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GEOGRAPHICAL ASSESSMENT OF FARMERS MARKET CONSUMERS IN SOUTHERN ILLINOIS

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Abstract

This study sought to assess southern Illinois farmers market consumers' whom are buying local food, how they define 'local', their reasons for shopping at the farmers market, and from where they travel. The exploratory and descriptive approach to this study is to provide significant insight into various consumer dimensions for supporting local food. Data was collected by administering surveys to four farmers markets, each in different counties, in southern Illinois. This research revealed important community definitions of local food by geographic region. Geographical linkages exist between survey responses and place. The key dimensions for a viable local food system in this study represent the categories of factors that relate to the importance consumers place on local food. The farmers market consumers key dimensions for supporting local food are the following: Quality, Loyalty, and Enrichment. This can aid in marketing differentiated product 'quality' schemes that can add value to products.



Research Questions

1. What are the demographic characteristics of farmers market consumers in southern Illinois?
2. What are farmers market consumer definitions of local food?
- 3a. What are farmers market consumer reasons for supporting local food?
- 3b. What are the key dimensions of a viable local food system?

Methodology

- Survey Instrument - Three Sections: Use of the Farmers Market, Fruits and Vegetables, Demographics
- Convenient sampling of farmers market shoppers
- SPSS 16.0

Study Area

Counties Surveyed:
 Jackson - 59,612
 Franklin - 39,018
 Williamson - 61,296
 Union - 18,293

Total N=486
 Carbondale N= 231
 Anna N= 96
 Marion N=83
 Benton N=76



Figure 1

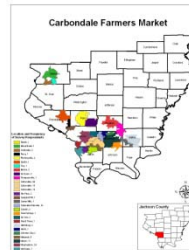


Figure 2

Mean - Caucasian female, 53, bachelor degree, \$35-50,000, 2 adults, 0 children
 Median - Caucasian female, 54, with associate degree, \$35-50,000, 2 adults, 0 children
 Mode - Caucasian females, 62, graduate degree, income of \$50-75,000, 2 adults, 0 children

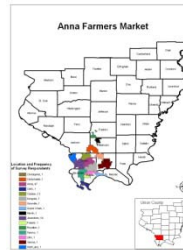


Figure 3

Mean - Caucasian female, 60, bachelor degree, 35-50,000, 2 adults, 0 children
 Median - Caucasian female, 61, bachelor degree, \$35-50,000, 2 adults, 0 children
 Mode - Caucasian female, 57, high school or less, \$10-20,000, and 2 adults, 0 children

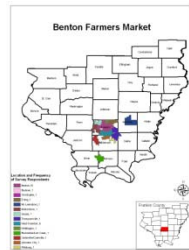


Figure 4

Mean - Caucasian female, 56, associate degree, \$20-35,000, income, 2 adults, 0 children
 Median - Caucasian female, 56, associate degree, \$20-35,000, 2 adults, 0 children
 Mode - Caucasian female, 74, high school or less \$20-35,000, 2 adults, 0 children

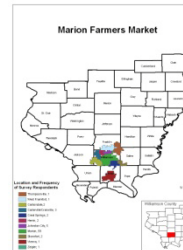


Figure 5

Mean - Caucasian female, 56, bachelor degree, \$35-50,000, 2 adults, 1 child
 Median - Caucasian female, 58, bachelor degree, \$35-50,000, 2 adults, 0 children
 Mode - Caucasian female, 62, high school or less, \$20-35,000, 2 adults, 0 children

Research Question 1:

Figures 2-5 illustrate the frequency and location of survey respondents within each farmers market. Along side each map is the demographic characteristics of survey respondents from each farmers market. Considering mean scores, they are mostly Caucasian, female, middle aged, college educated, and have middle incomes. Measures of central tendency are an important factor in this analysis for describing the population demographics. Analysis of the mode shows some differences among farmers market consumer demographics and location of the market. The mode seems more fitting as a predictor of the typical shopper.

Research Question 2:

Labeling foods by a community identifiable locale may help consumers identify that the products came from nearby farmers. This research revealed important community definitions of local food by geographic region. The results indicate that most farmers market consumers view local to be defined as southern Illinois. Anna consumers view local as being defined by the county. The majority of consumers in Benton defined local as southern Illinois though it is fairly divided across definitions ranging to the county and surrounding counties. After running Pearson's Chi-Square statistic there is statistical significance between respondents' definitions of local food and the farmers markets. There is a pattern to the respondents geographical definition of local by each market location surveyed.

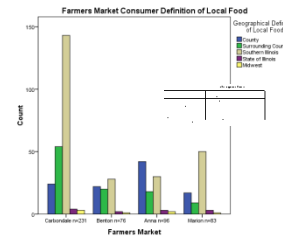


Figure 6: Cluster bar chart of each farmers market

Table 1: Fresh Produce	Table 2: Buying Direct from Farmer	Table 3: Supporting Local Economy
...

Research Question 3a:

The following tables represent the most significant reasons consumers are shopping at the farmers market. Responses to the characteristic 'fresh produce' has about 90% of consumers from each market choosing this as being the main reason for shopping at each of the farmers markets. 'Buying directly from the farmers' is the second most important reason showing 40% or higher having noted this as a significant factor. 'Supporting the local economy' is the third most important reason with about 49% of the total sample responding as such.

Table 4: Dendrogram	Table 5: K-Means Cluster Analysis and Number of Cases
...	...

Table 4: Dendrogram

Table 5: K-Means Cluster Analysis and Number of Cases

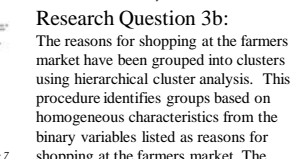
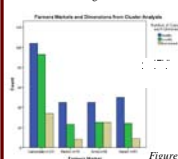


Figure 7

Research Question 3b:

The reasons for shopping at the farmers market have been grouped into clusters using hierarchical cluster analysis. This procedure identifies groups based on homogeneous characteristics from the binary variables listed as reasons for shopping at the farmers market. The analysis of identified groups are key dimensions linked to reasons attributed to consumer purchasing of local food. The farmers market consumers key dimensions for supporting local food are: Quality, Loyalty, and Enrichment. Chi-square analysis was conducted to test if an association existed between the variables derived from the cluster analysis. Results show statistical significance having certainty of an association between farmers market and the key dimensions.

Conclusions

Results indicate the mode is a better predictor of the typical shopper. The majority of survey respondents define 'local' as southern Illinois. Freshness, buying direct from farmers, and supporting the local economy were the main reasons for shopping at the farmers market. Key dimensions for supporting local food are the following: Quality, Loyalty, and Enrichment. These dimensions reveal southern Illinois farmers market consumers want food that is better for them, food from a trusted source, and food rooted in community. This geographical assessment of farmers market consumers, interest and support for local food, indicates farmers markets have enormous potential to expand and revive the local food system in southern Illinois therefore, strengthening communities, economies and rural development.