



Farmers' Market Customer Priorities

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Introduction

Farmers' markets provide an alternative shopping experience, especially for those consumers looking for fresh, high quality, healthy produce (Holloway and Kneafsey, 2000; Brown, 2001; Archer et al., 2003; McGarry-Wolf et al., 2005; Zepeda and Deal, 2009; Lyon et al., 2009; Cole 2010; and USDA-AMS, 2011). Farmers' markets also provide consumers the opportunity to meet and communicate directly with produce growers. Growers may then educate consumers about their farm, products, and production methods.

Consumers also attend farmers' markets to relax while enjoying fresh air, and to socialize by interacting with friends, neighbors, and other individuals in their community (Hilchey et al., 1995; Oberholtzer and Grow, 2003; Brown and Miller, 2008).

This fact sheet provides an overview of the attitudes and priorities of consumers who shop at farmers' markets in the Great Basin states of Utah and Nevada. Specifically we examine the activities and features of farmers' markets such as location, parking, etc., consumers prefer, the attributes of fresh produce and produce stands they prefer, as well as the lifestyle habits and attitudes they have towards things such as food safety, health, food preparation, etc. The results discussed in this fact

sheet may be used by farmers' market managers and vendors to customize market events, hours of operation, location, as well as product variety and promotional and educational materials to address consumer concerns and interests.

Data Overview

This fact sheet uses data collected through in-person surveys conducted with 1488 consumers at 12 farmers' markets in Nevada in 2008 and four farmers markets in Utah in 2011. Surveyors made several trips to each farmers' market location throughout the summer market season and distributed surveys to attendees. Table 1 provides sample statistics for the survey respondents.

Consumers who responded to the survey were primarily females (66%), married (62%), and Caucasian (81%). The vast majority (80%) of our sample was composed of household primary shoppers and those whose primary motivation for visiting farmers' markets was to purchase produce (73%). An average respondent is 42 years old, has a 4-year college degree, earns \$75,420 per year, lives in a household with 3 individuals and attends farmers' markets 4 to 7 times per summer season. Our sample also consists of 58% persons who home-garden and 44% who would like to join a community supported agriculture (CSA) program.

Table 1: Survey Sample Statistics

Consumer Characteristics	Mean
Purchase produce	73%
Primary shopper	80%
Age	42
Education	College
Female	66%
Married	62%
Willing to join CSA	44%
Number of visits	4 to 7
Home gardeners	58%
Income	\$75,420
Caucasian	81%
Family size	3
Observations	1488

Consumer Priorities

To examine consumer priorities at farmers' markets, respondents were asked a number of questions relating to their attitudes and lifestyle, preferences for fresh produce attributes, and preferences for farmers' market attributes. With regard to attitudes and lifestyle habits, respondents were asked to rate 11 statements on a scale of 1-5, where 1 represents strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 unsure, 4 agree, and 5 strongly agree. Table 2 provides the mean rating for each statement, ranked from highest to lowest.

Table 2: Attitude/Habit Ratings (1-5)

Consumer Attitudes/Habits	Mean
Concerned about food safety	4.39
Concerns for diet/health	4.38
Supporting local farmers is important	4.19
Agricultural open space is important	4.18
Concerned about food origin	4.16
Physical activity is important	4.09
Buy products with low environment impact	3.55
Eating out is an event in my family	3.38
Have little time to prepare meals at home	3.07
Eat out frequently	2.79
Vegetarian or vegan	1.77

On average, the survey respondents were most concerned with food safety, followed by diet/health. Supporting local farmers and preserving agricultural open space was important to consumers. Food origin was also a strong concern, while buying products with low environmental impact was a lesser concern. Respondents seem to prefer preparing meals at home rather than eating out, and are not primarily vegetarians or vegans.



To assess consumer priorities for produce attributes, respondents were asked to indicate the level of importance they assign to attributes when shopping for fresh produce, on a scale of 1-5, where 1 represents not important, 2 slightly important, 3 important, 4 very important, and 5 extremely important. Table 3 shows the mean ratings for each of the 11 attributes, ranked from highest to lowest.

Table 3: Produce Attribute Ratings (1-5)

Produce Attributes/Features	Mean
Product freshness	4.61
Product taste	4.60
Product quality	4.59
Product value	4.24
Product appearance	4.10
Produced locally (own State)	3.99
Product variety	3.96
Product pricing	3.92
Organic production	3.60
Know grower/farmer	3.55
Specialty item	3.05

Results in Table 3 indicate that three fresh produce attributes are of primary importance. They are product quality, freshness and taste. This suggests that people choose to shop at farmers' markets

because they believe produce with these attributes exists at farmers' markets. These findings suggest that top consumer priority in terms of produce attributes is fresh produce with the highest quality and taste. Additionally, local produce was preferred to that produced organically, and although value was rated quite high, product pricing was of a lesser concern. Interestingly, knowing the grower was rated low, perhaps indicating that communication between consumers and growers at farmers' markets isn't important, or that this type of interaction is taken for granted at the market.

Finally, consumer preferences for farmers' markets features were assessed by providing survey respondents with nine typical attributes and asking them to rate the importance of each from 1-5 (1 not important, 2 slightly important, 3 important, 4 very important, 5 extremely important). Table 4 provides the mean ratings for each farmers' market attribute.

Table 4: Farmers' Market Attribute Ratings (1-5)

FM Attributes	Mean
Convenient location	4.12
Free parking	4.05
Number of vendors	3.97
Hours of operation	3.92
Certified market	3.37
Cultural events	2.68
Educational events	2.61
Concerts/music	2.56
Child/family activities	2.31

Results show that survey respondents find four attributes of primary importance. They are convenient location, free parking, the number of vendors, and hours of operation. These are top priorities in the eyes of consumers who attend farmers' markets. If these features are provided, the expectation is that more people will attend the market. Market managers should prioritize providing free parking and maximizing the number of vendors at their markets.

Market features such as a certified farmers' market, cultural and educational events, and concerts/music

were rated as important, while child/family activities less important.



Conclusions

This fact sheet uses survey data collected from a sample of 1488 farmers' market consumers in Nevada and Utah to examine consumer priorities. Results indicate that respondents are concerned with food safety, diet/health and supporting local growers. Locally produced food was more important to consumers than certified organic foods. In terms of fresh produce attributes, the highest rated were quality, freshness, and taste. With regards to farmers' markets attributes, respondents place higher importance on convenient location, free parking, number of vendors, and hours of operation. These results indicate the areas of concern and priorities policy makers, market managers, and vendors should emphasize to attract customers and meet consumer preferences.

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