

Why buying local will soon be everyday life: An inquiry of local food markets

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the customer preferences between buying produce from local farmers' markets verses buying produce from supermarkets within San Luis Obispo County and determine if the application of a delivery service of said produce would be successful. Surveys were conducted with one hundred and sixty individuals in San Luis Obispo County. Participants were asked a series of questions about purchasing preference, interest in a produce delivery service, and about other information they may want to know before purchasing produce. Student responses were compared to non-students from the San Luis Obispo County for contrasts of interests. The results of this study can be used to determine the success rate of delivery services offering farmers' market produce deliveries within San Luis Obispo County.

Chapter 1

Statement of the Problem

The problems addressed by this study have worldwide implications and are seen through the detrimental impacts occurring to our climate, environment, personal health and economics. These problems face the entire world and speak to many different facets of everyday life of a modern day consumer. The problems identify environmental issues resulting from application of pesticides to the fruits and vegetables we eat and the methodology and vast distances our food travels on its way from the grower to our plates. It also delves into the health issues resulting from purchasing non-locally grown produce sold in most supermarkets to that of locally grown produce. Our assumption is that if we can analyze and identify specific factors at a local level, perhaps the results of our study can be scaled up and impact a broader base, and ultimately the world. The major questions we needed to ask were, “what portion of San Luis Obispo consumers purchase from the San Luis Obispo farmers’ markets”, ‘what drives some residents in San Luis Obispo County to purchase their produce directly from farmers’ markets”, and “would a delivery service for locally grown produce be a viable option to get said produce.”

Significance of the Problem

Some consumers do not seem to know or understand the environmental, health, and pricing benefits and consequences of purchasing from local farmers’ markets versus supermarkets. The misinformation and in-grained spending habits

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of the average consumers hinder the chances of people purchasing from farmers' markets. With this situation the marketing messages from both sides of the issues are blurred, confusing and distort the truth about the differences between buying local and buying from supermarkets such as Safeway and Albertsons. The depletion of vital resources, the need to improve and promote a healthier environment, increased gasoline dependency by consumers in first world countries, and the lack of pertinent, factual information are leading to a non-sustainable situation. Living in a society where there are no limits to consumption skews individual perceptions and removes them from the reality of the situation. This is all due to the spending power of the dollar and the way advertisers manipulate consumer thoughts about themselves and what they need. Eventually, information regarding the health, financial, and environmental benefits of buying locally will become more widely known and become an integral part of our universal consciousness. This will be possible through classroom education, factual mainstream publications, word of mouth, and/or personal research. A greater understanding of the plight of world and the agricultural issues currently facing it are soon to become common knowledge. The significance of this research will be an increased awareness about buying locally purchasing from farmers' markets in San Luis Obispo County.

Interest in the Problem

My interest in this problem is relatively broad one. I first want to be able to raise awareness of the health risk to all individuals through consumption of pesticides and hormones contained in our food. I also want to make consumers

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knowledgeable of financial benefits to the farmers and buyers to purchasing locally verses over purchasing produce that has traveled hundreds and thousands of miles to appear in our supermarkets. Buying local has always been my passion and after doing minor research previous to this study, I have been able to see a significant shift in our public consciousness is critical to our continued existence on this planet. In gathering my study findings, I hope they will support my theories and will become the basis for instituting positive changes. I wish to prove to those whom are less informed, or misinformed that buying local can be cheaper and better for the consumer as well as the environment. Giving myself the challenge of obtaining more valid information will be a difficult one, but I find it absolutely necessary to be 'the change maker' I wish to be in the future; an ideal instilled in me since middle school. Introducing a potent piece of research into the world that is accepted and acted upon by the everyday consumer would be an amazing feat. Moreover, being able to communicate these results that I aim to prove true, would be an incredible experience. My fear is that I will not be able to maintain a humble demeanor when conveying my message. I want to have a broad acceptance by my audience and enable me to affect more lives overall.

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Chapter 2

Purchasing locally grown products and being able to obtain fresh, organic produce are ideas many believe to be necessary for our future in the 21st century and beyond. Today, some consumers acquire produce and other goods from the smaller local stores in order to attain the ‘freshest’ products. Some others go as far as to promote this idea of ‘buying local’ to their friends and family as a means to keep local economies flourishing and keep the support of larger corporations at arms length.

San Luis Obispo County has been recognized as having one of the most sustainable and successful farmers’ market in California. Many travel from places like Bakersfield, Kings City and even as far as San Diego County, all just to get a taste of what the central coast has to offer. Senior Contributor from *tripadvisor.com* out of Orange County, self titled “LuminateTHEway” (2013), is quoted in a review of the San Luis Obispo farmers market as saying, “What a great Thursday evening. For in Towners or out of Towners...You owe it to yourself to experience this Farmers’ Market...”. Some visitors may go as far as saying San Luis Obispo’s farmers’ market is the best on the west coast. Furthermore, San Luis Obispo County is one of the only counties in the state that offers multiple farmers’ markets, in multiple locations throughout the county, with offerings produced within each city in the county. Caitlyn B. (2013), local resident of SLO County, writes in *sunset.com* saying, “...we have a fun all-ages event weekly, not exclusively on the first Saturday or second Sunday of every month like some events. I have something to look forward to every

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Thursday after work”. In having such a lucrative business model and local community support group, San Luis Obispo County is ‘the place to be’, when it comes to buying local produce. It is a sustainable model that can be replicated through out our state and elsewhere in the world.

However, what does it mean in when people say, ‘keeping it local’? Technically individuals from places like Kings City and Ventura County aren’t buying locally when the shop in San Luis Obispo, but they are reaping the benefits of the fruitful and fertile central coast and concurrently financially supporting California farmers. Dawn F. (2013), an ‘Eite’ from *yelp.com*, writes “...I FINALLY made it up here on a Thursday night after 15 years of a Thursday never coinciding with my visit to SLO!”, but this isn’t necessarily purchasing ‘local’ at all, and the world is suffering. The environmental impact of not buying local is one not widely known by the average person. The Center for Urban Education about Sustainable Agriculture (2014), a Bay Area company devoted to cultivating a sustainable food system through education, claims “Food in the U.S. travels an average of 1,500 miles to get to your plate”. Utilizing *travelmath.com* (2014), a site based on a calculation algorithm, it would cost \$225 to have a vehicle (not a semi-truck), buying gasoline at \$3.75 per gallon and travelling with 25 mpg fuel efficiency, to travel 1500 miles, using over 50 gallons of gasoline. To some this a reasonable price to pay to have almost anything a consumer wants to purchase available at the local grocery, to others this is astronomic. However, when you compare \$225/50 gallons of gas to \$33/8.8 gallons of gas, the cost of that same vehicle, with the same cost for fuel and the same fuel efficiency, to travel 220 miles, the distance from San Luis Obispo to

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Oakland, the 'center' of the bay area, this is an acceptable cost. Because our country has established rural and urban environments we need to accept these more reasonable costs in order to feed our population. Financial analysts see these distances, the specific parameters, and the overall costs as irrelevant because it is within the general 'outline' of travel costs and because it doesn't take into account other variables, but it does indicate a significant cost difference which is avoidable. This comparison also does not tell you specifically the costs of each piece of food, but again, it does validate that buying local does save on shipping costs and, to some extent, the cost of the carbon emission produced by shipping far distances as well as the environmental impacts of extracting oil and gas by choosing where to ship and buy our foods and other goods.

When investigating further into the environmental impacts and benefits of buying local verses buying shipped products from supermarkets, there is also another issue. The issue is the predominant use of pesticides and lack of regulations in food produced in other countries that needs to be recognized. According to the National Pesticide Information Center (2014), a cooperative agreement between Oregon State University and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "Pesticides in agriculture and urban settings have the potential to contaminate our air, affecting human, animal and plant health". Though this statement does not claim to "contaminate" the environment in a negative way, the Center For Disease Control proclaims, pesticides have been shown to increase crop production, preserve produce, combat insect infestations, "pesticides also have the potential for causing harm". To combat this message, the National Center for Biotechnology Information

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published a case study in 2007 entitled *Three farmworkers who gave birth to infants with birth defects closely grouped in time and place*, claims mothers working for the same tomato grower who was using pesticides, each gave birth to 3 children, within 8 weeks of one another, all with different degrees of birth defects. This case study alone illustrates the potential for significant adverse effects due to pesticide exposure over time. Further, the NPIC (2014) states, “Even the least-toxic products, and those that are natural or organic, can cause health problems if someone is exposed to enough of it”. With many individuals moving further away from where their produce is farmed, it is recognized that even products containing pesticides for reasons of preservation may have some risks regarding human health. Furthermore, foods bought locally, where no preservatives are used, are healthier for the individual consumer.

Not everyone believes that fresh, locally grown organic produce is necessarily better and healthier for the consumer. But to what degree can research prove the price of buying produce from a farmers’ market is cheaper and healthier than buying everyday supermarkets? According to Swenson (2013), an Agricultural Business graduate of Cal Poly, this has been already proven through her previous research. Through purchasing commodities such as broccoli and Navel oranges from both local, San Luis Obispo County farmers’ markets and local superstores and then comparing prices using extensive price and statistical analyses, Swenson’s research showed just that. ANOVA, or ‘Analysis of Variance’, tests which were then performed to test the prices of the supermarkets and farmers’ markets determined there was significant variance between the mean prices. Swenson (2013) then claims “A

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regression analysis was then done to test the price differentiations between the farmers' market prices and supermarket prices", and after the analysis was done, "a significant price advantage at farmers' markets" was proven. Swenson (2013) is later quoted as saying "Given the selected produce items, ANOVA testing further verified statistical significance that farmers' markets prices, on average, were less than prices at local supermarkets in San Luis Obispo County". Buying produce from San Luis Obispo County's farmers' markets is cheaper than buying produce from local supermarkets, as shown through this research. This fact may be skewed for other counties throughout California and/or the world, but it shows that with the proper purchasing of local foods from farmers markets, that informed consumers are able to save money by simply adjusting from whom they purchase certain items.

As some people within the city of San Luis Obispo city limits chose to purchase local and only from the locally owned stores and restaurants, others still show a preference for the 'FoodMax' and the 'SaveMart'-like shops. With access to the grand farmers' market, like the one downtown San Luis Obispo, Cal Poly students are provided a better opportunity to buy local than some normally receive in their home communities. But, to those who live up in the Poly Canyon Village areas, physically getting to farmers' markets can be a difficult task. Many students living on campus do not have access to cars, or other forms of transportation and, due to this fact, never have the opportunity to experience what San Luis Obispo's farmers market has to offer. But what if these students were given the opportunity to receive a 'tote' of locally grown produce to their doorstep weekly? Would this option outweigh the process of having to go to the San Luis Obispo farmers' market

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and purchase the produce oneself? There are organizations like 'SLO Veg' (2013) who deliver to consumers predetermined 'totes' for different prices containing different types of produce in each. Each of the different totes contains produce chosen 'at random' based upon what is currently 'in season'. The problem with this approach is that not everyone knows how to cook a "Triton Radish", one of the items 'SLO Veg' (2013) contained in "this week's tote". Additionally, not every selection is something the consumer likes. Other companies such as 'Goodeggs' and 'Farmgram' offer a solution to this 'problem' by offering the customer choices based on what is currently in-season. The consumer can pick and choose what they want before they are delivered. Both companies have similar business models as 'SLO Veg' in that there is an allotted time between the time you order and the time your produce is ready. All three also offer delivery services or the consumer can choose to pick up the produce themselves.

'Farmgram', alone, takes on the additional responsibility of making sure people know exactly where these goods are being produced. Under each item's description there is an area revealing to the consumer exactly where each item was grown, picked, and/or produced. It is a type of "online farmers' market", claims Adrian Godby (personal comm. February 2014) co-owner/founder of 'Farmgram'. Consumers going into the 'Farmgram' website are presented with a page "like an 'Etsy' for local food" (personal comm., January 2014) states Tyler Thomas another co-owner/founder of 'Farmgram'. Instead of being just another food delivery service 'Farmgram' aims more to be "a part of the community" (personal comm., February 2014) says Thomas, articulating future projections of the company. One way that

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the company already illustrates its community presence is through their two day 'delivery' policy (personal comm. January 2014), claiming that as soon as your order is processed your products will be delivered or available for pick up within the two days. Another way this company plans to get more involved with the local community is through spreading the word to the local college students living on campus. In creating a greater presence of local foods to dorm-dwellers, 'Farmgram' plans to increase student knowledge of the benefits of buying local as well as give them improved access to healthier, more sustainable foods. From the view of the parents, 'Farmgram' claims, "this idea will be an amazing opportunity for younger, inexperienced 'chefs' to utilize access to their kitchens and learn to cook".

Companies like 'Farmgram', 'Goodeggs', and 'SLO Veg' all visualized, conceptualized and actualized a world where consumers have immediate access to organic and sustainable foods. With the spread of knowledge on sustainable practices, like those of 'Farmgram', the everyday consumer will soon be able to save money, act on their knowledge of the environmental impacts of buying from supermarkets and understand the health risks associated with purchasing products containing pesticides and synthetic fertilizers.

Chapter 3

The purpose of this study was to determine the customer preferences between buying produce from local farmers' markets verses buying produce from supermarkets within San Luis Obispo County. This study illustrates that the possibility of delivering local, sustainable produce will eventually be a more common form of attaining healthier and cheaper produce and change the mind-set of consumers. The data gathered from this research establishes the higher likelihood that students and other members of San Luis Obispo County will soon be more prone to purchasing local and will adopt the practice of purchasing from online farmers' markets that will deliver fresh, local produce to their doorstep.

Specific research objectives for this study include:

- Obtaining unbiased information from students living on campus and others whom attend farmers' markets in San Luis Obispo County
- Gain an understanding of student population habits with regards to farmers' markets

Data Collection Plan

The overall plan involves surveying two groups, farmers' market goers and those who do not attend farmers' markets. Within the survey will be targeted questions to identify what both groups think about farmers' markets and purchasing local. The subjects involved included Cal Poly students, those whom live on campus in University Housing and those whom live off campus, as well as local residents including. Each group will be given a specific survey.

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In order to collect valid data during this research, surveys will be taken in person to students as well as local residents. Subjects were asked multiple questions ranging from 'Do you live on campus? In San Luis Obispo?', Are you a student? 'Do you chose to purchase produce from farmers' markets over produce from supermarkets? Or do you purchase from both?'.

Individual 'Data Sheets'

In asking different targeted consumers there will need to be multiple data sheets created to obtain different pieces of information from the different pools of individuals. At the same time as that these questions were asked to certain *different* groups of individuals, many questions crossed over onto one another to maximize efficiency of the information obtained.

Data Analysis Plan

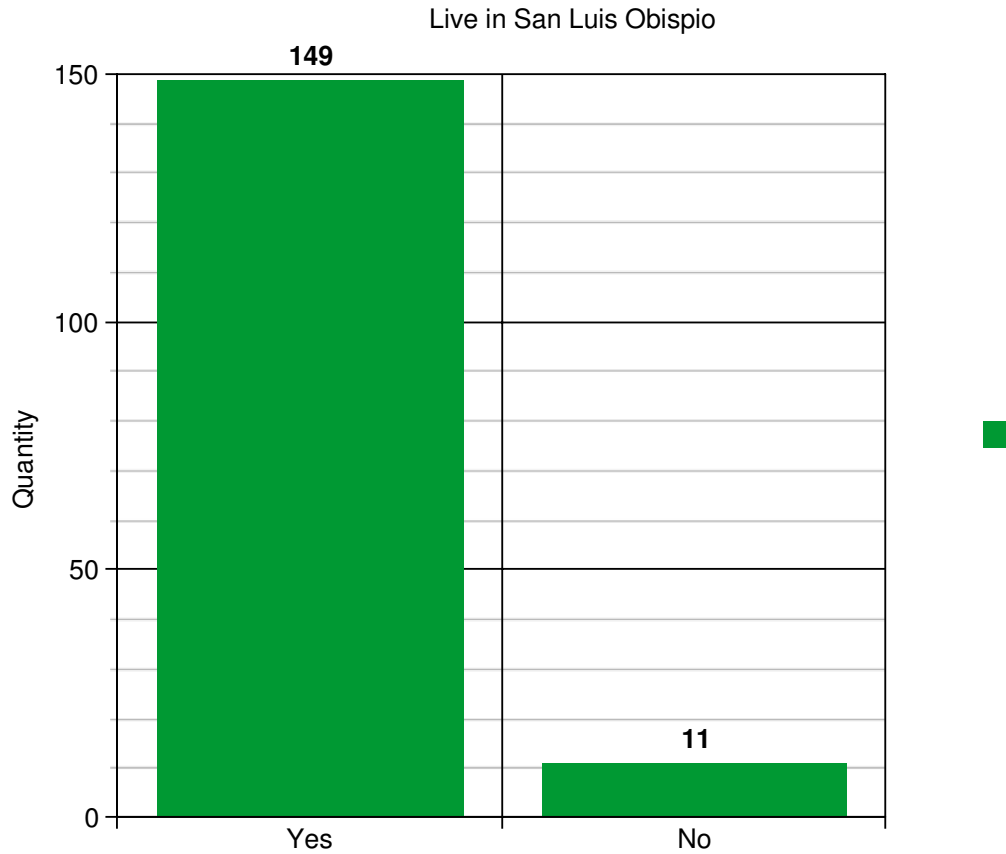
After receiving back this information from these surveys, the data collected was then input into data sheets. The separate data sheets reflected, in full, the positions of both students and the general population in SLO overall. Once all the data was collected, correlated, and compressed the information obtained was used to help a company, such as 'Farmgram', become more informed about San Luis Obispo's farmers' markets attendees and the students at Cal Poly.

Chapter 4

One hundred and sixty individuals were surveyed at random. Eighty were interviewed on campus in the University Union, and the other eighty were interviewed in front of local supermarkets in the San Luis Obispo area. Individuals willing to be surveyed preferred purchasing from farmers' markets over supermarkets even though there seemed to be more convenience to shoppers using supermarkets. The majority of people interviewed were students, and many were quite passionate about purchasing produce from local growers at different farmers' markets. Overall, farmers' markets have won over the population in regards to San Luis Obispo County students. Below are the questions asked during the interviews.

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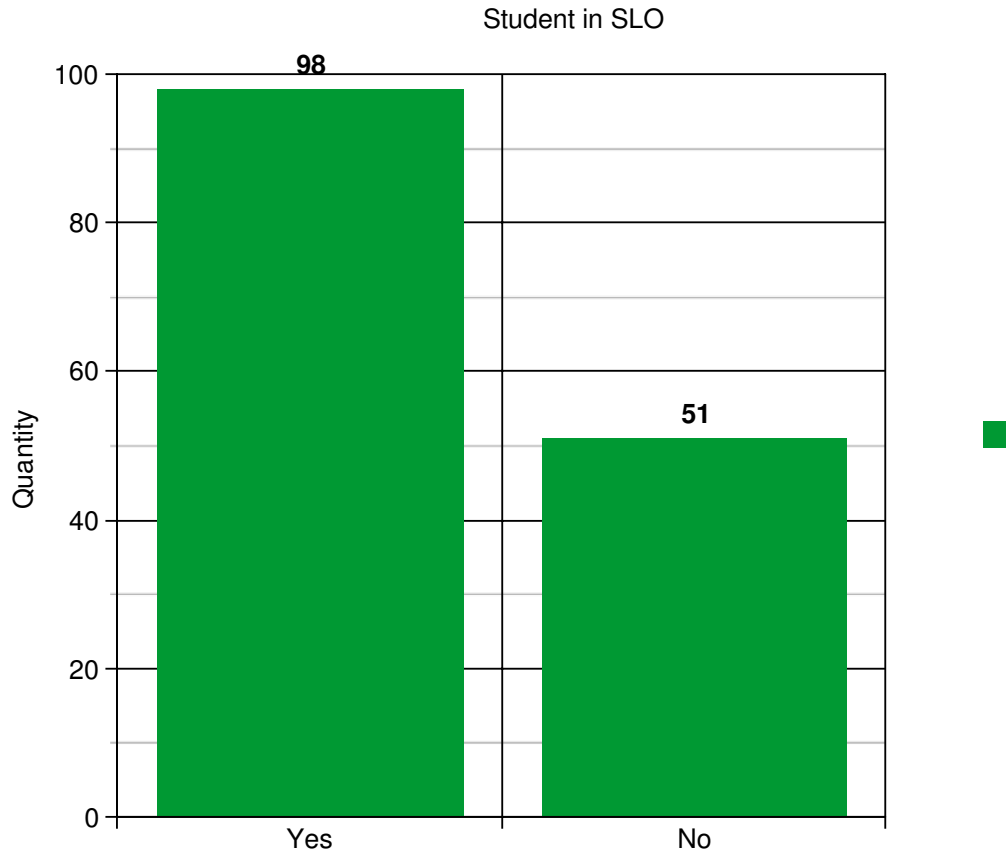
1. Do you live in San Luis Obispo County?



To better understand the demographic of people interviewed, participants were first asked if they lived in San Luis Obispo County. Of the 160 individuals, only 11 of those lived outside of the county. This helped gauge who exactly was being interviewed and the relevance of their specific answers to this study. Since the information from those whom did not live in San Luis Obispo was irrelevant to this study, it was not used in any of the further statistics.

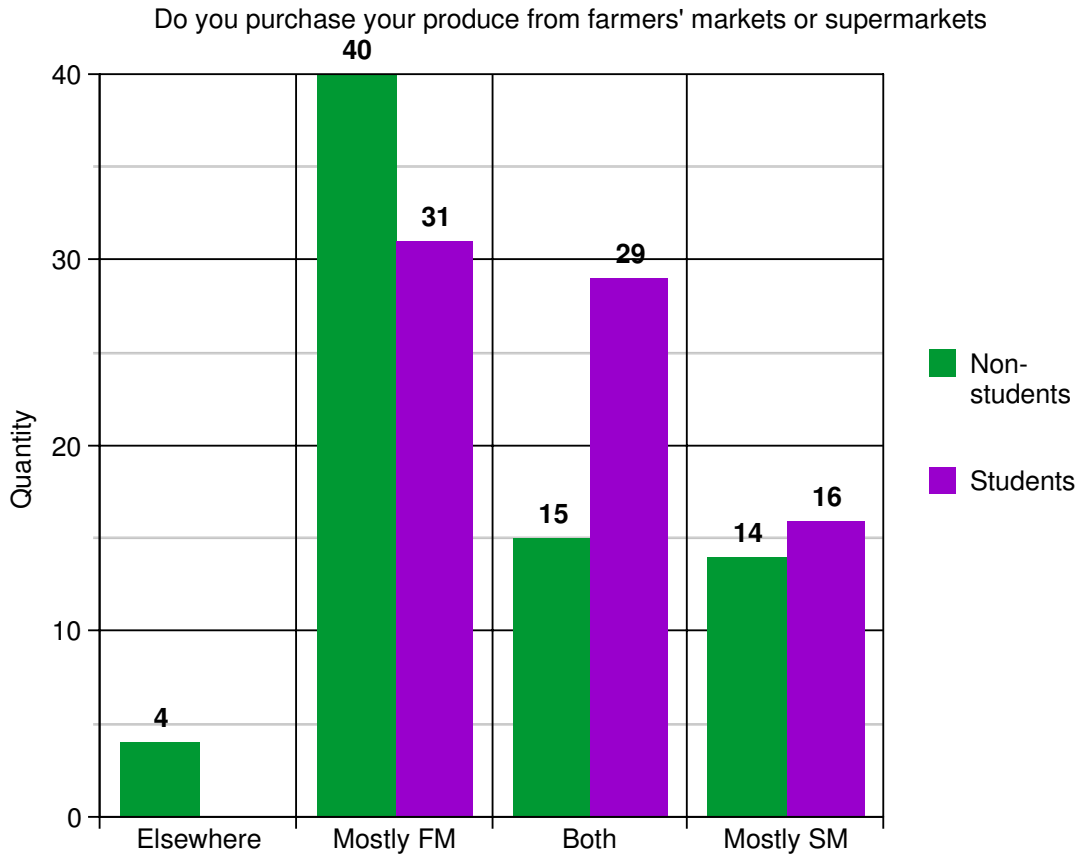
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2. Are you a student?



Participants were then asked whether or not they were students or not. This helped to gauge whether or not the information was from a general public perspective or that of a student. Out of the 149 living in SLO County, a total of 98 individuals responded they were currently students and 51 responded they were not. This helped illustrate that the results of the survey were accurately gauging the voice of the both students and non-students as consumers.

3. Do you purchase your produce from farmers' markets or supermarkets?

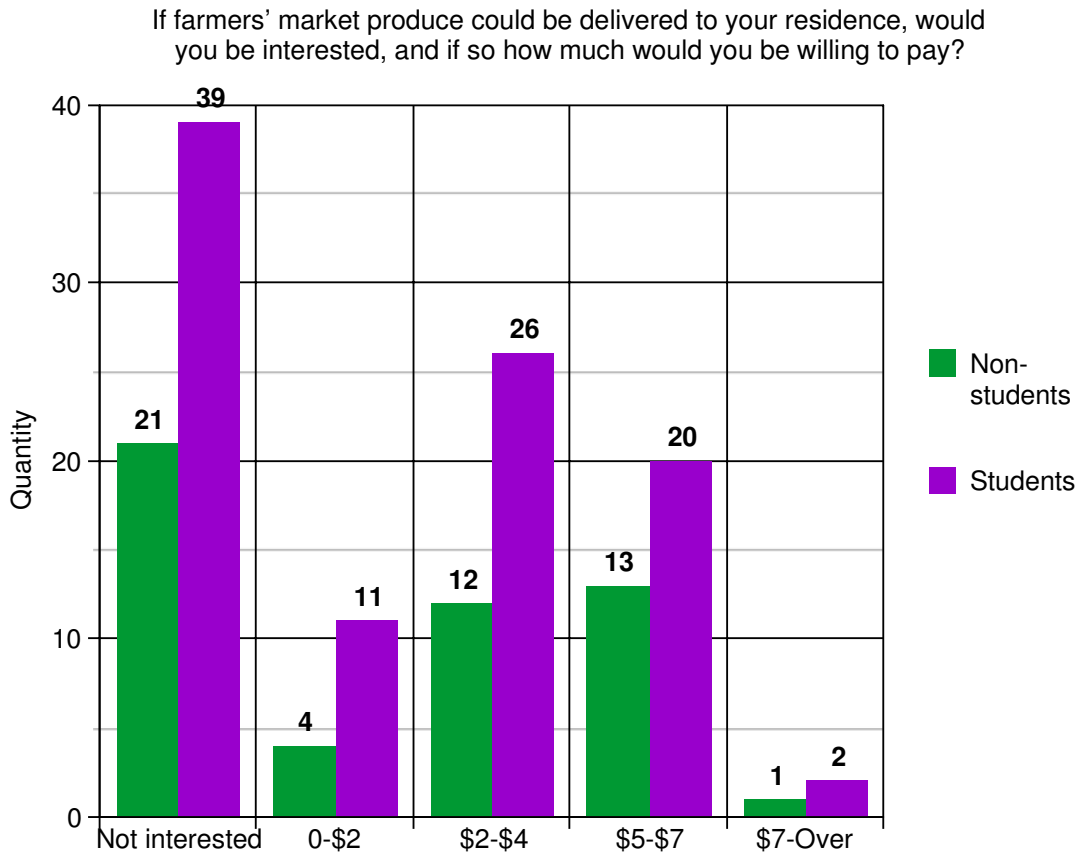


Next, participants were asked to articulate their preference towards purchasing produce from farmers' markets or from supermarkets. Results indicated that of those living in SLO County, the majority of respondents purchase mostly from farmers' markets. Only 4 of participants actually claimed to purchase produce elsewhere and almost one quarter of those surveyed said they purchase from both, with no major preference. A total of 71 of the participants, almost half of all those interviewed, said they purchase mostly from farmers' markets and only 30 claimed to purchase mostly from supermarkets. Non-students overall seemed to prefer purchasing mostly from farmers' markets whereas students seemed to be equally as

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inclined to purchase from both supermarkets and farmers' markets as they were from farmers' markets alone.

4. If farmers' market produce could be delivered to your residence, would you be interested, and if so how much would you be willing to pay?

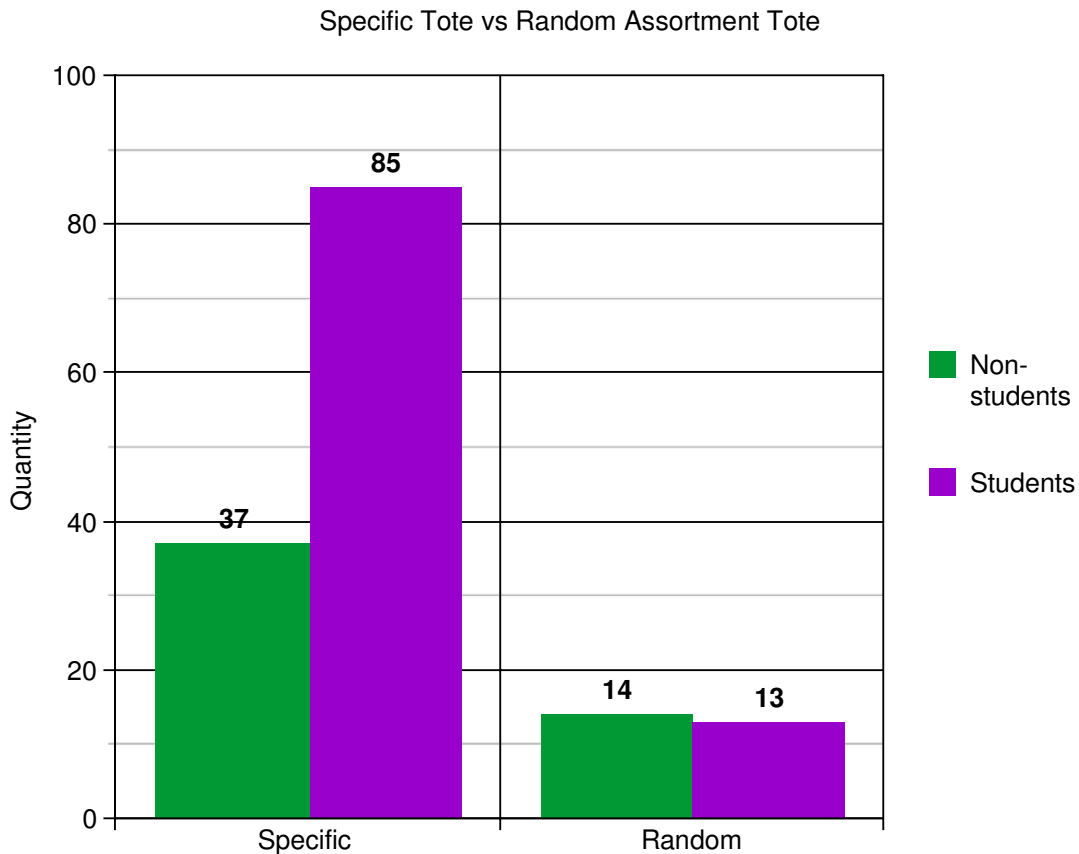


Results indicate that the majority of both students and non-students would be interested in having farmers' market produce delivered to their place of residence. Both groups also had similar preferences in price. In total, 47% of all individuals interviewed, both student and non-student, said they would be willing to pay between \$2 and \$7 for this delivery service. Students had a slight preference towards paying between \$2 - \$4 over paying between \$5 - \$7, whereas non-students

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seemed to not have as much of a preference over the two price ranges. Only 3 participants, or 2% of those interviewed, claimed they were willing to pay \$7 or more for this service. Overall, there is a slight preference for a delivery system for farmers' market produce.

5. Would you prefer a tote with a random assortment of locally grown produce or a tote where you choose which specific type of locally grown produce you would be receiving?

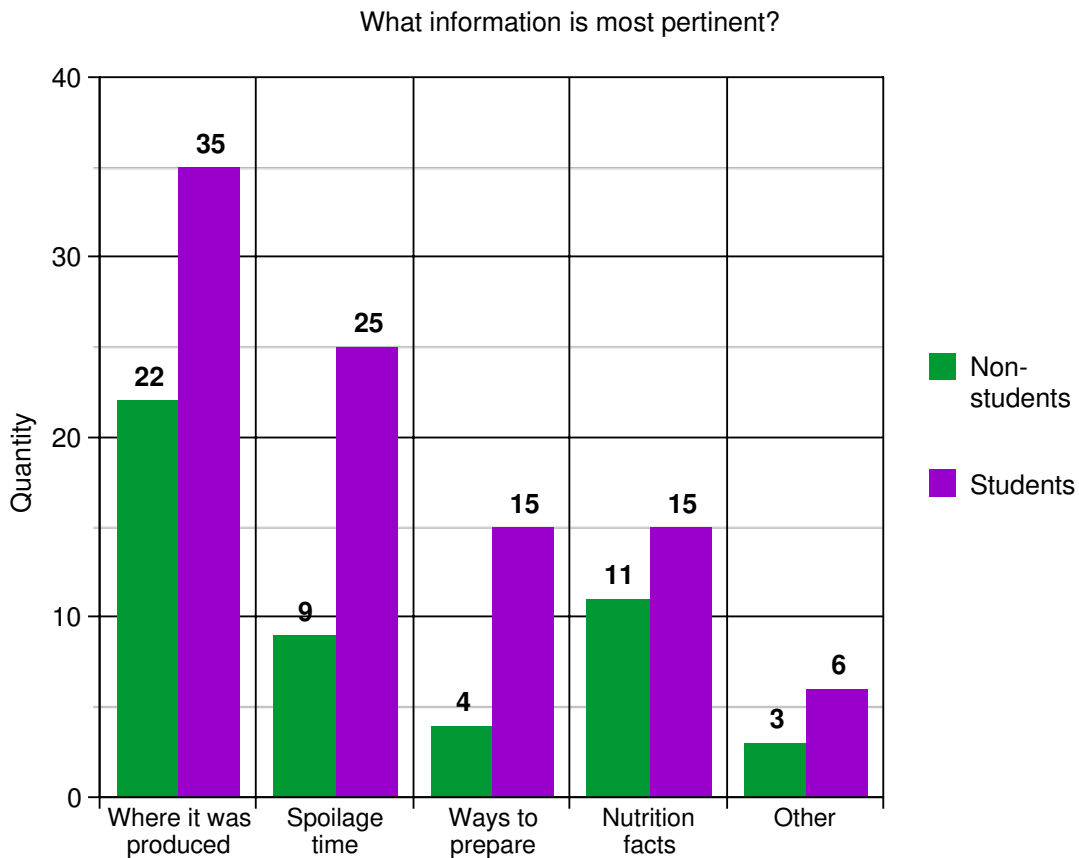


When participants were asked for their preference of knowing what was going to be in their totes or not knowing what was going to be in their totes, the majority preferred knowing. There was a slight discrepancy between students and

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non-students in the percent of who preferred knowing and who didn't. 27% of non-students preferred their totes to contain random produce, whereas only 13% of students preferred the same randomness.

6. If knowing more information about products you are receiving make you more inclined to purchase said produce, what information is most pertinent?



Consumers were asked about the importance of added information, besides type of produce, when purchasing produce. Most participants voiced they would be more inclined to purchase produce when they knew more information about the product. Only 10 individuals total they were not interested and did not feel more inclined by knowing more information. Lastly, those who said they wanted more

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information about the produce were asked which of the above information would be most pertinent. 36% of students and 44% of non-students claimed where the product was produced was the most important information. Students also seem to have a higher preference for knowing spoilage times and ways to prepare the produce than non-students. There was not much discrepancy in the percentage of students and non-students whom wanted information pertaining to nutritional facts. Some participants who said 'other' during the survey voiced their opinions on other bits of information. A few said that they would want to know if the produce was organic or not, and some others claimed they would want to know if the produce was in season or not. Overall, more information about the produce being acquired is wanted and the majority of both students and non-students want to know where their produce is coming from.

Chapter 5

The purpose of this study was to determine the customer preferences between buying produce from local farmers' markets versus buying produce from supermarkets within San Luis Obispo County. Conclusions were drawn by analyzing the responses of one hundred and sixty participants on a series of questions. By comparing and contrasting the student and non-student populations, this study examined the perspectives of both groups. These surveys were conducted in person and at random in multiple locations within San Luis Obispo County in order to get an understanding of the general population. Farmers and businesses cannot gauge the applications of delivery services and other information relative to products if they do not understand the needs and wants of their customers. This study helped to surface what these needs are and how produce sellers may want to adapt to consumer preferences.

One main purpose of farmers' markets is to distribute produce and other goods locally. Another is to ensure the freshest goods are consumed with little to no pesticide use as a means of preservation. With San Luis Obispo County being located in the heart of the central coast area, the capabilities of growing and producing foods for local consumptions are very high. The cost of farmers' market produce has been shown to equal that of supermarket produce, at least in San Luis Obispo County; and as more people understand the benefits of buying local, a shift in purchasing trends of consumers is inevitable. Results showed that consumers have already begun this change from buying produce from supermarkets towards buying

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from farmers' markets. This shows the modern day consumer, at least within SLO county, has shifted away from global corporate powers and moved towards smaller local producers.

Survey results illustrate there is a slight trend towards having farmers' market produce delivered to the consumers place of residence. When asked if individuals would be interested in such a service, 59% of all participants claimed they would. From a price-of-delivery standpoint, of those whom said they were interested, 42% of both non-students and students said they would be willing to pay between \$2 - \$4 per more just to have their produce delivered. Results show a successful service, like the one delivering farmers' market produce to your home, depends on a balance of interest level and cost, among other things.

When asking about product knowledge, consumers value information about the produce and what exactly they are purchasing over uncertainty. When asked about receiving a tote of randomly assorted produce verses receiving a tote with specifically chosen produce, 81% of all participants agreed they would want a tote filled with exactly what they want. The need to know what the consumer will be receiving is much greater than that of not knowing.

With regards to other information pertaining to each piece of produce, where the item was grown is the most wanted piece of information. 39% of participants claimed that the location of the grower where the food was produced was most important. Information about spoilage time for each food was also a highly sought after amenity. In total, 23% of those surveyed said knowing more in regards to spoilage time was most important. Nutritional facts as well as ways in which to

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prepare the produce were bits of information that were slightly less desirable.

Individuals answering 'other' were later asked what they would want to know about the foods they were purchasing. One person claimed knowing when the item was picked would be vital information. Others said knowing exactly what the item looked like would be most important as well.

Overall, by combining the different groups of San Luis Obispo County residence, surveying them, and correlating their responses, it shows that farmers' market produce is more sought after than supermarket produce. It is important to note that service providers offering farmers' market produce delivery to your home may in fact be a trending service. Produce consumers within San Luis Obispo County also seem to prefer totes of farmers' market produce containing exactly what types of produce desired over totes containing random assortments of farmers' market produce. These same consumers also want to know exactly where the produce was grown over other bits of information like nutritional facts or ways in which to prepare the foods. If these are truly the tendencies of the general population in SLO County, farmers' market produce delivery services are currently trending and may soon be more popular than ever.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Study

If time permitted, it would have been useful to get more participants in the survey and create more questions for demographic purposes. This would help gain a larger perspective of the general population as well as a greater understanding of those being surveyed. To continue this study, it is recommended to survey in more areas within the San Luis Obispo County. It would also be useful to get more information from non-students specifically in order to balance out some of this current research. Farmers and food distributors could benefit from not only knowing the customer preferences but also the general idea of the differences between student and non-student spending habits.

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Appendix A.

Interview Questions:

Demographic Questions:

1. Do you live in San Luis Obispo County?
2. Are you a student?

Questions:

1. Do you purchase your produce from farmers' markets or supermarkets?
2. If farmers' market produce could be delivered to your residence, would you be interested, and if so how much would you be willing to pay?
3. Would you prefer a tote with a random assortment of locally grown produce or a tote where you choose which specific type of locally grown produce you would be receiving?
4. If knowing more information about products you are receiving make you more inclined to purchase said produce, what information is most pertinent?