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The Talk at Tailgate Markets: How Interactions Affect Purchase Behavior



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Motivations

- Many consumers are motivated to attend tailgate (farmers’) markets because they offer opportunities for purchasing fresh and local products as well as unique social interactions that often provide consumers with direct assurances about their purchases (Thilmany, Bond and Bond, 2008).
- By selling at a farmers' market, vendors gain a loyal clientele, receive a greater profit, are able to independently manage their business, and educate consumers about farms, farming, and the food they sell (Hunt, 2006; Andreatta and Wickliffe, 2002).
- Both consumers and vendors seem to benefit from interactions at tailgate market (assurance about the quality of products, greater income, direct feedback).
- Though significant evidence exists about motivations to attend tailgate markets, little is known about how the social interaction between sellers and consumers at markets influences purchase behavior and .



Research Question

How do the social interactions at tailgate markets affect purchase behavior?

Methods

- Surveys, observations, and interviews were conducted at 6 different tailgate markets in Western North Carolina.

| Method | Number | Information Collected |
|---|----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Consumer Surveys | 349 | Profile of typical consumers |
| Observations of Consumer-Vendor Interaction | 537 | Interaction characteristics |
| Consumer and Vendor Interviews | 6 vendor, 9 consumer | Motivations, values, and behavior |

Results

I. Interactions between vendors and consumers

- ☐ 63% of interactions observed at TMs were informational
- ☐ The most common topics of conversation include:
 - ☐ Identification of items
 - ☐ Samples
 - ☐ Price
 - ☐ Product information
 - ☐ Suggestions for preparation



II. Consumer purchasing behavior

Reasons consumers are drawn to make a purchase:

- ☐ Vendor loyalty
- ☐ Friendly vendor personality
- ☐ Attractive stand
- ☐ Signs and information

Reasons consumers are deterred from making a purchase:

- ☐ Unfriendly vendors
- ☐ Unattractive display
- ☐ High prices
- ☐ Pesticide use

III. Values

Consumers Value:

- ☐ Social atmosphere
- ☐ Exchange of information
- ☐ Hard work of farmers

Vendors Value:

- ☐ Social interactions/Friendships
- ☐ Direct interactions with consumers
- ☐ Appreciation from customers

IV. How shopping habits have changed

- Since attending tailgate markets
- ☐ 79.9% of consumers purchase more local food
 - ☐ 51.2% of consumers purchase more fruits and vegetables
 - ☐ 43.6% of consumers purchase more organic foods
 - ☐ 42.7% of consumers purchase foods for the sake of trying something new

V. Differences at rural vs. urban tailgate markets

- ☐ Interaction with the vendor or with another consumer affects purchases more often at rural markets
- ☐ More interaction with a familiar tone at urban markets
- ☐ More conversations continue after a purchase decision at rural markets
- ☐ Conversations at rural markets are more about socializing, production information, recommendations for how to prepare and use the product and less about product samples

Conclusions

- Purchase behavior is closely related to consumers’ motivations to buy fresh and local food and enjoy the social atmosphere.
- Informational and social interactions can either attract or deter consumers:
 - Informational exchange: information about the product and the methods of production (i.e. use of pesticide, organically grown)
 - Social exchange: friendliness, loyalty.
- There are significant economic and educational values associated with informational interactions:
 - Producers get direct feedback from their consumers
 - Consumers know more about their food
 - Increase awareness about local food movement, farmers’ need for support
 - Farmers can influence customer shopping habits
 - More fruits and vegetables, more local foods, healthier eating habits
- A sense of community is developed through social interactions
 - “*You start by looking for food, and then you get into the community.*” (interview excerpt)
- Interactions serve as a marketing tool for farmers
 - Engage with customers
 - Discuss both informational and social topics
 - Be honest and transparent about production



References

Andreatta, S. and W. Wickliffe. "Managing Farmer and Consumer Expectations: A Study of a North Carolina Farmers Markets." *Human Organization* (2002).
Thilmany, D., C. A. Bond, and J. K. Bond. "Going Local: Exploring Consumer Behavior and Motivations for Direct Food Purchases." *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 90.5 (2008): 1303-1309.

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