Food Buying Practices of College Students

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As young adults, many college students are independently buying their food for the first time. What they buy, how, and where they buy food are dependent on a set of factors. One of the factors that influences how students buy food may be practices learned while living at home. Food buying is for the most part a new experience for college students. In order to better serve their customers, food service establishments and food outlets in and around college areas will need information on the food buying habits of students. It is also important to understand the preferred sources of food for college students. This study assesses factors that are important to college students in their food buying practices.

### Results Cont’d

For raw food, a majority (51.6%) of the respondents buy food from a supermarket and do so weekly while 40.6% patronize a supermarket once a month (Figure 1). Another 51.6% of the students seldom (37.5%) or never (14.1%) buy food from a local grocery store. A combined 61% of students buy raw food from a convenience store on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. Over 69% of the respondents buy ready to eat food items from a grocery store on a daily, weekly or monthly basis while 82.5 percent do so from a cafeteria or regular restaurant (Figure 2). Over half, 51.6%, of the students patronize a fast food restaurant weekly, 25% do so daily and another 12.5% do so monthly.

- **On food attributes**, about 75% of the respondents attach some or great importance to nutritional levels shown on a food label while 76% attach some or great importance to food contents shown on the label (Figure 3). Price is the second most important food attribute as 89% of the respondents indicate that it is of some (23.4%) or great (65.6%) importance. The most important food attribute is taste which 93.8% of the respondents indicated to be of some (12.5%) or great (81.3%) importance.

- A vast majority of the respondents, 80.59% indicated a willingness (agreed or strongly agreed) to pay more for food that is grown organically and 82.1% will pay more for food grown locally (Figure 4). An equally high percent, 77%, will pay more for food grown on small farms.

### Summary and Conclusions

- Even with limited incomes, students indicate a willingness to pay more for food that is produced organically, grown locally and/or produced on small farms.
- Taste, followed by price are the two most important food attributes for students.
- Food service establishments that students tend to patronize regularly could improve their market performance by blending taste, local content and competitive pricing.

### References
