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Building Sustainable local food systems in Christchurch, New Zealand: Barriers and opportunities to direct marketing between restaurants and chefs and farmers' market

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Abstract

This paper investigates restaurants and chefs' perceptions, motivations, and constraints in buying local food products from farmers' markets in a study conducted in Christchurch, New Zealand. Survey were conducted with restaurants and chefs. Results indicate that purchasing local food from farmers' markets was beneficial, but restaurants and chefs experienced challenges with purchasing. Common barriers for local food adoption from farmers' markets included time commitments, staff availability to visit market, and satisfaction with current wholesale distributors. Food products grown locally, fresher products, and higher quality of products were the major respondent motivations for local food adoption from farmers' markets.

Keywords: Local food; Purchasing; Restaurants; Chefs; Farmers' markets; Food wholesalers.

Introduction

Over the decade demand for locally grown food products has increased substantially among the public as well as academics and policy makers (Peters et al., 2009). Local foods have been primarily explored from the consumer's perspective (Martinez et al., 2010). Relatively limited research has been carried out in relation to how restaurants handle local procurement (Murphy & Smith, 2009; Duram & Cawley, 2012), benefits of local product usage (Inwood, Sharp, Moore, & Stinner, 2009), cost (Sharma, Gregoire, & Strohbehn, 2009), and purchasing decisions (Sharma, Moon, & Strohbehn, 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 Christchurch, New Zealand. Thereby helping to identify strategies for sustained local purchasing by restaurants and chefs.

Literature review

Local food systems

There is no consensus on defining "local" and what constitutes a local food system (Dunne, Chambers, Giombolini, & Schlegel, 2011; Hall & Gössling, 2013), although Hall (2013) provides several definitions based on consumer perceptions of definitions used by farmers markets. Local food systems are variously described as face-to-face agricultural markets (Hinrichs, 2000), politically constructed boundaries (Selfa & Qazi, 2005), and as an alternative to conventional food systems (Mount, 2012). However, local food remains an important component of food promotion and purchasing (Hall, 2013).

The local food movement

Local food systems are often viewed as a solution to many of the negative externalities associated with the global industrialized food system, such as deforestation, land use change, biodiversity loss, greenhouse gas emissions, food scares, and loss of cultural identity and traditional knowledge (Blake, Mellor, & Crane, 2010; Kremer & Deliberty, 2011). As a result, consumers increasingly demand ''information about the food's origin and how it is handled and transported'' (Bosona & Gebresenbet, 2011, p.293). Such demands can also be viewed as linked to a quest for authenticity (Sims, 2009). Due to these concerns, alternative food initiatives (AFIs) and movements have surfaced. To this end, Hall and Gössling (2016) argued that a local food system refers to deliberately formed food systems that are characterized by "a close producer-consumer relationship within a designated place or local area" (p.10). AFIs include a range of activities and provisioning agendas including direct marketing distributions (farmers' markets, roadside stands, community supported agriculture, and farm-to-school programs) (Hodges & Stevens, 2013; Hall, 2013), indirect marketing distribution (restaurants, foodservices, and retails) (Roy, Hall, & Ballantine, 2016), sustainable agriculture (Starr et al., 2003), and Fair Trade (Connell, Smithers, & Joseph, 2008).

Local food and consumers

The consumer has been the primary focus for research on local foods, especially in relation to farmers' markets and direct markets. Consumer studies have identified a number of benefits and constraints associated with local food purchasing decisions. Benefits ranges from perceived tangible and intangible characteristics including better appearance (Connell et al., 2008), fresher and tastier (Hall, 2013), healthier (Dodds et al., 2014), safer (Tobin, Thomson, & LaBorde, 2012), supporting the local economy (Roininen, Arvola, & Lähteenmäki, 2006), supporting the local community and farmers (Dodds et al., 2014), sustainability (Sims, 2009), less distance travelled (Roininen et al., 2006), more authentic (Pearson et al., 2011), and better treatment of workers and animals (Roininen et al., 2006). Furthermore, some consumers also perceive social benefits or social interaction that include trust and connectedness between consumers and farmers is an important motivation for purchase of local food directly from farmers and/or farmers' market vendors (Pearson et al., 2011; Hall, 2013). Consumers are often willing to pay a premium price for local foods although the importance of being local may vary by products (Denver & Jensen, 2014). Nevertheless, several barriers to purchasing local foods exist in relation to seasonal constraints and limited accessibility (Khan & Prior, 2010), higher prices (Zepeda & Deal, 2009), and unavailability (Hodges & Stevens, 2013).

Local food and restaurants

Previous literature has identified important attributes and the challenges and obstacles associated with purchasing locally produced foods by restaurants. Some of the perceived benefits of local food purchasing by restaurants include good public relations, supporting local producers, better quality and fresher food, superior taste, supporting the local economy, ability to purchase small quantities, and improved customer satisfaction (Inwood et al., 2009; Kang & Rajagopal, 2014; Roy et al., 2016). The perceived barriers to purchasing local food by restaurants include payment procedure conflicts, lack of knowledge about local sources, inconvenient ordering and delivery times, limited availability and amounts, variable costs, packaging and handling, lack of authority to choose suppliers, inadequate distribution systems, and additional time to process the food in the operation (Kang & Rajagopal, 2014; Roy et al., 2016).

Method

The selected sample location was Christchurch, New Zealand. The location was selected because of its demographics, culture, geography and climate, political system, local agrifood system that facilitate or limit the development of local food systems. The study is also notable as it is taken outside of the American context where the vast amount of research of the role of restaurants and chefs in local food systems has been conducted. Data was gathered through self-completed questionnaires with restaurants and chefs. Research occurred from February to April 2015 in Christchurch. Eligible foodservice businesses were selected for participation in the survey and put into a purpose built address database. The sample of restaurants and chefs was acquired from telephone directories and websites that maintain extensive foodservice establishment addresses. The final samples of foodservice establishments were cross-checked for valid addresses for the mailing list. The mailing list included full and limited service restaurants, hotel restaurants, cafés, buffet restaurants, and speciality/catering foodservice establishments. These establishments were independently owned or chain/corporate ownership, both franchised and non-franchised establishments. Deli-style foodservice establishments were excluded in this sample as these establishments are less likely to use local fresh food products and more likely to use pre-made products (O'Donovan, Quinlan, & Barry, 2012). A pilot test was conducted with ten Executive Chefs prior to administration of the final survey to assess the clarity of survey questions due to their familiarity with the topic (Diamantopoulos et al. 1994). A total 455 questionnaires (survey) were distributed in mail as well as in-person. The questionnaire were measured on a 7-point Likert Scale anchored from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The final data collection effort resulted in 96 completed questionnaires, which contributed to a 21.09% (96/455) response rate and this is a typical response rate in other restaurant surveys (Brown, 2008; Casselman, 2010; Reynolds-Allie & Fields, 2012). Therefore, the usable response rate reported in this study compares favourably with these studies of a similar nature. In this study, frequency analysis was used to analyze respondents' demographic profiles, definition of local food, and other related questions measuring attitudes toward local food purchasing behaviours. Descriptive analysis was also conducted to obtain the means and standard deviations of the data. This was performed in order to further explain respondents' perceptions, motivations, barriers and constraints of buying and promoting local food ingredients on their menus.

Results and discussion

Based on 96 completed questionnaires, respondents defined "local food" as grown and/or produced with in the greater Christchurch area (Canterbury region). Of the 96 respondents, 69.79% identified their establishment as a casual/family full service restaurant, 13.54% stated their establishment is an upscale full service restaurant, and 81.25% identified themselves as independently owned (Table 1).

<Insert Table 1 here>

Results of the survey provides insights into restaurants and chefs local food purchasing motivations and perceived barriers to local food purchasing. Respondents indicated high level of perceived benefits to purchasing local food products from farmers' markets. The attribute food products/ingredients grown/produced locally, the ability to obtain fresher food products, and ability to get higher quality of products/ingredients were the most important reasons among respondents for local food adoption from farmers' market (Starr et al., 2003; Duram and Cawley, 2012; Hall 2013; Kang & Rajagopal, 2014; Roy et al., 2016). Lack of time and staff to visit the market, do not offer delivery, and satisfaction with current wholesale distributors (foodservice distributors) were the most perceived barriers to local food adoption from farmers' markets (Inwood et al., 2009; Schmit & Hadcock, 2012; Duram & Cawley, 2012). However, issues with delivery of the products appear less problematic (mid-level obstacle) in other studies (Strohbehn & Gregoire, 2002).

Conclusions

This study presented evidence that restaurants and chefs rated delivery of the products from farmers' markets as a barriers when it comes to local purchasing. In addressing this, Producer-Involved Distribution Systems (PIDS) can be considered another form of distribution that reduce the barrier of transportation and facilitates relegalization (Stott, Lee & Nichols, 2014). PIDS service allows the sharing of costs among several farmers for better services associated with storing, marketing, selling and transporting the products to the buyers. Interestingly, this study shows a preference of restaurants and chefs for wholesale distributors from which is purchased local food products, as they are able to efficiently and consistently provide products to restaurants. Similar to other studies (Inwood et al., 2009; Schmit & Hadcock, 2012), such preference is not unique to restaurants, although the vital role of wholesalers in foodservice supply chains is often lost in discussions of local food systems (Hall & Gössling, 2016). However, restaurants and chefs satisfaction with wholesale distributors clearly creates an alternative outlet for the farmers to move greater volumes of their products through these channels. The study therefore suggests that there is potential to further expand the sales of local food products to restaurants, thereby also potentially developing another route through to consumers to embrace local food.

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Table 1
Demographic characteristics of respondents (Segment and Ownership) (N = 96)

Segment	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Upscale Full Service Restaurant	13	13.54
Casual/Family Full Service Restaurant	67	69.79
Hotel Restaurant	3	3.12
Limited Service (Fast Food) Restaurant	5	5.20
Café	4	4.16
Buffet Restaurant	1	1.04
Speciality Foodservice (e.g. Caterer)	3	3.12
Other (Please specify)	0	0.00
Ownership		
Independently Owned	78	81.25
Chain/Corporate (centralized ownership)	11	11.45
Franchise (Owned separately, but part of a chain concept)	7	7.29