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CONSUMER ATTITUDES AND SHOPPING BEHAVIOR FOR FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

By

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Direct marketing has virtually exploded throughout the U.S. in recent years, especially in the form of farmer and gardener markets. This development has raised a number of questions concerning producer and consumer welfare, and the long-run viability of these marketing methods, of particular importance to marketing firms (including producers), consumers, educators, and public policy decision-makers. The project reviewed here presents highlights of a research project carried out in 1980 and 1981, in an effort to address some of these questions.

Nearly 1100 (1082) shoppers were interviewed at five different types of outlets (supermarkets, roadside stands, farmers' markets, consumer food co-ops, and "mobile markets"), in three different urban centers in Massachusetts. Information collected included an assortment of descriptive and shopping behavior information, plus an evaluation of alternative market sources with respect to six characteristics of those outlets (prices, quality, variety, convenience, etc.). Experimental data were also developed on shopper behavior at farmers' markets.

As would be expected, a relatively large percentage of shoppers at farmers' markets, mobile markets (truck delivery), and food co-ops had shopped those outlets for only short periods of time. Roadside stands and supermarkets, by comparison, had substantially fewer new shoppers, especially roadside stands where nearly two-thirds of the 352 shoppers interviewed had shopped the stands involved for 5 or more years.

Farmers' market and supermarket shoppers interviewed represented a wide spectrum of income levels. Roadside stand interviewees were preponderantly from upper-income groups, food co-op shoppers from middle-income groups and mobile market shoppers, by virtue of the route selected, from low-income classes.

Food co-op shoppers had average expenditures of $8.11 for fresh fruits and vegetables, while at the four other types of outlets, shopper expenditures averaged $4-5--highest at supermarkets and lowest at mobile markets.

In general, shoppers tended to give the highest ratings to the outlets they shopped. Overall, farmers' markets, roadside stands, and mobile markets received the highest ratings for <u>quality</u> of fresh fruits and vegetables. Shopping <u>convenience</u> was rated greatest for mobile markets and supermarkets and lowest for farmers' markets and roadside stands. For <u>prices</u>, mobile markets and food co-ops received the best ratings; roadside stands the lowest. Mobile markets and food co-ops were judged to be the most <u>friendly</u>. Supermarkets, considered the least friendly, were given the best rating for <u>variety</u> of food products. Shoppers found shopping at farmers' markets and mobile markets to be the most <u>enjoyable experience</u>; supermarkets the least enjoyable.

Price data collected for a market basket of six fresh fruit and vegetable items at the same outlets over a 19-week period showed farmers' markets and food co-ops to have the lowest prices, followed by mobile markets, supermarkets and roadside stands, in that order.

Experimental observations of customer shopping at two farmers' markets indicated that shopper counts over the period of market operations are surprisingly consistent. This information, combined with average length of shopping visits and average expenditures would provide a convenient method of estimating farmers' market sales volume.