4

Determinants of Participation in AFNs and Its Value for Consumers

Alessandro Corsi and Silvia Novelli

Consumers are the demand side of Alternative Food Networks (AFNs). This chapter will discuss their preferences and motivations for participating in AFNs, first in general and theoretical terms and as analysed in the literature. Some empirical findings from a study carried out in Piedmont will then be presented.

A. Corsi (✉)
Department of Economics and Statistics "Cognetti de Martiis",
University of Torino, Torino, Italy
e-mail: alessandro.corsi@unito.it

S. Novelli
Department of Agricultural, Forest and Food Sciences, University of Torino,
Grugliasco (TO), Italy
e-mail: silvia.novelli@unito.it

© The Author(s) 2018

A. Corsi et al. (eds.), *Alternative Food Networks*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-90409-2_4

Consumers' Food Choices: Theoretical Framework

In economic terms, food purchases are the result of a trade-off. Food is exchanged for money. The monetary cost of food represents the loss of utility from any alternative consumption that could be achieved with that sum. This is traded off with the benefits that food brings to the consumer. Though consumers do not make such comparisons consciously and rationally at each purchase, this is the implicit exchange. All in all, therefore, the purchase of a particular food, and specifically of a particular food in a particular chain like an AFN, is a matter of preference and of the value that consumers assign to the benefits and costs of their food choices. What is particular about AFNs, we argue, is that purchasing a food in an AFN is different (i.e., provides a different utility) from purchasing exactly the same good in another chain. From this point of view, then, it is interesting to discuss the benefits that consumers obtain from purchasing food in a specific AFN.

Arguably, consumers' preferences regarding the goods purchased in AFNs can be quite diverse. The choice of the chain might be conceived as sequential: consumers choose where to buy and, once this decision is made, what to buy. While this can be true in some cases, however, in others the choice of the chain and the choice of the food are made together. As an example of the first case, consumers may decide to go to a farmers' market (FM) and then decide whether and what to buy. By contrast, consumers choosing to join a Solidarity Purchase Group (SPG) also decide to a large extent what to buy, since SPGs offer a certain basket of goods.

The economics approach assumes that consumers maximise their utility from the purchase of a particular food in a particular chain based on its perceived attributes (Thilmany, Bond, & Bond, 2008), under a budget constraint. The theoretical framework can be extended, considering: (1) the determinants of the preferences for the chain; (2) consumers' general attitudes, as also determined by values, beliefs, and habits, that may influence both the choice of the chain and the choice of the food; (3) the tastes concerning specific attributes of the food to be purchased.

Often, these three aspects are inextricably mingled. This creates a problem with empirical analyses: for example, in the consumers' eyes, the food attribute "freshness" is associated with a short food chain (Hunt, 2007; Feagan & Morris, 2009; La Trobe, 2001), so the attribute of the short chain which is of interest to consumers is also an attribute of the food they believe they can find there. Nevertheless, we will discuss these three points separately.

Preferences for chains may depend on their intrinsic characteristics or attributes (we will use the two terms interchangeably) such as convenience, travel cost, cleanliness, and trust. Convenience may be a critical issue for consumers, since AFNs typically do not ensure that purchase opportunities are continuously available. For instance, farmers' markets are usually held weekly or monthly, and SPGs collect and distribute food at time intervals. Parking facilities, opening hours, and distance may be other impediments to the choice of AFNs; participation in some AFNs (e.g., FMs) is hindered by inconveniences such as difficulty in finding them or little variety of products (Conner, Colasanti, Ross, & Smalley, 2010; Khan & Prior, 2010).

The above attributes are of self-interest to the consumer. However, chain preferences can also involve attributes that are of general interest, such as a lower environmental impact, support for local farmers, or more generally social concerns. In other words, altruistic motives can be a part of consumers' preferences, as can their social and political beliefs. Empirical studies of participation in FMs have often found that environmental and social concerns are a part of the motivation for choosing AFNs. For instance, environmental and social justice have been indicated as motivations for participating in FMs (Alkon, 2008), while Toler, Briggeman, Lusk, and Adams (2009) show that willingness-to-pay (WTP) for local products is to a certain extent linked to altruistic support for local farmers. This component of preferences has been widely stressed by a set of studies drawing on a political economy perspective (Tregear, 2011). This literature—mainly belonging to the sociological, geographical, and anthropological approaches—viewed AFNs as an expression of opposition to the industrialised and globalised agro-food sector (e.g., Allen, FitzSimmons, Goodman, & Warner, 2003; Goodman, 2004).

These general beliefs and attitudes may depend, in turn, on the consumer's (observable) socio-economic characteristics such as age, gender, occupation, and the like, but also on idiosyncratic (unobservable) individual traits. Hence, a stream of literature has attempted to characterise the features of typical AFN consumers and identify specific clusters (e.g., Rocchi, Cavicchi, & Baldeschi, 2012; Weatherell, Tregear, & Allinson, 2003).

Beliefs and attributes also affect the way consumers perceive the characteristics of chains and of food. The characteristics of interest to consumers may be intrinsic to the food (such as tastiness, freshness, safety), or symbolic or intangible characteristics associated with it. It is important to note that while the intrinsic characteristics of food are an experience good (i.e., their real quality can only be assessed after consumption), the intangible characteristics are mostly credence goods, that is, their real quality cannot be assessed, or can only be assessed at a huge cost (Darby & Karni, 1973; Nelson, 1970). This is what makes the preference for an intangible characteristic of food strictly associated with the preference for a particular chain, when consumers are confident that the chain guarantees the presence of that intangible characteristic. For instance, consumers having a preference for local products may prefer to shop at a farmers' market because they have a high confidence that the lettuce they buy there is actually locally produced, something they cannot detect personally.

The strictly monetary variables—prices and income—are also relevant for consumers' choices. Since the exchange is between AFN food (with all its intrinsic and intangible characteristics) and whatever else can be bought with the same sum, the relative price dictates the rate at which AFN food can be traded with the other goods. Economic theory predicts that rational consumers with a budget constraint will increase their consumption of a good as long as the increase in utility they get from one dollar more spent on it is greater than the loss in utility due to withdrawing one dollar from the consumption of the other good. Hence, higher prices for AFN food decrease their consumption, and vice versa. Thus, if the same product is available from the alternative and the conventional chains, and consumers buy in the AFN even though the price is higher, it is because they believe the additional characteristics of food in the alternative chain are worth the higher cost. If the price in the AFN is lower, we cannot directly infer whether the choice of buying is simply due to the lower price, or whether the other characteristics also play a role. Income is relevant because it relaxes the budget constraint, allowing greater consumption. How much consumption increases with income depends on income elasticity, that is, the ratio of the relative change in consumption to the relative change in income. Food is generally income inelastic, for the simple reason that there are physiological limitations to food intake. Nevertheless, food is also a necessity and, at low-income levels, it has a high priority. All this explains the historical evolution in food consumption. Rather than resulting in higher consumption, income growth has translated into a change in food habits, with an increase in the consumption of more expensive food, first animal products and then more sophisticated and exotic products. In several respects, the birth and expansion of AFNs reflects this tendency. The search for fresh, tasty, and healthy food in alternative chains is certainly part of this trend. This obviously leaves aside the motivations linked to the intangible attributes of alternative chains and of the food they offer, for example, support for local economy and local farmers, environmental stewardship, and justice.

Previous Research on the Motivations for Attending AFNs

There is an enormous literature on the issue of consumers and AFNs. A recent review of studies on consumers' perceptions and preferences for local food (Feldmann & Hamm, 2015) considers 73 publications out of a total of 550 scientific articles identified using the search terms "local", "regional", "food", and "consumer". "Local" is not the same as "alternative", and the count would be higher if all AFNs were included. Without claiming to provide a complete review of the literature, we will limit ourselves to indicating the main streams of literature based on the above considerations.

One part of the literature investigates which characteristics of the chain are of interest to consumers. This stream often overlaps with a second one identifying the preferences for food characteristics in AFNs. A third stream aims to identify the characteristics of consumers of AFNs in terms of their socio-economic characteristics and/or of groups of consumers with different attitudes or motivations towards FMs. A fourth streams attempts to measure preferences, estimating the WTP for particular characteristics of the food and/or of the chain.

The streams of literature dealing with preferences for chains and food characteristics are not separate, since most papers do not draw clear-cut distinctions between the preferences or the WTP for the chain and for the food, and these preferences are often related to consumer characteristics. Thus, for example, in one of the first quantitative analyses of consumers' behaviour towards AFNs, Govindasamy and Nayga (1997) estimate logit models of the probability of visiting four different direct marketing facilities, including such determinants as consumers' socio-demographic characteristics and habits as well as expected quality and price relative to supermarkets.

Among the few papers listing intrinsic characteristics of the chain as determinants for chain choice, Abelló, Palma, Waller, and Anderson (2014) show that travel distance, market promotional activities such as entertainment, education, and food events were all key factors influencing the frequency of visits to farmers' markets. In a survey reported by Govindasamy, Italia, and Adelaja (2002), approximately 20% of consumers considered convenience as the most important characteristic. Among the reasons for visiting FMs, respondents to a survey in Indiana (Betz & Farmer, 2016) assigned high ratings to the convenience of the FM location and of the opening hours. Similar assessments of the convenience of market location and hours of operation were expressed in the surveys reported by Conner et al. (2010) and by Gumirakiza, Curtis, and Bosworth (2014), while the effect of various physical attributes of farmers' markets on customers' willingness to attend a particular market was estimated by Neill, Mitchell, and Williams (2014) and by Keeling, Thilmany, and Bondet (2009).

Civic concerns and food quality are far more frequently cited as reasons for attending AFNs (the majority of papers actually concern FMs). Eating quality, and especially freshness, is almost invariably the most important feature sought in FMs, normally together with support for farmers and the local economy (Archer, Sánchez, Vignali, & Chaillot, 2003; Betz & Farmer, 2016; Conner et al., 2010; Feagan & Morris, 2009; Govindasamy et al., 2002; Keeling et al., 2009; Lyon, Collie, Kvarnbrink, & Colquhoun, 2009; Onozaka, Nurse, & Thilmany McFadden, 2010; Toler et al., 2009). All these papers concern the USA, UK or Canada, but in France too (Sainte-Marie, Balle, & Kubista, 2012), the most important reason for buying local food is support for the local economy and farmers, followed by better taste, while a Eurobarometer survey indicated that 89% of EU respondents totally agree or tend to agree that there are benefits to buying products from a local farm (Eurobarometer, 2011). In Italy, Giampietri, Koemle, Yu, and Finco (2016) find a noteworthy consumer awareness of the positive influence of buying at FMs on supporting farmers' income. Hence, self-interested motivations go hand in hand with concern for public goods. In Italy, civic concern is apparently greater among patrons of specific AFNs, SPG members in particular. In one survey, 48%, 56%, and 54% of respondents indicated environmental problems, social injustice, and food safety respectively as their main concerns, and 59.3% considered the SPG to be a way of putting responsible behaviour into practice (Carbone, Gaito, & Senni, 2007).

Nevertheless, some attracting features of AFNs stem from personal exchange and sociability. Some consumers love social interactions, such as enjoying the market, talking with farmers, and making a trip to the market a family event, which significantly increases their spending at farmers' markets (Hunt, 2007). Many consumers prefer to have a farmer hand them the produce directly rather than being helped by a generic vendor or taking it from a shelf (Giampietri et al., 2016). This suggests that the modalities of the exchange themselves, and not only the specific product, are a part of consumers' preferences.

Among the papers that seek to identify the characteristics of consumers attending AFNs, some relate attendance only to socio-demographic characteristics. As regards observable characteristics, a general finding is that shoppers at AFNs are in general wealthier, older, and better educated than the general public (e.g., McGarry Wolf, Spittler, & Ahern, 2005; Onianwa, Wheelock, & Mojica, 2005). Varner and Otto (2008) also find a positive relation between sales at FMs and average income in the area.

Other studies (e.g., Zepeda & Li, 2006) include, in addition to socio-demographic variables, general attitudes towards food, the environment, and farmers, as well as personal tastes (interest in cooking), or diet habits (Govindasamy & Nayga, 1997). Other scholars identify specific groups of AFN patrons. Rocchi et al. (2012) use a cluster analysis to characterise two groups of FM shoppers, one wealthier and better educated and primarily motivated by "a positive attitude towards environmental and rural development goals and by the willingness to participate in a social event", the second motivated by the opportunity to meet producers, which they consider to be a guarantee of quality. Weatherell et al. (2003) find evidence of a homogeneous group of "concerned consumers" (58% of respondents) prioritising all food-related issues except price, strongly interested in local food, and at the same time expressing moral and health concerns. Megicks, Memery, and Angell (2012) identify four groups according to the stated reasons for buying local food, that is, "Intrinsic quality", "Local support and provenance", "Ethical sustainability", and "Shopping benefits". However, the idea that AFN participants seek high-quality credence goods and are more willing to pay for them than non-participants is challenged by Cembalo et al. (2015), who characterise AFN patrons as having values and lifestyles that are more oriented to rational shopping, sensibility to quality and taste rather than emotional involvement. On the basis of the same survey, Pascucci, Dentoni, Lombardi, and Cembalo (2016) find that SPG participants are characterised by higher levels of uncertainty on price, negotiation, and quality monitoring than non-participants and emphasise that the role of values as aggregating factors coexists with cost-economising motivations.

Nevertheless, some studies address consumers with price concerns. The probability of shopping at an FM can be significantly lower among consumers for whom cost is the most important characteristic of food (Zepeda, 2009), and "too expensive" was the most important reason indicated by respondents for not purchasing local food (Khan & Prior, 2010). Even participation in community supported agriculture (CSA) is discouraged by the price of shares (Kolodinsky & Pelch, 1997). This is evidence of the monetary constraint that consumers necessarily face and, at the same time, shows that some consumers have weak preferences for the intrinsic and intangible characteristics of AFN food relative to other consumption items.

Lastly, some papers quantify consumers' preferences in terms of willingness-to-pay for specific characteristics of food, but they deal mostly with food of local origin, which, even if related, is not necessarily the same as AFN food.[1] Burchardi, Schröder, and Thiele (2005), for instance, estimate WTP for local milk and find that it depends significantly on strong preferences for supporting farmers. Burnett, Kuethe, and Price (2011) estimate willingness to pay a price premium for "locally grown" products. Carpio and Isengildina-Massa (2009) find a higher WTP for older and female consumers who perceive local quality as higher. Darby, Batte, Ernst, and Roe (2008) estimate a higher WTP for local products than for wider provenance and find that this demand is independent of other attributes usually associated with local foods such as freshness and affiliation with "less corporate" production. Gracia, Barreiro-Hurlé, and López-Galán (2014) find that most consumers rate "local" more highly than "organic". Only one paper (Giampietri et al., 2016) finds a lower value assigned to local products. Thilmany et al. (2008) split the WTP (price premium) for local produce between different motivations (reduction of food miles, support for local farmers and economy, superior quality).

This short literature review illustrates our points that (1) motivations for attending AFNs are highly heterogeneous, (2) hedonistic and selfish motivations coexist with altruistic and social motivations, and (3) preferences may concern the intrinsic characteristics of the chains themselves or the (intrinsic or intangible) characteristics of the food available in them. One important aspect to note is that different motivations can coexist in the same individuals, who can, for example, be attracted by the tastiness of the farmers' produce and at the same time appreciate the personal interaction with them. When different motivations are compatible, they are mutually reinforced, while when they run counter to each other, the consumer must trade off the benefits against the costs. For instance, a typical trade-off is between higher prices and better expected quality at farmers' markets.

Hence, any claim to identify "the" AFN consumer can be questionable, given the high variability of desired attributes, of beliefs, and of preferences. Nevertheless, one can try to identify certain patterns shared by groups of consumers, with a higher level of confidence when considering small or compact groups. In our empirical work, we aimed at quantifying a measure of preferences in two groups of consumers, namely, consumers attending urban open-air district markets and members of SPGs.

The Choice of Purchasing at Farmers' Stands

A first part of our empirical work concerns the preferences for a particular chain. More specifically, we investigated consumers' choice to buy at farmers' stands in urban open-air district markets (Novelli & Corsi, 2015). Open-air district markets are widespread and popular in Italy. Most sellers at these markets are retailers procuring from wholesalers and selling to the public. Nevertheless, some stands are usually kept by farmers, who have a legal right to do so. Urban district markets are open daily, and farmers sell there frequently and regularly, generally three to four days per week. This contrasts with farmers' markets (typically promoted by farmers' unions in Italy) that generally take place once or twice a month. Hence, consumers in district markets differ from those at farmers' markets: they are shopping for everyday food rather than special items and are presumably not a priori self-selected for committed consumption. While consumers attending FMs have already decided to buy directly from farmers, this is not necessarily the case for those attending district markets. It is therefore interesting to investigate the motivations for choosing to purchase at farmers' vs. conventional vendors' stalls.

We hypothesised that this choice depends on (1) socio-economic characteristics of consumers (such as gender, income, education, etc.), as proxies both of cultural traits and of economic status, and (2) general attitudes towards food and chain. If consumers' predominant interest is in the quality of food, then purchasing directly from farmers is presumably due to expected better quality of their products. If expenditure is a major concern, consumers' choice between conventional and farmer vendors might be dictated by a comparison between prices. As trust in the vendor can also be a crucial criterion, the choice of vendor can thus be due to consumers' expectations about quality, taste, healthiness of what the particular vendor sells, and on the time consistency of these characteristics in repeated purchases. From this standpoint, choosing to buy from farmers depends on whether consumers consider them more trustworthy than conventional vendors. Lastly, for some consumers the main concern when shopping might be convenience, so that the location of the farmers' stands in the district market can be relevant.

A total of 1138 valid questionnaires were collected through in-person interviews in open-air markets in Torino, Cuneo, Alessandria, and Asti, four cities in Piedmont (Italy) during the spring and summer of 2014. In Torino, the regional capital of Piedmont, a two-stage random sampling procedure was used, the first stage being a random choice of district markets. In each market, consumers to be interviewed were also chosen at random.

Consumer attitudes were assessed from responses to questions about the interviewees' reasons for choosing the district market and for choosing specific market stands. The stated reasons made it possible to identify three main attitudes: convenience, price, and quality. Likewise, the criteria for choosing market stands were clustered into four categories: convenience, price, quality, and trust in the vendor.[2] Attitudes were not mutually exclusive. Table 4.1 shows the relevant percentages of consumers.

The major reason for choosing district markets is convenience. This is not surprising, since these are district markets, typically attended by people living in the area. Quality comes second, which suggests that, since the interviewees had actually chosen the district markets, they consider that the products there are better quality than those in other facilities

Table 4.1 Attitudes towards the choice of market and stand

Attitudes	%
District market—convenience	65.4
District market—price	21.4
District market—quality	41.5
Market stand—convenience	1.3
Market stand—price	57.0
Market stand—quality	70.3
Market stand—trust	29.3

such as supermarkets. By contrast, price is a relatively minor factor in the choice of district markets.

Once at the market, convenience is no longer an important consideration in choosing a stand. Quality is a major criterion (indicated by 70% of the interviewees), but price (57%) is also important. Almost 30% indicate trust in the vendor as a reason for choosing a stand.

When asked where they bought fruit or vegetables, 33% of the interviewees stated they purchased predominantly from farmers' stands, 45% stated that they sometimes bought from them, while the rest either did not buy from or were not aware of farmers' stands.

We ran a statistical analysis of the probability of purchasing at a farmer's stand (whether regularly or occasionally). An attitude towards quality seems to play a central role in the preference for farmers' stands, as inferred from both the stated reason for choosing the local market and for choosing market stands. Both variables were statistically highly significant, and the estimates suggest that choosing the local market on the basis of quality increases the probability of buying from farmers by 9.5%.[3] If the quest for quality drove the choice of market stand, consumers were 21.5% more likely to buy from farmers. This suggests that consumers generally consider farmers' products as higher quality. The attitude of seeking a trustworthy vendor was also important in driving the choice of a farmer's stand, since it increases the probability by almost 8%. This implies that farmers are considered more trustworthy than conventional vendors. By contrast, attitudes towards low prices (both in the choice of the market and of the stand) bore a negative sign but were not significant, that is, even if farmers' stands are considered more costly, prices do not seem to be relevant in the choice of farmers' stands.

Among personal characteristics, consumers who usually took care of purchasing fruit and vegetables were 24.2% more likely to buy from farmers' stands, perhaps because they are more aware of quality issues and better acquainted with the vendors. Better educated consumers were also more likely to buy from farmers, though in this case the effect was weak (every additional schooling year increases the probability of purchasing from farmers by just 1%). Males were 5% more likely to purchase from farmers than females, though the effect was only weakly significant.

Income was not significant, and the effects of professional status were unclear.

Overall, these results suggest that (1) consumers' attitudes towards the choice of the market and of the stand are highly heterogeneous; (2) the dominant attitude determining the choice of the district market is the search for convenience, along with the search for quality; (3) the dominant attitude once in the market is the search for quality, while price comes second; (4) trust in the vendor is also relevant to the choice at the market; and (5) farmers in district markets are therefore mostly appreciated for quality and trust.

The Value of the Personal Relationship with Farmers

The finding that price, though outweighed by quality and trust, is relevant in consumers' choice bears out the truism that purchasing food entails a trade-off. The cost of food represents the loss of utility from any alternative consumption that could be achieved with that sum. This is traded off with the benefits the food brings to the consumer. In addition to quality and trust, these benefits include the intangibles stemming from disinterested personal interactions. It has been shown that such personal relationships are attractive for people attending farmers' markets (Kirwan, 2006). We wanted to investigate whether patronising farmers' stands created relational goods, that is, disinterested personal relationships with the farmers in "less alternative" facilities such as district markets and—something new to the best of our knowledge—to measure their value for consumers.[4] To this end, we used a stated preference technique similar to those used for the evaluation of environmental goods (Corsi & Novelli, 2015). We submitted a specific questionnaire to a sub-sample of the participants in the survey presented above, conducting in-person interviews with randomly chosen people attending open-air district markets in Torino and other cities in Piedmont. We retained only respondents who stated they regularly shopped in that particular market and who usually bought from farmers, since we wanted to estimate the value of the direct relationship between consumer and farmer. After the preliminary filter questions on their purchasing habits, they were asked whether they would still buy the products they frequently bought from one farmer if another farmer offered exactly the same products at a lower price.[5] The wording "exactly the same" was specified in order to rule out reasons other than the relational good and the price. In particular, we sought to rule out preferences based on the expected quality of the produce, the information provision, the preference for the point of sale, and support for farmers or local products. Proposed price discounts of 10%, 20%, and 30% were randomly assigned. In each case, the absolute change for a typical expenditure was also stated. What we wanted to estimate was thus the willingness-to-accept (WTA), that is, the minimum amount of money needed to relinquish the relational good. It should be emphasised that this is only a measure of preferences, using money as a metric, and does not imply that the relational good is for sale. To be sure that the respondents really stated their WTA for the relational good, those who stated they would rather stay with the previous vendor were asked the reason. In some cases, they mentioned trust, which is not equivalent to the relational good. We experimented with two different approaches to dealing with these cases: either the responses were reclassified as an acceptance of the alternative vendor, or they were simply dropped. Two different estimation methods were employed to assess WTA, one similar to the difference-in-utility approach used in contingent valuation of environmental goods as proposed by Hanemann (1984), the second similar to the valuation function proposed by Cameron (1988) (for details, see Corsi & Novelli, 2015). The latter makes it possible to assess the effect of the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics on the probability of accepting the change of vendor. The first model was estimated on 249 observations, the second, due to some missing data for socio-economic variables, on 241 observations (212 and 205, respectively, if trust responses were dropped). The results differ according to the models, but at the most conservative estimate, they indicate that the average WTA in the sample was 12.2% or 9.6% contingent on how trust responses were treated, with a standard deviation of 2.3% and 2.6%, respectively. The median is 12.5% and 10%, respectively. In other words, a typical consumer would have remained with his/her favourite farmer unless the proposed discount was over 12% or 10%. This suggests that even in a setting which is not particularly dedicated to alternative and committed consumers, direct sales were to a non-negligible extent driven by the personal relationship created between producer and consumer, even though there was a certain variability in this respect. However, though we sought to isolate the effect of this component, some ambiguity may remain, since some motivations may be mingled. When asked to indicate their reason for staying with their favourite vendor, for instance, some respondents answered “out of habit”, which is difficult to interpret in one sense or another. Habit may mean familiarity and, hence, be related to the relational good; but it can also stem from risk-averse attitudes. Similarly, trust is not the same as a relational good, but may be strictly connected. If I know and like someone, I usually tend to trust him/her, though the converse might not hold, since I can trust someone who is indifferent to me. Moreover, if relational goods are created between farmers and consumers, this does not mean that they may not also be created with conventional vendors in a facility where sales, unlike in supermarkets, are face-to-face. Rather than being a dichotomy, opportunities for personal relationships range in a continuum, from the lowest level in supermarkets up to the highest in AFNs.

Overall, the findings from the survey in district markets suggest that in such facilities as elsewhere, customers have heterogeneous and multi-faceted reasons for purchasing directly from producers, from reasons linked to intrinsic food quality (taste, freshness) to intangible attributes such as environmental friendliness and local origin, or knowing and liking the vendor.

The Value of Participating in SPGs

The following empirical investigation concerned Solidarity Purchase Groups (SPGs; in Italian, Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale or GAS). SPGs are organisations of consumers who join together to buy food and other goods collectively and directly from producers, at a price that is fair to both parties. In their statements, SPGs typically stress the use of short food chains, quality and environmentally friendly food consumption, and support for farmers' right to fair prices (Saroldi, 2001). Hence, ethical and solidarity issues, establishing trust relationships between consumers and producers (especially local ones) and getting fresh, seasonal, and healthy food figure prominently in their ideology (Novelli & Corsi, 2018, Chap. 10). In decisions to join SPGs, ethical and political motivations and social concerns are thus arguably dominant, but more selfish and monetary reasons can be nevertheless at work, since members are in any case budget-constrained.

Accordingly, we were interested in investigating SPG members' motivations and in assessing the ethical, social, and environmental reasons on the one hand and the self-interested or strictly economic reasons on the other. In addition, we wanted to measure the value members attach to their participation in the SPG. Again, money is only a metric for measuring preferences.

For this analysis (Corsi & Novelli, 2016), an in-person questionnaire was administered to 151 members of four SPGs in the city of Torino (Italy) and other neighbouring towns. The four SPGs differed in size, as they had 25, 156, 96, and 136 member families or individuals, respectively. The questionnaires were administered during the meetings held to distribute the food ordered by members. The questionnaire included a first section in which respondents were asked about their participation in the SPG, the tasks they performed in the SPG, and their motivations. The answers to the questions concerning the tasks performed for the SPG were used to construct an indicator of respondents' commitment to the SPG.[6] Then, using an approach similar to that used for patrons of urban district markets, respondents were asked whether they would still buy from the SPG if its prices were to increase by a certain percentage above what they currently pay, and the only alternative were to buy at a supermarket. Price increases of 20%, 30%, 40%, and 50% were randomly assigned to each questionnaire. Members who responded they would still buy from the SPG were then asked to indicate their reasons. The information from this question was used to estimate a WTP function and the mean and median WTP.

As regards the respondents' socio-economic characteristics, the majority (64%) were women, the mean age was 48, and the education level was quite high (the mean corresponded to some university-level education).

The majority of respondents were white-collar workers (69%), followed by professionals (14%) and self-employed (9%) while manual workers were a minority (4%), the rest being unemployed and non-labour force. The average monthly household income was about 2500 euros, and the average number of household members was 3.2, with 0.8 children under 14 years old. Interestingly, commitment averaged 12.8 points but varied widely (±7.5), so that members performed the activities needed to run the SPG quite differently. Another relevant data is that 55% of the respondents stated that the prices of fruit and vegetables purchased through the SPG were lower than in conventional supermarkets.

Table 4.2 shows the distribution of motivations for participating in the SPG (respondents could give up to three reasons). The most frequent motivation was "Support for local farmers"; this, together with the other social motivations ("Respect for the environment" and "Fighting multinationals and supermarket chains"), accounted for 39.6% of total responses.

Responses relating to the intrinsic or symbolic characteristics of food ("Quality guarantee", "Consumption of seasonal products", "Consumption of local food") added up to another 38%. Strictly monetary considerations ("Price" and "Quality/price ratio") accounted for only 12.7%. Lastly, it is interesting to note that explicit social and relational motivations ("Participation in a collective action of people with the same

Table 4.2 Responses to the question about the main reasons for participating in the SPG (max 3 items)

	N	%
Respect for the environment	23	7.2
Support for local farmers	74	23.1
Consumption of seasonal products	36	11.2
Consumption of local food	45	14.0
Fighting multinationals and supermarket chains	30	9.3
Quality guarantee	41	12.8
Price	2	0.6
Quality/price ratio	39	12.1
Participation in a collective action of people with the same ideals	14	4.4
Knowing the producers	17	5.3
	321	100.0

ideals" and "Familiarity with the producers") accounted for almost 10% of total responses.

Different statistical models were estimated for assessing members' WTP to participate in the SPG. The valuation function approach also made it possible to assess which variables affected the probability of remaining with the SPG even with the indicated price increases. The effects of some variables are rather obvious. Price had the predicted negative effect, but it was quite weak, since a 1% increase in prices reduced the probability of remaining with the SPG by only 0.7%. Members who stated that the SPG prices were lower than the supermarkets' were 14% more likely to stay with the SPG than other members. This is consistent with having a monetary incentive to participate in the SPG.

The commitment variable was statistically significant and positive. For each one-point increase in the commitment indicator (the average is 12.8, with a range from 2 to 33), the probability of staying rose by 1.3%. This means that participation provided utility to some participants regardless of the monetary incentive. Far from being a cost, work for the SPG provided a reward: the satisfaction of engaging in an ethical activity, the pleasure of socialising through the initiatives and the activities, and, more generally, a psychic reward.

Some characteristics that are typically considered as conducive to participation in AFNs, that is, higher income and upper level occupation, were not significant in our estimates. Professionals and self-employed people did not differ from the non-labour force group (the reference category), unlike white-collar and manual workers who were more likely to stay. Younger age and higher education were also factors that made respondents more willing to stay with the SPG even with higher prices. Nevertheless, the effects of these variables were weak: each additional year of age decreased the probability by 0.6%, and each additional year of education increased it by 2.4%. Lastly, having young children reduced the probability of staying with the SPG, because of the tighter income constraint faced by households with young children: with each additional child, the probability of staying dropped by 10%. Overall, socio-economic variables did not have a strong effect. One should nevertheless consider that the analysis addressed SPG members, rather than the general population, and it is not surprising that there should be a certain homogeneity among them. Most SPGs originate from small groups of friends or neighbours, and tend to draw on a pool of acquaintances even when they grow to a larger size, so it is only to be expected that members have some similarities that make it more difficult to identify socio-economic drivers because of the lack of variation.

Average and median WTP were also estimated using the statistical models. The mean WTP according to the valuation function model was 68.4% (with a standard deviation of 26%), and the median was 66.3%. The difference-in-utility model yielded a similar value, a mean and median of 77.6%. In other words, a typical member would have continued to stay with the SPG even with an almost two-thirds increase in prices. Even allowing for some hypothetical bias, these results show members' strong commitment to their SPG. We asked respondents who stated they would stay with the SPG despite the indicated price increase to provide their most important reason for doing so. Answers are shown in Table 4.3. Among the reasons, slightly over half of the respondents cite the better quality of SPG products and distrust of supermarket offerings, while support for farmers, environmental protection, and sociality total about 45%.

Though not exactly comparable with the findings from the survey of district market patrons, these results suggest a much higher preference for the specific chain, which is not surprising, given the self-selection of SPG members. Food quality remains a crucial driver of the choice, but altruistic motivations and social concerns have a greater weight. Nevertheless, the higher WTP among those SPG members who pay lower prices and the negative sign for young children suggest that purely monetary motivations cannot be ruled out.

Table 4.3 Reasons for staying with the SPG even with a price increase (%; *n* = 85)

Quality is better and/or I don't trust the quality of supermarket products	51.8
I would be sorry to stop dealing with SPG friends	4.7
For environmental protection reasons	12.9
For reasons linked to respect for farmers	27.1
Other/no response	3.5
	100.0

Conclusions

One of the first points regarding AFNs' attractiveness to consumers that arises from the literature and from our empirical analysis is that motivations are highly heterogeneous. There is no single attribute, either of the chain or of the food, that exclusively determines the decision to participate in AFNs. Different people have different motivations and, on the other hand, AFNs themselves are far from homogeneous. They certainly share the common feature (at least in our concept) of allowing personal interactions between producers and consumers, which is not possible (or possible only to a very limited extent) in a supermarket. And they make it possible to imbue food and its consumption with fresh meaning through its links with the local area and to the people who produce it. Nevertheless, it goes without saying that having this possibility does not mean that everyone takes advantage of it, nor that everyone benefits from it in the same way. Moreover, there are differences among AFNs. Some, like SPGs or CSAs, are organisations characterised by, and requiring, a strong commitment, especially when their members are bound to contribute to the group's activities. At the other extreme, farmers' direct sales in district markets, though providing a producer-consumer connection, do not require any special effort by consumers, and an inattentive consumer might not even know that the vendor is a farmer. Other forms of AFNs, like FMs and on-farm direct sales, are somewhere in the middle of a continuum.

It is not surprising that the observed determinants for choosing to purchase food through AFNs are so diverse. There are two reasons for this. On the demand side, consumers look for different attributes. On the supply side, different AFNs offer different attributes of the chain itself and of the food that consumers can purchase in it. A strong self-selection of consumers towards the different types of AFN can explain both the socio-economic characteristics found in some literature and the apparently contradictory lack of influence of these characteristics in other literature. The literature (overwhelmingly dealing with FMs) that compares the characteristics of shoppers at AFNs to non-shoppers or to the general population generally finds that typical shoppers at FMs are older, better educated, and wealthier. This is consistent with the idea that income (with which education and age are positively correlated) is a driver of this choice, because a higher income makes it possible to shop for more expensive higher quality food, where quality is seen to include all intrinsic and intangible attributes of food. Incidentally, it can also explain why AFNs were born and grew in developed countries. This is not to say that the choice of AFNs is a "radical chic" attitude. Rather, it serves to remind us that there is always a budget constraint, which is less binding for wealthier people but nevertheless has some impact on average. From this point of view, the comparison between prices in AFNs and elsewhere is important, since those who are more income-constrained are also more interested in AFNs when they offer lower prices. This comparison is nevertheless difficult, since it entails keeping all other things equal, which is in contradiction with the intangible values that AFNs in themselves bring about.

If AFNs are diverse, people are diverse as well, and so are their preferences. The intrinsic attributes of the particular chain (such as distance, convenience, variety of products, possibility of contact with farmers, etc.) may be relevant, as our finding that convenience is the major reason for choosing a district market demonstrates. Nevertheless, a desirable attribute of AFN chains is the opportunity to access desirable intangible attributes of food. People who prefer fresh produce and are convinced that FMs provide fresher food than conventional chains prefer FMs; those preferring local products choose chains they trust as regards the provenance of the produce. Among the preferred attributes of food available in AFNs, our investigation as well as the literature indicates that quality seems to be the most important. Obviously, quality covers many aspects, but the main reference is to the intrinsic characteristics of food, such as freshness, healthiness, and taste. Nevertheless, intangible attributes such as local origin, support for farmers, and environmental protection are frequently cited among the motivations. However, it is difficult to distinguish and to assess the relative weight of the different motivations, because they are frequently associated with each other, and derive from general attitudes or beliefs. For instance, people who want direct contact with farmers prefer local products (Giampietri et al., 2016). Among the characteristics of the chains, one we stress is the value of human interactions they allow, a value that is not limited to information about the products and how they are produced, nor to trust in the quality of the products themselves. It is a value stemming from the interaction among people in the chain. It can consist in farmers and consumers in the district market knowing and liking each other, or in the value that participating in SPGs has for their members, as shown by our empirical surveys. It should also be noted that this value depends on the type of chain: the value of participating in SPGs was found to be much higher than the value of direct interaction with farmers in district markets. It is quite plausible that there is a continuum of situations from this perspective as well.

In addition to the characteristics of products and of chains, prices are a relevant variable in consumers' choices, but are frequently overlooked by the literature. There are two reasons for this. One is that many surveys are conducted among people attending FMs and more generally AFNs. These individuals, as we have argued, are self-selected and in general are inclined to assign a higher value to the intrinsic and intangible attributes of AFN produce than the general public. Hence, in the trade-off between price and food attributes, their valuation for the attributes is higher, so that prices count less. The second reason is that, in developed countries, expenditure for food accounts for a relatively minor share of household budgets, so that the effect of food price changes on real income is rather limited. That said, the effect of income should not be forgotten, as suggested by our finding that the likelihood of staying with an SPG is increased by lower prices. Actually, since lower prices for SPG members and paying fair prices to producers are only possible because of the voluntary work provided by members (Novelli & Corsi, 2018, Chap. 10), it can be argued that members trade off their work for lower purchase prices and fair prices for farmers (though it is also possible that they get utility from working for the SPG). The importance of income also differs according to the specific chain. In some cases, the goal of finding lower prices becomes dominant. An example is the Collective Purchasing Groups (Gruppi d'Acquisto Collettivo—GAC), promoted by a consumers' association and supported by the Province of Torino Department for Social Policies (Movimento consumatori, 2018). Each week, the association buys the products ordered by registered members directly from local or national organic producers and distributes them. Though some of the initiative's motivations are environmental (reduction of food miles), the emphasis is on obtaining lower prices by eliminating middlemen and on enabling "everyone to access higher quality food, not just people who can afford to buy from specialised shops or from farmers who overcharge for their products at the market" (Movimento consumatori, 2018). In this case, even if it is an organisation outside the conventional chain, the "degree of alternativeness" is rather low, since personal relationships between producers and consumers are quite irrelevant, as are the links to the local area and recovering the meaning of food.

Heterogeneity of preferences across consumers goes along with diversity of preferences within individual consumers. A person may like freshness of food and at the same time be a supporter of local farmers. When preferences for different attributes are compatible, they are mutually reinforced. In some cases, though, they might be in opposition. For instance, the desire to have contact with farmers and to know how they produce would favour on-farm direct sales, which a person who is mindful of the environment could be reluctant to choose because of the environmental impact of trips to the farm.

All the above considerations help to put the nature of AFNs and their strengths and weaknesses in perspective. If we accept that people's motivations are heterogeneous and that involvement and participation lie along a continuum in different types of AFN, then the picture is one of a population of different organisational forms, covering different market segments and responding to different economic, political, and social demands. The vision of AFNs as politically and socially oriented, as suggested by the political economy approach that conceptualises "AFNs as movements in constant struggle against a threatening forces of global capitalism" (Tregear, 2011), or by the "reflexive localism" perspective (Dupuis & Goodman, 2006) that aims at "food systems […] making for a more inclusive metropolitan regionalism promoting equitable distribution of resources and services" (Goodman, Dupuis, & Goodman, 2012), is undoubtedly true for some, but not all AFNs. In these forms, that is, in subjective intention to change the food system, it concerns some particularly committed groups of citizens, like the SPGs described by Brunori, Rossi, and Guidi (2012), Grasseni (2013), and Fonte (2013), while other forms are mainly motivated by short-sighted and selfish interests. One might ask whether these movements may nevertheless objectively have the effect of changing the conventional food system. Though the question is obviously difficult to answer, the foregoing considerations give reason to doubts that they can. From an economic perspective, if AFNs are not underpinned by an explicit and intentional strategy for creating an alternative to conventional food systems, many other motivations are simply emerging demands that the conventional chains have not yet been able to meet, but can hijack in the future. For example, the Carrefour supermarket chain (like other supermarket chains) has created a line of quality food sold under its private label ("Terre d'Italia", Lands of Italy) and advertised as being sourced from small producers in specified geographical areas. Though this is not a line of fresh produce, conventional supermarkets are marketing increasing amounts of produce with a Protected Designation of Origin, thus providing the same attributes of freshness and quality now typically offered by AFNs.

In any case, from the efficiency perspective of standard welfare economics, AFNs are particular markets matching demand and supply and hence increasing overall welfare. According to welfare economics, any voluntary transaction represents a Pareto improvement, that is, a change in which someone or everyone benefits and no one loses. From this point of view, criticisms of AFNs based on their supposed inefficiency and on the efficiency superiority of conventional chains are ill-grounded. There can be no doubt that AFNs increase their participants' welfare. This alone would be sufficient reason to welcome them, even if there were no other points in their favour.

Notes

1. Martinez et al. (2010) present the main characteristics of local food chains in the USA and add a review of papers dealing with characteristics and attitudes associated with local food purchase and willingness to purchase and with consumer characteristics associated with willingness to pay more for local foods.
2. With regard to the district markets, convenience was identified as an attitude if consumers' stated reasons for choosing a market were "Closeness

to home", "Closeness to workplace, to school, to places where their relatives live", and "Location on the way between home and workplace". Price attitude corresponded to the answer "Reasonable prices". Quality attitude was identified by the answers "Product quality", "Wide choice", and "Pleasant ambience". Attitudes towards the choice of stands were Convenience ("Location of the stands in the market"), Price ("Reasonable prices", "Quality/price ratio"), Quality ("Product quality", "Freshness", "Supply of local products", "Region of provenance of products"), and Trust in the vendor ("Personal acquaintance with the vendor"). Respondents could indicate up to three items.

3. Since in these statistical models (probit) the marginal effect of the variables on the probability of the outcome varies according to the value of the variable itself and of the other variables, the change in probability is as usual calculated at the mean values of the variables.
4. Relational goods are discussed in Chap. 2 of this book.
5. The exact wording was: "Think of farmers' stands, in particular of the stand where you most frequently buy fruit and vegetables, and think of the farmer who usually helps you and with whom you talk while buying. Now imagine that tomorrow another farmer opens a stand in this market and offers produce that is exactly the same as the produce you buy from your regular vendor: same territorial provenance, same quality guarantee, and same freshness. *The only differences would be the vendor and the price*. If the new vendor's price were X% lower than your usual vendor's price, and you wanted to buy the same quantity, from whom would you buy? Consider, for instance, that something costing 10 euros from your usual vendor would cost X euros at the new stand."
6. Respondents were assigned up to 5 points if they made purchases for their household, depending on the frequency (less than 6 times/year; every second month; every month; every 15 days; every week); up to 5 points if they also made purchases for other households; up to 5 points if they collected products from the farmers and distributed them to the other members; 5 points if they prepared the mailing list, the website, and so on; 5 points if they managed the relationship with the producers; 5 points if they handled contacts with participants and collected orders; 5 points if they were members of the SPG board; and 1 point if they participated in the SPG assembly and social initiatives. The points are obviously arbitrary, but they attempt to reflect the time devoted to each activity and, hence, the commitment to the SPG, since members are not paid for these activities.

References

Abelló, F. J., Palma, M. A., Waller, M. L., & Anderson, D. P. (2014). Evaluating the Factors Influencing the Number of Visits to Farmers' Markets. *Journal of Food Products Marketing, 20*(1), 17–35.

Allen, P., FitzSimmons, M., Goodman, M., & Warner, K. (2003). Shifting Places in the Agrifood Landscape: The Tectonics of Alternative Agrifood Initiatives in California. *Journal of Rural Studies, 19*(1), 61–75.

Alkon, A. (2008). From Value to Values: Sustainable Consumption at Farmers Markets. *Agriculture and Human Values, 25*, 487–498.

Archer, G. P., Sánchez, J. G., Vignali, G., & Chaillot, A. (2003). Latent Consumers' Attitude to Farmers' Markets in North West England. *British Food Journal, 105*(8), 487–497.

Betz, M. E., & Farmer, J. R. (2016). Farmers' Market Governance and Its Role on Consumer Motives and Outcomes. *Local Environment, 21*(11), 1420–1434.

Brunori, G., Rossi, A., & Guidi, F. (2012). On the New Social Relations Around and Beyond Food. Analysing Consumers' Role and Action in Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale (Solidarity Purchasing Groups). *Sociologia Ruralis, 52*(1), 1–30.

Burchardi, H., Schröder, C., & Thiele, H. D. (2005). *Willingness-to-Pay for Food of the Own Region: Empirical Estimates from Hypothetical and Incentive Compatible Settings*. Selected Paper prepared for presentation at the American Agricultural Economics Association Annual Meeting, Providence, Rhode Island, July 24–27.

Burnett, P., Kuethe, T. H., & Price, C. (2011). Consumer Preference for Locally Grown Produce: An Analysis of Willingness-to-Pay and Geographic Scale. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development, 2*(1), 269–278.

Cameron, T. A. (1988). A New Paradigm for Valuing Non-market Goods Using Referendum Data: Maximum Likelihood Estimation by Censored Logistic Regression. *Journal of Environmental Economics and Management, 15*, 355–379.

Carbone, A., Gaito, M., & Senni, S. (2007). *Consumers' Buying Groups in the Short Food Chains: Alternatives for Trust*. Paper presented at the 1st International European Forum on Innovation and System Dynamics in Food Networks, Innsbruck-Igls, Austria, February 15–17, 2007.

Carpio, C. E., & Isengildina-Massa, O. (2009). Consumer Willingness to Pay for Locally Grown Products: The Case of South Carolina. *Agribusiness, 25*(3), 412–426.

Cembalo, L., Lombardi, A., Pascucci, S., Dentoni, D., Migliore, G., Verneau, F., & Schifani, G. (2015). Rationally Local: Consumer Participation in Alternative Food Chains. *Agribusiness, 3*(13), 330–352.

Conner, D., Colasanti, K., Ross, R. B., & Smalley, S. B. (2010). Locally Grown Foods and Farmers Markets: Consumer Attitudes and Behaviors. *Sustainability, 2*, 742–756.

Corsi, A., & Novelli, S. (2015). *Relational Goods and Direct Purchase from Farmers: Estimating the Value of the Relationship between Consumers and Producers*. Paper presented at the International Association of Agricultural Economists Conference, August 9–14, 2015, Milan, Italy.

Corsi, A., & Novelli, S. (2016). *Alternative Food Networks and Short Food Chains: Estimating the Economic Value of the Participation in Solidarity Purchasing Groups*. Paper presented at the 149th EAAE Seminar 'Structural Change in Agri-food Chains: New Relations between Farm Sector, Food Industry and Retail Sector' Rennes, France, October 27–28, 2016. Retrieved from https://ideas.repec.org/p/ags/eaa149/244776.html

Darby, M. R., & Karni, E. (1973). Free Competition and the Optimal Amount of Fraud. *Journal of Law and Economics, 16*(1), 67–88.

Darby, K., Batte, M. T., Ernst, S., & Roe, B. (2008). Decomposing Local: A Conjoint Analysis of Locally Produced Foods. *American Journal of Agricultural Economics, 90*(2), 476–486.

Dupuis, M. E., & Goodman, D. (2006). Should We Go "Home" to Eat? Towards a Reflexive Politics of Localism. *Journal of Rural Studies, 21*, 359–371.

Eurobarometer. (2011). The Common Agricultural Policy. Special Barometer 368. Retrieved March 27, 2018, from http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/SPECIAL/surveyKy/996

Feagan, R. B., & Morris, D. (2009). Consumer Quest for Embeddedness: A Case Study of the Brantford Farmers' Market. *International Journal of Consumer Studies, 33*, 235–243.

Feldmann, C., & Hamm, U. (2015). Consumers' Perceptions and Preferences for Local Food: A Review. *Food Quality and Preference, 40*, 152–164.

Fonte, M. (2013). Food Consumption as Social Practice: Solidarity Purchasing Groups in Rome, Italy. *Journal of Rural Studies, 32*, 230–239.

Giampietri, E., Koemle, D. B. A., Yu, X., & Finco, A. (2016). Consumers' Sense of Farmers' Markets: Tasting Sustainability or Just Purchasing Food? *Sustainability, 8*(11), 1157.

Goodman, D. (2004). Rural Europe Redux? Reflections on Alternative Agro-food Networks and Paradigm Change. *Sociologia Ruralis, 44*(1), 3–16.

Goodman, D., Dupuis, M. E., & Goodman, M. K. (2012). *Alternative Food Networks. Knowledge, Practice, and Politics*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Govindasamy, R., & Nayga, R. (1997). Determinants of Farmer-to-Consumer Direct Market Visits by Type of Facility: A Logit Analysis. *Agricultural and Resource Economics Review, 26*(1), 31–38.

Govindasamy, R., Italia, J., & Adelaja, A. (2002). Farmers' Markets: Consumer Trends, Preferences, and Characteristics. *Journal of Extension, 40*(1).

Gracia, A., Barreiro-Hurlé, J., & López-Galán, B. (2014). Are Local and Organic Claims Complements or Substitutes?: A Consumer Preferences Study for Eggs. *Journal of Agricultural Economics, 65*(1), 49–67.

Grasseni, C. (2013). *Beyond Alternative Food. Italy's Solidarity Purchase Groups*. London: Bloomsbury.

Gumirakiza, J. D., Curtis, K. R., & Bosworth, R. C. (2014). Who Attends Farmers' Markets and Why? Understanding Consumers and Their Motivations. *International Food and Agribusiness Management Review, 17*(2), 65–82.

Hanemann, W. M. (1984). Welfare Evaluations in Contingent Valuation Experiments with Discrete Responses. *American Journal of Agricultural Economics, 66*, 332–341.

Hunt, A. R. (2007). Consumer Interactions and Influences on Farmers' Market Vendors. *Renewable Agriculture and Food Systems, 22*(1), 54–66.

Keeling, J. K., Thilmany, D., & Bondet, C. (2009). What Influences Consumer Choice of Fresh Produce Purchase Location? *Journal of Agricultural and Applied Economics, 41*(1), 61–74.

Khan, F., & Prior, C. (2010). Evaluating the Urban Consumer with Regard to Sourcing Local Food: A Heart of England Study. *International Journal of Consumer Studies, 34*, 161–168.

Kirwan. (2006). The Interpersonal World of Direct Marketing: Examining Conventions of Quality at UK Farmers' Markets. *Journal of Rural Studies, 22*, 301–312.

Kolodinsky, J., & Pelch, L. (1997). Factors Influencing the Decision to Join a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Farm. *Journal of Sustainable Agriculture, 10*(2/3), 129–141.

La Trobe, H. (2001). Farmers' Markets: Consuming Local Rural Produce. *International Journal of Consumer Studies, 25*(3), 181–192.

Lyon, P., Collie, V., Kvarnbrink, E. B., & Colquhoun, A. (2009). Shopping at the Farmers' Market: Consumers and Their Perspectives. *Journal of Foodservice, 20*, 21–30.

Martinez, S., Hand, M., Da Pra, M., Pollack, S., Ralston, K., Smith, T., et al. (2010). *Local Food Systems: Concepts, Impacts and Issues*. ERR 97, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, May 2010.

McGarry Wolf, M., Spittler, A., & Ahern, J. (2005). A Profile of Farmers' Market Consumers and the Perceived Advantages of Produce Sold at Farmers' Markets. *Journal of Food Distribution Research, 36*(1), 192–201.

Megicks, P., Memery, J., & Angell, R. J. (2012). Understanding Local Food Shopping: Unpacking the Ethical Dimension. *Journal of Marketing Management, 28*(3–4), 264–289.

Movimento consumatori. (2018). *Gruppi d'Acquisto Collettivo: il Progetto*. Retrieved March 25, 2018, from http://piemonte.movimentoconsumatori.it/gac/

Neill, C. L., Mitchell, D. M., & Williams, R. B. (2014). A Look at the Variations in Consumer Preferences for Farmers' Markets Attributes. *Proceedings of the 2014 Annual Meeting of the Southern Agricultural Economics Association*, February 1–4, 2014, Dallas, Texas. Retrieved from http://ageconsearch.umn.edu/record/162445

Nelson, P. (1970). Information and Consumer Behavior. *Journal of Political Economy, 78*(2), 311–329.

Novelli, S., & Corsi, A. (2015). *Alternative Food Networks and Local Markets: Determinants of Consumers' Choices between Conventional and Farmers' Stands*. Paper presented at the 4th AIEAA Conference "Innovation, Productivity and Growth: Towards Sustainable Agri-food Production", 11–12 June, 2015, Ancona, Italy. Retrieved from https://ideas.repec.org/p/ags/aiea15/207289.html

Novelli, S., & Corsi, A. (2018). *The Economic Viability of Solidarity Purchase Groups (Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale)*. Chapter 10 of this Book.

Onianwa, O., Wheelock, G., & Mojica, M. (2005). An Analysis of the Determinants of Farmer-to-Consumer Direct-Market Shoppers. *Journal of Food Distribution Research, 36*(1), 130–134.

Onozaka, Y., Nurse, G., & Thilmany McFadden, D. (2010). Local Food Consumers: How Motivations and Perceptions Translate to Buying Behavior. *Choices, 25*(1), 1–6.

Pascucci, S., Dentoni, D., Lombardi, A., & Cembalo, L. (2016). Sharing Values or Sharing Costs? Understanding Consumer Participation in Alternative Food Networks. *NJAS – Wageningen Journal of Life Sciences, 78*, 47–60.

Rocchi, B., Cavicchi, A., & Baldeschi, M. (2012). Consumers' Attitude Towards Farmers' Markets in Tuscany. *Sviluppo Locale, 15*(1–2), 5–23.

Sainte-Marie, J., Balle, A., & Kubista, M. (2012). Les Français et les produits locaux, Sondage CSA pour Region Midi-Pyrenees. Retrieved March 27, 2018, from https://www.laregion.fr/IMG/pdf/CSA_pour_Region_Midi-Pyrenees_-_Les_Francais_et_les_produits_locaux_presentation_.pdf

Saroldi, A. (2001). *Gruppi di acquisto solidali. Guida al consumo locale*. Bologna: Edizioni EMI.

Thilmany, D., Bond, C. A., & Bond, J. K. (2008). Going Local: Exploring Consumer Behavior and Motivations for Direct Food Purchases. *American Journal of Agricultural Economics, 90*(5), 1303–1309.

Tregear, A. (2011). Progressing Knowledge in Alternative and Local Food Networks: Critical Reflections and a Research Agenda. *Journal of Rural Studies, 27*(4), 419–430.

Toler, S., Briggeman, B. C., Lusk, J. L., & Adams, D. C. (2009). Fairness, Farmers Markets, and Local Production. *American Journal of Agricultural Economics, 91*(5), 1272–1278.

Varner, T., & Otto, D. (2008). Factors Affecting Sales at Farmers' Markets: An Iowa Study. *Review of Agricultural Economics, 30*(1), 176–189.

Weatherell, C., Tregear, A., & Allinson, J. (2003). In Search of the Concerned Consumer: UK Public Perceptions of Food, Farming and Buying Local. *Journal of Rural Studies, 19*, 233–244.

Zepeda, L., & Li, J. (2006). Who Buys Local Food? *Journal of Food Distribution Research, 37*(3), 5–14.

Zepeda, L. (2009). Which Little Piggy Goes to Market? Characteristics of US Farmers' Market Shoppers. *International Journal of Consumer Studies, 33*(3), 250–257.