PROMOTING THE CONSUMPTION OF LOCALLY GROWN FOOD

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ABSTRACT

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The provisioning of food in America has become a commodity which has been supported by large-scale, industrial agriculture. However, research has shown that industrial agriculture is not sustainable because of its detriments to society, the economy, and the environment. This thesis presents locally grown food as a sustainable alternative to industrial agriculture and explains that the consumer is an integral part of the success of the movement. It examines consumer behavior from several different points of view and hypothesizes that local food consumers are middle-aged, highly educated, and liberal. Through surveys at farmers’ markets, this thesis develops answers as to why people are buying local food, what discourages them from buying local food, and who they are. It finds that local food consumers are presumably middle-aged, highly educated, and liberal. It also finds that people buy local food for its freshness and the chance to support local farmers. Finally, it analyzes how different demographic groups value different benefits of local food. This data is used to make several marketing implications for promoting farmers’ markets and the consumption of local food.
This thesis is dedicated with love to my parents. To my Dad who showed me that farming can be small and in tune with the environment and to my Mom who is watching her business grow at farmers’ markets.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The question arises of whether agriculture is, in fact, an industry, or whether it might be something essentially different...Now, the fundamental ‘principle’ of agriculture is that it deals with life, that is to say, with living substances. Its products are the results of processes of life and its means of production is the living soil...The fundamental ‘principle’ of modern industry, on the other hand, is that it deals with man-devised processes which work reliably only when applied to man-devised non-living materials. The ideal of industry is the elimination of living substances...In other words, there can be no doubt that the fundamental ‘principles’ of agriculture and industry, far from being compatible with each other, are in opposition.

-Schumacher 1973, p. 110-111

In a world with a rising population, major environmental challenges, and a sensitive economy, the “provision of adequate, fully nutritious, non-toxic, wholesome, and palatable foods for the total population” is challenging (Kramer 1973, p. 9). Agriculture in the United States has undergone dramatic changes in the past century in response to new technologies and the fear of growing hunger. In particular, industrial agriculture\(^1\) has enabled massive amounts of food to be produced from relatively small amounts of land. Through technical innovations, scientific discoveries, and changes in the commodity and marketing system, industrial agriculture has provided food to Americans conveniently and inexpensively (Harper and Le Beau 2003; Pillsbury 1998). While such practices were once praised as the only way to feed such a large population (Kramer 1973), many believe that it cannot continue on its present course because of its effects on society, the economy, and the environment (Halweil and Nierenberg 2004; Lyson 2004; Harper and Le Beau 2003; Shiva 2000).

In response to the problems created by industrial agriculture, which will be discussed in greater detail in the next section, Congress passed the 1990 “Farm Bill” (Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990). This bill called for “sustainable agriculture” which was defined as “an integrated system of plant and animal production practices” that is specific to each

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\(^1\) Also referred to as “large-scale” and “corporate” agriculture and “agribusiness” throughout this thesis.
farm. This means that farmers are allowed to choose their methods of production as long as they fulfill the following long term goals:

- satisfy human food and fiber needs
- enhance environmental quality and the natural resource base upon which the agricultural economy depends
- make the most efficient use of nonrenewable resources and on-farm resources and integrate, where appropriate, natural biological cycles and controls
- sustain the economic viability of farm operations
- enhance the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole

In sum, sustainable agriculture combines societal, economic, and environmental interests with the production of food (Lyson 2004).

One type of sustainable agriculture that has grown in popularity has been the promotion of locally produced foods and agricultural products. “Local foods” provide healthy, fresh food to communities while supporting local farmers and contributing to the local economy. They are also generally produced by methods that are less intensive and damaging to the environment (Planck 2006; Lyson 2004; Harper and Le Beau 2003). One of the major routes for locally produced food is through farmers’ markets which have grown substantially throughout the United States in the past decade (AMS/USDA 2006). The growth of farmers’ markets provides support for the idea that local food can provide a successful form of sustainable agriculture. However, the survival of local farmers and farmers’ markets depends heavily on the consumers who purchase food at the markets. This thesis addresses the benefits of locally produced foods and farmers’ markets and seeks to answer some important questions about consumer behavior. Through surveys of farmers’ market patrons, I determine the characteristics of local food consumers and answer the question of why people look for locally produced food. I show that different groups differ in farmers’ market attendance and their reasons for buying local food.
These differences can be used to develop a series of marketing strategies for policymakers and market managers to promote the integration of local food into society.

In order to understand why local food as a form of sustainable agriculture is important, one must explore why industrial agriculture has flourished and become detrimental to the economy, society, and the environment. In the first chapter, I briefly describe how industrial agriculture became the major source of food in America and why it cannot continue on its present course without serious environmental damage. Next, I present local food as a supplement and method for reducing our dependence on industrial agriculture and explain why it is better for society, the economy, and the environment.

The Rise of Industrial Agriculture

The history of American food began in the home. During colonial times, more than 95% of the population farmed their own food because technology and transportation to obtain food from other places was limited (Pillsbury 1998). The Industrial Revolution of the mid-nineteenth century changed the way society functioned and brought an increase in industrialization, urbanization, and modernization. “In 1850 about 85 percent of the American population engaged in farming or farm-related occupations. By 1900 that figure dropped to 60 percent” (Harper and Le Beau 2003, p. 63). People left their farms for jobs in the cities, and city populations grew rapidly. “New ways of farming, new ways of building homes and offices, new ways of transport, and new ways of cooking were all created and integrated into everyday life” (Pillsbury 1998, p. 54). Each sector of society (agriculture, industry, and urban areas) grew in response to the others, and developments in technology, farming, and industry spurned a population growth. This change not only affected how people lived and worked, it also changed the way they ate.
Several inventions during the Industrial Revolution made large-scale farming possible. Lyson (2004) describes these in three “revolutions.” The first was the mechanical revolution which saw machinery being used extensively on farms for the first time. The steel plow, the reaper, and the binding and threshing machine allowed farmers to cultivate large areas that would have been impossible before. Increased mechanization allowed farming to be done quickly, efficiently, and effectively through equipment like seeders, combines, and mowers. Before the advent of machinery a single farmer could only harvest about 7.5 acres of wheat per season. Using an automatic binder, one farmer could now harvest 135 acres (Harper and Le Beau 2003). With decreases in time and cost to plant crops, farmers were able to cultivate much larger areas and sell much of their crop.

The second revolution was the chemical revolution. Farmers began to use commercial herbicides, pesticides, and fertilizers following World War II (Harper and Le Beau 93). After the war, many bomb-making factories were converted to agrichemical production (Lyson 2004), and chemical use in farming increased accordingly. Figure 1.1 shows the rapid rise in fertilizer use in the United States beginning in the 1960s. By the end of the early 1990s, fertilizer use began to level off at a steady, but high, level of use. Pesticide and herbicide growth was similar to that of fertilizer.
The last revolution was the biotechnology revolution beginning in the 1980’s (Lyson 2004). Agriculture took advantage of increased hybridization and selective breeding, and farmers began using crops that had been genetically engineered to produce high yields and be resistant to bugs and other plants (Harper and Le Beau 2003). Genetically engineered crops have also been created that are resistant to herbicides that are applied to fields. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), biotechnology in the form of genetically engineered crops has reduced production costs and the use of chemicals (2007). This leads to higher crop yields which has been very appealing to farmers. The USDA (2007) estimates that that there were approximately 220 million acres of crops with herbicide tolerance and/or insect resistance worldwide in 2005, increasing 11% since 2004. U.S. acreage accounts for about 55 percent of land planted with genetically engineered crops.
The three revolutions made large-scale production of agriculture possible, but other innovations and changes in society allowed food to be sold and marketed in new ways. During World War II, several new packaging materials were developed by the military which eventually led to plastic tubs, polyethylene jugs, aluminum cans, and other types of new materials being used in the private sector. Food processing and packaging made it possible for people to enjoy foods that were previously seasonal. Americans soon developed the attitude that food was no longer limited by distance, season, or price (Harper and Le Beau 2003). As food was becoming less expensive to produce, people were also earning better wages. As a result, they had more disposable income to spend on food, and food production became a booming industry. This eventually led to the marketing system we know today where grocery stores carry thousands of items and offer endless choices for food. America is no longer a land of farmers who produce their own food; it has become a land of convenience where food comes from the store, not the ground.

These innovations allowed farmers to cultivate even more acreage, and soon the family farm gave way to the corporate farm as farmers sold their land to large corporations or entered into contracts with large agribusinesses. As cities grew, people moved into multiunit housing, and they no longer had places to cultivate crops and raise livestock (Pillsbury 1998). Food production became commodified, meaning that people no longer produced food for their own consumption (Harper and Le Beau 2003). Economies of scale also led to conglomerate agriculture because it lowered producer and consumer costs and boosted technological innovation (Pillsbury 1998). Food was now a commodity, and agriculture was now a business.
The Rise of Problems

Industrial agriculture has changed the way Americans acquire food and eat. It has made life outside the farm possible and convenient. However, as stated above, industrial agriculture has detrimental effects on health, the economy, and the environment. As Local Harvest, a non-profit dedicated to promoting sustainable agriculture through local foods, states, “Cheap energy and agricultural subsidies facilitate a type of agriculture that is destroying and polluting our soils and water, weakening our communities, and concentrating wealth and power into a few hands.” The next section details some of the problems associated with large-scale agriculture.

The Health Consequences of Industrial Agriculture

In her book Appetite for Profit, Simon (2006) explains how America has fallen into an “epidemic of diet-related problems, including obesity, heart disease, and diabetes” (1). She blames the food industry for offering us few choices and marketing to our appetites instead of our health. The convenience of packaged food has led many Americans to prefer processed food to whole foods. While frozen and canned foods can be easily microwaved for a fast meal, these foods are usually filled with saturated fat, cholesterol, sugar, sodium, and preservatives. Heart disease was the leading cause of death in the United States in 2004 according to the Center for Disease Control (CDC). Heart disease is greatly affected by a person’s diet, and the foods that are produced by industrial agriculture contribute to an unhealthy diet.

Another issue with mass produced foods is the chemical residue from the pesticides and fertilizers used extensively by industrial farms. The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) reported that pesticide residue was found on 37.3% of domestic and 28.2% of imported food products in 2003. Levels of residue were volatile for 2.4% of domestic and 6.1% of imported foods. While this may seem like a small number, the effects of pesticide
residue can be very harmful. The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) states “Laboratory studies show that pesticides can cause health problems, such as birth defects, nerve damage, cancer, and other effects that might occur over a long period of time” (2007). Therefore, exposure over time can cause significant problems for people. People can be exposed to pesticides through food, but also through water contamination and “spray drift” where chemicals applied to a field move through the air to neighbors (EPA 2007).

Industrial farming not only includes highly intensive cultivation of crops through the use of genetic engineering and chemical use, it also includes confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs) or factory farms where thousands of animals are concentrated in small areas and fed. The animals spend their entire life eating and are then shipped off to slaughter. Factory farms allow businesses to mass produce beef, pork, and chicken but there are serious associated health concerns. Waste from these facilities is exorbitant and has been found to contribute to high levels of nitrates, bacteria, and pathogens in the water supply (NRDC 2005). The National Resources Defense Council (NRDC) states that this is a major public health concern and is responsible for widespread health problems such as miscarriages, “blue-baby syndrome,” Salmonella, E. coli, Cryptosporidium, Pfiesteria piscida, short-term memory loss, skin irritation, and gastroenteritis (2005). Gases such as hydrogen sulfide and methane also emanate from factory farms and cause air pollution which has been blamed for flu-like symptoms in areas surrounding these facilities (NRDC 2005).

The rise of diseases such as bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE, also known as mad cow disease) and avian flu have been linked to the practices of CAFOs. For example, mad cow disease results from feeding cattle protein derived from the remains of other animals, a once-common practice in CAFOs (Halweil and Nierenberg 2004). Because of the close proximity of
animals, diseases like this spread quickly and if uncaught, can enter the food supply as BSE did in the United Kingdom in the late 1990s. Diseases also spread to the global nature of the food supply: animals and meats are moved across countries allowing diseases to spread more rapidly (Halweil and Nierenberg 2004). The threat of disease is an economic problem for CAFO managers and leads to a third health problem associated with factory farms.

Since animals are kept in such close proximity, disease is prevalent. As a result, agribusinesses have started using antibiotics at alarming rates. Factory farms account for 70% of the total use of antibiotics in America (NRDC 2005). Approximately 24 million pounds of antibiotics are added to animal feed each year to prevent the spread of disease (NRDC 2005). This can have a debilitating effect on our ability to treat diseases because the regular use of antibiotics can lead to antibiotic-resistant strains which can infect humans and jeopardize public health (Harper and Le Beau 2003).

*The Economic Consequences of Industrial Agriculture*

When farmers were first able to cheaply produce and ship goods, they did so at a very high rate. Harper and Le Beau (2003) describe a “boomerang” effect:

“[A] self-destructive loop was set in motion. Oversupply and declining crop prices cut into profits and fueled a demand for more technology aimed at protecting their shrinking profit margins…while food commodity prices stagnated or declined” (p. 108).

The United States Government has attempted to rectify the situation by offering to buy surpluses and pay farmers to discontinue production. Despite these attempts, the result has been fewer farms on much larger tracts of land, many run by agribusinesses. This has driven small farms to their end even more quickly because they are not able to compete with large agribusinesses.

Small farms cannot survive in a market where large agribusinesses are able to control the price of agricultural products. While it may appear that there are a great many brand names at
the grocery store, most are owned by only a few big corporations: Kraft, Beatrice, General Mills, and ConAgra (Harper and Le Beau 2003). These conglomerates have bought out many of the once-family-owned brands that we still see in the grocery store. While these brands keep their identity, most are just part of a large corporation. Often, these corporations own subsidiaries that purchase, process, package, market, and distribute the crop or livestock, and there is little competition among them. For example, the four largest meat processors in the United States slaughter 87% of beef cattle (Harper and Le Beau 2003). The conglomeration of agriculture has triggered unfair business practices such as market manipulation and price fixing (Pillsbury 1998). “Their control of respective markets is so great that, compared to more competitive markets, they have an overwhelming influence on the quality, quantity, type, location of production, and prices throughout the entire food system” (Harper and Le Beau 2003, p. 115).

Small farmers that are able to produce crops often end up selling their products to large agribusinesses to be processed by their subsidiaries. Figure 1.2 shows the route that agricultural products can take. Most products do not go directly to the consumer as the alternate route in the second step depicts. Many products take the long route to the consumer through middlemen (processors, packagers, marketers, distributors, etc). Because of the middlemen and the hold that agribusinesses have on the market, a typical farmer’s profit is very low: estimates range from 7% (Gussow 2002) to 18% (Local Harvest 2007) of the profit made from the sale of the product. This means low profits for the farmer who grows the food and high profits for agribusiness that gets it ready for market.
It is evident that farmers do not benefit from the current food system. They are tied into business with powerful corporations that are able to control prices and keep the majority of profits made from food. While the health and economic problems caused by industrial agriculture are serious, the environmental consequences of industrial agriculture are staggering.
The Environmental Consequences of Industrial Agriculture

The most grievous accusations against industrial agriculture are its effects on the environment. Harper and Le Beau state:

Taken together, producing food and other agricultural products (like cotton) uses more soil, water and energy resources—and causes more pollution and environmental damage—than any other human activity. Indeed, if our planet were a bank disbursing loans of natural resources, agriculture would be among its biggest debtors (67).

The most prevalent environmental concerns include the overuse of fertilizers and pesticides, overuse of water, pollution from CAFOs, high energy consumption, soil degradation, and threats to biodiversity. These are discussed in detail below.

Fertilizers and Pesticides

United States agriculture used over 21 million tons of fertilizer in 2006 (ERS/USDA 2007). Much of the fertilizer that is used is not actually absorbed by crops but instead ends up as run-off in our waterways. The most apparent example is in the Gulf of Mexico. Run-off into the Mississippi River has led to a “dead zone” the size of New Jersey in the Gulf of Mexico where an increase in nitrogen and phosphorus from fertilizer has caused a great increase in algae. The increased algae has caused a decrease in the amount of dissolved oxygen (hypoxia) in the water. As a result, the native sea life has died or left the mouth of the Mississippi River (Roach 2005). While the Mississippi River is a large example of fertilizers affecting waterways, this scenario is repeated in smaller rivers and streams across the United States.

Pesticides (which include herbicides, fungicides, and insecticides) can also cause severe environmental problems. Rachel Carson was the first to draw attention to this in her book *Silent Spring* (1962). She described how DDT and other dangerous pesticides affected the reproductive
systems of bird species and helped to get these dangerous chemicals banned in the United States. Unfortunately, Kellogg et al (2000) state that although DDT and other dangerous pesticides have been banned, traces of them are still found in the atmosphere and fall to the earth when it rains. Additionally, even approved pesticides can jeopardize water quality, especially if they are used extensively (Kellogg et al 2000). Recent research finds that physical deformities in frogs such as extra appendages and incomplete organ systems can be traced back to pesticide use on farms (Associated Press 2007). This shows that even with advanced regulation, overuse of pesticides can be detrimental to the environment. Overuse is abundant on industrial farms where it can ultimately lead to resistance in the targeted species (Horrigan et al 2002). Not only does this cause genetic changes in target species, but it results in the use of more pesticides to kill the resistant target species.

**Overuse of Water**

In a world where clean water suitable for humans or agriculture is limited and unevenly distributed, agriculture is the dominant user of water at the global level according to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations (2003). Poor water and sanitation conditions account for 80% of diseases in developing countries, and 1 in 4 deaths of children under the age of five are due to water related illnesses (The Water Project 2007). Industrial agriculture utilizes more water than other types of agriculture (such as sustainable agriculture methods mentioned below) to produce mass amounts of food. Despite global water scarcity, 70-80% of irrigation water is lost to runoff, evaporation, or seeping into the ground before even reaching crops (Harper and Le Beau 2003). Due to such inefficiency, the production of one kilogram of cereal requires almost 400 gallons of water to raise and process a single head of cattle for food takes over 1 million gallons of water (FAO 2003). This means that groundwater
is being pumped from aquifers at alarming rates, usually much faster than its replacement rate. Over-pumping can cause depletion of wetlands, lakes, and rivers, and it removes support causing topsoil to sink (Harper and Le Beau 2003).

Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs)

CAFOs are causing major environmental damage throughout the United States. Factory farms consist of thousands of animals producing millions of pounds of manure which has the potential to contaminate the water supply and affect native species. The manure from these facilities is typically kept in lagoons, large contained ponds which are intended to keep manure from leeching into the groundwater. However, these lagoons are prone to leaking which releases the manure into the water supply. This causes excess nitrates, ammonia, and phosphorus to contaminate the water supply (Bowman et al 2000). As discussed earlier, nitrates are responsible for human health problems such as miscarriages, “blue-baby syndrome,” Salmonella, E. coli, Cryptosporidium, Pfiesteria piscida, short-term memory loss, skin irritation, and gastroenteritis (Bowman et al 2000). Ammonia depletes oxygen from water, causing “dead zones” similar to those caused by fertilizer runoff (Bowman et al 2000). Phosphorous also leads to eutrophication (excessive algae) which causes oxygen depletion (Bowman et al 2000). In addition to nitrates, ammonia and phosphorous, spills from factory farms release harmful bacteria that can affect fish. For example, Pfiesteria piscicida has been released into water unintentionally through manure spills killing at least one billion fish in Maryland and North Carolina (NRDC 2005).

High Energy Consumption

Many maintain that industrial agriculture has only thrived because of low energy prices and cannot continue forever. The mass production of food is reliant on our ability to provide cheap, sustainable energy. The ability to transport food from one region to another is what
allows industrial agriculture to thrive. The term “food miles” refers to the distance food must travel in order to reach its ultimate destination. The average food travels 1500 miles from farm to table (Local Harvest 2007). When food travels, it uses a substantial amount of fuel which is a nonrenewable resource (Nestle 2006). This is especially troubling when the food could be easily produced locally. For example, to fly a 5 calorie strawberry from California to New York utilizes 435 calories in fossil fuels (Gussow 2002). Although we cannot eat fossil fuels, we can cut down on their use by eating foods that are produced locally. Strawberries can easily be produced in New York for several months out of the year as can most vegetables and fruits in much of the United States. The issue of seasonality provides some support for industrial agriculture, but this relates directly to the shift in Americans’ attitudes about food mentioned above. Changing this attitude is necessary for promoting other methods of sustainable agriculture and will be discussed in further chapters.

Of all the oil used in North America, 25% is used for agriculture (Farmland Center 2005). The average American farm uses 3 kcal of fossil fuel energy to produce 1 kcal of food energy (Horrigan et al 2002). For processing foods, it can take up to 575 kcal/kg for canned fruits and vegetables and 1815 kcal/kg for frozen fruits and vegetables (Horrigan et al 2002). Therefore, whole foods and foods that are not produced by industrial means are a more efficient use of energy.

**Soil Degradation**

Industrial agriculture removes naturally occurring organic material before it can enter into soil through cultivation with heavy machinery and overgrazing. This leads to erosion, inhibits moisture retention and suppresses plant growth. Soil degradation rates for agricultural lands are 20-100 times the natural rate of soil replacement (Harper and Le Beau 2003). “Enough
topsoil erodes each day to fill a line of dump trucks 3,500 miles long” (Harper and Le Beau 2003, p. 168). The use of heavy machinery also leads to soil compaction which makes it impossible for plants to grow (Horrigan et al 2002). Industrial agriculture is guilty of these crimes against soil degradation while sustainable methods of agriculture are more sensitive to soil.

**Threats to Biodiversity**

In large agri-businesses, a single breed of plant (termed “monoculture”) is genetically engineered for high yields and resistance to disease. The breed is also chosen for its ability to grow quickly and in large quantities in order to expedite it to market. By using monocultures, industrial agriculture threatens the biodiversity and quality of its surrounding environment (Farmland Center 2005). Native species are “crowded out” by the monoculture species that is engineered to be exceptionally hardy. Genetically engineered monocultures also threaten carefully bred and heirloom varieties of seeds that several generations of farmers have worked to create (Shiva 2000). Other long-term environmental effects of genetically modified organisms are still relatively unknown (Gussow 2002).

**Local Food as Sustainable Agriculture**

It would appear that current methods of industrial agriculture cannot be sustained forever. The economic, health, and environmental threats are too great. But what is our alternative? One solution is locally produced foods. Local foods are usually produced on small-scale farms and are sold close to where they are produced. Farmers generally use environmentally sound practices and help keep money within the local economy instead of exporting it as is discussed below. This practice has also been termed direct marketing (Hinrichs 2000), entrepreneurial farming (Farmland Center 2005), and civic agriculture (Lyson 2004). Local foods have three
main outlets: directly from farmers/roadside stands/internet and mail-order sales, community supported agriculture (where members cover the cost of production and receive food in return), and farmers’ markets. Millions of local food consumers (dubbed “locavores”) have dedicated themselves to purchasing locally produced food whenever possible (McKibben 2007).²

Consumers should seek to increase their local food consumption because there are several benefits for them. Local foods are fresher and generally taste better than food in the grocery store. Planck (2006) describes how food that is allowed to ripen on its own tastes better than food that is picked early so that it may be ripe when it arrives in a different location. This is based on the French idea of terroir where fruits and vegetables gain taste from the minerals and moisture in the soil. Foods produced by industrial agriculture are picked before they are ripe so that they may be ripe by the time they reach their destination. They lose much of flavors that they would have had if they were allowed to ripen on the vine, tree, or stalk. Produce on sale at the farmers’ markets is generally harvested the evening before or the morning of the markets. It is allowed to ripen thoroughly on the vine, tree, or stalk and maintains its terrior; therefore, it is much fresher than produce at the grocery store and tastes better (La Trobe 2001).

Local foods are generally healthier because they are not processed as extensively with preservatives and chemicals. Typically, small-scale farmers do not use chemicals because they are less concerned with quantity and more concerned with the quality of the foods they produce (Farmland Center 2005). They are not producing food for thousands or millions or people, so they are not concerned with mass production. Therefore, they typically do not use large amounts

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² This thesis does not suggest that all people should dedicate their entire diets to local food and become full-fledged “locavores.” Many local food proponents suggest dedicating approximately 10% of a person’s diet to local food (Local Harvest 2007). I suggest that local food should be promoted to help minimize the effects of industrial agriculture, but I also acknowledge the fact that industrial agriculture produces mass quantities of food which may be the only means of feeding a growing population. Therefore, the goal should be to promote local food as a supplement to our current diets.
of fertilizers or chemicals to increase yield. Additionally, many local producers are certified organic or practice organic methods. “Consumers eating organic fruits and vegetables are exposed to one third as many pesticide residues as they would get in conventional produce” (Halweil and Nierenberg 2004, p. 80).

Farmers who raise beef, pork, or chicken also are concerned more with quality. Because they raise their animals in smaller quantities than factory farms, they have less need for antibiotics which means that consumers are not exposed to antibiotics on such high levels. Local farms also do not produce the same amount of waste as CAFOs. This means that they do not cause the same health and pollution problems as CAFOs. Also, many local farmers allow their animals to be grass fed versus feeding them high protein feed. This is closer to the animals’ natural diet and creates much healthier meat that is lower in fat (Farmland Center 2005). The lack of antibiotic use and preferable diet means that local meat products are healthier and have even been shown to taste better (Farmland Center 2005).

The economic benefits of local foods are great for small farmers and the local economy. Farmers who sell their products directly to the consumer receive a majority of the profits (unlike the 7%-18% that farmers get when they sell to a large agribusiness) which they return to the local economy (Farmland Center 2005). According to The Farmland Center, for every $1 spent on local food, an additional $1.94-$3.98 enters the local economy since farmers will reinvest the money elsewhere within the local economy. Farmers who sell locally are not focused on producing mass quantities of a single crop. Therefore, they are more likely to produce a variety of different types of foods, and focus on the quality of the product. They are no longer concerned about whether the product will stand up to long-distance shipping; they are more concerned with the freshness and taste (Pleasant and Alterman 2006). This means that they can
alter their products more readily dependent on consumer demand and marketing fads. They can also produce “niche” products such as specialty crops or organic produce that can be highly profitable (Govindasamy et al 2003). In this way, farmers greatly increase their profit margin (Farmland Center 2005).

Because local farmers are more concerned with the quality of their product, they also concentrate on the quality of soil and the diversity of products versus the mass production of a single crop. This is termed “polycultures” where many different plants maturing at different times are planted together (Farmland Center 2005). Polycultures have differing root levels within the soil, so they are able to capture the maximum amount of moisture and minimize the need for irrigation. They also require less pesticides and herbicides since insects and plants have a difficult time competing with the different types of plants. In this way, local foods are better for the environment, and local farmers generally seek to work with the environment to produce food instead of exploiting it. Polyculture farms require more knowledge and skill “about crops, livestock, and local soil, water, and growing conditions—but much less reliance on expensive mechanization or agrochemical inputs …Compared with monocultures, polycultures are more sustainable over time and do not degrade the environment” (Harper and Le Beau 2003, p. 182).

Farmers’ markets

Farmers’ markets have been on the rise in the United States. They grew from 1,755 in 1994 to 4,385 in 2006, an 18.3% increase (AMS/USDA 2006). Originating as early as 1742, farmers’ markets are one of the most convenient means for farmers to sell their products and consumers to buy them. They are usually held once a week (on Saturday mornings) although some are held more often. Many small towns host farmers’ markets in central, temporary locations such as town halls or parking lots, while large cities have permanent facilities where
vendors can sell their products throughout the week. In areas with seasonal climates, farmers’ markets are mostly held during the summer and fall months. If they are held indoors, farmers in these areas are still able to provide certain foods like meat and eggs and canned products year-round.

The most popular items at farmers’ markets are fruits and vegetables, but grassfed beef and chicken have become increasingly popular as people look for alternatives to CAFOs. Vendors also sell flowers, honey, canned items such as jams and jellies, and crafts. Farmers’ markets can serve many purposes besides providing communities with a source of local food. Many farmers’ markets employ musicians and vendors to sell concession-type food and coffee so that the market becomes a social gathering as well as a place to shop.

Markets are also wonderful small business incubators where vendors can try new things and experiment before launching into a formal business (Gerbasi 2006). Farmers’ markets comprise a minimal risk opportunity, so farmers can try different varieties of fruits and vegetables, for example, without the fear of a huge investment. Vendors can also gain valuable business skills such as customer service and financing (Gerbasi 2006). In this way, farmers’ markets serve another role in the community by encouraging entrepreneurialism.

There are several effects on local economies and neighborhoods from farmers’ markets. Stores located near farmers’ markets report increased spending on market days and new customers from outside the community who travel to the farmers’ market (Gerbasi 2006). Markets in municipal areas can help support urban economies and support nearby businesses (Shakow 1981). Markets can also lead to community redevelopment projects. In Portland, Maine a city farmers’ market brought about civic renewal where a 136-year-old home was
renovated to house the market. The market attracted shoppers to generate $1.2 million in sales annually (Schneider 2007).

Farmers’ markets that are run by nonprofit organizations typically use this opportunity to educate the public about local foods and encourage connections between farmers and consumers. Markets “offer the opportunity, not only to sell, but also to educate the public and build relationships with consumers” (Farmland Center 2005). People gain valuable knowledge and make social connections with farmers. Patrons get the opportunity to talk with vendors and learn about how their food was produced. In this way, markets reconnect people with the source of their food.

Farmers’ markets are important venues for farmers wishing to sell their goods, consumers wishing to purchase local food, and communities wishing to prevent money from being exported. They bring hope of a sustainable way of feeding America through local foods which have been shown to be more environmentally and economically friendly as well as healthier. However, local food as a sustainable agriculture relies heavily on the consumer to take action. The convenience of supermarkets stocked by industrial agribusinesses has become part of the American way of life. Instead of seeking out environmentally friendly foods and products, individuals are drawn to big box stores where all of their needs are satisfied in one trip. The rise of farmers’ markets in the United States means that a shift has occurred in the minds of American consumers from convenience to social responsibility. But who shops at farmers’ markets and why? Are market patrons aware of the economic, health, and environmental benefits? How should market managers publicize and who should they market to? Because local food as sustainable agriculture has so many social, economic, and environmental benefits, this research approaches the subject similar to other studies on environmental behavior and
ecological and socially responsible consumer behavior. I seek to answer these questions and decide if people who buy locally produced food are like others who engage in environmental and socially responsible behaviors.

The next chapter examines the literature on environmental behavior and ecological and social responsible consumerism. It also examines the small pool of literature that recently developed from the rise in farmers’ markets. This will setup my research into who buys local food and why and what marketing strategies and implications can be drawn from the results.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

*Farmers markets in the United States of today are rich and complex human institutions that involve millions of people. Direct markets are lauded around the world for their usefulness in farmland preservation and praised for their containment of sprawl. Yet the research literature only hints at their true impact.*  
- Brown 2001, p. 670

Promoting sustainable agriculture is an important issue for policymakers, environmentalists, economist, and conscience food consumers. Chapter 1 presents the problems associated with industrial agriculture and offered locally produced food as an alternative. However, the success of locally produced food depends heavily on the consumer. Local foods are not usually labeled or sold in typical supermarkets, and consumers must seek it out at farmers’ markets, farm stands, the internet, or join community supported agriculture organizations. Buying local foods requires more of an effort on the part of the consumer than traditional food purchasing.

Some scholars believe the consumption side of food provisioning has been understudied (Goodman and Dupuis 2002). However, a few have examined farmers’ market patrons (Feagan et al 2004; Weatherell et al 2003; La Trobe 2001; Holloway and Kneafsey 2000; Lockeretz 1986) and local food consumers (Chambers et al 2007; Scholten 2006) and ecological and socially responsible consumers (Tanner et al 2004; Webster 1975; Kinnear et al 1974; Anderson and Cunningham 1972). There are many gaps in the literature, but this chapter reviews all relevant studies to reconcile their differences and demonstrates that there is still much to learn about local food consumers.
As stated in Chapter 1, local food offer vast environmental, economical, and social benefits to communities:

- Requires less inputs of water, energy, and chemicals
- Is less polluting and degrading to biodiversity and soil
- Improves the economic situation of local farmers who keep more of the profits
- Improves local economies by keeping money within the community
- Is healthier to consumers and reconnects them with the source of their food

In this way, buying local foods can be thought of as an environmental behavior and a socially responsible behavior.

Why do People Purchase Local Food? And why Don’t they?

The broad question of why people buy local food has been answered by several scholars (Feagan et al 2004; Weatherell et al 2003; La Trobe 2001; Holloway and Kneafsey 2000; Lockeretz 1986). Most studies found varying reasons why people buy local food. Some of the reasons for buying local food are based on benefits to the consumer and include the freshness, quality, and taste of the food (Chambers et al 2007; Feagan et al 2004; La Trobe 2001; Holloway and Kneafsey 2000; Lockeretz 1986). Scholars also cited health concerns related to food such as being free of chemicals and additives and non-genetically modified foods (La Trobe 2001; Holloway and Kneafsey 2000).

Other reasons for buying local foods have been based on the effects on society or individuals other than the consumer. One of the most reported reasons was to support local farmers (Feagan et al 2004; Holloway and Kneafsey 2000). Other benefits include the humane treatment of animals by local farmers and the benefits to the environment (Weatherell et al 2003; La Trobe 2001). In general, personal benefits were valued more highly by local food consumers. People were more apt to value factors such as freshness over supporting local farmers (Feagan et
The different reasons for buying local food are categorized and discussed more in depth in Chapter 4.

As mentioned above, buying local food places a heavy burden on the consumer. Several factors discourage people from buying local food, and they are mainly related to convenience and availability. Convenience is commonly cited as a barrier to buying local food (Chambers et al 2007; Lockeretz 1986), as consumers prefer to buy food at supermarkets (Weatherell et al 2003), but many supermarkets do not carry local food. To get local food, consumers must seek out other means. The benefits of local food may be enticing, but so is the convenience of supermarkets. Second, consumers rate availability and variety as a barrier to buying local food (Chambers et al 2007; Weatherell et al 2003). Many of the fruits and vegetables sold at farmers’ markets are seasonal and not available throughout the year. This greatly limits the choices of consumers and provides another incentive to shop at supermarkets where fruits and vegetables are available throughout the year.

Buying local food is similar to other environmental behaviors in that it requires a certain amount of effort. Environmental behavior has been linked to concern for the environment and the amount of effort required for the behavior (Schultz and Oskamp 1996). For example, behaviors that require little effort (avoiding littering) are exhibited by people with relatively little environmental concern. Conversely, behaviors that require more effort (“adopting” a highway) are exhibited only by people with high environmental concern. This idea can be transposed to buying local food. Buying local food takes a fair amount of effort to overcome the barriers mentioned above. Those who buy local food would likely have a certain concern or opinion about the importance of this “high effort” behavior. Because the environmental benefits of local food are associated with socially responsible behavior (as have other environmental behaviors
such as recycling [Schultz and Oskamp 1996]), social responsibility can translate to high environmental concern. Scholars have described this concern from a demographical and attitudinal perspective. The hypotheses for this particular study are based on the demographic and attitudinal characteristics discussed below.

**Demographic Characteristics**

Demographic characteristics may be important in describing local food consumers because they relate to the lifestyle of the consumer: “[D]emographic factors may be influential as consumers in higher income or social class groupings have more flexibility to afford the trade-offs between costs and perceived benefits” (Weatherell et al 2003, p. 234). For this study, two demographics were chosen based on Van Liere and Dunlap’s (1980) conclusions about people with pro-environmental attitudes: age and education. They found that these demographics were the most indicative of pro-environmental attitudes, but they also relate to local food consumers. The hypotheses for this study were based on the literature for pro-environmental behavior, but the demographics mentioned below are also discussed by researchers of socially responsible and local food consumers. The basis for hypotheses and rationale for each of these variables is presented below.

**Age**

The age hypothesis maintains that younger people (18-30) are generally more concerned with the environment than older people (Schahn and Holzer 1990; Van Liere and Dunlap 1980). The reasoning is that younger people are less imbedded into the economy so they are less worried about environmental regulations that may affect businesses (Van Liere and Dunlap 1980). This means that older people may be more involved in their work or may own businesses that can be greatly hindered by environmental regulations. To extrapolate this to local food
consumption, older people may side with large agribusinesses and see the effects of regulation on the industry more than younger people. However, research of farmers’ market patrons places them as much older. Weatherell et al (2003) found they were 35-54 and Feagen et al (2004) found they were 50-69. This discrepancy is troubling when attempting to classify local food consumption as an environmental or socially responsible behavior. My research seeks to reconcile this discrepancy.

_Education_

Those with higher educations are typically more concerned for the environment (Van Liere and Dunlap 1980; Buttel and Flinn 1974). There are some explanations for this. First, highly educated individuals are usually in the higher classes that generally demonstrates environmental concern. The theory behind the social class hypothesis is that higher classes generally have their basic needs met and are able to spend the time and energy worrying about the environment (Van Liere and Dunlap 1980).³ Second, educated individuals are generally more politically and socially active and aware than those with less education (Van Liere and Dunlap 1980; Althoff and Greig 1977). Lastly, people with concrete knowledge of environmental problems exhibit more environmental concern and behavior (Schahn and Holzer 1990). This suggests that as people gain concrete knowledge (education) of environmental degradation, they become more concerned. Therefore, it makes sense that local food consumers would be highly educated. The detriments of industrial agriculture and benefits of local food are most likely to be known by educated people, reinforcing the idea that highly educated people would have pro-environmental attitudes and be more likely to seek out local food.

³ Interestingly, social class was not shown to be indicative of pro-environmental attitudes which is why education was used in this study.
Attitudinal Characteristics

One particular attitudinal characteristic, political ideology, plays a large role in people’s views on the environment. Liberals tend to have pro-environmental attitudes more than conservatives (Van Liere and Dunlap 1980; Buttel and Flinn 1976; Constantini and Hanf 1972). This could be because environmental policies typically hinder business and industry (supported by conservatives) and call for reform and innovation (typically opposed by conservatives) (Constantini and Hanf 1972). I also hypothesize that conservatives would be more supportive of large agribusinesses and, therefore, less supportive of local foods. Lastly, certain attitudinal characteristics such as tolerance and perceived effectiveness are typically characterized as liberal (Constantini and Hanf 1972). These characteristics are also exhibited by socially responsible and ecological consumers.

After reviewing the literature, I found two additional, attitudinal trends among socially responsible and ecological consumers: tolerance and perceived effectiveness. Tolerance refers to the degree of open-mindedness to new ideas, and is found to be an important attribute of socially responsible and ecological consumers (Webster 1975; Kinnear et al 1974; Anderson and Cunningham 1972). Related to local food consumers, this would mean that they are open to trying local foods and seeking out alternative sources of food. This is consistent with the realities of buying local food. While conventional consumers praise the convenience of supermarkets and industrial agriculture, local food consumers seek other environmental, economic, and social benefits.

The last attitudinal characteristic of socially responsible and ecological consumers is perceived effectiveness (Webster 1975; Kinnear et al 1974). Webster (1975) states, “[T]he socially conscious consumer feels strongly that he or she can do something … and tries to
consider the social impact of his or her purchases” (p. 193). This means that consumers believe they make an impact on the environment or community by buying environmentally friendly products. For local food consumers, this means that they are aware of the benefits of local food on the environment and society and choose to participate in this behavior because of these benefits. This may relate to education and concrete knowledge as discussed above (Schahn and Holzer 1990).

This Study and Hypotheses

The current study is similar to those conducted by Feagan et al (2004), La Trobe (2001), and Holloway and Kneafsey (2000). However, these studies took place in the United Kingdom and Canada. This suggests that while the United States leads the world in the number of farmers’ markets, the research on them has not kept the pace. Some studies have been conducted in the United States relating to local food (Scholten 2006; Lockeretz 1986), but they are limited in their scope (Scholten) or not current (Lockeretz). Secondly, these studies do not ask questions related to the attitudinal and demographic characteristics mentioned above.

I wanted to test three variables mentioned above (age, education, and political ideology) to see if they related to local food consumers. The literature on farmers’ market patrons describes them as middle-aged (Weatherell et al 2003; Feagan et al 2004), but do not describe their political ideology or education. From the literature, I have proposed the following hypotheses:

H1: Local food consumers are between the ages of 40-59.
H3: Local food consumers are highly educated.
H2: Local food consumers are generally liberal.
Additionally, I wanted to answer broad questions about why people do/do not buy local food and their sources of local food. These questions will be answered in Chapters 4 and 5.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This research is modeled after similar studies mentioned in the last chapter (Feagan et al., 2004; La Trobe, 2001; Holloway and Kneafsey, 2000). I utilized surveys at three farmers’ markets to determine certain demographic characteristics of farmers’ market patrons and specifically those who seek out locally produced food. Respondents were selected using convenience sampling.

Site Selection

In order to decrease bias, three different farmers’ markets were chosen as locations for the survey. Before describing the individual markets, it is important to distinguish between different types of markets as described by Brown (2001). She proposes a market classification based on wholesale versus retail and types of sellers. Terminal markets only sell wholesale and restrict local farmers from participating. Public markets sell retail food but do not enforce regulations on the origin of the product. Farmers’ markets can be wholesale or retail, but they require that the farmer sell his or her own product, often through visitations to the farm to inspect the farming practices and make sure the food is produced on the farm. For this study, three retail farmers’ markets were chosen in three different areas. Each market represents a different geographical area: urban, rural, and suburban.

The first market was the Toledo Farmers’ Market which is located in downtown Toledo, Ohio. This market is unique because it is open Tuesday-Sunday with limited vendors, but its main market day is on Saturday. The survey was conducted on a Saturday between the hours of 9 am and 12:30 pm, when the market is the busiest. In order to be a vendor, you must grow, produce, or assemble 51% of each item you sell. The director had no scientific study of the demographics of the market patrons, but described them as very diverse. He observes a variety
of African American and Caucasian visitors as well as a large age distribution each week. This market represents a typical urban market.

The second market was located in Peninsula, Ohio which is a small town near Akron, Ohio. This market was run by the Countryside Conservancy, a non-profit organization which works within the Cuyahoga Valley National Park to promote sustainable agriculture. The market is held weekly during the summer on Saturdays from 9 am to 11 am. The survey was conducted during this time. This market is a “producers only” market which prohibits the resale of wholesale items from entering the market. Vendors must grow or produce their products. The executive director of the Countryside Conservancy describes their patrons as educated, upper-middle class from surrounding “bedroom communities.” Again, they have no scientific data to determine their demographics. This market was meant to represent a rural market, but most of the customer base travels from the suburbs surrounding Peninsula to the market.

The last market was located in Westlake, Ohio which is an affluent suburb of Cleveland. The market is run by North Union Farmers’ Markets which has several market locations in Northeast Ohio. The Westlake market is located at Crocker Park, a development incorporating retail stores, office space, restaurants, and luxury apartments. Patrons at this market tend to be upper-middle class, white, and come from affluent suburbs. Like the other markets, they do not accept vendors of resale items and state that all items must be handcrafted. They do not have a stated policy on what percentage of each product must be locally produced, but the management reviews vendors for eligibility and decides on a case by case basis. This market is a typical suburban market.
Convenience Sampling

Convenience sampling is a form of non-probability sampling where respondents are chosen based on their availability (O’Sullivan et al 2003). Convenience sampling may be inappropriate for some studies as it incurs a high risk of bias and does not always produce generalizable results (O’Sullivan et al 2003). However, convenience sampling was the most reasonable method in this case and is defended by other scholars (Hultsch et al 2002, Ferber 1977). As will be discussed below, given the nature of this study convenience sampling was necessary: there is no defined sampling frame to choose from, I chose a representational group from which to pull respondents, I am studying a relatively small cohort, and the numbers are adequate. In addition, convenience sampling has been the norm in studying farmers’ markets (Feagan et al, 2004; La Trobe, 2001; Holloway and Kneafsey, 2000; Lockeretz 1986). All of them employed surveys and convenience sampling to test the opinions of farmers’ market patrons.

Research by convenience was utilized in this study because it was the most efficient and plausible method for reaching people who buy locally produced food. First, there is no sampling frame to choose from. Local food consumers are not an easily identifiable group, but we do know one of the main ways they obtain their food: farmers’ markets. Convenience sampling in this case is open for some bias since people who purchase locally produced food at locations other than farmers’ markets were not included (members of community supported agriculture or those who seek out local foods at grocery stores for example). However, appropriate uses of convenience sampling occur when the sampling frame is representative of the population being studied, and the target population is closely linked to the topic of study (Ferber 1977). Farmers’
market patrons provide a reasonable sample for local food consumers and would logically have relevant views on local food.

Convenience samples have been shown to be generally representative of large populations (Hultsch et al 2002). This means that even if my population were large, convenience sampling would produce somewhat generalizable results. However, my population is small and relatively cohesive. Convenience sampling is acceptable for particular cohorts or people that form a cohesive social group (Ferber 1977). Based on past literature, local food consumers can be viewed in their own social group (Weatherell et al 2003). Therefore, it is reasonable to generalize the data from my survey to this small cohort.

Lastly, the size of my sample is sufficient to make generalizations. My study yielded 312 respondents, providing an adequate base for analysis. This is higher than similar studies. Feagan et al (2004) reported 146 respondents at three different markets. La Trobe (2001) also reported 146 respondents at three different weekends of the same market. Therefore, my numbers are high compared to studies of the same group.

Method

The survey (see Appendix A) was designed to serve three functions. First, it was meant to gauge the age, education, and political ideology of patrons. Second, it aimed to find out what people buy at farmers’ markets and where people might also buy local food. Third, it was meant to gauge the attitudes of local food consumers. The first and second functions could easily be served by multiple choice questions. In order to gauge the attitudes of local food consumers, open-ended questions would have been ideal. However, due to the nature of farmers’ markets it was necessary to use a multiple choice question to find out why people do and do not buy local food. Research has shown the patrons at farmers’ markets will typically not stop to fill out long,
involved surveys (Lev et al 2004). Therefore, the survey needed to be short and concise. The questions were all multiple choice, and average time to complete the survey was less than three minutes. For the questions relating to attitudes about local foods (questions 3 and 4-Appendix A), the choices were derived from talking with the market managers and from the results of similar studies (Feagan et al 2004; La Trobe 2001; Holloway and Kneafsey 2000). In addition to the survey, respondents were given an information sheet explaining the purpose of the study and indicating that the project had been approved by a Human Subjects Review Board (see Appendix B). The information sheet explained that the survey was being used for my thesis and that the information would be returned to the farmers’ markets in order to improve the markets.

When conducting the surveys, I displayed a poster displaying information about the study and Bowling Green State University. I also wore a Bowling Green State University t-shirt to distinguish myself as a student and separate from the managers of the market. I provided clip boards, pens, and a drop-box for the surveys. All three markets featured areas with tables and chairs where patrons could sit, relax, drink coffee, or socialize, and this is where I performed the survey. Each location also gave me access to people as they walked through the market and as they sat to rest. Instead of randomly selecting people to fill out surveys, I attempted to approach as many people as possible, asking them to complete a survey about farmers’ markets. Some people avoided me purposefully and some voluntary asked me what I was doing, but a majority of the people were looking around or talking as they walked past. I estimate that I approached approximately 70% of farmers’ market patrons that walked past the area I was stationed, and approximately 60% of them agreed to fill out the survey.
CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

*Buying local supports an idea of community that appeals to me and connects us to what supports us.*
-Peninsula farmers’ market patron

Who are the people that buy local food? Who are these “locavores?” Previous literature answers these questions for ecological consumers and socially responsible consumers (Tanner et al 2004; Webster 1975; Kinnear et al 1974; Anderson and Cunningham 1972). Other studies have directly targeted farmers’ market consumers (Feagan et al 2004; La Trobe 2001; Holloway and Kneafsey 2000) and local food consumers in other countries (Chambers et al 2007; Scholten 2006; Weatherell et al 2003). These studies provide us with a broad picture of who local food consumers are and why they behave in a certain way. However, as stated in Chapter 2, they do not tell us specifically about local food behavior in the United States and across three important characteristics: age, education, and political ideology. This chapter will begin by answering the broad questions of where people but local food, what they buy at farmers’ markets, and why they buy local food. It then addresses the stated hypotheses:

H1: Local food consumers are between the ages of 40-59.

H2: Local food consumers are highly educated.

H3: Local food consumers are generally liberal.

Where People Buy Local Food

Respondents were asked, “Where do you acquire locally produced food?” They could check all that apply from the following list:

- Farmers’ markets
- Roadside stands
- Directly from local farmers
- My own garden or friend’s garden
- A grocery store
They were asked to specify the grocery store if selected and were also given an “other” category to choose from. Additionally, respondents could designate that they do not buy local food, but only 2 people chose this option. The responses are presented in Figure 4.1.

![Figure 4.1 "Where do You Buy Local Food?"]

N=312 Note: All percentages exclude missing values.

The majority of respondents reported farmers’ markets as their source for local food. Roadside stands, grocery stores, and gardens were also popular responses. The grocery store responses ranged from small, local stores to big box stores like Walmart. However, it is important to note that farmers’ markets are an important source of local food, and of those who shop at farmers’ markets, very few do not buy local food.

What do People Buy at Farmers’ Markets

Figure 4,2 depicts what types of items are purchased at farmers’ markets.

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4 The response “grocery store” may include error as respondents may have answered based on where they buy food in general.
Fruits and vegetables were the most popular items, but “other” items were also popular. Within the other category, baked goods, coffee, flowers, cheese, and soap/aromatherapy products were the most prominent. Figure 4.3 depicts the number of respondents who reported these items.
This shows that farmers’ market patrons attend markets for reasons other than to buy local fruits, vegetables, and meat. Local baked goods and cheese were also important food items, but other items like flowers, soap, and coffee were important.

Why People Buy Local Food

Next, I wanted to answer the broader question of why people buy local food. Respondents were asked, “Why is it important to you to buy locally produced food?” They were given the following options and told to check all that apply and circle the most important answer:

- It is not important to me
- I believe locally produced food is fresher (Freshness)\(^5\)
- I believe locally produced food is healthier (Health)
- Locally produced food is generally less expensive (Price)
- I believe it is socially responsible (Social Responsibility)\(^6\)
- I like to support local farmers (Support Local Farmers)
- I believe locally produced food helps minimize urban sprawl (Sprawl)
- It is more convenient to buy local food (Convenience)

The survey also featured an “other” category where respondents could enter their own response.

Figure 4.4 shows the percentage of respondents that checked each category.

\(^5\) The terms in parentheses will be used for the remainder of the paper to denote each factor.
\(^6\) Social responsibility is considered synonymous with a concern for the environment in this study which means that those who valued social responsibility did so because of the environmental benefits of local food.
The most popular response was freshness (90.4%) followed by supporting local farmers (87.8%). Health and social responsibility also were indicated by over half of respondents. This is consistent with earlier findings (Chambers et al 2007; Feagan et al 2004; La Trobe 2001; Holloway and Kneafsey 2000).

Most respondents (69.2%) did not indicate which factor was the most important for buying local food. The question stated in bold print to circle the most important answer, but many people still neglected to do this. I believe this is because many people rushed through the survey to get back to shopping. Of those that did respond to the question, 40.6% indicated that the most important reason was freshness. Supporting local farmers was rated as most important by 25% of respondents. This is consistent with the findings of Chambers et al (2007), Feagan et al (2004), La Trobe (2001), and Holloway and Kneafsey (2000). Interestingly, the most important reasons for buying local food varied across different characteristics. This will be examined below.
People who filled in the “other” open-ended response gave reasons similar to freshness, supporting local farmers, health, and social responsibility. Many remarked on the taste of local food and the health factors related to organic food and lack of chemical use. As one respondent at the Westlake farmers’ market said, “American food for Americans—not toxic [foreign] pesticides.” A patron at the Toledo farmers’ market commented on local food as having, “Much better TASTE!” People at each market commented on the fact that local foods use less energy for transport. At the Peninsula market, respondents stated, “Less transportation energy imbedded in food cost” and “Fewer miles (i.e. less pollution) from farm to my home.” Lastly, people commented on the idea that they could meet the farmer who grew their food and that it connected them back to the source of their food. One respondent at the Westlake market said he liked “get[ting] to know the farmers who grow the food.” This special role of farmers’ markets will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

At this point I would like to propose a concept to distinguish between different types of reasons for buying local food: intrinsic and extrinsic benefits. Intrinsic benefits are those that benefit the consumer directly such as freshness, health, price, and convenience. Extrinsic benefits are those that benefit another person or society such as social responsibility, supporting local farmers, and preventing urban sprawl. These terms became obvious as I analyzed why different groups buy local food. Some are more apt to choose intrinsic reasons while others choose extrinsic. People may also have a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic reasons for buying local food which is evidenced by the fact that many people cited multiple reasons for buying local food as shown in Figure 4.5.

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7 See Appendix C for complete list of open-ended responses.
Intrinsic and Extrinsic benefits are also illustrated by cross-tabulating the top two reasons for buying local food (freshness and supporting local farmers). Of those who said that they value supporting local farmers, 91.2% also value freshness. Likewise, of those who valued freshness, 88.7% also value supporting local farmers. Intrinsic and extrinsic benefits will be discussed more below.

Barriers to Buying Local Food

Now that we know why people buy local food, we must ask, “Why not?” This question was structured similarly to the question of why respondents bought local food. Respondents were able to check all that apply from the following:

- It is hard to find places that sell local foods (Place)
- Local foods are more expensive (Price)
- I don’t trust local foods to be safe (Safety)
- I don’t have time to search for local foods (Time)
- I don’t have cash to buy local foods (Cash)

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8 This was included because most vendors at farmers’ markets only accept cash for payment, but many people rely heavily on credit/debit cards.
Again, an open-ended “other” category was included and respondents were asked to indicate the most important reason for not buying local foods. Figure 4.6 displays the percentage of people that indicated each factor.

![Figure 4.6 Barriers to Buying Local Food](image)

N=312

The most frequently indicated factor was finding places that sell local foods. Interestingly, 30.1% left the question or blank or indicated that nothing discouraged them from buying local food. While I cannot speculate that all of these people meant to say that nothing discouraged them from buying local food, several respondents approached me saying that nothing discouraged them or indicated it on their survey. One respondent at the Toledo market said, “Unable to get local produce in winter. Otherwise, nothing discourages me from buying local.”

When asked to identify the most important factor, 47.8% said it was because it was hard to find places that sell it. Other factors were not as common. Price and time play a small role in whether people are discouraged from buying local food. However, a popular reason indicated in the “other” category was related to seasonality and availability of fresh produce during winter months.
The reasons people do/do not buy local food varied across different characteristics. As stated in Chapter 2, age, education, and political ideology were studied because they were found to be the most indicative of environmental attitudes (Van Liere and Dunlap 1980). Ecological and local food consumers were similar to those who have pro-environmental attitudes (and therefore engage in pro-environmental behavior [Schultz and Oskamp 1996]). I wanted to test whether these three characteristics would be indicative of local food consumers.

Age

I found that the age of farmers’ market patrons was consistent with my hypothesis and earlier findings (Feagan et al 2004; Weatherell et al 2003). Figure 4.7 depicts the number of people within each age group. The modal age category for farmers’ market patrons was 40-59 which constituted 44.5% of respondents. Those 60 and above were the second highest age group with 36.7%. No respondents were under 20, but a fair amount of respondents were 20-39 (18.8%). Additionally, middle-aged patrons were the modal age group at all three locations.

![Figure 4.7 Age of Farmers' Market Patrons (%)](image)

N=312
By cross-tabulating the most important reason for buying local food by age, I was able to see that these reasons varied for different age groups (Table 4.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>20-39</th>
<th>40-59</th>
<th>60 and Above</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshness</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>58.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Responsibility</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Local Farmers</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Young people (20-39) were more likely to indicate that buying local food was socially responsible. All other reasons were fairly consistent across all age groups. When asked what the most important reason for buying local food was, young people varied more in their responses whereas middle-aged and older people overwhelmingly chose freshness: 45.7% of middle-aged people and 58.8% of older people valued freshness more than other factors. Health and social responsibility each received 26.1% of young people’s choice as most important while supporting local farmers received 21.7%. Freshness was only chosen as most important by 13% of young people. This indicates that young people are more varied in their reasons for buying local food.

**Education**

Van Liere and Dunlap (1980) found that highly educated people were the most likely to have pro-environmental attitudes. I found similar results for farmers’ market patrons. The largest category of respondents (36.6%) had achieved postgraduate work, meaning work beyond a bachelor’s degree. This was consistent across all three locations. Those with a bachelor’s
degree made up 30.7% of respondents. This means that 67.3% had a bachelor’s degree or higher compared to the national average of 27% (U.S. Census Bureau 2005). Only 32.7% had achieved some college or trade school or less education. This proves that highly educated people are the most likely to attend farmers’ markets.

This supports the idea that educated people are more likely to display pro-environmental behavior and buy local food. This may be because they are more aware of the benefits of buying locally grown food and the detriments of industrial agriculture. Second, highly educated people tend to be more liberal and exhibit more socially responsible behavior. They also may have a stronger perceived effect on society. Perceived effect was discussed as an attitudinal characteristic of socially responsible and ecological consumers in Chapter 2. Educated individuals are more aware of the problems of industrial agriculture and believe they can have an effect on the environment, the economy, and/or society by buying local food (extrinsic benefits).

As stated above, freshness was found to be the top reason that people purchase local food, followed by support for local farmers. However, these reasons vary greatly across education levels. There is great variation across different education levels for health and social responsibility reasons for purchasing local food. People with higher education are more likely to value health benefits of local food and to rate social responsibility as most important. As people require more education, they become more concerned with the social responsibility of buying local food. This suggests that as people acquire more education, they become more aware of extrinsic benefits of buying local food. This may be because of the concrete knowledge that they possess about the benefits of local food (Schahn and Holzer 1990). It may also relate to perceived effectiveness on the environment and society which comes from increased education
(Webster 1975; Kinnear et al 1974). Table 4.2 shows the most important reason for buying local food for each education level.

**Table 4.2 Most Important Reason by Education Level** (% within education level)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Some High School</th>
<th>High School Graduate</th>
<th>Some College or Trade School</th>
<th>College Degree</th>
<th>Postgraduate Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshness</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>28.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Responsibility</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Local Farmers</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is a variation across education levels as it relates to what is the *most important* reason for buying local food. There is some bias to the data since the numbers of less educated respondents were so small, but it is still possible to speculate from them. This table also shows that freshness and supporting local farmers are important reasons across all education levels, but to different degrees. In general, people with more education indicated a wider variety of reasons for buying local food. People with less education value supporting local farmers more than people of higher educations which is interesting because this is an extrinsic benefit. Also, people with postgraduate work value social responsibility and health before supporting local farmers. Other education levels were more consistent with overall findings.

Lastly, it has been hypothesized that highly educated people are probably of a higher social class and have time and money to participate in pro-environmental behaviors (Van Liere and Dunlap 1980). When examining why people are discouraged from buying local food, I
found that price and time constraints diminished as education increased. Table 4.3 illustrates this fact.

**Table 4.3 Most Important Barriers by Education Level (%) within education level**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Some High School</th>
<th>High School Graduate</th>
<th>Some College or Trade School</th>
<th>College Degree</th>
<th>Postgraduate Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Places</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>77.4</td>
<td>65.7</td>
<td>70.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=4</td>
<td>n=18</td>
<td>n=31</td>
<td>n=70</td>
<td>n=67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Again, the numbers for the less educated respondents are low, but they provide us with some insight into why people are discouraged from buying local food. It could be based on social class which is greatly affected by education.

**Political Ideology**

Figure 4.8 presents the political ideologies of respondents. The modal response (25.2%) of political ideology was “moderate” on a 7-point ideology scale. However, for two of the locations (Toledo and Westlake), the modal response was liberal (27% and 24.6% respectively). Additionally, almost half of the respondents fell on the liberal side of the scale when condensed to liberal, moderate, or conservative.
When I combined very liberal, liberal, and slightly liberal, I found that 46.4% of respondents classified themselves as some form of “liberal.” Conservatives accounted for only 26.1% of all respondents, and moderates were 25.2%.  

Again, I wanted to see if this was related to local food consumption as well as farmers’ market attendance. Of those who said that nothing discouraged them from buying local food, 49.3% were liberal. Of those who stated that buying local food was not important to them, none were liberal. The reasons given for buying local food also varied across political ideology. Liberals are more likely to rate “social responsibility” as the most important reason to buy local food; 62% of those who feel buying local food was socially responsible were liberal. Of those who believe that buying local food helps curb urban sprawl, 61% were liberal. Like education, political ideology played a role in what people rated as the most important reason for buying local food.

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9 For the remainder of this chapter, “liberal” refers to those who responded “very liberal,” “liberal,” or “slightly liberal,” and “conservative” refers to those who responded “very conservative,” “conservative,” or “slightly conservative” unless otherwise noted.
local food. Table 4.4 shows which reason respondents rated as the most important for buying local food.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Liberal</th>
<th>Liberal</th>
<th>Slightly Liberal</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Slightly Conservative</th>
<th>Conservative</th>
<th>Very Conservative</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Freshness</strong></td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Health</strong></td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Price</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Responsibility</strong></td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support Local Farmers</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4 suggests that liberals are more likely to rate extrinsic benefits that affect the community (such as social responsibility and supporting local farmers) high in their reasons for buying local food while conservatives are more likely to rate intrinsic benefits (such as freshness, health, and price) high in their reasons for buying local food. This could be because liberals are generally thought of as being responsive to social movements and would value socially responsible consumerism higher than conservatives. Liberals also exhibit the attitudinal characteristic of being tolerant and open to new ideas which is a characteristic of socially responsible and ecological consumers mentioned in Chapter 2 (Webster 1975; Kinnear et al 1974; Anderson and Cunningham 1972).

However, by condensing the ideologies in Table 4.5, we can see that conservatives do rate external benefits just as highly as liberals. Table 4.5 compares the most important reason by collapsed ideology.
Table 4.5 Most Important Reason by Political Ideology-Collapsed Categories (% within ideology)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Liberal</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Conservative</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshness</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Responsibility</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Local Farmers</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=40 n=21 n=25 n=3

Social responsibility and supporting local farmers were rated most important by 40% of both ideological groups. Conservatives were simply more likely to value supporting local farmers over social responsibility (both extrinsic benefits). They were also more likely to rate price and health as the most important reason than liberals, but only slightly. This fact is also evident when I collapsed the benefits in Table 4.6. Conservatives were slightly more likely to rate intrinsic benefits than liberals.

Table 4.6 Intrinsic and Extrinsic Benefits by Political Ideology (% within ideology)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Liberal</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Conservative</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsic</td>
<td>56.8</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extrinsic</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=37 n=19 n=25 n=3

It is also important to note that conservatives also made up a fairly large portion (26.2%) of farmers’ market patrons. Therefore, while liberals are more likely to shop at farmers’ markets, conservatives make up a sizeable minority.
Hypotheses Revisited

This analysis has found that different characteristics play an important role in why people buy local food. It also confirmed that highly educated liberals between the ages of 40-59 were the most likely to attend farmers’ markets. My first hypothesis is correct. Farmers’ market patrons are typically middle-aged (40-59). Reasons for buying local food varied between different age groups. Middle-aged and older people are most concerned with freshness while young people are more varied in their reasons and value health and social responsibility more. My second hypothesis is also correct. People with postgraduate work attended the farmers’ markets at a higher rate than any other education level. Additionally, those with a college degree or higher were a majority of respondents. They also presented a wider variety of reasons for buying local food such as social responsibility and health. Lastly, my third hypothesis is correct. Although “moderate” was the modal response, respondents were more likely to be liberal (very liberal, liberal, and slightly liberal) than moderate or conservative. Liberals were also likely to rate social responsibility and health as important reasons in buying local food while conservatives were more likely to choose intrinsic benefits. However, conservatives do make up a good portion of farmers’ market patrons and also value extrinsic benefits such as supporting local farmers.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

*It is a great feeling wading through people... seeing friends, people with their pets.*
*I love it. I like driving by and seeing the market umbrellas... wholesome.*
- Westlake farmers’ market patron

This thesis began by exploring the issues associated with our current agricultural system. Industrial agriculture cannot be sustained because of the environmental, economic, and societal problems it creates. I proposed local food as a sustainable agricultural practice and explained that it relies heavily on consumer effort and behavior. Consumer behavior is affected by new events and products, the intrinsic and extrinsic benefits of participating in the behavior, and demographic and attitudinal characteristics of the individual. This research studied the intrinsic and extrinsic benefits of buying local food as well as the barriers to buying local food and three characteristics of local food consumers: age, education, and political ideology.

This research is important because it helps to create different marketing and education strategies to increase the consumption of local food. As mentioned in previous chapters, the success of local food as a sustainable agriculture depends highly on the consumer. “Convincing a population group that the food they are used to is not adequate and that they should change or modify it in any way is a most difficult problem” (Kramer 1973, p. 4). It is difficult to convince people of the benefits of shopping for local foods when supermarkets are so convenient. The change requires a “step back” to a less advanced and convenient time. “It is my experience that it is rather more difficult to recapture directness and simplicity than to advance in the direction of ever more sophistication and complexity” (Schumacher 1973, p. 154). This means that promoting local foods is a difficult task. The results of this research should be utilized to market to and educate consumers on the benefits of local food.
The results indicated that the leading reasons for buying local food are freshness and to support local farmers, but these reasons varied across different characteristics. Liberals are more likely to buy local food and cite extrinsic benefits such as social responsibility before intrinsic benefits, but conservatives are likely to rate extrinsic benefits and intrinsic benefits equally. Highly educated people are more likely to attend farmers’ markets and buy local food and see fewer barriers to buying local food. They also vary more in their reasons for buying local food. Lastly, middle-aged people are more likely to attend farmers’ markets, but they are more likely to say that buying local food is not important to them. This brings me to the different roles that farmers’ markets can play.

The Different Roles of Markets

The obvious role of markets is to supply people with locally grown food. However, markets can serve several other functions. They can help spur economic development and foster small businesses. They can also offer a place for people to gather, shop, and socialize. The differing roles of markets will be discussed below. It is important to distinguish these roles because they could assist in the marketing of farmers’ markets and local food.

Chapter 1 explained several benefits of farmers’ markets for the economy and society. First, they help economic development in areas by bringing in outside consumers and support the nearby economy (Shakow 1981). This is true for all three markets that I surveyed. The Peninsula market is one of the bigger attractions for the small town of Peninsula, drawing in people from the surrounding suburbs to shop at small shops nearby and dine at local restaurants. The Westlake market brings in customers who eat at nearby restaurants and shop at the stores at Crocker Park. The Toledo market is also surrounded by stores and brings people to the downtown area. Therefore, the economic development role of farmers’ markets cannot be
underemphasized. This means that market managers should stress this idea to policymakers and local businesses to garner support for farmers’ markets.

Second, markets serve as small business incubators for local farmers (Gerbasi 2006). Many local farmers and food producers have trouble when first starting their business. I know this from personal experience: my mother has jumpstarted her own business by selling at farmers’ markets and several of the vendors where she sells have started the same way. Farmers markets are an important outlet for local producers to sell their product. Gerbasi (2006) explains that there is less investment involved because vendors pay for space on a weekly basis and there is less overhead involved. Therefore, market managers in need of more vendors can advertise the fact that markets serve an important function for small businesses. This is also important for economic development since it helps to promote local businesses which will keep money inside the local economy.

Markets also serve to connect people to the source of their food. In this way, markets can serve as a source of education about local food. Local food consumers are more aware of the connection between food production and the earth. They become more aware of their impact and connection to the environment. Instead of people purchasing food at a supermarket where they have no idea where it comes from or how it is produced, they can talk to the farmer who actually grew their food. They can find out what kinds of cultivation methods were used and the practices of the farmer. For example, by talking to the farmer, a patron can find out whether any chemicals were used on the food. If it is a meat product, patrons can find out how the animal was treated, what it was fed, etc. Several people indicated this as a reason that they buy local food as discussed in Chapter 4. The quote at the beginning of Chapter 4 suggests the idea of connecting people back to their food. Other respondents felt the same way. At the Peninsula
market, one respondent said, “I know who grow[s][the] vegetables I eat.” This suggests that marketing campaigns promoting the source of food and getting back to the earth would be successful.

Lastly, the quote at the beginning of the chapter suggests another role of markets: a social gathering place. I believe this is why markets are so attractive to middle-aged and older people. They see it as a place to gather on Saturday mornings with friends to people-watch. They also use it as an opportunity to shop for items besides food. The social gathering role of markets has been noticed by other scholars (Brown 2001; Holloway and Kneafsey 2000; Pyle 1971) as well. Each market had a section for sitting and enjoying baked goods and coffee or relaxing. The Toledo and Peninsula markets offered coffee, but the Westlake market did not (I believe this is because it was near the shopping center and coffee was available at a nearby café). Patrons at all three markets could be seen sitting in the designated areas and socializing with friends. The social gathering role of markets also becomes evident when I examined the “other” reasons for buying local food. Several respondents misinterpreted this question to read “Why do you come to farmers’ markets?” They responded that they enjoyed coming to the markets and shopping. As Pyle (1971) states, “[T]he farmers’ market, whether in the city or outside it, continues to perform social functions.”

The social role of markets can be an important marketing tool. Market managers could publicize the market as a fun way to spend a Saturday morning/afternoon in order to raise attendance. This would in turn expose a greater number of people to local food vendors and their products and raise awareness about the benefits of local foods. Other marketing strategies should target different demographic groups and utilize the conclusions reached in the previous chapter.
Marketing Implications

In addition to utilizing the different roles of markets to promote local food, market managers should take into account the results of this study. For example, marketing strategies should stress the freshness of the product and the fact that it supports local farmers since these were the most important reasons for buying local food. Health and social responsibility also rated high as reasons for buying local food. However, I would also stress that marketing campaigns should differ depending on which demographic group they are directed towards. For example, campaigns directed at middle-aged or older people should stress the freshness of products and the opportunity to support local farmers. Conversely, campaigns directed at younger people could also stress the social responsibility associated with buying local food and the health factors since these were valued by younger people. Also, campaigns to highly educated people could emphasize the different benefits of local food while campaigns to less educated people should attempt to de-emphasize the barriers associated with buying local food.

Underrepresented Groups

This research has also shown that certain demographic groups are under-represented at farmers’ markets. No one under the age of 20 participated in the survey, and those aged 20-39 only made up 18.8% of respondents. Therefore, marketing efforts should seek to increase attendance by young people. As discussed in the previous chapter, young people value health and social responsibility despite the fact that they have grown up in an era of pre-made foods. They are used to convenience foods and rely less on whole foods to cook. Therefore, young people may be seeking healthy, whole foods but are intimidated by the thought of preparing them. Vendors should seek to minimize the fears of cooking and provide young people with incentives to buy whole foods. This could include pre-made items to be reheated or providing
easy recipes. By doing this, we can reawaken a generation to the benefits of preparing and cooking whole, local foods.

This research also showed that those who do not have a bachelor’s degree or higher attended the market at a much lower rate. Therefore, marketing strategies should increase attendance by less educated people. As stated above and in the previous chapter, less educated people were more likely to state time and money as barriers to buying local food. Government programs have attempted to lessen these barriers. For example, the federally-funded Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program provides eligible women with coupons which they can exchange for fresh, local food at farmers’ markets, roadside stands, and community supported agriculture organizations. Vendors are reimbursed by their state which applies for funds from the federal government. In 2006, almost 2.5 million WIC participants exchanged coupons with 14,323 farmers at 2,715 farmers’ markets and 1,999 roadside stands (FNS/USDA 2007). This resulted in over $22.4 million in revenue for farmers in 2006 (FNS/USDA 2007). Participants also benefited by acquiring fresh, healthy food. However, WIC serves nearly 8 million people per month (FNS/USDA 2007), suggesting that a large portion of WIC participants are not participating in the Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program. A similar program is the federally funded Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program which provides low-income senior citizens with local food in the same manner. In 2006, 825,691 seniors in the program purchased local food from 14,528 farmers at 2,958 farmers’ markets as well as 2,323 roadside stands and 260 community supported agriculture organizations (FNS/USDA 2007).

Programs like these encourage individuals to attend farmers’ markets and buy local food. Although no analysis was done of the participants in these programs, discussions with market managers, vendors, and my own observations lead me to believe that these programs were not
being highly utilized at these three markets. Market managers should seek to increase participation by WIC members in order to raise awareness about the benefits of local food. This could be achieved through marketing campaigns or making farmers’ markets more accessible to WIC participants. Managers could advertise bus routes or work with policymakers to provide transportation to the markets and make the markets child friendly so that people do not have to worry about childcare. In this way, an underrepresented group of people can start to enjoy the benefits of local food and farmers’ markets.

Niche Markets

The importance of niche markets has been addressed by other scholars (Govindasamy et al 2003) and is revisited here. Niche markets include specialty products such as organic produce or hard to find varieties of crops. Organic and special heirloom varieties of vegetables and fruits are just some examples of these niche products. Specialty meats (such as bison or pheasant) or cheeses (Amish or locally made cheeses) are also beginning to grow in popularity at markets. The importance of these items can be seen when examining what people buy at the markets (Figures 4.2 and 4.3 above) and when examining what respondents reported. Respondents at the Peninsula market remarked that they buy local food to “protect [the] seed heritage/diversity of plant species” and because “I like to buy organic food as much as possible.” At the Westlake market, one respondent said, “I try to buy pesticide and hormone free.” This suggests that farmers’ market patrons are looking for specialty items, and market managers should promote the market based on these niche products. Marketing strategies should emphasize the fact that the products are unique and exclusive to the farmers’ market.
Branding

Another important strategy is to emphasize the distinctiveness of local food (Chambers et al 2007). This means that the quality of the product (freshness and health factors) should be stressed as well as its benefits for the local economy and local farmers. Weatherell et al (2003) suggest branding of local foods in order to market them better. Branding has several effects. First, it distinguishes local food from other types. Second, it emphasizes why local food is better for the environment, economy, and society. Branding could take the form of a label or logo promoting local food. Different regions could adopt different logos to distinguish themselves. A similar concept is ecolabeling which has been studied by Blend and Van Ravenswaay (1999). They found that over half of their sample would purchase ecolabeled apples regardless of the type of label or price increase. They also found that the claims made by the label (how the product benefited the environment) and the certifying agent (who certified that the product was environmentally friendly) had little effect on people’s willingness to buy ecolabeled products. Therefore, a “local food” brand would not have to be very complex, as long as it distinguishes the product as locally produced. Additionally, branding can increase the price that consumers are willing to pay for a certain product. Batte et al (2005) found that consumers were willing to pay more for organic products, especially those certified and labeled by the National Organic Program (a program instituted by the USDA).

A branding effort in Ohio is the “Ohio Proud” marketing strategy developed by the Ohio Department of Agriculture. The logo is placed on food that is at least 50% produced in Ohio. Farmers and vendors can join the organization to have their product listed as an “Ohio Proud” product, and the organization publicizes farmers’ markets and the products that are registered. The group also helps local food producers by offering networking with farmers’ markets, stores,
and restaurants. Groups like this help local food producers market their product. They also assist consumers in finding places to buy local food and distinguishing what foods are local.

This also helps alleviate the most important barrier to buying local food identified in this study: finding places that sell local food. By creating a brand and an organization to help connect consumers to that brand, groups like “Ohio Proud” can make it easier for consumers to find local food. While farmers’ markets were the most popular place that people bought local food, over half also looked for local food at roadside stands and the grocery store. The convenience of supermarkets is appealing to most Americans, so branding local foods at supermarkets exposes more people to them and makes them easier to find. This also suggests that local food advocates should press for more local food to be sold in grocery stores.

**Consumer Education**

Lastly, promoting markets is important for increasing attendance, but consumer education is important for creating local food consumers (Feagan et al 2004). Consumer education increases the concrete knowledge of individuals which has been shown to increase their environmental concern and behavior (Schahn and Holzer 1990). “[E]ducation and food-awareness information need to be part of the direct marketing environment if farmers’ markets are to play a progressive role in the development of local food systems (Feagan et al all 2004, p. 251). This is important if farmers’ markets are going to continue into the future. Marketing campaigns for local food should function like environmental marketing campaigns. “The right approach to environmental marketing is about market building as well as about activation short-term demand, and the key to market-building is education” (Coddington 1993, p.223).

This would also increase people’s perceived effectiveness on society and the environment which would lead to more socially responsible behavior (Webster 1975; Kinnear et al 1974). A
marketing campaign designed to attract people to markets as a social gathering place should be coupled with a consumer education campaign in order to keep people coming back to the markets to buy local food. “Long-term thinking and the right approach to environmental marketing go hand in hand,” according to Coddington (1993, p. 222). The survey results showed that people were buying local food for intrinsic as well as extrinsic benefits. The goal of consumer education should be to increase the perceived extrinsic benefits in order to promote long-term local food consumption. While people may buy local food for its freshness today, they will continue to buy it because of its environmental, economical, and societal benefits.

All three markets explain why local food is important on their websites, but only two of the markets (Westlake and Peninsula) had information tents where pamphlets and literature were distributed. The Westlake market gave information on seasonality and recipes for food sold at the market. The Peninsula market offered more information on the benefits of local food and supporting local farmers. When analyzing why people bought local food, the reasons differed across each market. Respondents at the Peninsula farmers’ market were more likely to indicate “other” as an important reason for buying local food. These reasons included the reduction in transportation and energy costs associated with local foods and a connection to the growers/source of food which is emphasized in their consumer education program. Respondents said, “Less transportation. Less gas used” and “Less transportation energy imbedded in food cost” at the Peninsula market. This could be because of their consumer education efforts.

Education campaigns should consist of the following principles:

- Education should be ongoing
- Education should be comprehensive
- Education should promote sustainable attitudes followed by sustainable behavior
These principles are derived from Coddington (1993) and the International Strategy for Action in the Field of Environmental Education and Training by the United Nations (1990). These principles can easily be applied to local food campaigns and carried out at farmers’ markets. First, many patrons of farmers’ markets come back week after week. Markets already encourage patrons to return each week promising them new, seasonal food. Therefore, market managers could prepare new literature to be distributed each week highlighting a different topic related to local food. Another option would be to create email lists for market managers to contact frequent patrons. They could contact them with the seasonal items that will be available at the market and add a small fact about local food. Second, education should be comprehensive. This thesis has made the argument that local food benefits not only the environment, but also the economy and society. Lastly, education should promote sustainable attitudes. By promoting sustainable attitudes, sustainable behaviors will follow.

Final Thoughts

I have addressed the benefits of locally grown food, addressed the issues surrounding local food consumers, studied why they do/do not buy local food, and studied their demographic and attitudinal characteristics. Finally, I prescribed three marketing strategies and discussed important government programs for farmers’ markets and local food. The information gathered here serves to promote a viable form of sustainable agriculture. Local food serves to protect the environment by being less invasive and extracting methods. It requires less energy, water, and chemicals while preserving land and biodiversity. It also keeps money within the local economy and supports local farmers and benefits consumers who can obtain fresher, healthier food.

Local food consumers are aware of these benefits and show some level of social responsibility. Their top reasons for buying local food are freshness, to support local farmers,
health, and social responsibility. The most distinguishing feature of local food consumers is a high level of education. Local food consumers are also liberal although conservatives made up a fair portion of farmers’ market patrons. Farmer’s’ market patrons are typically middle-aged, but local food consumers are believed to be younger. Additionally, demographic and attitudinal characteristics played an important part in why people buy local food. Further research should seek to continue this study to see how marketing strategies can be improved.

Lastly, I will reiterate the fact that local food consumers are an understudied population. If local food is to succeed as a viable option for sustainable agriculture, we must understand local food consumer behavior. In the United States, this understanding is lacking. The success of local food depends on poignant marketing strategies that express the importance of buying local food. These strategies cannot succeed unless we have a deep understanding of consumers’ views and attitudes about local food. We must also understand the barriers to buying local food more deeply in order to remove them. Since local food relies on local support, future studies should target different areas of the United States. Future research should also study those who do not consume local food and why. I have begun the research here, but more is needed to stop the debilitating effects of industrial agriculture. The future of agriculture cannot look like its present, and the consumer is the route to change.
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APPENDIX A: SURVEY INSTRUMENT

1. What do you buy at the farmers markets? (Check all that apply)
   - Fruit
   - Vegetables
   - Jelly or Canned Products
   - Honey
   - Meat
   - Other. Please specify ________________

2. Where do you acquire locally produced foods? (Check all that apply)
   - I don’t buy locally produced foods.
   - Farmers markets
   - Roadside stands
   - Directly from local farms
   - My own garden or friend’s garden
   - A grocery store. Please specify________
   - Other. Please specify________________

3. Why is it important to you to buy locally produced food? (Check all that apply and please circle the most important reason)
   - It is not that important to me.
   - I believe locally produced food is fresher.
   - I believe locally produced food is healthier.
   - Locally produced food is generally less expensive.
   - I believe it is socially responsible.
   - I like to support local farmers.
   - I believe locally produced food helps minimize urban sprawl.
   - It is more convenient to buy local food.
   - Other. Please specify________________

4. What discourages you from buying more local foods? (Check all that apply and please circle the most important reason)
   - It is hard to find places that sell local foods.
   - Local foods are more expensive.
   - I don’t trust local foods to be safe.
   - I don’t have time to search for local foods.
   - I don’t have cash to buy local foods.
   - Other. Please specify________________

5. What is your age?
   - Under 20 years
   - 20-39
   - 40-59
   - 60 and above

6. How would you describe yourself politically?
   - Very Liberal
   - Liberal
   - Slightly Liberal
   - Moderate
   - Slightly Conservative
   - Conservative
   - Very Conservative
   - Unsure

7. What is your highest level of education?
   - Some high school
   - High school graduate
   - Some college or trade school
   - College degree
   - Post-graduate work

Thank you for completing our survey! Your time is much appreciated. Please place your finished survey in the drop box.
APPENDIX B: INFORMATION SHEET

Note: Two versions of the information sheet were used. The first were for the Toledo and Westlake markets. The second was for the Peninsula market which mentions the Countryside Conservancy (the nonprofit organization that runs the market). Both versions of the information sheet were printed on Bowling Green State University letterhead.

Dear Farmers Market Patron,

Locally grown food has several environmental and economic benefits, and farmers markets are the major avenue for these foods. The purpose of this study is to gauge who buys local foods and why. The benefits of this project will be increased understanding of consumer behavior and local foods so that we may better market to all consumers.

This survey is being performed by a graduate student at Bowling Green State University, Tiffany Ferry, who is conducting the study for her Masters in Public Administration. Participation is voluntary, and the survey will only take a few minutes. Your identity will be kept anonymous and confidential, and you may stop at any time if you wish. Completion of the survey constitutes your consent to participate. You must be 18 years or older to participate. You may also contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Board at BGSU at (419) 372-7716 with questions or concerns. Please detach the top sheet to keep and return the completed survey.

Thank you very much for your time! You are helping to promote sustainable agriculture throughout Ohio!

Dear Farmers Market Patron,

The Countryside Conservancy, a nonprofit organization that works with Cuyahoga Valley National Park, is dedicated to promoting the purchase of locally produced foods versus foods produced miles and miles away. Through its farmers markets, it has become a model for organizations working with national parks to promote local foods, but it would like to learn more. The purpose of this study is to gauge who buys local foods and why. The benefits of this project will be increased understanding of consumer behavior and local foods so that we may better market to all consumers.

This survey is being performed by a graduate student at Bowling Green State University, Tiffany Ferry, who is conducting the study for her Masters in Public Administration. Participation is voluntary, and the survey will only take a few minutes. Your identity will be kept anonymous and confidential, and you may stop at any time if you wish. Completion of the survey constitutes your consent to participate. You must be 18 years or older to participate. You may also contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Board at BGSU at (419) 372-7716 with questions or concerns. Please detach the top sheet to keep and return the completed survey to the Countryside Conservancy Tent.

Thank you very much for your time! You are helping to promote sustainable agriculture throughout Ohio!
Question 3: Why is it important to you to buy locally produced food?

**Westlake farmers’ market:**
“It’s fun to shop at the farmers market”
“Get to know the farmers who grow the food”
“American food for Americans—not toxic Mexican pesticides”
“It is a great feeling wading thru-people meeting, seeing friends, people with their pets. I love it. I like driving by and seeing the market umbrellas…wholesome”
“Less gas used in transport”
“Less pesticides”
“I try to buy pesticide and hormone free”

**Toledo farmers’ market:**
“I enjoy coming to the market”
“Much better Taste!”
“Can find more organic grown”
“Less carbon impact (no gas or little gas for transport)”
“Cuts down on energy use”

**Peninsula farmers’ market:**
“I know who grow[s][the] vegetables I eat”
“More selection for organic foods”
“Must protect seed heritage/diversity of plant species”
“Tastes better”
“Less petroleum use. Fewer chemicals”
“Organic”
“Less transportation energy imbedded in food cost”
“It’s more fun”
“Less transportation-Less gas used”
“Buying local supports an idea of community that appeals to me and connects us to what supports us. Better for the environment”
“I enjoy shopping at the farmers markets”
“Fewer miles (ie less pollution) from farm to my home”
“I like to buy organic food as much as possible”
“Tastes better”
APPENDIX C: Cont’d

Question 4: What discourages you from buying more local foods?

**Westlake farmers’ market:**
“Can not buy anytime”
“Some are too far away to access easily, but I do my best.”
“Not a big concern”
“Usually I’m not available at time of farmers market sale”
“It is not as available in the off seasons”

**Toledo farmers’ market:**
“Availability”
“Food is food”
“Daily Convenience”
“Unable to get local produce in winter—otherwise nothing discourages me from buying local.”
“Whatever is easiest”
“Don’t always have time to get to farmer’s market”
“Not always specified as local or not in main grocery store”
“Forget to go to farmers market”
“Seasonal availability”
“‘Local grown’ is commonly mislabeled”

**Peninsula farmers’ market:**
“If food is found to be unsafe, it is difficult to hold grower responsible”
“Seasonal Availability”
“Winter”
“Difficult to find all things we eat locally”
“Hard to find meats. No local stuff available in winter”
“Only availability”