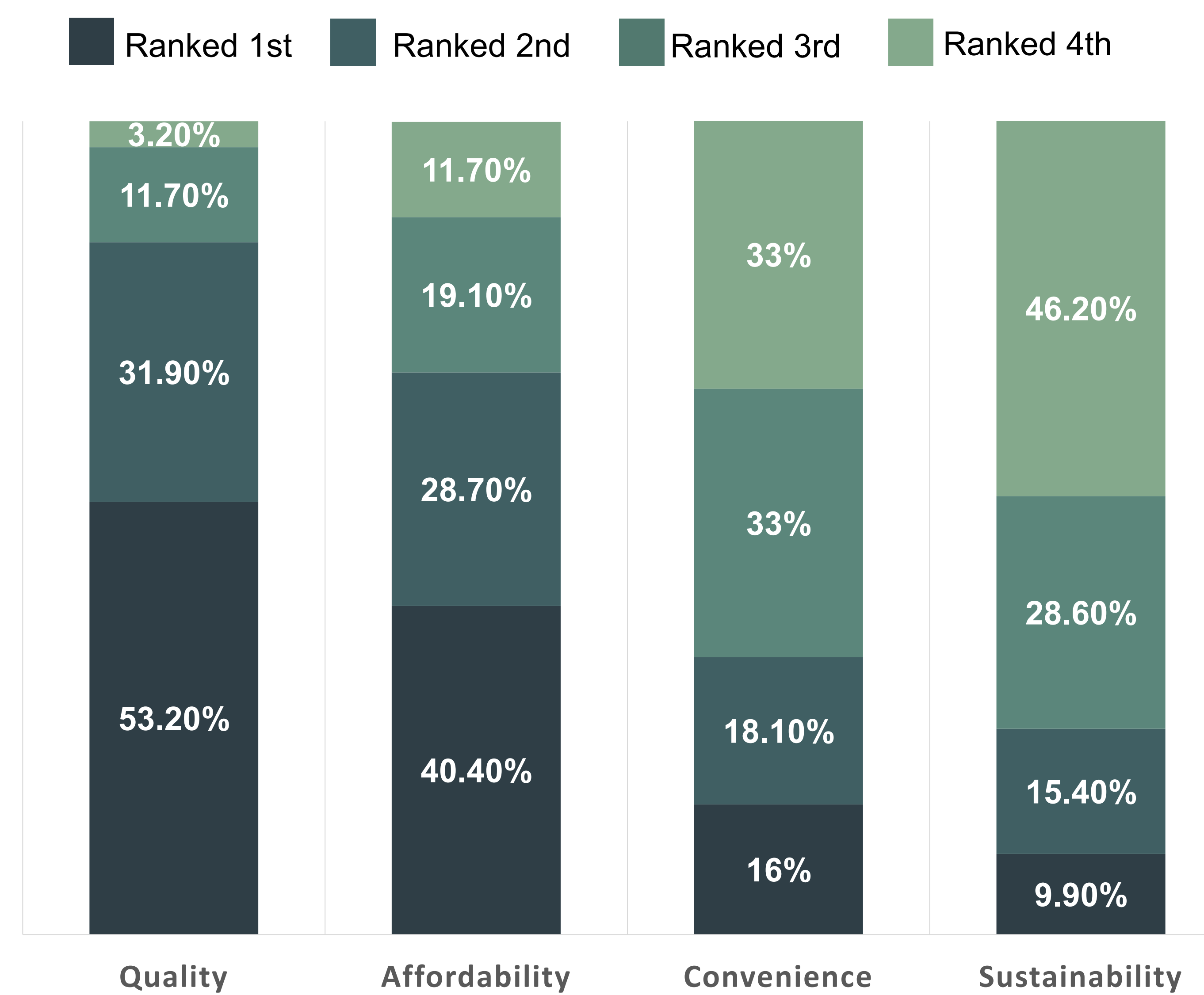
RESULTS

- People who reported higher levels of awareness had stronger preferences toward sustainability, $r(132) = .434, p < .001$
- People who reported higher levels of connection felt a greater sense of responsibility, $r(132) = .213, p = .016$.
- When asked about what matters most when buying food, "quality" was most frequently ranked as most important while "sustainability" was ranked as least important.
- Participants prefer sustainably and locally sourced food, yet most do not buy food directly from local stores or farmers.

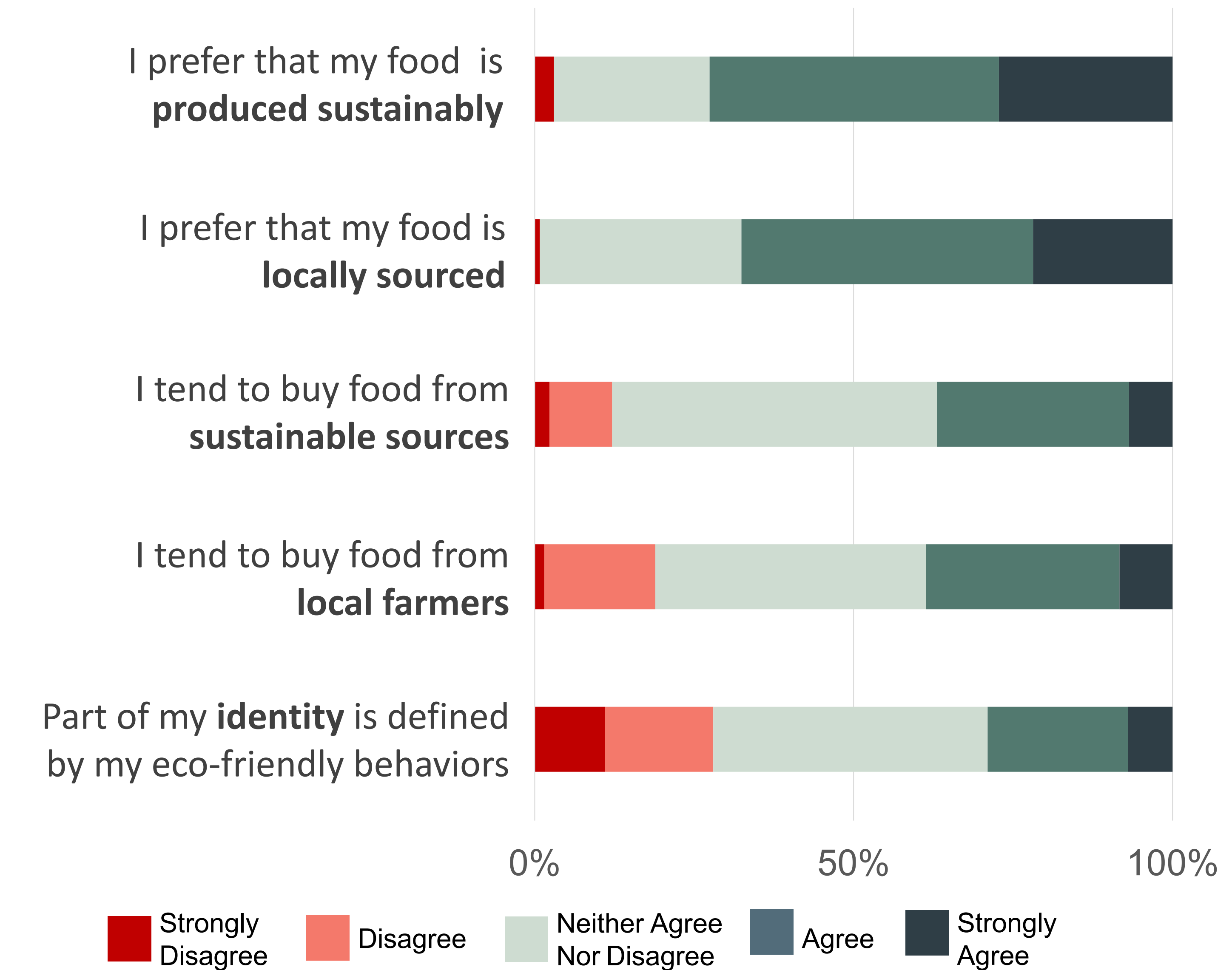
DISCUSSION

- Consistent with previous research, results suggest a disconnect between consumer attitudes about sustainability and their behaviors.
- These findings are important to consider when encouraging consumers to purchase foods produced using sustainable farming methods.
- Only 46% of respondents agreed that they would "support local farmers more if they used sustainable methods," suggesting that consumers might not associate sustainable behaviors with buying directly from farmers.

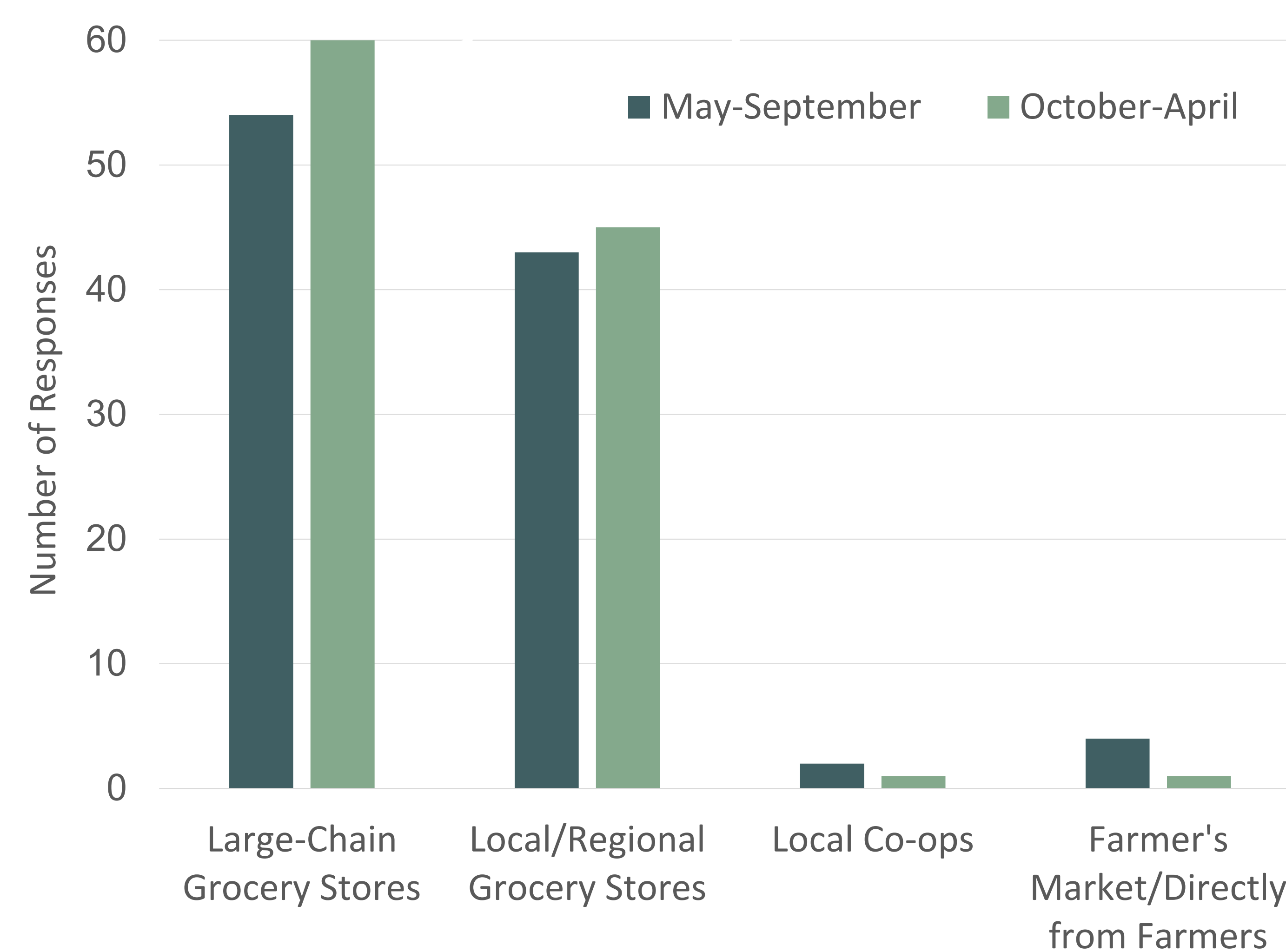
What matters MOST when buying food?



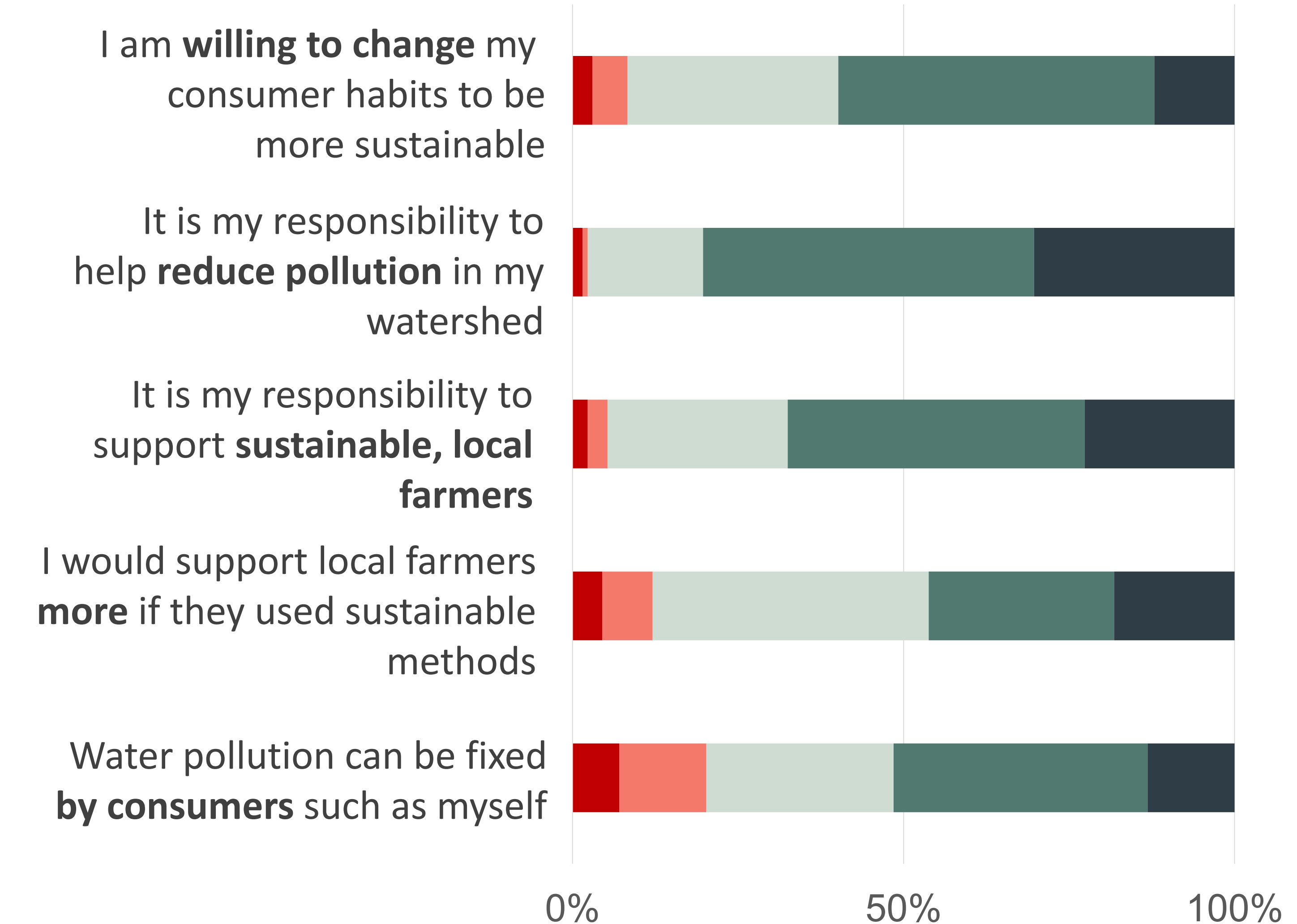
Sustainability Preference



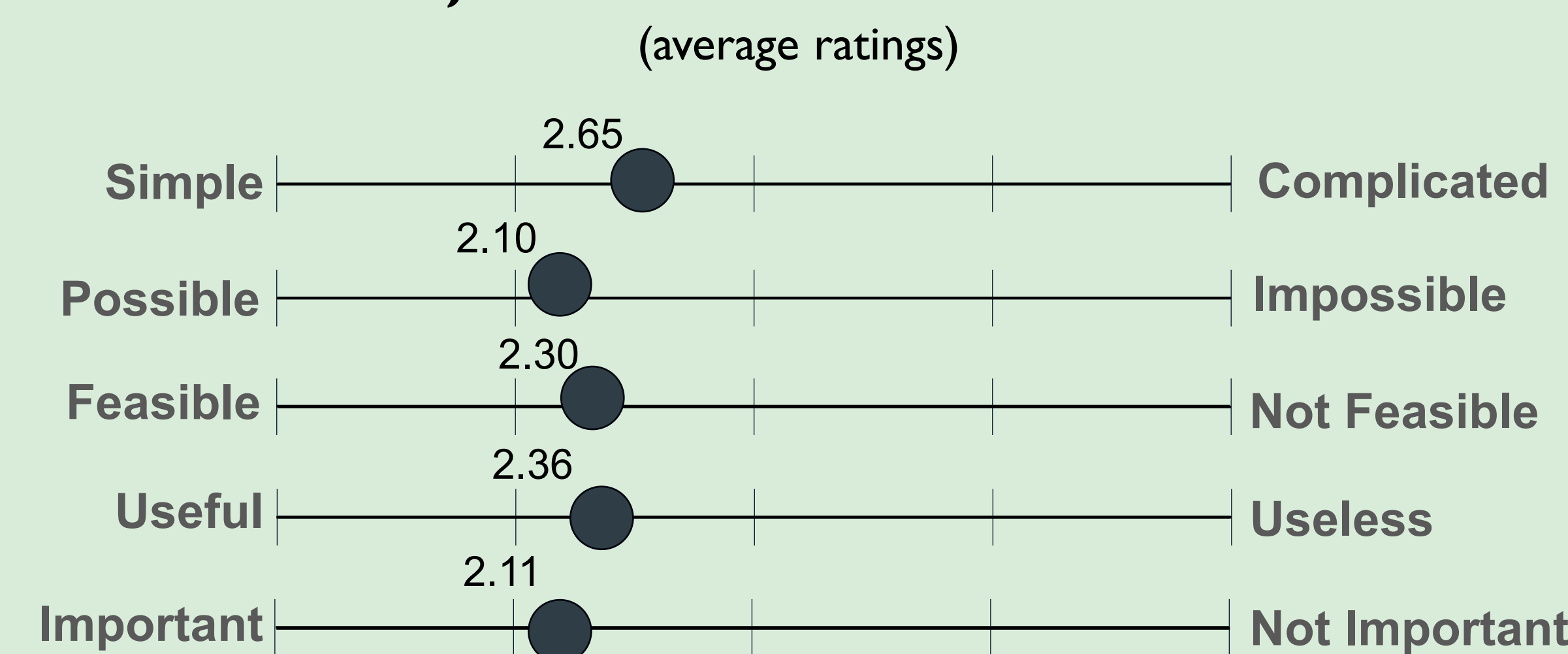
Where do you buy the MAJORITY of your food?



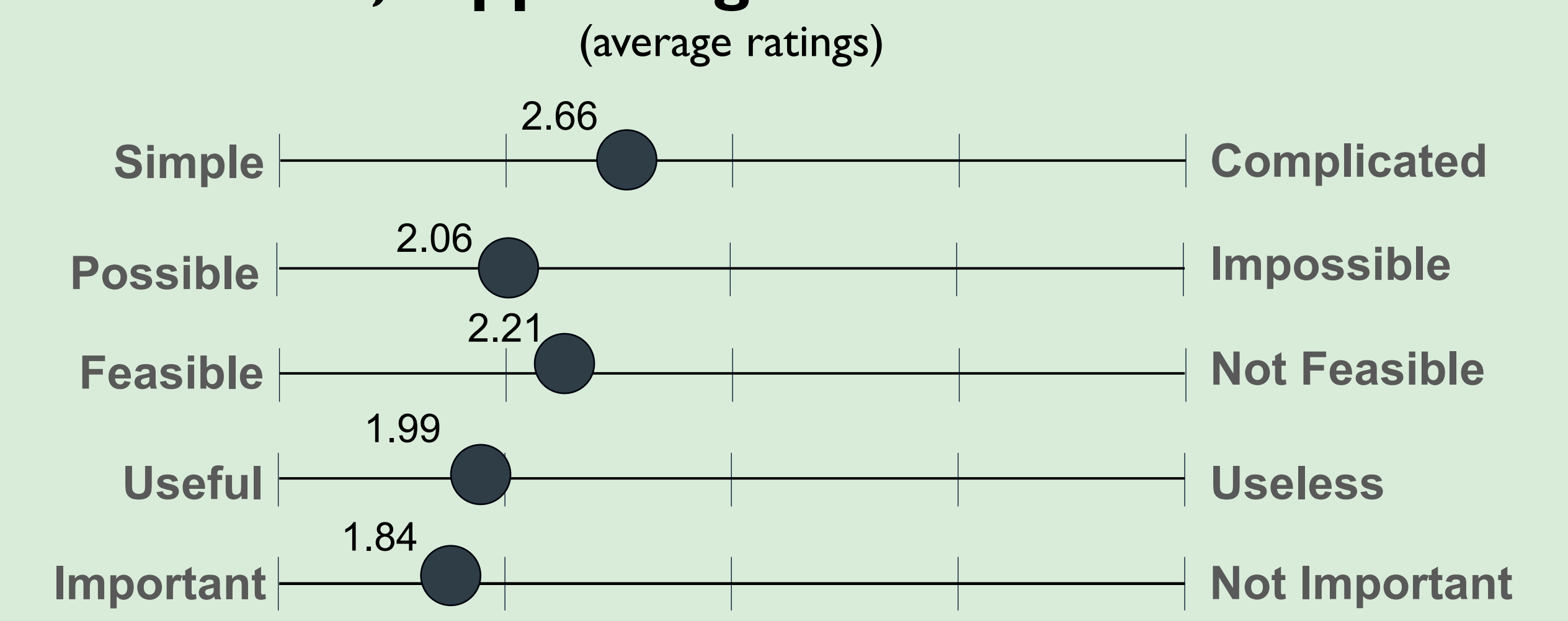
Sense of Responsibility



For me, sustainable behaviors are...



For me, supporting local farmers is...



REFERENCES

- Evans, D., Welch, D., & Swaffield, J. (2017). Constructing and mobilizing 'the consumer': Responsibility, consumption and the politics of sustainability. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 49(6), 1396–1412.
- Soron, D. (2010). Sustainability, self-identity and the sociology of consumption. *Sustainable Development*, 18(3), 172–181.
- Wallis, H., Bamberg, S., Schulte, M., & Matthies, E. (2021). Empowering people to act for a better life for all: Psychology's contributions to a social science for sustainability. *European Psychologist*, 26(3), 184–194.

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