

Consumption Patterns and Demand for Local Food in Chittenden County, Vermont

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During the past several years, Vermont consumers have been voicing and demonstrating increased interest in local, Vermont-grown food products. Over just a ten year period, from 1992 to 2002, direct sales of local, Vermont-grown food products increased by 140 percent (Timmons, 2006). Furthermore, the amount of money spent on local food products can be a substantial portion of a household's total food spending. In 2005, the average Vermont household spent approximately \$125 dollars per week on food, and almost \$25 or one-fifth of that money was spent on local products (Center for Rural Studies, 2005).

In order to assess current patterns of local food purchasing in Chittenden County, Vermont, with the goal of assisting in the facilitation of future interactions between local farms and consumers, the Intervale Center (IC) with research assistance from the Center for Rural Studies (CRS) at the University of Vermont developed and conducted a study on the demand for local food products.⁴

The survey was conducted at the University of Vermont by telephone between the hours of 4:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. beginning on November 5, 2007 and ending on November 13, 2007. The survey sample was randomly drawn from a list of telephone numbers of households in Chittenden County, Vermont. The telephone polling was conducted by a trained staff of interviewers using the Sawtooth Software Ci3 computer-aided telephone interviewing (CATI) system. Only Chittenden County residents over the age of 18 years who were the primary household food shopper were eligible and interviewed for this study. In total, 1,030 eligible households in Chittenden County were successfully contacted, yielding 412 usable completed questionnaires; therefore, the response rate was 40 percent. The results based on a group of this size have a confidence interval of 95 percent with a margin of error of plus or minus 5 percent.

Overall, this research shows that there is demand for quality and reasonably priced local foods, specifically during the winter months. Respondents would like additional venues for purchasing local foods and have an interest in joining a CSA in the future. The results of this study were used by the agricultural-based nonprofit to successfully develop and initiate a multi-farm CSA model for a "pilot year", with weekly food pick-ups from June to November 2008 and monthly pick-ups from December 2008 through March 2009. By working with many farms, the CSA met consumer demand for a variety of product mixes and share types without straining the resources of a single farm and efficiently utilizing the expertise of niche farms. Convenience was addressed by having pre-packaged shares available for pick-up at workplace locations. This CSA model works to build a sustainable food system. Farm profitability is supported by increasing access to markets and sharing ownership risk with 130 shareholders, yielding \$105,000 in gross sales. Consumer demand is met by increasing availability of high quality and reasonably priced local food options through most of the calendar year.

References

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