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The Role of Sustainable Local Food Among Tourism Stakeholders: A Comparative study in Vancouver, Canada and Christchurch, New Zealand

Abstract

Local food is increasingly regarded as an element of sustainable tourism and hospitality. This study examines restaurant and chefs' (tourism stakeholders) perceptions, motivations, and constraints in buying local food ingredients from local farmers' market vendors on a study conducted in Vancouver, Canada and Christchurch, New Zealand. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with restaurants and chefs. The study identified that restaurants and chefs are most interested in perceived tangible benefit such as freshness, as well as more intangible motivations such as supporting local farmers and the local economy/community/businesses. However, they experienced challenges with purchasing. Based on the findings, strategies are posited for both restaurants and chefs and farmers (hereby farmers' market vendors) to better serve foodservice establishments.

Keywords: Local food; Purchasing; Restaurants and Chefs; Farmers' Market; Supply Chain

Introduction

Over the decade interest in local foods has grown among the public as well as academics and policy makers (e.g., Peters et al., 2009). As such, local food has become a component of the development of sustainable culinary systems within tourism and hospitality (Gössling & Hall, 2013). The growing interest in local foods has been explored largely from the consumer's perspective (Martinez et al., 2010). Relatively limited research has been carried out in relation to how restaurants handle local procurement (e.g., Duram & Cawley, 2012; Kang & Rajagopal, 2014; Roy et al., 2016, 2017), benefits of local product usage (Inwood et al., 2009; Casselman, 2010), cost (Sharma et al., 2009), and purchasing decisions (Sharma et al., 2014). However, in contrast to the image portrayed in the food media with respect to the chef regularly purchasing supplies from the farmers' markets (CUESA, 2012; Martell, 2012), little is known about the role of restaurants and chefs as purchasers and users of local food from farmers' markets. This research therefore, examines restaurants and chefs' perceptions, motivations, barriers and constraints of buying and promoting local food ingredients on their menus from farmers' markets in Vancouver, Canada and Christchurch, New Zealand.

Literature Review

There is no consensus on defining "local" and what constitutes a local food system (Pearson et al., 2011). Research indicates that the definition of "local food" is complex, as are its implications for small-scale producers (Trivette, 2015), and is "based on a general idea of where local food is coming from" (Dunne et al., 2011, p. 50). Nevertheless, although there is no consistent definition of what constitutes "local food," it remains an important component of food promotion and purchase (Hall, 2013).

Local food environment in Canada and New Zealand

Canada has a significant local food movement. A review of local food initiatives across Canada identified a total of 2,314 initiatives (Canadian Co-Operative Association, 2009). The most common being restaurant and chef initiatives (e.g., Green Table Network, Taste of Nova Scotia) and farmers' markets. Farmers' markets continue to grow with approximately over 600 farmers' markets providing local food to communities across Canada (Egbers, 2009; Hall, 2013). In New Zealand, local food initiatives are primarily supported by farmers' markets where local growers and processors directly market local food to consumers (Hall, 2013) although there is growth in other direct marketing initiatives by farmers (Gatrell et al., 2012). There were 50 farmers' markets in New Zealand by October 2009 (Lawson et al., 2008; Hall, 2013).

Local food, consumers, and farmers' markets

A main place to purchase local food is at a farmers' markets. Farmers' markets are important and increasingly prevalent venues for direct marketing locally grown food, and as such are prominent players in the emerging alternative food networks of Canada, the US, the UK, Australia, and New Zealand (Guthrie et al., 2006; Gillespie et al., 2007; Lawson et al., 2008; Smithers et al., 2008). The reasons why consumers shop at farmers' markets is a combination of high quality, fresh, support for local agriculture/community/economy, and locally produced products, and a sociable and interactive atmosphere where the consumer knows the producer (Hughes et al., 2008; Murphy, 2011; Dodds et al., 2014; Hall, 2016). While the price, seasonality, limited market days and hours of operations, and transaction costs associated with obtaining local foods can be a barrier to consumers (Ver Ploeg et al., 2009; Hodges & Stevens, 2013; Dodds et al., 2014). However, farmers' markets have been identified as a hallmark of food localism for consumers and producers.

Local food and restaurants

Restaurant decisions to purchase local food are based on a number of factors, such as products taste, perceived higher quality of products, freshness, safety, access to unique or specialty products, satisfaction of consumer requests, increase in bottom-line profits of the establishment, public relations, supporting the local economy and communities, possibility of purchasing smaller quantities, lower transportation costs, competitive pricing, and the dependability of farmer suppliers (Kang & Rajagopal, 2014; Roy et al., 2016). A number of barriers to restaurants purchasing local food have also been identified, particularly relating to cost factors, payment procedure conflicts, product availability, dealing with multiple suppliers, complicated ordering processes, packaging and handling, inadequate distribution systems and service, ineffective communication, and higher product costs (Pillay & Rogerson, 2013; Nilsson, 2016).

Method

This study is based on individual semi-structured interviews conducted from September to November 2014 in Vancouver, and February to April 2015 in Christchurch, with restaurants and chefs. The two locations were selected partly in terms of convenience of access and also because they provide a good basis of comparison of various factors (e.g., location, demographics, culture, geography and climate, political system, composition of local agrifood system) that affect the development of local food systems. The study areas also offered contrasting situations. Vancouver is more developed with respect to local government supported food initiatives than Christchurch, while both study areas possess several farmers' markets. Hence, the study locations provide diverse research opportunities, making it possible to compare the relative challenges and prospects for food localism.

The sample of restaurants and chefs was acquired from telephone directories and websites that maintain extensive foodservice establishment addresses. Restaurants and chefs were selected by a purposive sampling and non-probability method in order to gather information that was not otherwise possible to obtain from a specific population (Patton, 2001; Neuman & Robson, 2009). A purposive sampling and non-probability method was used because of convenience, speed, and low cost (Patton 2001). In total 59 restaurants and chefs were interviewed for this study (31 in Vancouver and 28 in Christchurch). The interview data was extracted manually under the thematic headings (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Results and Discussion

Results of the interview provides insights into restaurants and chefs' local food purchasing motivations and perceived barriers in the local culinary food system. Respondents indicated high level of perceived benefits

to purchasing local food products from farmers' markets. Respondents in both samples noted supporting to the local farmers/producers, supporting to the local economy/community/business, and fresher food products as the main reasons for this (e.g., Roy et al., 2016). On the other hand, seasonality, price (cost of the food products), and logistic of transportation and delivery were the most common perceived barriers to local food adoption from farmers' market vendors (e.g., Duram & Cawley, 2012; Nilsson 2016).

Conclusions

Overall, this research reveals strong support by Vancouver and Christchurch restaurants and chefs towards the purchase of local food products from farmers' market vendors. The results has also implications for understanding the development of sustainable value chains in which food, tourism and hospitality are embedded (Duram & Cawley, 2012; Hall & Gössling, 2016; Nilsson, 2016). Furthermore, findings indicated that broader social-emotional goals (supporting local farmers and supporting local economy/community/business) as a part of community building efforts to create a positive image for their establishments were important in determining purchases of local foods for restaurants and chefs. Such findings are assumed to be vital for the success of local food systems (Ilbery & Maye, 2005). In line with previous research, price, seasonality, and transport and delivery logistics remain problems among restaurants and chefs in this study (e.g., Nilsson, 2016). The study therefore encourages farmers' market vendors to offset these barriers by offering timely information about product cost and availability, and flexibility with delivery where possible for more widespread adoption of local food in the foodservice community and beyond.

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