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Food Buying Practices of College Students

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Statement of Problem

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.

Description of Research Method

A survey instrument was used to obtain information from a sample of 64 students on the frequency of food purchases from convenience stores, groceries, supermarkets and restaurants. Respondents were also asked to rate the importance of various food quality attributes such as taste, nutritional label and brand name. Additional information was collected on food safety, handling and processing issues. The frequency distributions of the responses were analyzed and used to make inferences on students' food buying, practices, attitudes and preferences. Sources of food were categorized as either food-at-home or food-away-from-home.

Results

- 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

Results Cont'd

- 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 nutrition 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.

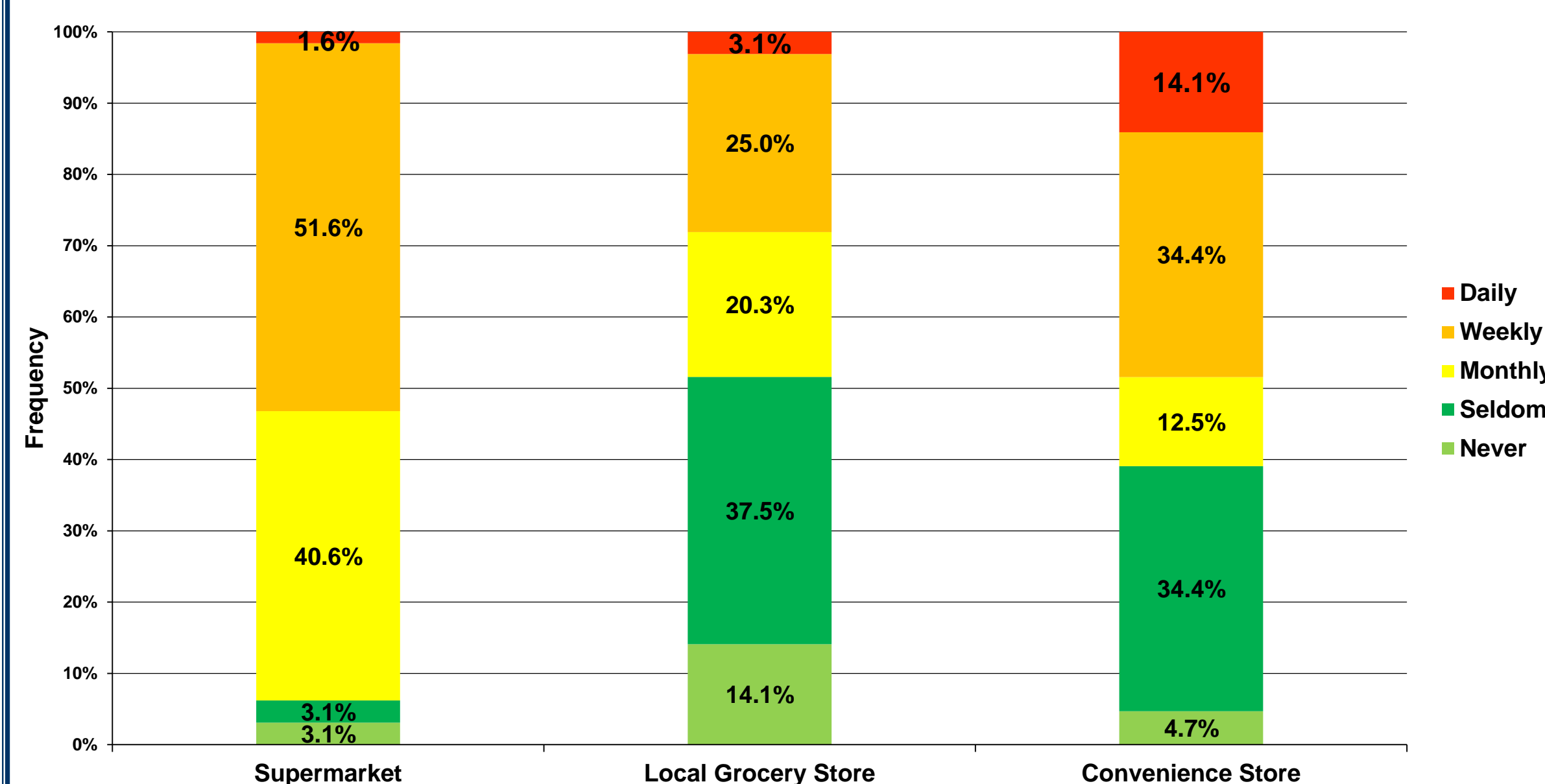


Figure 1: Frequency of Student Food Items for Home Preparation (N = 64)

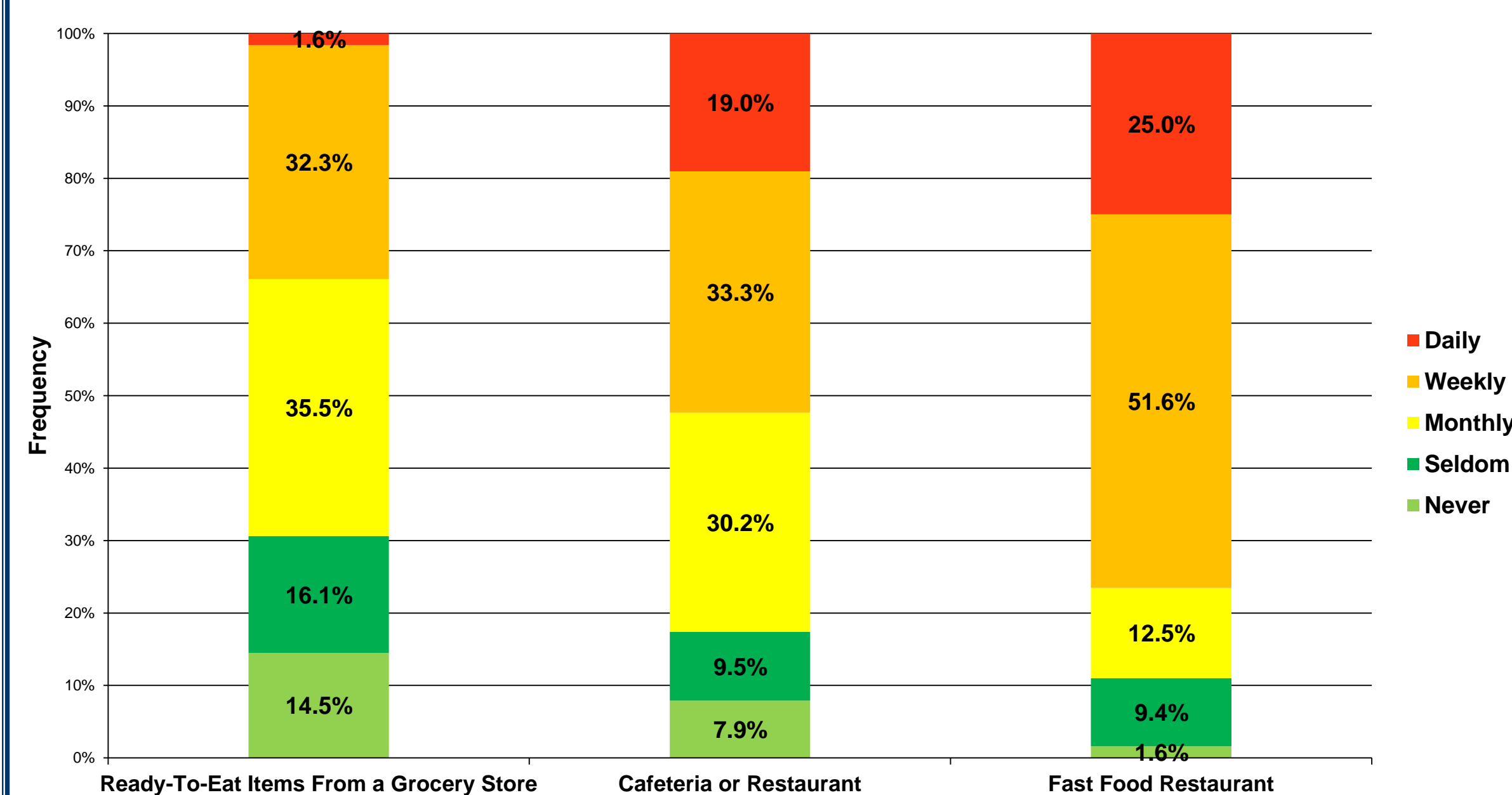


Figure 2: Frequency of Buying Prepared and Ready-To-Eat Foods (N = 64)

Results Cont'd

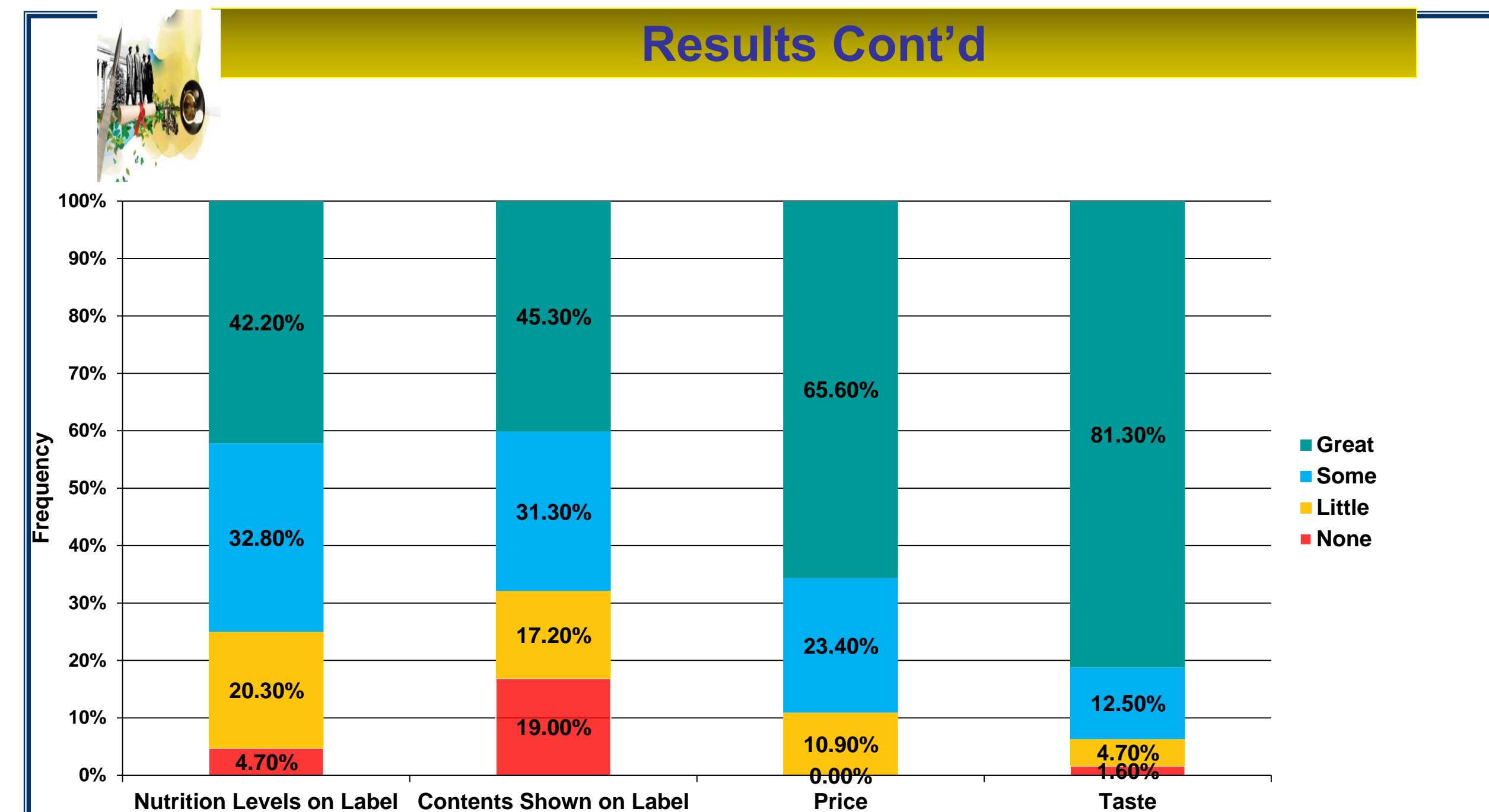


Figure 3: Importance of Food Price, Taste, Nutrition and Labels, N = 64)

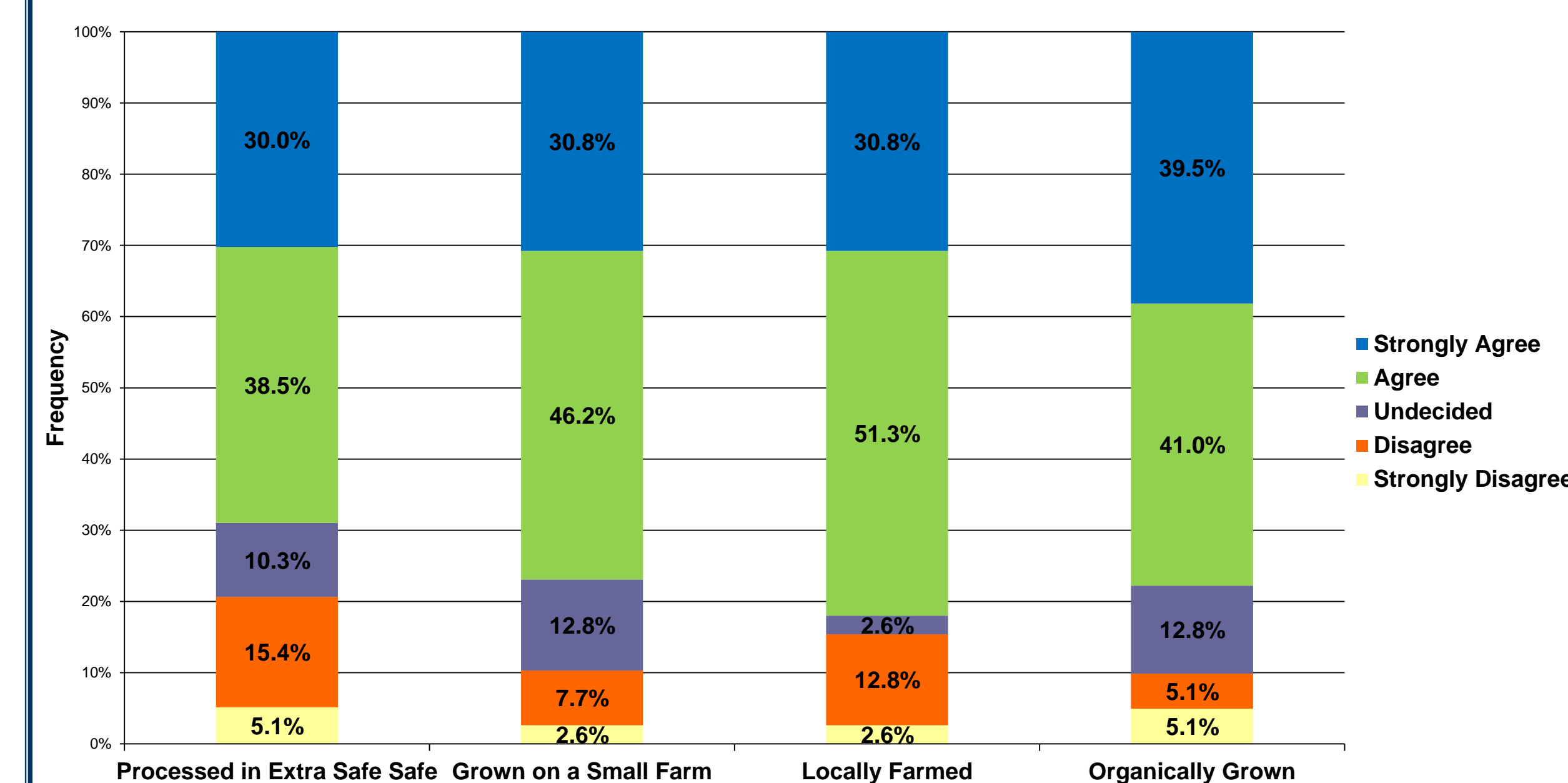


Figure 4: Willingness to Pay More for Food Based on Source (N=39)

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

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