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# Connecting Growers with Shoppers: Characteristics of the Farmers Market Consumer

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With an increased focus on healthy eating combined with the rise in popularity of direct-marketing outlets, farmers markets present a chance for interested producers to tap into niche-marketing opportunities. In order to better market their products, it is important that producers have access to information about the farmers market consumer. It is also important for growers and market managers to understand the changing dynamics of their local food system. This research surveys farmers market customers and market managers about their perceptions concerning their local market.

A convenience sample of individuals attending farmers markets in four metropolitan areas in Arkansas was completed to identify characteristics of consumers who frequent farmers markets and to determine what factors influence their choice of the farmers' market over other venues. Respondents were asked their frequency of shopping at farmers markets and of purchasing organic foods. Specifically, respondents were asked what type of organic foods they purchase and why they purchase such products (for example, organic products are more environmentally friendly).

Preliminary survey results show that respondents

were frequent patrons of farmers' markets (52.7 percent shop once or twice per week) and most have been purchasing organic foods for at least two years (80 percent). Respondents also reported that several equally important factors contributed to their decision to buy organic. Demographic data show that these consumers are overwhelmingly female (68.2 percent), white (86 percent), and older. Approximately 42 percent of respondents were aged 56 or older, while 26 percent of those surveyed were aged 46–55. Respondents were also more highly educated than the average Arkansan. Fifty-four percent of those completing the survey reported having at least a four-year degree, while more than one-fifth (22 percent) of respondents reported having a masters, professional, or doctoral degree. Similarly, well over half of respondents (71.2 percent) reported annual household incomes greater than the average household income for the state.

Future research efforts will focus on collecting data from the market managers concerning their market structure, economic impact, and perceptions about their local markets and food system. This project will include convening a focus group of managers.