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## Improving Consumer Participation in Oklahoma Farmers' Markets

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Consumer interest in locally grown foods has increased dramatically in the United States, which has contributed to an increase in the number of farmers' markets (FMs). In Oklahoma, between 2004 and 2011, the number of farmers' markets has tripled from 24 to 72. Despite the growth, consumer participation in these direct markets has been limited. In fact, only 15% of adults in Oklahoma consume the recommended quantity of five or more servings per day of fruits and vegetables. A better understanding of FMs consumer and producer characteristics would help in designing appropriate marketing strategies aimed at increasing consumer participation.

The general objective of this study is to give a better understanding of Oklahoma farmers' markets participants' (consumers and producers) characteristics. More specifically, Oklahoma FMs consumer and producer surveys were conducted and analyzed in 2010 in order to determine the following information:

- a. Consumer and producer demographics
- b. Producer perceptions of farmers' markets consumer demographics
- c. Producer participation in food assistance programs
- d. Consumer and producer perception of price, quality, and freshness of products offered at farmers' markets as compared with those sold at grocery stores

Survey summary statistics and analysis revealed several interesting points:

1. The majority of farmers' market customers are female, like to cook, and have household income above \$80,001.
2. One of the barriers to consumer spending at FMs is that many sellers are not able to accept credit/debit cards. This limits the participation of SNAP participants and the amount consumers can potentially spend at the FMs.
3. An interval censored regression model was used to determine the impact of various consumer and producer attributes and demographics on their perceived differences in price, quality, and

freshness between products offered in farmers' markets and grocery stores. Results show that most consumers and producers believe that quality and freshness of farmers' markets products are superior to the same products sold in grocery stores.

Other Findings:

1. Consumers rank "locally grown", "organic", "better nutrition", and "food safety" as the most valued attributes of products offered at farmers' markets.
2. Consumers are willing to pay a premium price for products offered at farmers' markets as compared to those offered at retail outlets.