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Influence of Consumer Demographics on the Demand for Locally Grown Ethnic Greens and Herbs Because of Food Miles Concerns: A Logit Model Analysis

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Abstract

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Trade in fresh fruits and vegetables has raised concerns about the distance food travels, food cost, freshness, and climate change associated with the transport. The term food mile refers to the distance or the number of miles that food travels from producer to consumer through its supply chain. Purchasing directly from local farmers may reduce these miles, thus, reducing our dependency on fossil fuels and strengthen the local economy and creating more self-sufficient communities. According to a study conducted in 1996, on average food traveled distances of 1,500 miles from source to consumer. Another study, conducted in 1997, estimated that the average pound of fresh produce travelled 1,685 miles from farm to the main wholesale market in Baltimore, Maryland. Transporting food such long distances requires a great deal of fossil fuels, increases dependency on foreign oil resources and food prices. Buying locally grown produce helps to reduce the environmental impact and cost of transportation. Locally grown fruits and vegetables can be perceived as being fresher as they are usually picked within 24 hours of pur-

chase, may taste better, and have a higher nutritional value than produce transported from great distances.

The main purpose of this paper is to highlight increased purchases of locally grown ethnic greens and herbs due to consumer interest in reducing food miles. To document ethnic consumers' behavior and their demand for greens and herbs, a telephone survey was conducted in 16 East Coast states and Washington D.C. during May through October, 2010. This survey collected information that can be used to assist small and medium farmers with better understanding consumer perceptions and factors that drive ethnic greens and herbs markets, specifically attitudes and behaviors of Asian Indian, Chinese, Mexican, and Puerto Rican consumers. A focus of the study was to predict the influence of socioeconomic and demographic variables on the purchase of locally grown ethnic greens and herbs because of food miles concerns. Respondents answered questions about whether they increased purchase of locally grown ethnic greens and herbs to reduce their impact on food miles, and based on this, a logit model was developed to predict the influence of demographic and other factors on increased purchase of locally grown ethnic greens and herbs.

Results indicate that 34% of ethnic consumers have increased purchases of locally grown ethnic greens and herbs due to food miles reason. Participants more willing to buy locally grown ethnic greens and herbs due to concerns about food miles were those who: tend to buy ethnic greens and herbs from ethnic stores; traveled greater distances to the nearest ethnic grocery store; felt that language the employees of the store spoke was very important; felt that the information on the package was very important when they purchased ethnic greens and herbs; strongly agreed in finding and purchasing ethnic greens and herbs that were the level of quality that they expect and desire; had a post-graduate or advanced degree, had an income of over $200,000; and were Asian Indians.. Purchasing locally grown ethnic greens and herbs may help reduce food miles and provide fresh produce to the local ethnic consumers while saving fuel costs. These results may be useful to the local farmers investigating the possibility of growing ethnic greens and herbs based on the demand and target markets.

Keywords: Ethnic Greens and Herbs, East-Coast United States, Locally Grown Produce, Food Miles and Logit Model