

Abstract

Objective

To examine consumer perceptions of locally grown produce as well as factors associated with food choices.

Design

Cross-sectional survey

Setting

Various locations in a northern California community

Participants

646 community members

Data Collection

Surveys were administered at various other locations within the community..

Results

Approximately 39% of low-income and 30% of non low-income respondents never shopped at farmers' markets. Low-income respondents were 3.8 times more likely than non low-income respondents to choose the price of vegetables as the number one reason for not shopping at a farmers' market ($p=0.01$). Low-income consumers were less likely to think that farmers' markets offer more fresh, local fruits and vegetables than large chain grocery stores compared to the non low-income participants ($p<0.001$). Low-income consumers were significantly less likely to think that locally grown produce tastes better compared to the non low-income participants ($p=0.012$). When asked about factors associated with food choice, low-income consumers were significantly more likely to consider the importance of special offers (on sale or with a coupon) when purchasing foods ($p=0.037$)

Conclusion

In conclusion, income level appeared to be associated with perceptions of locally grown food products among the study participants.



Introduction

Low-income consumers may face barriers limiting their access to farmers' markets and locally grown produce.. Produce has become more expensive and less readily available compared to processed foods. When income is limited, low-income families tend to consume more high calorie, processed foods and less fruits and vegetables. Participation in farmers' markets has been associated with increased fruit and vegetable consumption. There is a need to promote locally grown produce to increase the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables among economically diverse consumers.

Methods

Participants

646 surveys were completed on a voluntary basis by community members

Survey Creation

- Based on common themes used in previous research
- Questions related to consumer perceptions of locally grown food and factors associated with food choice
- Demographic information : age, gender, ethnicity, education level and income level was also gathered.
- Income level determined by program participation in low-income federally supported programs (WIC, free or reduced school meals, MediCal and food stamps/EBT)

Data Collection

Surveys administered at grocery stores, farmers' markets and various other locations within the community. Shoppers and community members were approached by research assistants and completed surveys on a voluntary basis.

Data Analysis

- Statistical software program (SPSS)
- Descriptive statistics, chi-square, t-tests, logistic regression and factor analysis

Results

How do you feel about shopping at large chain grocery stores or farmers' markets?	Low income (n=57)						Higher income (n=515)						p value
	Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Fruit is more expensive at farmers' markets than large chain grocery stores	13	23	16	28	24	42	135	26	130	25	193	38	0.748
Vegetables are more expensive at farmers' markets than large chain grocery stores	13	23	17	30	23	40	157	31	177	23	175	34	0.300
Farmers Markets offer more fresh ,local fruits and vegetables than large chain grocery stores	6	11	13	23	35	61	28	6	39	8	431	84	0.001
What is important to you when you choose local fruits and vegetables?													
I would choose to buy locally grown fruits and vegetables if they were easier to use or cleaned	13	23	19	34	21	38	160	31	167	33	178	35	0.023
I think it is fair to pay farmers more for growing local fruits and vegetables	11	29	23	43	18	33	77	15	147	29	273	54	0.041
Local fruits and vegetables taste better than fruits and vegetables grown outside of this area	5	9	20	36	25	46	27	5	110	21	345	67	0.016
I choose fruits and vegetables if the fruits and vegetables are.....	Not important		Slightly important		Very important		Not important		Slightly important		Very important		
Given with special offers (on sale or with a coupon)	8	7.8	27	8.2	21	16	95	92	302	91.8	113	84	0.037
Organically grown or produced (no chemicals/sprays used)	13	12.1	29	8.9	14	11	94	88	298	91.1	113	89	0.559
Easily available (sold where I shop)	8	7.8	27	9.1	27	10	7	70	270	90.9	232	90	0.09

Approximately 9% of respondents were self identified as low income
 70% of all respondents expressed a positive attitude toward local food
 61% of the respondents shopped at a farmers' market at least once a month
 39% of low-income and 30% of non low-income respondents never shopped at farmers' markets.
 Low-income respondents were 3.8 times more likely than non low-income to choose the price of vegetables as the number one reason for not shopping at a farmers' market (p=0.01).
 Low-income respondents were less likely to think that farmers' markets offer more local fruits and vegetables than large chain grocery stores (p<0.001).
 Low-income respondents were less likely to think that locally grown produce tastes better (p=0.012).
 Low-income respondents were more likely to value special offers (sale/coupon; p=0.037)

Conclusion

Study findings indicate that income level affects perceptions of locally grown produce. While 70% of the participants had a positive attitude toward local food, income level was found to be an important factor associated with the purchase of local produce. Low-income respondents perceived that local produce was more expensive, but not necessarily tastier or fresher than produce available at large chain grocery stores.



Limitations

- Non-randomized sample section
- Smaller number of low-income consumers compared to higher income consumers
- Does not reflect county census data