

# **Current consumer opinions on local food purchasing: A summary of ongoing research by the UAC**



July 14, 2011

# Research Context

- As part of our USDA grant, we have been using surveys as one component of understanding why Ohioans do or do not purchase local foods.
- Our goal is to capitalize on opportunities and identify barriers and ultimately make a stronger connection between local producers and local consumers.
- Making this connection has a variety of benefits, including building the local economy, improving public health, and strengthening our sense of community.

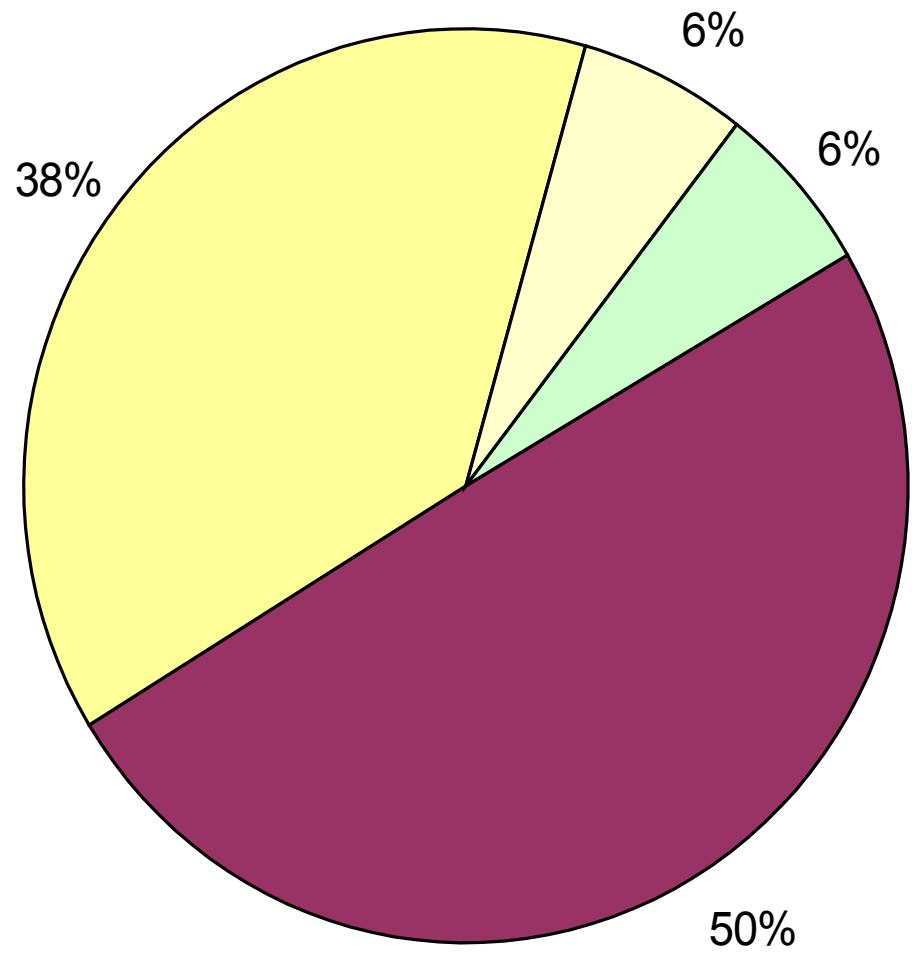
# Survey of UT Faculty and Staff

- Inspired by the success of Isidore Foods in Pennsylvania.
- Asked participants what they wanted to buy local and how much they were willing to pay.
- UT faculty and staff in general showed great interest in a local food buying club, and a willingness to pay a fair price.

# Summary of Results

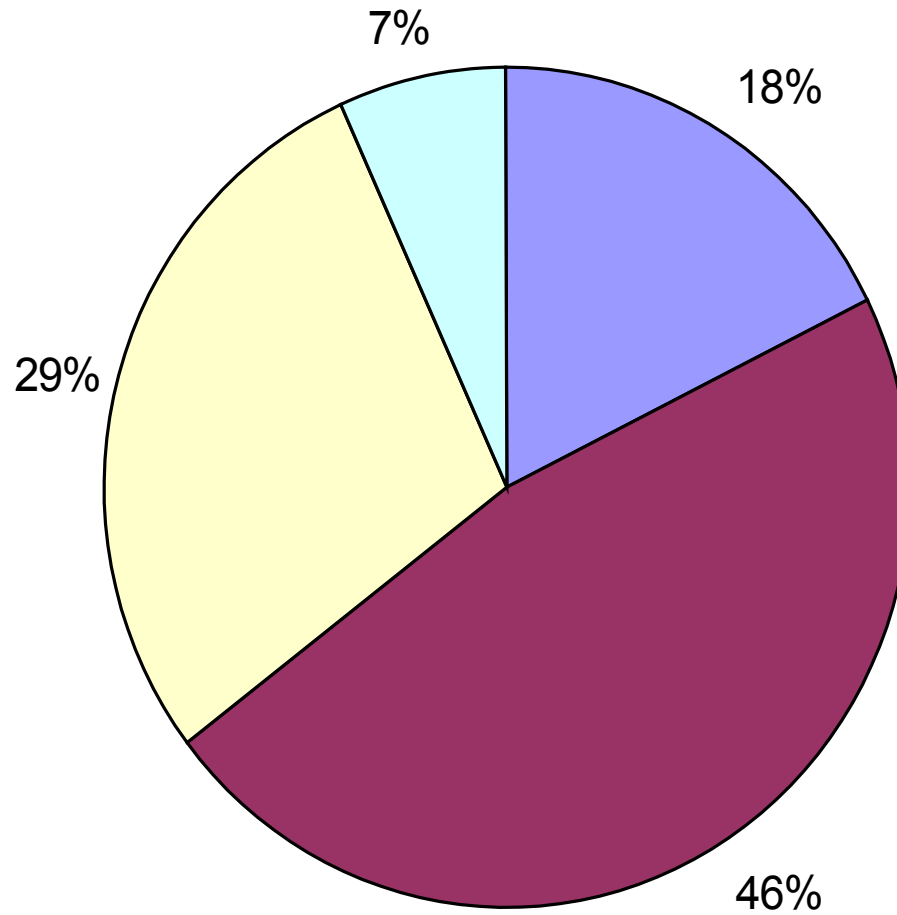
- 674 respondents
- 50% “very likely” to participate
- 30% willing to pay up to 10% more than grocery store prices
- Strawberries and leafy greens were most popular products. Other popular products were tomatoes, peaches, sweet corn and asparagus.

# Likelihood of Participation in Buying Club



Very likely      Somewhat likely      Somewhat unlikely      Very unlikely

## Amount Willing to Pay (Compared to Grocery Store Prices)



Less than

The same as

Up to 10% more

10%-20% more

# As a Result of the Survey...

- The UAC attempted to identify local producers/entrepreneurs to create pilot program.
- Riehm Farms CSA offered to make UT a CSA drop off point.
- Drop offs began May 31<sup>st</sup> to 46 subscribers.
- Riehm Farms now has a waiting list for their CSA.

# Survey of Ohio Food Service Directors

- Partnering with the Ohio Dept of Ag, OSU, and using materials from the Nat'l Farm to School program.
- Purpose of study was to identify perceptions, opportunities and barriers for farm-to-school in Ohio.
- Incorporating local foods into school lunches fosters a sense of community, provides fresher and potentially more nutritious food items, and keeps more money in the local economy.

# Summary of Results

- 206 responses from school districts throughout the state of Ohio.
- 37% of respondents currently purchase some local food.
- 77.5% reported being somewhat or very interested in purchasing food directly from a farmer.
- This number increases to 90% if they are able to buy local food through a distributor.

# Respondents would be more likely to purchase local food if:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
There were financial incentives to purchase local food	62.3%	27.7%	5.8%	4.2%
There were stronger assurances of safety regarding local foods	53.4%	38.3%	6.7%	1.6%
There was one place for ordering from multiple farmers	61.5%	29.7%	6.8%	2.1%

# Potential Benefits of Farm-to-School

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Purchasing local foods supports the local economy	77.8%	19.7%	.5%	2%
Purchasing local foods improves local school district public relations	62.1%	19.7%	4%	3%
Serving local foods makes students' diets healthier	37.1%	41.8%	13.9%	7.2%

# Potential Barriers to Farm-to-School

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
It is difficult to arrange timing and frequency of product deliveries	41.8%	36%	14.3%	7.9%
It is difficult to find local farmers willing to sell to schools	32.3%	45%	16.4%	6.3%
It is difficult to get competitive prices for local foods	34.4%	43%	17.2%	5.4%
It is difficult to fit local food into the budget	22.4%	42.6%	23%	12%
Approved food distributor does not offer local options	32.4%	38.9%	17.8%	10.8%
Extra time is needed to prepare and handle fresh produce	42.1%	34.7%	16.3%	6.8%
Local farmers do not comply with food safety and food handling regulations	26.4%	39.6%	22.5%	11.5%

# What the Survey Tells Us

- Food service directors in general are interested in farm-to-school purchasing, and believe it benefits children and the local economy.
- However, areas of concern are seasonality, cost, food safety concerns, one-stop ordering, and participation by vendors and distributors.

# **Survey of NW Ohio Consumers**

- This survey is ongoing—the first stage obtained 350 responses within the counties of Erie, Fulton, Lucas, Ottawa, Sandusky, and Wood. An additional 200 responses are currently being collected to ensure sample accurately reflects area demographics.
- Goal is to find out what the average consumer thinks about local food: How do they define it, how important is it to them, what have their experiences been.

# **(Very) Preliminary Results**

- Overwhelmingly, respondents state they have at some point purchased food directly from a farmer (90%+).
- Respondents in general believe in supporting family farms and the local economy, and believe local produce tastes better.
- However, many cite cost and convenience as the primary drivers of their food buying decisions.

# Next Steps

- We need to hear from you:
  - What new markets are you interested in?
  - What do you need to make that happen?
  - What do you see as current opportunities?
  - What do you see as barriers?
  - Are there ways that you as growers can collaborate or aggregate product?

# Thank You!

- For more info: <http://uac.utoledo.edu>

