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

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

- Freshness
- Variety & Selection
- Relationship
- Price
- Organic Certification
- Aesthetics

Values Visitors Look for in Vendor
Blacksburg Farmers Market

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:

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- Ron Holdren
- Robert Webster
- Gwynn Hamilton

Guest Speaker
- Ms. Kathlyn Terry

Questions?

Dr. Anita Puckett

Director
- Ellen Stewart

Appalachian Studies