Markets Alter Diets

Shoppers told us that their market "habit" has had profound impacts, altering their attitudes and behavior. It has positively affected what they cook and consume, what they know about food and how it is grown and how they define "healthy," fresh food. It has also translated into one in four shoppers sharing more meals with family/household members.

Shoppers are hungry for nutrition and health information and cooking tips. Also, the mix of what they buy is changing - over 70% are interested in buying more organic produce and more value-added items. Two thirds of vendors agreed that demand for organic items has increased. Markets, particularly Toronto based and larger markets, are encouraged to pilot more value-added options and organic food. This poses potential challenges for some vendors to continue expanding what they are growing and selling (value-added products) and to consider adopting organic production methods.

Based on your experience buying food at farmers' markets, have you:

- Increased the number of meals my family eats together.
- Learned more about local agricultural issues.
- Tried cooking new foods.
- Learned more about when various Ontario foods are in season.
- Improved the overall menu of things you/your family eats.
- Increased my interest in buying fresh, healthy food.
- Added more local food to range of foods you/your family eat.

Staying Connected to Shoppers

Shoppers told us they want to be connected to their markets both on and off site. This involves a combination of face-to-face interaction, signage (promoting the market, products and farms), local print media and electronic tools. Shoppers seek out and value a wide diversity of communication channels, demonstrating a generational divide between younger and older adults. Younger adults automatically turn to electronic media, while older shoppers that were particularly evident in the non-Toronto locations rely on local newspapers. Most market managers and vendors understand that it is critical to connect with shoppers and potential new shoppers in a variety of ways, but may be falling short of reaching the full spectrum of people.

There may be opportunities to work with students and young food activists to create or enhance websites, Facebook content, Twitter, and electronic newsletters, and to stimulate content creation and viral linkages via market contests and challenges.

Strengthening Markets

Shoppers have strong commitments to their markets and want more: longer hours, extended seasons, and more market days during the growing season.

It is worth exploring extending the market season. In addition, given shoppers' interest in learning more about cooking, markets could provide access to other methods of 'extending the season' by promoting or planning canning, preserving, freezing and dehydrating workshops, in tandem with community-based organizations. This could also prove beneficial to shoppers who have limited budgets.

Overwhelmingly, shoppers told us that Markets Deliver.

9 out of 10 said they're here to stay!

The GBFMN Shopper Study was funded by the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation.

The online survey was completed by 339 shoppers at farmers markets in and around the Greenbelt. Results are based on shoppers at markets from: Toronto (47%), Northeast/Northwest (19%), Hamilton/Niagara Region (15%) and Durham/York/Pee/Halton (13%).

The study was conducted by Informa Market Research (www.informamarketresearch.com).

Contact Greenbelt Farmers’ Market Network at 416-336-9103 or GreenbeltFarmersMarketNetwork@gmail.com.
What we learned in the 2010 Shopper Survey

Why Visit the Market?
Farmers’ markets are about food that is local, fresh from the farm, tasty and linked to the people who grow produce it. They are also much, much more. Shoppers told us they view markets as a leisurely, welcome outing, an opportunity for chance encounters with friends and neighbours. They are a venue for learning what’s in season and how it was grown, ‘touching’ the earth via exchanges with farmers, getting cooking advice and being inspired to try new items. There are several tangible and intangible drivers that beckon shoppers to markets.

How Long and How Often?
Markets are a learned experience, and shoppers divide into longer term and shorter term converts. This reflects the growth of farmers’ markets in and around the Greenbelt since 2005. The longer the history of shopping at markets, the more often shoppers attend and the more they spend. It takes time to develop the farmers’ market habit. It takes time to adapt to the particularities of farmers’ markets – one day a week during limited hours, cash only, etc.

Market Spending
The proportion of a household’s weekly food budget spent at markets varies, but averages $40.10 per shopper. This is a healthy figure: in 2001 Statistics Canada reported that Ontario households spent an average of $86.97 a week for food purchased from stores and another $38.93 for restaurant/takeout food. Shoppers at farmers’ markets are consciously doing their best to support local farmers and the rural economy.

Expand the Options
Both farmers and potentially local small scale chefs/caterers can expand the share of shoppers’ total food expenditure spent on local products, for food consumed at home or take-out options. Expand the markets’ share of the snacking/home meal replacement sales which account for about one-third of the total that households spend on food by increasing the variety of fresh and value-added choices. The goal is to increase the volume of locally produced food eaten by market shoppers and their families.

Break Down Barriers
Market organizers and vendors are encouraged to continue exploring solutions to some of the barriers that may be negatively impacting some segments of shoppers: provide large volume shoppers with assistance to carry items to their vehicles (use trained volunteers), expand young adults’ cooking skills with onsite demonstrations, orient opening hours to reflect shoppers’ needs.

Other Sources for Local Food
Market shoppers also seek out independent grocers and other ways to access local foods. In order to fully appreciate the significance of these spending patterns, it is worth noting that overall, three major supermarket chains capture 80% of food spending in Ontario.

In the past 12 months, have you bought locally grown food in other ways?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Locally Grown Food</th>
<th>% of Shoppers</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grocery chain or other retail store</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent grocery store</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-farm market</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pick-your-own farms</td>
<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bought a share of the crop/CSA</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total %