

Cultural Factors Impacting Food Sustainability Distribution and Consumption in the New River Valley, Virginia

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2012 Appalachian Teaching Project:

Our topic focused on:

Consumer Cultural Influences

Our research focused on:

Producers and consumers at the Blacksburg Farmers Market

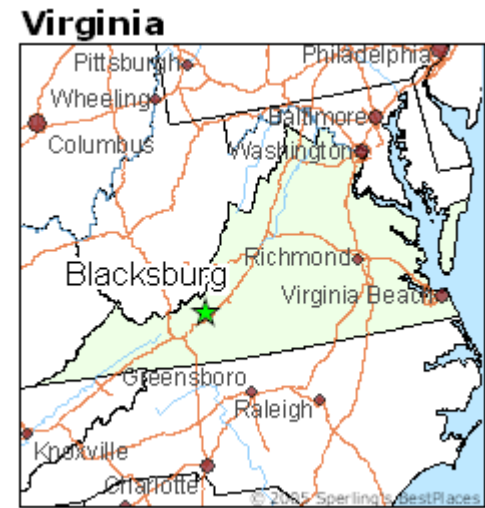


New River Valley, Virginia: Blacksburg

Montgomery County

Home to Virginia Tech campus

42,600 estimated 2011 (U.S. Census Bureau)



Current Consumer Trends:

- 756 Farmers Markets established 2011-2012 (USDA)
- 9.6% increase in Farmers Markets in U.S. (USDA)
- USDA recognizes rising consumer interest in providing locally grown food in supermarkets.
- Studies estimate that processed food in the United States travels over 1,300 miles, and fresh produce travels over 1,500 miles, before being consumed



2011 VT ATP team determined that the local sustainable farmers of the NRV area require their own regional paradigm

Categories	Description
Soil and Plant Maintenance	Generally Sustainable Not Organic Certified
Animal Care	Minimal Antibiotics Grass Fed
Plant and Animal Diversity	Polycultures
Competition	Moderate Regional High Cooperation
Support	Vibrant Local Market
Culture	Highly Individualistic
Business	Family Owned or Small Business

Central Concepts Relevant to Cultural Factors:

Concept of Community:

Sense of place involving relationships, cultures, and environments specific to a particular area.

Social Capital:

Involves interactions within groups or communities to build trust, reciprocity, collective identity and mutually beneficial relationships.

Bottom-up Economics:

Rebuilding our infrastructure and investing in the sustainable practices that advocate the growth of mutually beneficial relationships when all parties involved are rewarded which in turn, is ultimately reinvested within the local populace.

Understanding Consumers' Cultural Orientations Related to Food Consumption Choices:

Local food refers to a geographic origin, it can also characterize the food by cultural subjectivity and social and political environment.

Influences for choosing/not choosing local products:

- Cultural Orientations
- Relationships
- Quality
- Cost

Several methods were used to obtain data from the Consumers, and direct and indirect marketers

Participant Observation



Surveys



Interviews

- **Vendors**
- **Grocery Stores**
- **Restaurants**

Guest speakers

Ms. Kathlyn Terry

Site Observation

Blacksburg Farmers Market

2011 Findings:

Age range: 35-55

Customer Turnout:

- Events
- Virginia Tech

Types of Shoppers:

- novelty
- utopian
- environmentalists
- localists



Blacksburg Farmers Market

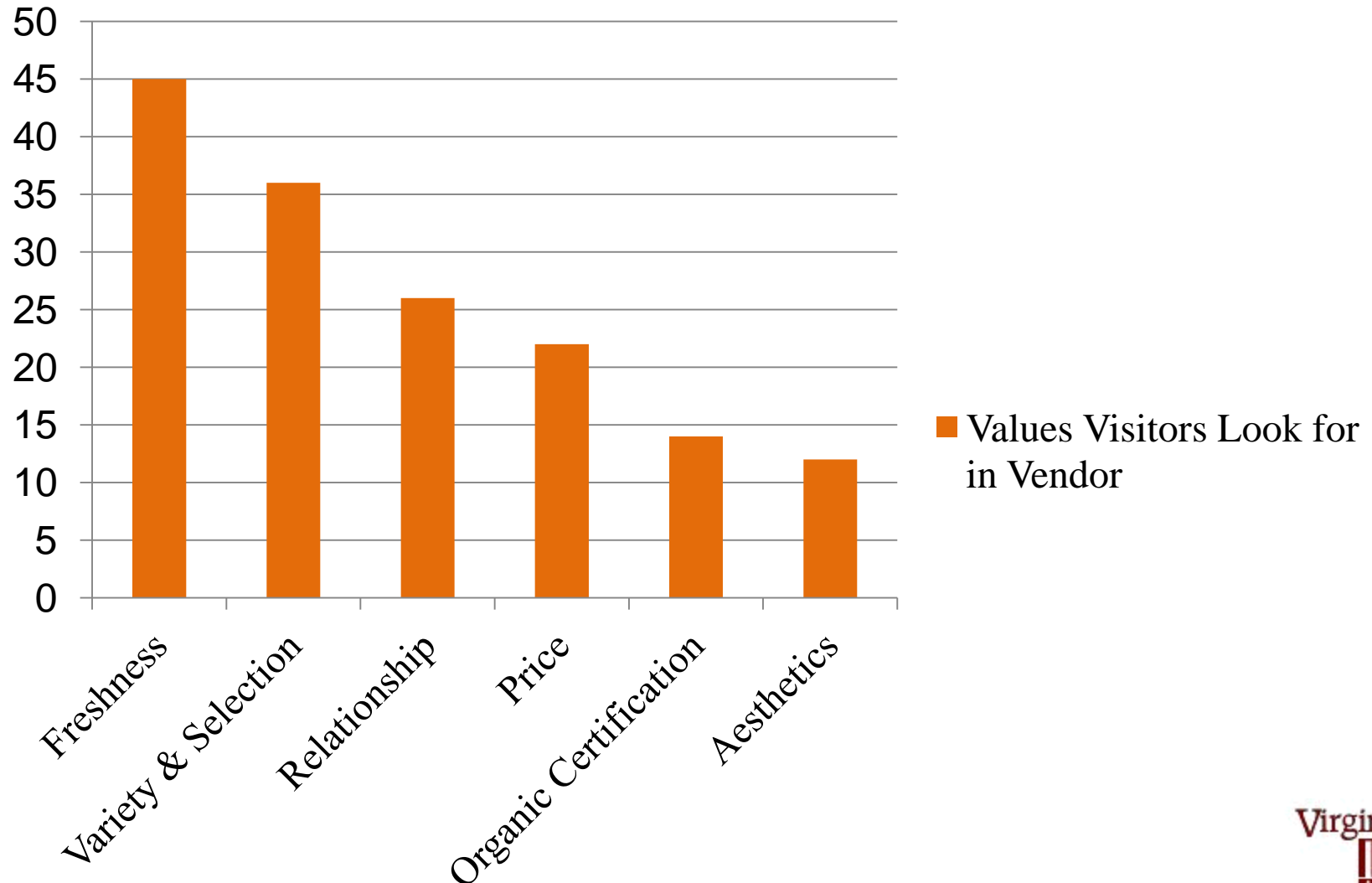
Consumer Observations

- Attendance variable by:
 - Day of week
 - Wednesdays more likely wealthy regulars
- Low socioeconomic status attendance
- Social aspect:
 - Meeting friends
 - Participate in events
 - Chat with vendors



Market Customer Survey

Values Visitors Look for in Vendor



Market Customer Survey

Labels Valued:

- None

Difference in organic labels:

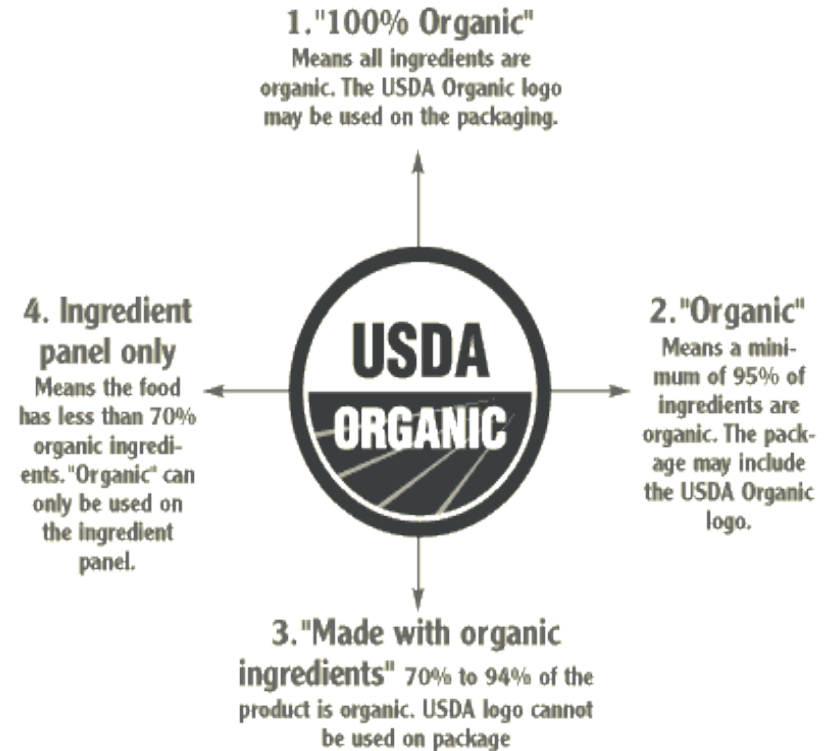
- 66% yes

Certified Organic Vendors?

45% local

16% organic

39 % none



Downtown Blacksburg

- A 2010 census reports roughly 42,600 people living within the town limits with the median age of 21.9 years old.
- Blacksburg supports a large student population that makes up roughly 60 percent of the town.
- The majority of restaurants within the town of Blacksburg tend to cater their menus to the influx of college students adhering to the business models that support fast and cheap food to cater to their constituency.



Local Restaurants:

- While many restaurants are interested in using local suppliers, they are concerned about higher costs associated with purchasing locally.
- The use of a local food supply chain is influenced by customer value creation through demand and business-to-business relationships between farmers and restaurants.
- The emergence of increased recognition of the significance of “localness” within the agri-food sector has radically begun to change how people view their food.



Local Restaurants:

Specific Findings:



- Demand for the utilization of local products in the local restaurant industry remains low.
- Food costs remain the largest barrier to overcome in serving and utilizing local products.
- Community advocacy for the use of local products remains high throughout Blacksburg but is severely lacking within the restaurant industry.
- Social capital between restaurants within the community remains high however the social capital between farmers and restaurants is mostly nonexistent.

Conclusions:

Cultural Factors that Influence the use of Local Products:

- Older established citizens can afford social scene at Blacksburg Farmers Market.
- Connectivity to local scene more important than label.
- Price of purchasing local products continues to be a concern among students.
- Consumers want the convenience of an one stop shop.
- Relationships cultivated between patrons and suppliers allows for a stronger marketplace that allows for the exchange of more than monetary capital.

ARC Recommendations:

Cultural Factors that Influence the use of Local Products:

Support local supermarkets

Support consumer education

Support outreach and marketing between local producers
and businesses



We would like to give a special thank you to



Farmers

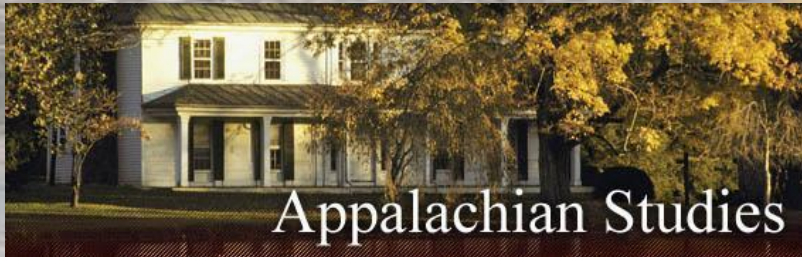
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**Guest Speaker
Ms. Kathlyn Terry**



Appalachian Studies

Questions?

