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Direct Marketing of Table Grapes in Southern Illinois: Consumer Purchase and Consumption Habits, Attitudes, and Impressions of Locally Grown Table Grapes

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PLSS 390-723
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*Direct Marketing of Table Grapes in Southern Illinois:
Consumer Purchase and Consumption Habits, Attitudes, and Impressions of Locally
Grown Table Grapes*

Introduction:

The grape growing and wine making industries are some of the fastest growing agriculture industries in Southern Illinois today. This means there is a growing market for locally grown wine-grapes, but as with any large industry like the wine industry there are outside suppliers that usually have much cheaper prices. This leads the grape growers to wholesale their wine grapes at relatively low prices. This causes grape growers to need a healthy capital in order to establish and produce grapes until they begin seeing a profit, often not occurring until many years down the road. This pressure could be lessened or possibly even avoided if grape growers attempted to direct market some of their grapes.

Wine grapes would most likely not work for direct marketing since there is not a high demand from local consumers for winemaking grapes but there seems to be more opportunity in direct marketing table grapes. In one study grapes were one of the fruits most frequently mentioned as locally grown items not available in sufficient quantities (Bruhn et al, 1992). "Direct marketing eliminates the 'middle man' functions of food exchange, transportation, storage and processing (Cottingham et al, 1994)." Cutting out this middleman allows farmers to make a much higher profit percentage for directly selling table grapes as compared to wholesaling wine grapes. Farmers see direct marketing as a different option for marketing their produce to increase their profitability

while consumers view it as a way to get fresher, higher quality foods at lower prices (Govindasamy & Nayga, 1996).

In recent years, US public health initiatives have increased and are placing greater emphasis on preventing diseases. Greater fruit and vegetable consumption is one of the main messages since it can help prevent cancer and cardiovascular disease (Padilla, 2000). Consumers seem to be listening too. Over the past five years, consumption of fruits in the household has either increased or stayed the same (Govindasamy & Nayga, 1996). People want the highest quality most nutritious fruit available and many believe that this can be found in local produce. Although some patrons enjoyed supporting the local economy the most important reasons for shopping for local produce were quality and freshness (Velasquez et al, 2005). Locally grown produce has the potential for very high quality because it can be harvested when fully ripe. With minimum shipping, it can arrive at market shortly after harvest, and if held at the proper temperature it will have little loss in nutritive value. In addition, fresh-to-market produce often tastes better than produce that has traveled through the conventional marketing system (Bruhn et al, 1992).

This has led to the development of an expectation of better quality at direct marketing facilities compared to supermarkets, and in addition to this expectation, many expect lower prices at direct marketing facilities than at supermarkets (Govindasamy, 2003). Although they expect lower prices many are still willing to pay a premium for a higher quality product. A study of Illinois farmers' markets showed that a majority of the customers were willing to pay a ten percent premium for locally grown produce (Velasquez et al, 2005). Growers stated that farmers' markets have been profitable for them and they were satisfied with the market (Perault et al, 2003). Consumers are willing

to pay more because they are so interested in getting fresh, quality produce that supports the local economy.

This is where the local Illinois viticulturist comes into the picture. With an increasing number of wineries opening, an increasing amount of grapes or grape juice must be supplied in order to make the wine. In addition the Illinois viticulturists' potentially have the option to tap into two markets, the wholesale wine-grape market and most likely the direct marketing of table grapes in order to supplement their income. Per capita consumption of table grapes was expected to increase during the period from 2000-2004 at an annual rate of about one percent (Adu-Asamoah, 2000). Fruit consumption is increasing and many consumers view local produce as being fresher and of a higher quality so there seems to be quite a potential market for locally produced fruits including table grapes. Local growers could provide fresher, higher quality grapes of a greater variety, which is what consumers want. Growers already growing wine grapes could fairly easily add some table grapes into their production practices and have a crop with a much higher net value if directly marketed. Production could be met and it seems as though there should be a demand for locally produced table grapes yet there is little research in Illinois on marketing of local fruits, especially table grapes since they are a newer item in the local produce market.

Many things need to be assessed in order to know in what way to approach the marketing of table grapes. The different market segments must be identified, the needs of each type of customer determined, and the characteristics that influence purchase and the potential for purchase must be found (Gold et al, 2004). "There is a need to document various characteristics of direct marketing consumers to better serve the needs of the

consumers efficiently. The needs of consumers can be met by analyzing the direct marketing consumer behavior and purchasing patterns (Govindasamy & Nayga, 1996)." Consumer attitudes tend to change with changes in age and occur fairly rapidly so new assessments of consumers' views must be conducted every few years in order to keep up with new trends and desires (Kelley et al, 2002).

Our objective is to gain not only a fundamental knowledge of consumer purchase and consumption habits of locally grown table grapes but also an understanding of their attitudes and impressions of locally grown table grapes. In particular, our intentions were to conduct consumer surveys to evaluate the direct market potential of table grapes in different direct market venues. Specifically we ran evaluations at a farmers' market, a state fair, an on-farm market, a roadside market, a class of college students and a small chain supermarket to assess the familiarity of consumers with locally grown table grapes and the conditions that lead to greater purchase and consumption. Interpretation of the results of the consumer surveys will help us to develop some possible marketing strategies to be used for the direct marketing of the table grapes.

Successful marketing of new products encourages consumer acceptance and has a long-range goal of building loyalty (Kelley et al, 2002).

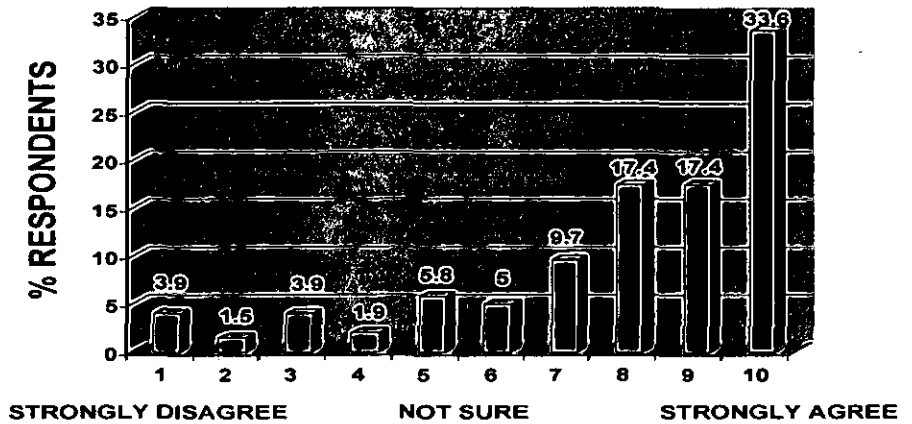
Materials and Methods:

We surveyed consumers at six different venues where produce was sold. Participants were asked at random to voluntarily complete the survey. The survey was split into two separate parts: a pre-sample survey and a post-sample survey (and sensory evaluation table). The pre-sample survey was given to the participants first and consisted

Results:

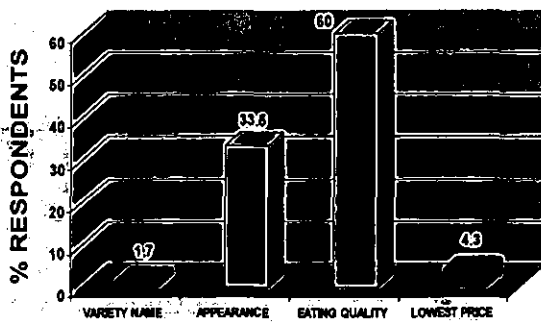
Before the participants had even seen or tasted the samples, they strongly agreed that they would buy

**PRE-SAMPLE
I WOULD BUY LOCALLY GROWN TABLE GRAPES
IF THEY WERE AVAILABLE**



locally grown table grapes if they were available. They also believed that locally grown table grapes were either rarely available or only available several weeks during the summer. On a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree), the average participant reply was a 7.7 (agree to strongly agree) that they would be willing to learn

**POST-SAMPLE
WHEN BUYING LOCALLY PRODUCED TABLE GRAPES,
I WOULD BASE MY PURCHASE ON...**



more about locally grown table grapes if the information were available.

Results also showed that they would prefer to learn this information from newspaper articles, brochures where products are sold, fairs and festivals, and product labeling. Participants said they would be persuaded to purchase

more locally grown table grapes if there was better information as to when and where they are available, if the producer was located nearby, and lower cost. 60% of

respondents stated that they base their purchase on eating quality and 33.5% say they base it on appearance. Participants ranked all five samples as having an above average overall eating quality, leaning more towards outstanding eating quality. Participants agreed that our samples had a more colorful appearance than what they normally find in

**PRE-SAMPLE
HOW MANY TABLE GRAPES DO YOU PURCHASE PER WEEK?**

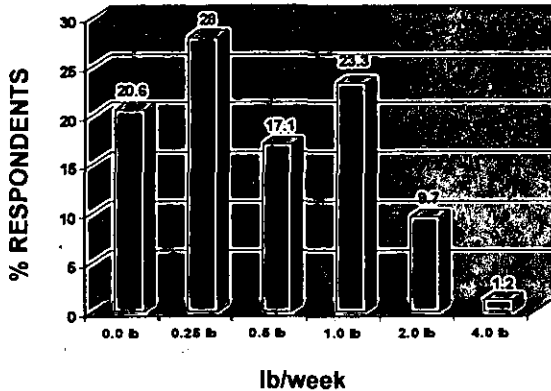
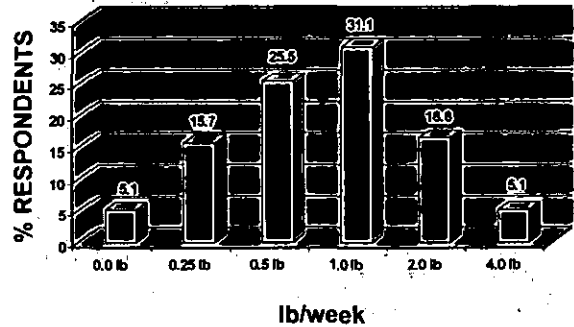


table grapes per week, but changed their answers post-sample to say that if locally grown table grapes like our samples were available that they would purchase an average of between 0.5 and 1.0 lbs, doubling the quantity they would purchase. On a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree), the average participant reply was a 7.9 (agree to strongly agree) that they would purchase locally grown table grapes like our samples if they were available.

their local supermarket, and in addition that they appeared fresher and more-shapely. Participants said pre-sample that they purchase between 0.25 and 0.5 lbs of

**POST-SAMPLE
HOW MANY LOCALLY PRODUCED TABLE GRAPES WOULD YOU PURCHASE PER WEEK IF THEY RESEMBLED THE SAMPLES BEFORE YOU?**



Discussion:

The results are straightforward and fairly conclusive. Consumers believe locally grown table grapes are rarely available and would buy the locally grown table grapes if they were available and if there was better information on when and where they are

available. They would prefer to learn this information through newspaper articles, product labeling, and at fairs and festivals. Consumers base their purchases of table grapes on eating quality and appearance and rated our samples as all having a fresher, more shapely, more colorful appearance and an above average to outstanding overall

2005 HARVEST DATA

Variety	Crop Yield (Tons/Acre)	Cluster Weight (Average)
Jupiter	11.6	0.54
Marquis	8.7	0.69
Vanessa	7.2	0.40
Neptune	7.0	0.87
Mars	5.6	0.31

eating quality. When asked plainly if they would buy locally grown table grapes like our samples, they strongly agreed. People are willing to buy them and our harvest data from the SIUC research vineyard shows that they would produce large clusters and plenty of them with yields reaching up to 11.6 tons/acre.

Consumers want them, growers can grow them, and growers can see increased diversification and increased revenue through direct marketing of the locally grown table grapes.

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