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A Disconnect between Appreciation of the Farmland and Commitment to Pay for Preservation: A Case for the Mid-Atlantic Farm Products and Agritourism

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to investigate the influence of public socioeconomic and value characteristics on willingness to pay more for direct market farm products and patronage of agri-tourism sites. Beyond contingent valuation approaches, this study provides an alternative approach to farmland preservation debate by contextualizing analysis on paying more for products associated with farmers' markets and agri-tourism. We argue that in order to continue enjoying Mother Nature's provisions, the public needs to directly show its willingness to politically and financially support activities that enhance land preservation. In a sense, we investigate how the actual community market behavior reflects desirability and preference for paying more toward supporting land preservation.

The research suggests that there may be a connection between farmland preservation and local farmers. Those appreciating this connection see long terms benefits and are willing to invest their dollars to enhance preservation efforts. Perhaps support of direct farmers' markets and agri-tourism activities may turn out to be a more effective way for farmland preservation complementing federal and state legislations. Those likely to vote with their dollars to support farmland preservation are individuals who increase variety of fruit and or vegetable consumption. Also individuals, who prefer to buy locally sourced farm products, visit and spend in direct farmers' markets and agri-tourism sites will more likely favor measures to support farmland preservation. The results of this study further suggest that mature, older people, people whose level of education is beyond high school are more likely to be supportive of farmland preservation. Given the scope of the survey data used, not all aspects about farmland preservation and support of local farmers are included in this study. Future studies should incorporate people's opinions on a wider spectrum of farmland preservation, and specific farmers markets and agri-tourism activities to allow more comprehensive analysis.