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ARTICLES

Consumer Choice and Farmers' Markets

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Abstract The increasing popularity of local food consumption can be attributed to the heightened awareness of food safety concerns, carbon emissions produced from food transportation, and an understanding of how large corporations' obtain their food supplies. Although there is increasing discussion on both the local and organic food movement independently, there is not a wide availability of literature examining the motivations and perceptions of consumers with regard to farmers' markets. Issues such as perceptions about what type of food consumers are purchasing at markets, nor the main motivations for frequenting such establishments are discussed. Therefore the purpose of this study was to determine consumer motivations, benefits, and perceptions of farmers' markets. Using the case study location of Toronto, Canada, this study surveyed 300 participants during the fall of 2011. Findings indicated that the main purpose for visiting famers' markets is not solely to fulfill grocery needs. Quality of products offered and the ability to support the local community were the primary motivators to visit the markets.

Keywords Farmers market · Local food movement · Toronto · Canada · Consumer choice

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Introduction

Inadequate inspections, the use of antibiotics, and the concern of animal waste products have led to food product contamination cases and product recalls (Feagan et al. 2004; Holloway and Kneafsey 2000; Norberg-Hodge 2002). Heightened awareness of food safety concerns, carbon emissions produced from food transportation, and an understanding of the impacts imposed by conventional industrialized systems, have led to the increasing popularity of the consumption of local foods (Bruhn 1997; Gilg and Battershill 1998; Hinrichs 2000; Marsden et al. 2000). These concerns have led individuals to become increasingly aware of food distribution and the globalization of food products, leading to a recognition of the need to shorten the distance between the consumer, and the consumer's source of food (Delind 2006; Norberg-Hodge 2002; Pretty et al. 2005).

These issues have not only raised consumer awareness, but they have led to an increase in alternative options for consumers to purchase their food from—such as farmers' markets. To meet this growing demand, the number of farmers' markets aiming to provide locally produced, organic food continues to increase. Although farmers' markets are not new, they have been increasing in popularity. Weekend and in some areas weekday, markets can be found worldwide in the summer months and in some cases year-round. Motivations and perceptions of consumers, however, are not widely known and there is little literature focusing on preferences, motivations and benefits from shopping at farmers' markets (Brown 2003; Byker et al. 2012; Eastwood et al. 1999; Govindasamy et al. 2002; Jekanowski et al. 2000; Kezis et al. 1998; Lockeretz 1986; Wolf et al. 2005; Zepeda and Leviten-Reid 2004). There is also a lack of literature that focuses on the differences between those seeking organic versus local food (Berlin et al. 2009; Adams and Salois 2010). Therefore the purpose of this study is to further the body of literature examining consumers responses to such motivations and benefits. This paper will also begin a discussion of the differences in motivational differences, and subsequent benefits, between those looking for organic products versus those looking for local products at farmers' markets.

To cover this topic, this paper will begin by discussing the historical context of the local organic movement, the perceived value of local food, the economic benefits derived from farmers' markets, as well as provide a brief review of previous studies conducted on farmers' markets in Ontario. The methodology for this paper will then be provided, followed by the findings, discussions, recommendations and conclusions.

Literature Review

The Local and Organic Food Movement

It is essential to point out the difference between organic versus local foods since the two are distinctively different. A trend in food production is the organic food movement. This movement of eating organically produced goods first emerged, and became popular, in response to the perceived dangers and deficiencies of the modern food system (Delind 2006). Organic production is referred to as "an ecological production management system that promotes and enhances biodiversity, biological cycles, and soil biological activity" (Winter and Davis 2006, p. 117). The organic movement emphasizes "soil health, human health, and holistic or ecological farming practices" (Delind 2006, p. 122). Ironically, the huge success of marketing organic products to consumers has turned the organic food industry into a large-scale, long-distance, industrialized, and monoculture business, thus defeating the original purpose (Adams and Salois 2010; Delind 2006). Furthermore, a lack of universal regulation and standardization of organic food has caused issues for consumers. It was this lack of oversight that led the Canadian government to implement the 'organic products regulation' in 2009. However, the organic food movement was put under scrutiny when it became public knowledge that organic food producers were only required to satisfy the minimum standards of being pesticide-free, or free of genetically modified content (Adams and Salois 2010). Ikerd (2011) contends that many health conscious food consumers make the choice to switch from purchasing organic foods to local foods because they lost trust in both the corporate food system and the government's ability to maintain integrity of the so called certified organic foods. Interestingly, however, the certified organic acres of crops and pastureland are increasing at approximately ten percent per year (Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) 2009). Although it is a requirement that certified organic farmers must undergo an annual inspection, producers can turn away the scheduled inspectors as they see fit. Spontaneous inspections are rare because it is not uncommon for producers to make requests about when and who makes the inspection (Gulli 2007). Consumers becoming increasingly aware of the pitfalls of organic food production and marketing, in conjunction with a heightened awareness of the benefits of locally produced foods, has led to the growth of the local food movement.

Local foods are perceived to be a more holistic and authentic alternative because the food miles and the distance food travels from producer to consumer are deemed to be more representative of sustainability, rather than simply using an organic label (Sirieix et al. 2008; Adams and Salois 2010).

In America, the local food movement is a reflection of the food revolution that is taking place due to rising concerns regarding obesity and other diet-related health problems (Ikerd 2011). According to Adams and Adams (2009), there is no specific definition for local foods, because on many occasions the definition is dependent on consumer perceptions. Some consumers consider local foods to be within a certain geographical distance, for example food that is produced within a 100-mile radius of where it was purchased, or the drive time to get the food (Zepeda and Leviten-Reid 2004). Others define local in terms of political boundaries such as a state border while others perceive "local" as a concept associated with ethics and community (Adams and Adams 2009). Initially, the local food movement was driven by the increase of individual produce consumption during the 1980s and 1990s. Consumers seeking quality fruits and vegetables were led to local food outlets such as farmers' markets (Adams and Salois 2010). Farmers' Market Ontario defines a public farmers' market as, "a municipally owned/operated (not private) year-round operation consisting of unique, specialty, food and crafts merchants who sell some products they produce or grow themselves but who often buy from local producers or wholesalers" (Hall and Sharples 2008, p. 210).

The local food movement holds onto the notion that consumers will consume local produce, rather than relying on traditional food distribution systems (that can still be used to transport organic products). As previously mentioned, the local food movement was founded by a need to reconnect consumers to local area food suppliers and to restore the values and relationships within the community (Norberg-Hodge 2002). Local food is seen as an instrument for initiating positive change for society while supporting small to mid-sized farmers because it can increase and strengthen local economic activities, which in turn can help improve community infrastructure and insure social welfare (Delind 2006). Shortened food miles allow for fresher and healthier products by reducing the need for unnecessary preservatives, transport, packaging, and synthetic re-fortification (Johnston 2002). Markets that provide local foods provide consumers with direct access to nutritional information because they are able to interact with the farmers and vendors firsthand. Consumers can ask the vendors exactly what pesticides and fertilizers were used on the produce, even the kind of labour and conservation practices employed during production (Delind 2006). The local food movement today is about consuming food with economic, ecological, and social integrity in addition to searching for foods that are fresh and flavourful (Ikerd 2011).

Perceived Value of Local Food

Local foods tend to be produced on a smaller scale, whereas organic farms are not required to be small-scale, nor are they restricted to only selling to consumers nearby (Berlin et al. 2009). A number of global studies have taken place to determine consumer preferences between local and organic. When a study conducted in New England in 2009 asked consumers whether they would prefer a local, non-organic product, versus a non-local, organic product, the former was found to be more desirable (Berlin et al. 2009). Similarly, an American study conducted by Thilmany et al. (2007) found that 30 % of consumers preferred to "buy fresh produce from farmers' markets or directly from producers" (p. 2) as opposed to stores that do not provide a direct link from producers to consumers. Another study concluded that consumers were more willing to pay for locally produced foods as opposed to organic foods (Adams and Salois 2010). Connell et al. (2008, p. 182) found that farmers' market customers associate "good food" with "seasonal fresh food", nutritional content, food safety, food grown or produced locally, animal welfare, appearance (of product), and grown or produced in 'British Columbia'. Baker et al. (2009), found that the most important reason patrons attended farmers markets was for local food, followed by fresh food and support for local agriculture. The most distinguishing characteristic that sets the produce available at farmers' markets apart from those available at supermarkets is the level of freshness, as indicated by the 80 % of Ontario consumers who participated in Smithers et al.'s study (2008). This study also concluded that most Ontario consumers perceive local foods as those being from that region or county. Products available for sale at farmers' markets are viewed to be of higher quality when compared to products available elsewhere (Smithers et al. 2008). In an attempt to describe the difference, Japan adopted a local food movement trend in the mid 1990s called the *Chisan-Chisho*, a phrase that translates literally to locally produced and locally consumed food (Taniguchi 2002). Japanese rationale behind consuming local goods is that local goods are "safer, more delicious, trustworthy, environmentally friendly," and they may boost the local economy (Kimura and Nishiyama 2007, p. 49).

Economic Benefits Derived from Farmers' Markets

A main place for purchasing local food is a city or town's farmer's market. Not only do farmers' markets provide an opportunity for consumers to interact with farmers directly, they also have a large impact on the Canadian Economy. *The National Farmers' Market Impact Study* found that farmers' markets in Canada derived $1.03 billion in sales, along with an economic impact of $3.09 billion in 2008 (Farmers Markers Canada 2009). The total sales from 19 of the 127 farmers' markets located in Ontario in 1998 were found to be $73 million. This was estimated to be close to $500 million provincially (Cummings et al. 1998).

Hughes et al. (2008) propose that farmers' markets help support the local community by enabling a greater portion of local dollars to stay in the local economy. Cummings et al. (1998), found that the visitation to farmers' markets also resulted in increased patronage of surrounding businesses, with close to half of the customers visiting other shops before or after their farmers' market visitation. Farmers' markets were also found to create between one and five jobs per stall vendor, and to comprise one-third of all vendors' income on average (Farmers Markers Canada 2009). A study conducted by Oberholtzer and Grow (2003) uncovered a belief by farmers that their participation in farmers' markets benefited the local communities. The benefits included the increased availability of fresh food, the creation of 'community hubs,' greater support for local farms, and increased awareness of where their food is coming from. Smithers et al. (2008) found that shoppers at a farmers' markets place value on the social interaction that exists at a farmers market, but not at a grocery store.

Case Study Location: Farmers' Markets in Toronto, Ontario

History of Farmers' Markets

A popular source for obtaining local and organic foods is at one's local farmers' market. Following the trends of the aforementioned food movements, farmers' markets emerged as a popular method of obtaining groceries. According to the Farmers Market Ontario's official website (2011), farmers' markets are operated by individual vendors who offer a variety of locally produced, seasonal, and organic goods. This history of farmers' markets is important to mention in this study because it demonstrates how this method of obtaining food first originated, lost, and then regained its popularity.

Historically, the first farmers' markets are believed to have originated in Greece where they were designed to benefit the community as a whole (Wells 1994). The earliest markets in Canada were modeled after these European markets; open-air stalls that were located along major roads (Johnston 2002). The first farmers' markets in Ontario began in the early 19th century where religious, social, and governmental meeting places evolved into simple outdoor marketplaces where food and other goods were bartered because it was a convenient location for both consumers and farmers (Johnston 2002). According to Johnston (2002), these markets were located in well-populated towns, such as Kingston and Toronto, which had at least 500 or more residents, where farmers would sell their surplus produce. For example in 1861, St. Lawrence Market opened up to the general public of Toronto selling a variety of goods to consumers. These types of markets soon evolved into more permanent market block buildings that had double the floor space of the outdoor markets and could withstand Canada's extreme weather conditions. The constructed market block buildings were managed and regulated by the municipality, who imposed health standards for the condition of the facility.

Canadian farmers' markets thrived in the early 19th century until globalization sent farmers' markets under the radar. The popularity of farmers' markets began to decline by the 1950s because they were no longer profitable or able to compete against these new urban developments (Johnston 2002). At the beginning of the twentieth century, Canadian railways enabled products to be transported from further distances to city centers while new refrigerated transportation allowed food to be kept in transport for longer time periods without going rancid (Johnston 2002). Grocery stores, supermarkets, and shopping centers became the mainstream method of obtaining goods as they began appearing at an exponential rate, serving the demand of Canada's urban growth (Wells 1994). Farmers' markets lost popularity and appeal because consumers were presented with readily available foods and more choice of global foods from grocery stores.

Farmers' Markets in Ontario

Throughout the 1970s, the number of farmers' markets in Ontario dwindled to a mere 60 and did not experience any form of rejuvenation until the 1980s (Farmers' markets Ontario 2011). This revitalization of the farmers' market was due to current increasing consumer food and health awareness. Increasingly, individuals are acknowledging the negative impacts of globalized food, and are beginning to embrace the concept of local foods (Kimura and Nishiyama 2007). In 1861, St. Lawrence, St. Patrick, and St. Andrew's farmers' markets were the only three public market buildings in Toronto serving a population of 45,000 (Palassio and Wilcox 2009). St. Lawrence Market was the very first market to open in Toronto in 1836 and still operates today as a functioning indoor market (Palassio and Wilcox 2009). Today, according to Greenbelt's (2011) farmers' market list, there are a total of 25 Farmers' markets in the Toronto area alone. Nineteen of the farmers' markets in Toronto are members of the Farmers' Market Ontario Association (2011). Farmers' Markets Ontario is an organization that was established in 1991 to help with market start-ups, reorganization, rejuvenation, operations, market layout, governance models, strategic planning, marketing, vendor recruitment and training, vendor mix, budgeting, fund-raising, rules of conduct, hiring managers, and cooperating with governmental departments (Farmers' markets Ontario 2011). According to Farmers' markets Ontario (2011), currently new markets are being established and old markets are being revitalized as shoppers across the province discover a more personal shopping experience. This organization supports a network of farmers' markets in Ontario and serves to connect consumers and vendors so that this method of food purchasing can continue to thrive in Ontario.

Certification is also in place within farmers' markets. The concept of farmers' market certification was introduced in 2006 in Ontario and was developed with Ontario's Greenbelt, Farmers' Market Ontario, and Weston Farmers' Market (Hall and Sharples 2008). This concept was developed to ensure that non-farmers could not simply purchase food from Ontario food terminals, to resell at the markets, thus supporting sale of authentic, locally grown products, and the local economy (Hall and Sharples 2008). The certification, known as 'my pick', includes each farmer being inspected by a third party, providing a farm business registration number, and displaying a sign at the market stalls showing the location of their farm and the products they grow (Farmers Markets of Ontario 2012). While not all farms at a farmers market must comply with this standard, some may still claim to be local.

Consumers of Farmers' Markets in Ontario

Although there is information on the history of, and economic benefits derived from farmers' markets, there are few studies that have been conducted on consumer demand for local produce. Smithers et al. (2008) compiled a consumer profile of farmers' market patrons by conducting interviews at 15 different farmers' markets across Ontario. They found that the average customer was female (58 %) between the ages of 35 and 64 (48 %). This profile was slightly different from that released by Cummings et al. in 1998. Their study found that the average consumer in 1998 was female (65 %) and between the age of 45 and 64 (just over 60 %).

Cummings et al. (1998) also attempted to understand the motivations of visitors to farmers' markets in Ontario and their frequency. Fresh products (just over 90 %) and supporting local growers (90 %) were the strongest motivations for patrons to visit, with only 20 % of patrons being motivated to visit by the opportunity to meet friends and socialize. In their study they also found that most customers have frequented farmers' markets more than once, with less than 3 % being first-time visitors. Most customers learned about the farmers' market though friends and family, while just over 15 % learned about it from the newspaper. Patrons were also asked to rate their satisfaction on a number of features: produce (73 %), service (just over 70 %), variety (just under 60 %), location (70 %), displays (just over 60 %), and facilities (just over 40 %).

A recent study conducted by Campigotto (2010) on Wychwood Barns, a farmers' market located in Toronto, indicated that "the average patron at Wychwood Farmers' Market was 47 years of age for females and for males 45 years" (p. 4). "Compared to the existing neighbourhood, the average income of a Wychwood farmers' market patron was higher… [where] only a small percentage identified as a visible minority [that] is not representative of the neighbourhood demographics [and] the main reasons for shopping at Wychwood were found to be access to a community or feeling a part of a community, and to buy local, and organic food" (Campigotto 2010, p. 4–5).

The information gathered from Campigotto (2010), Smithers et al. (2008) and Cummings et al. (1998), is useful as it serves as a general overview of the consumers found in farmers' markets across Ontario. However, there is still limited data regarding the consumers of farmers' markets. Therefore, this study will seek to examine the consumer profile and consumer perceptions of Toronto farmers' market patrons.

Methodology

Study Location

To acquire a sample of farmers' market patrons in Toronto, a total of 300 surveys were administered at two farmers' markets in two slightly differentiated geographic locations, Evergreen Brick Works and Wychwood Barns. Evergreen Brick Works is a large market situated in a location easily accessible by car while Wychwood Barns is a smaller market within a residential community. These two locations were chosen due to their difference in size, and difference in accessibility to enable a greater representation of farmers' market patrons. The markets offer patrons the opportunity to purchase a variety of local and/or organic offerings. These offerings include, but are not limited to: fruits, vegetables, baked goods, honeys, jams, meats, etc. Both markets are produce rather than craft markets and produce is almost entirely locally sourced as vendors are within a 100-mile radius. Vendors are farmers or local producers.

Although there are grocery stores selling organic or even local produce in the city (and, in the case of Wychwood Barns, at a grocery store close by), consumers attend the market to source local produce from local farmers and to interact with the vendors (please see findings for motivations for visiting). Both markets represent the more affluent consumer due to their geographical location, therefore it cannot be assumed that the sample is representative of the entire city's markets, due to the large scale of Toronto and its population. However, the data collected does show a good cross representation of the consumer as outlined in the methodology.

Evergreen Brick Works is a national charity and umbrella company whose mission and vision is to "deepen the connection between people and nature" (Evergreen 2011, para 1) with its main goal being "to inspire visitors to become active participants in shaping a more sustainable future through education that inspires action" (Stoner et al. 2008, p. 18). The farmers market at Evergreen Brick Works is just one of the programs available at Evergreen Brick Works. It is a market that provides the opportunity for people to purchase local and organic produce while learning about slow food processes and supporting local food suppliers (Stoner et al. 2008). The market opened to the public in 2006, and is located between the intersection of Bloor and Danforth, just north of the Bayview exit from the Don Valley Parkway (Evergreen 2011). The market is open on Saturdays from 8 a.m. to

1 p.m. and is open in the winter on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. where customers can shop indoors (Evergreen 2011).

The Wychwood Barns farmers' market is located within Toronto's St. Clair and Christie neighbourhood, is open year round, and is entirely volunteer-based according to the Wychwood Barns Community Association (WBCA) website. The facility was originally a Toronto Civic Railway hub for TTC streetcars that was built between 1913 and 1921, that was redeveloped by the City of Toronto in 2004 as a multi-faceted community center (WBCA 2011). Today Wychwood Barns is a 60,000 square foot facility "where arts and culture, environmental leadership, heritage preservation, urban agriculture and affordable housing are brought together to foster a strong sense of community" (WBCA 2011).

Sampling

A purposive sampling method was used for its effectiveness in gathering information from highly specific populations (Neuman and Robson 2009) and "the results can almost be considered to constitute a population" (McBurney and White 2004, p. 248). Researchers used a convenience sampling method to identify survey participants (Neuman and Robson 2009). This sampling method is applicable to the study because the primary research involved randomly approaching consumers and asking each of them to complete a standardized questionnaire at Evergreen Brick Works and Wychwood Barns farmers' markets. Questionnaires were used for this research because they support a quantitative research method, enabling the production of results that satisfy the requirements necessary for generating a consumer profile of farmers' markets in Toronto.

As the consumer population could not be determined for the farmers' markets, the sample size could not be calculated based on any statistical confidence level. It was decided that a sample size of 300 would suffice. To reach 300 completed surveys, 175 questionnaires were administered at both locations for a total of 350 surveys allowing for incomplete responses. Of the 350 surveys administered, 50 surveys were deemed incomplete, resulting in 300 completed surveys.

The data was collected on three separate days over a 3-week period in early October at both Evergreen Brick Works and Wychwood Barns Farmers' markets. The survey was composed of 22 questions that were designed to answer the following research objectives:

a. Determine the demographic profile of the consumers,
b. Assess consumers' motivations for attending the farmers' markets,
c. Assess benefits of visiting farmers' markets as opposed to grocery stores,
d. Gauge consumer perceptions regarding price and accessibility,
e. Gauge consumer preferences for local and organic foods.

There were four sections to the questionnaire: perceptions, motivations, benefits of visiting the farmers' market, and demographics. Questions regarding motivations, benefits, and frequency of shopping were drawn from Cummings et al. (1998), and additional questions were added to allow for greater depth than that collected prior. A pilot survey was also administered to 10 people, prior to administration of the final survey. The respondents were asked to answer various bimodal, and Likert Scale questions that were closed ended. Before the actual data collection, researchers piloted a rough draft of the questionnaire with ten randomly selected farmers' market consumers.

Data Analysis

After collecting the 300 completed surveys from both farmers' markets, the data was entered into SPSS (a data analysis software program) to organize the raw data. The organized data was then analyzed to fulfill the research objectives and to develop a comprehensive consumer profile of Toronto farmers' market patrons.

Findings

Demographic Profile

The average farmers' market patron was female (67.9 %), and 41 years of age, similar to the findings by Eastwood et al. (1999) who found the typical farm market consumer to be female over the age of 45. More than half (66.4 %) of the patrons were married or living common-law. The average household income of respondents was $126,700, being significantly higher than the average income in Canada, and having a similar finding as Eastwood et al. (1999). More than 75 % of respondents were either of European (67.1 %) or Canadian (9.6 %) ethnicity. This distribution of white patrons supports the findings by Guthman (2008), who points out the more frequent use of farmers' markets by white patrons than by those of colour.

Use of Farmers' Market

More than one-third of the patrons used farmers' markets weekly (35 %), while only 23 % were first time customers. Of those that frequented the farmers market, most (73 %) had heard about the farmers market by word of mouth, with the internet (7 %) being the second most used means of information. Acquisition and newspapers were used by less than 3 %. Most patrons to the farmers' market travel to the market by automobile (48 %) or by foot (38 %).

Motivations for Visiting Farmers' Markets

Respondents were asked to check off all the factors that motivated them to visit a farmers' market and to indicate the most important motivator (see Table 1). Quality of products offered and the ability to support the local community were the greatest, and most important, motivators to frequent farmers' markets. Healthier diet (53 %) and environmental concerns (51 %) were also high motivations to frequent farmers' markets.

Weekly users of farmers' markets rated quality of products, convenience of location, family outings, healthier diets, interactions with vendors, and

Table 1 Motivation to visit farmers market

Motivation	Yes (%)	n	Most important
Quality of product	82.2	298	34.9
Supporting local community	75.5	298	28.8
Family outing	41.6	298	11.2
Healthier diet	52.7	298	9
Environmental concerns	50.7	298	5.4
Other	9.2	295	4
Convenience of location	35.6	298	2.5
Interaction with vendors	45	298	1.4
Social opportunity	32.6	298	1.4
Variety of products	16.1	298	1.4
Value for Money	35.2	298	0
N			278

* Numbers will add up to more than 100 % as respondents were able to have multiple answers

Table 2 Motivation to visit farmers market by usage

Motivations	First time user	Weekly user	Monthly user (1–2 time a month)	Occasional user (Few times a month)
Supporting local community (%)	72	82	76	65
Quality of products (%)	68	90**	92***	73
Family outing (%)	46	30*	47	49
Healthier diet (%)	45	68**	53	33
Variety of products (%)	42	33	31	35
Environmental concerns (%)	42	63**	48	41
Interaction with vendors (%)	33	61***	40	35
Social opportunity (%)	29	34	34	32
Convenience of location (%)	26	45*	39	25
Value for money (%)	13	16	16	19
N	69	105	62	63

t test conducted on each variable, comparing each usage against 'first time user'

* t test significance $p < 0.005$

** t test significance $p < 0.01$

*** t test significance $p < 0.001$

environmental concerns as significantly greater motivations to visit farmers' markets than first time users of farmers' markets (see Table 2). Similarly, monthly users rated quality of products as a greater motivation than first time users. There was also no significant difference in motivations between first time users and occasional users.

As compared to those that prefer local farmers' markets goods, those who prefer organic goods are more motivated to purchase food at farmers' markets for the purpose of a healthier diet (see Table 3). In contrast, those with no preference for local or organic foods are motivated less by the opportunity to interact with vendors, purchase a variety of products or environmental concerns than those who prefer local foods.

Benefits of Shopping at Farmers' Markets as Opposed to Grocery Stores

Respondents were asked to note all the benefits of shopping at a farmers' market as *opposed* to shopping at traditional grocery stores (see Table 4). The two most common benefits stated by consumers were the quality of products (82 %), followed

Table 3 Motivation to visit farmers market by preference for farmers' markets

Motivations	Local	Organic	No preference
Quality of products (%)	82	84	64
Supporting local community (%)	78	78	64
Environmental concerns (%)	53	56	21*
Healthier diet (%)	48	71***	36
Interaction with vendors (%)	47	48	14**
Family outing (%)	43	35	29
Variety of products (%)	39	34	14*
Convenience of location (%)	37	29	36
Social opportunity (%)	36	29	14
Value for money (%)	16	20	14
N	178	85	13

t test conducted on each variable, comparing each preference against 'local'

* t test Significance $p < 0.005$

** t test Significance $p < 0.01$

*** t test Significance $p < 0.001$

Table 4 Benefits of shopping at a farmers' market

Benefits	Yes (%)	n	Most important
Quality of product	82.2	298	39.7
Supporting local community	78.9	298	30.9
Healthier diet	50	298	14.5
Variety of products	42.1	297	3.9
Interactions with vendors	53.4	298	3.9
Social opportunity	37.6	298	3.9
Convenience of location	17.5	297	1.1
Other	5.1	297	1.1
None	1	297	0.7
Value for money	14.5	297	0.4
n			282

* Numbers will add up to more than 100 % as respondents were able to have multiple answers

by supporting their local communities (79 %). Quality product (40 %) and supporting local community (31 %) were also noted as the most important benefits received from shopping at a farmers' market as opposed to shopping at traditional grocery stores. While interaction with vendors (53.4 %) was also indicated as a benefit, it was not one of the most important benefits.

The quality of products, convenience of location and interaction with vendors are perceived as being of greater benefit by weekly users than by first time users (see Table 5). The variety of products and social opportunity are considered to be of greater benefit obtained from a farmers' market for first time users than from occasional users.

Those with a preference for organic products perceive a greater benefit to be derived from farmers' markets in the form of healthier diets and a value for their money, than is perceived by those with a preference for local products (see Table 6). Respondents with a preference for local and organic products also perceive their interaction with vendors to be a greater benefit than those who have no preference for organic or local products.

Grocery Buying Habits

Although consumers buy products at the farmers' markets, a very small amount of their grocery needs are satisfied through these markets. Most (69 %) of the customers' grocery shopping was done at the grocery store, while only some (32 %) of their shopping was done at farmers' markets [$t(276) = 12.71$, $p < 0.001$]. While grocery stores are still used more frequently than farmers' markets, farmers' markets are used more frequently than other options (9 %) such as local food stores, health food stores, and superstores [$t(274) = 12.55$, $p < 0.001$].

Table 5 Benefits of shopping at a farmers' market by usage

Benefits	First time user	Weekly user	Monthly user (1–2 time a month)	Occasional user (few times a month)
Supporting local community (%)	80	83	81	67
Quality of products (%)	75	91**	73	81
Variety of products (%)	49	41	45	32*
Healthier diet (%)	49	59	45	38
Interaction with vendors (%)	42	64**	55	46
Social opportunity (%)	42	44	34	25*
Convenience of location (%)	12	23*	18	14
Value for money (%)	10	20	8	16
None (%)	3	0	2	0
N	69	105	62	63

t test conducted on each variable, comparing each benefit against 'first time user'

* t test Significance $p < 0.005$

** t test Significance $p < 0.01$

*** t test Significance $p < 0.001$

Table 6 Benefits of shopping at a farmers' market by preference for farmers' markets goods

Benefits	Local	Organic	No preference
Quality of products (%)	84	80	64
Supporting local community (%)	80	77	71
Interaction with vendors (%)	54	58	21*
Healthier diet (%)	45	65**	43
Variety of products (%)	41	47	21
Social opportunity (%)	38	37	29
Convenience of location (%)	16	16	21
Value for money (%)	11	23*	21
None (%)	1	1	7
N	180	86	14

t test conducted on each variable, comparing each benefit against 'local'

* t test Significance $p < 0.005$

** t test Significance $p < 0.01$

*** t test Significance $p < 0.001$

Table 7 Benefits of shopping at a farmers' market

Rating of farmers' market	Poor	Below average	Average	Above average	Excellent	n
Quality on product	0.3	0.3	3.1	34.8	61.3	287
Interaction with vendors	0.4	2.1	8.4	37.5	51.6	285
Variety of product	0.4	1.8	14.4	41.1	42.5	285
Convenience of location	2.8	5.6	20.4	32.4	38.7	284
Other	12.5	25	0	0	62.5	300
Hours of operation	2.5	8.9	28.2	38.2	22.1	280
Value for money	2.1	6.8	31	40.2	19.9	281
Price	3.5	10.8	36.7	38.8	10.1	286

Level of Satisfaction and Areas for Improvement

The majority of consumers (77 %) are very satisfied with the farmers' markets. In general, over 98 % of the consumers were somewhat to very satisfied with the two farmers' markets. More than 40 % of the farmers' market patrons believe that farmers' markets are performing well in each of the categories listed (see Table 7). Patrons at the Toronto farmers' markets rated variety of product (84 %), quality of product (86 %), and interaction with vendors (89 %) as above average. Nevertheless, price (51 %), value for money (40 %) and hours of operation (40 %) were rated average or below, leaving room for improvement.

Barriers to Visiting Farmers' Markets

As shown in Table 8, the greatest barriers patrons face in visiting farmers' markets are the limited hours of operation (23 %), location (15 %) and price (14 %). Those three barriers were also the top three most important barriers listed by patrons, after the 43 % of patrons who indicated that there were no barriers to their visiting the farmers' market.

Perceptions

Consumers would prefer buying local (64 %) products more than they would prefer to buy organic (31 %) products. Very few (5 %) patrons had no preference for organic or local, while less than 1 % were not aware of the difference. Most patrons somewhat agree (33 %) to strongly agree (62 %) that products sold at farmers' markets are of a higher quality than those sold at regular grocery stores.

Consumers were asked to specify their perceptions on the types of products sold at both farmers' markets on a scale of 1 (none) to 5 (all). The majority of consumers believed that 'more than some' to 'all of the products' sold at the farmers' markets were local, organic, produced by the vendors, and grown within 100-mile radius (see Table 9). The low response percentage for level 1 (none) and level 2 (less than some) further supports the idea that consumers perceive the goods sold at their farmers' market to be local, organic, produced by the vendors, and grown within 100-mile radius.

Discussion and Recommendations

Grocery stores, supermarkets, and shopping centers have been the mainstream or conventional method of obtaining goods (Wells 1994). This is supported by the

Table 8 Benefits of shopping at a farmers' market

Barriers to visiting	Yes (%)	n	Most important
None	43.4	288	41.5
Limited hours of operation	22.9	288	20.9
Price	13.9	288	9.8
Other	10.4	288	9.8
Location	15.3	288	7.7
Traffic	8	288	5.6
Accessibility of transportation	10.4	288	4.9
n			287.0

* Numbers will add up to more than 100 % as respondents were able to have multiple answers

Table 9 Benefits of shopping at a farmers' market

Belief that products are	None	Less than some	Some	More than some	All	n
Local	0.7	1.0	8.4	40.9	49.0	286
Organic	0.4	3.9	33.7	43.9	18.2	285
Produced by the vendors	1.1	1.8	17.4	49.3	30.5	282
Grown within 100-mile radius	1.1	4.3	23.3	41.9	29.4	279

research findings that state one-third of the patrons surveyed used farmers' markets weekly (35 %). It is clear that the main purpose for visiting famers' markets is not solely to fulfill grocery needs. Data collected through the surveys indicates that the respondents' two primary motivations were the quality of products offered and supporting the local community. Additionally, 71 % of consumers prefer organic products for a healthier diet to the 48 % of consumers who prefer local products. This is a noteworthy finding because it differs from the information available in studies by Delind (2006) and Johnston (2002). These two studies stated that local food can allow for fresher, healthier products while at the same time strengthen local economic activities, while our study found healthier food to be less of an attractor. As also stated by Campigotto (2010), the major motive for shopping at Wychwood Barns was found to be access to a community or feeling a part of a community. Over half of the consumers also strongly agree that the products sold at the farmers' market was of better quality than those sold at traditional grocery stores.

Benefits

Consumers interviewed have indicated the benefits of shopping at farmers' markets as opposed to grocery stores. The two most prominent benefits, on a percentage basis, are obtaining quality products and supporting local community. A larger number of weekly users, compared to first time, monthly and occasional users cite quality products at farmers' markets as a benefit. This demonstrates that although consumers mostly shop at traditional grocery stores, they do realize the benefit of higher quality products that their farmers' market sells. Supporting local community was the single most important benefit for 30.9 %. Again, this notion supports the ideology that farmers' markets are not solely used to obtain goods, yet are visited to experience a sense of local community.

There is also a statistically significant relationship between vendor interactions and usage rate as found in the t tests; weekly and monthly consumers represent more than 50 % of all the consumers who view that interaction with vendors is a benefit of farmers' markets. The motivation to visit friends and socialize at farmers' markets was also found to be a significant motivational factor (33 %), higher than was found in Cummings et al. (20 %). This can be very valuable to many consumers because in today's society, many people go to grocery stores simply to obtain food and various household items. There is no outlet for socialization because there is no face behind the products at grocery stores. The farmers' markets seem to not only support traditional methods of obtaining food, but also promote a friendlier and social shopping experience due to their smaller scale operations where vendors can easily interact with consumers.

Local Versus Organic

Although there is no clear set definition of local foods, there is an affinity for consumers to sway towards the purchase of local goods versus organic goods. Results of this research show that 64 % of patrons interviewed at Evergreen Brick

Works and Wychwood Barns prefer buying local, as compared to 31 % who prefer organic products. This is congruent with studies from Berlin et al. 2009 and Adams and Salois (2010) which state that consumers prefer and are more willing to purchase locally grown foods. In addition, these research findings are aligned with what Ikerd (2011). Ikerd (2011) contends that health conscious consumers are more critical about the integrity of certified organic food. Patrons who visit farmers' markets because of the motivation to consume a healthier diet indicate that they would also prefer local products over organic if they had a choice.

It is important to note that the findings indicated that less than 1 % of respondents admitted that they did not know the difference between a local good, and a good that is organic. This number is surprisingly low compared to the impression given by Adams and Adams' study (2009), which stated that the definition of local food varies greatly depending on individual consumer's perceptions.

Recommendations

Consumers to Toronto farmers' markets have placed a great emphasis on preferring local foods and supporting the local community, thus making it important for the farmers' markets to maintain or even increase this sense of *localness* for consumers. Looking at the implications for the future viability of farmers' markets, there are a number of recommendations or suggestions which farmers' markets could adhere to if they are going to continue to support local communities from both a social and economic standpoint.

First, these markets must emphasize the use of local suppliers and be a host for passionate vendors who are able to explain where and how the products were produced. While consumers have shown that they understand the definition and value of local products, the farmers' markets could benefit from endorsing the economic benefits that come along with shopping at a farmers' market. This could be done by launching various campaigns that shows the consumers that they are actually contributing to the community. This experience should be very personal, informative, and reinforce positive feelings associated with shopping at their neighbourhood farmers' market.

Second, to maximize the shopping experience at the farmers' markets, the emphasis must be placed on the quality of products sold. It should always be emphasized to consumers where and how the food was produced so that vendors can always be accountable for the quality of food sold. The farmers' market is not a traditional shopping method and offers a unique shopping experience for consumers. A large majority of female consumers implicate that owners and operators should make an effort to market to this population by offering different types of products that female consumers would be interested in. Comments in the surveys included such things as: baking and cooking supplies, organic personal hygiene products, candles, and locally made crafts. Another type of product offering that is not yet available at either of the two farmers' markets studied, is sustainably and locally produced clothing. In addition, both farmers' markets should monitor the prices of the products that they sell. Research has shown that those who have less household income perceive price as more of a barrier than those who belong in the higher household income categories (Organic Consumer Association 2008). Furthermore, since value for money is not regarded as a main benefit or motivation to visit farmers' markets by consumers for either farmers' market, keeping the price ranges similar to grocery stores may encourage more consumers to purchase a larger amount of their grocery needs from farmers' markets, and would make farmers markets more accessible to those with lower incomes.

Third, owners and operators of the farmers' markets are encouraged to foster a sense of community for the single, never married consumers by facilitating social opportunities. This could include things such as: providing live entertainment, more casual seating areas, and general social areas. Oberholtzer and Grow (2003) outline that the sense of community that farmers' markets provide could also be bolstered by maintaining a family friendly reputation to cater to the married consumers. This can be provided by offering family friendly washrooms, nurseries, playgrounds, child sized furniture and fixtures, and providing child safety services.

Conclusion

Increased awareness of health and food distribution channels among food consumers internationally has created a world of implications for the food production industry. Some consumers are straying from the traditionally, large-scale produced goods at grocery stores and turning to community fuelled farmers' markets. The revitalization of farmers' markets has made it possible for consumers to enjoy a new food shopping experience. Toronto's Evergreen Brick Works and Wychwood Barns are two markets in Toronto where users can obtain fresh local and organic foods, and experience a sense of local community, which modern-day grocery stores cannot provide. Demographically, the Toronto farmers' markets are highly frequented by the married, followed by the single, never married population with a similar goal of seeking out social opportunities. Patrons are also more motivated to frequent farmers' markets where they can purchase quality products, support the local community, and support a healthier diet. Owners and operators of markets are encouraged to understand their consumer profile, provide quality and healthy products, maintain the important sense of community at markets by maintaining local vendors with local and organic products, and encouraging what patrons would consider a social opportunity, in order to realize the economic benefits available to successful farmers' markets.

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