

Abstract

This study explores consumer perceptions and behaviors toward purchasing locally grown or produced foods in six counties of the Sacramento region. Using data from 1,465 respondents, key demographic influences were analyzed, including gender, age, region, race, and income. Results showed that females, older adults, and higher-income individuals were more likely to purchase local foods, especially when provided with product or producers information. Fruits and vegetables were the top-ranked local food categories, and economic motivations, such as supporting farmers and the local economy, were the most cited reasons for purchasing. Price was the most influential purchasing factor across all demographics. Findings suggest that affordability and accessible information play critical roles in encouraging local food consumption.

Introduction

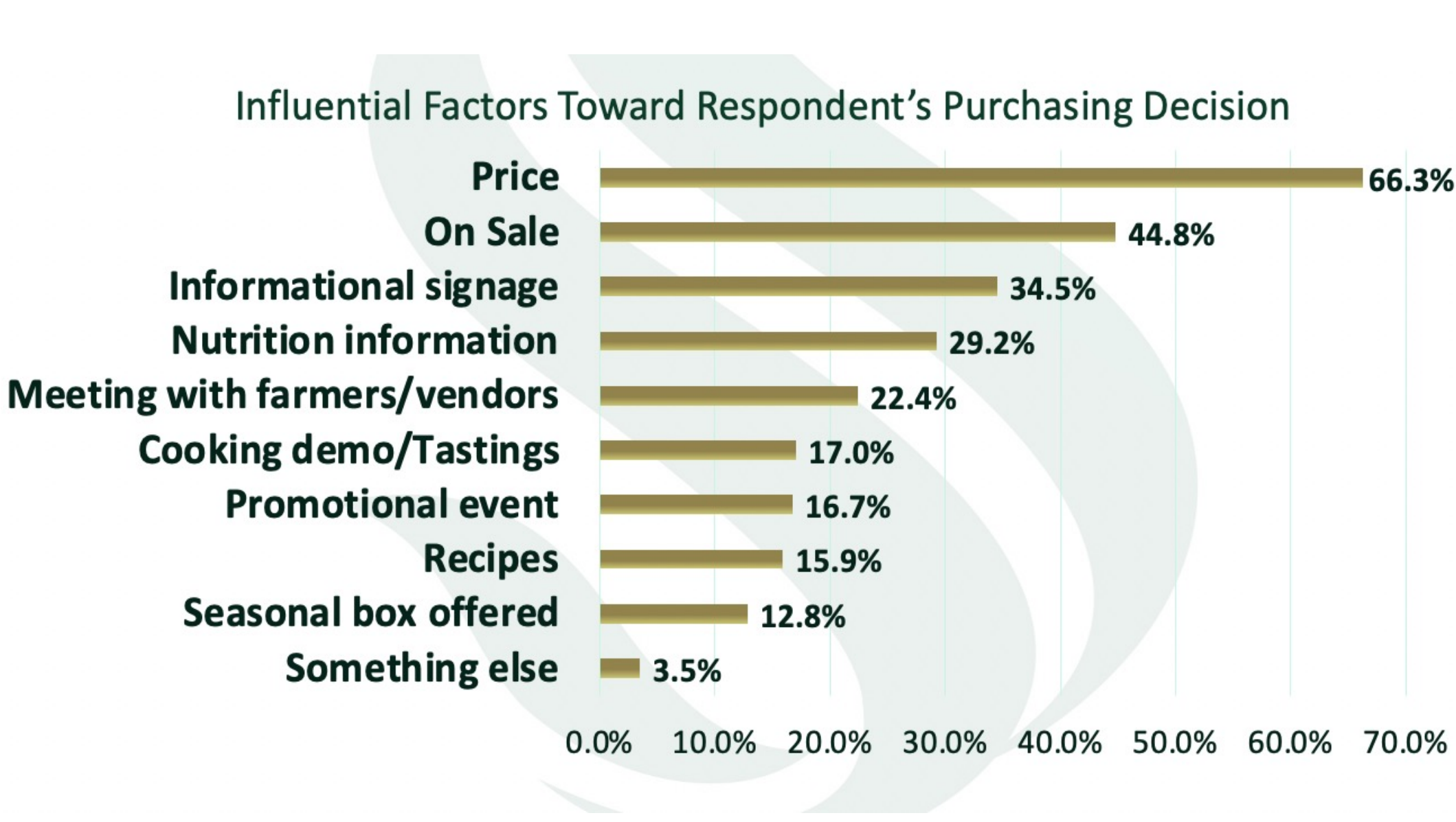
In 2023, the NUFD program at California State University, Sacramento conducted a research collaboration to investigate consumers' current shopping practices, preferences and barriers toward locally grown food and food localization in the stores which they shop. Participants living in 6 Sacramento region counties: El Dorado, Placer, Sacramento, Sutter, Yolo, and Yuba were being surveyed.

Current practices of Purchasing Locally Grown Food

When asked about the frequency of purchasing locally grown/produced foods, most of the participants (75.1%) reported purchasing them either sometimes (52.2%) or always (22.9%) when they are available.

Influential Factors Toward Respondent’s Purchasing Decision

When the participants were asked to rank top 3 marketing strategies that were most influential toward their purchasing decision, the most selected 3 factors were price (66.3%), sales (44.8%), and informational signage (34.5%).



Based on the previous research, the purpose of this current study was to use the available data to understand potential differences in perception and purchasing behaviors toward locally grown foods for participants with different demographic characteristics.

Methods

Data Collection

The data for this study was secondary data acquired from a research collaboration survey between the ISR Regional Panel and the Nutrition and Food program (NUFD) at California State University, Sacramento. 2,276 panel participants were invited, out of which 1,465 completed at least 85% of the survey and were included in the final dataset, resulting in a 64.4% response rate. Using a 95% confidence interval, the final data have a 2.6% margin of error.

Data Analysis

The results of the survey were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 29.0.2.0). Survey results were analyzed by breaking down participants’ key demographic information: gender, age, region, race & ethnicity, and income levels. Specifically, some demographic information was recharacterized into groups. Age was regrouped into <35, 36-50, 51-65, and >65; region was regrouped into Sacramento County and other counties (El Dorado, Placer, Sutter, Yolo, Yuba); and income was regrouped into <15K, \$15-\$50K, \$50-\$100K, \$100-\$200K, and >\$200K.

Descriptive statistics were conducted for each survey question to identify the characteristics of each demographic information, and frequencies and percentages of responses were examined.

The Independent-T test and ANOVA test were used to study consumers’ perception of locally grown food and purchasing practices by gender, age, region, race & ethnicity, and income.

Results

Purchasing Frequency of Local Foods

Females were found significantly more likely than males to purchase locally grown foods ($p < 0.001$). Significant differences were found in age group ($p < 0.001$, $F = 17.529$). Specifically, the tendency to purchase local foods when they are available increases with increasing age. Mean scores were 2.05 for respondents under 35, 1.89 for respondents aged 36–50, 1.79 for respondents aged 51–65, and 1.72 for those over 65, indicating increased purchasing frequency among older age groups.

Perception on Availability of Local Foods

Females ($SD = 1.113$) showed a significant higher agreement ($p < 0.001$) than males ($SD = 0.964$) that their grocery stores has had a variety of fresh, locally grown foods during the past 30 days.

Likelihood to Purchase Locally Grown or Produced Foods when Provided the Information

When provided the information, respondents in Sacramento County is significant more likely to purchase local foods than other counties. Significant differences were found between age groups ($p = 0.002$, $F = 4.850$) with the likelihood of purchasing local foods increasing with age. Mean scores rose from 3.78 (under 35) to 4.03 (over 65).

Consumer Purchasing Interest on Food Categories

Fruits and vegetables were the top choice for 84.1% of respondents, followed by cheese/dairy (42.8%) and meat/poultry (39.1%), suggesting a strong preference for fresh local foods over beverages.

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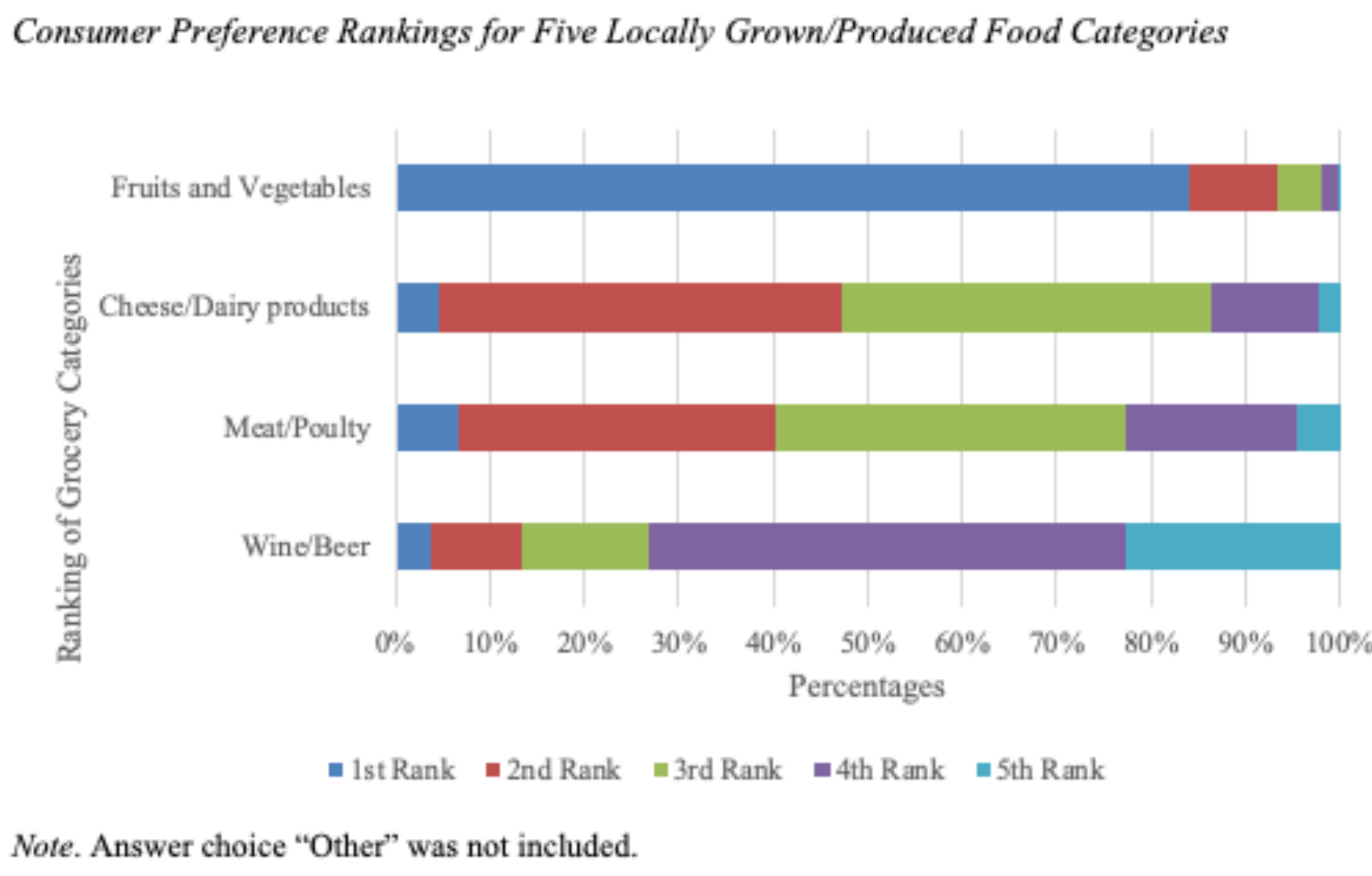
Reasons to Purchase Local Foods

“support farmers” was the top chosen reason across demographic groups, except for males (24.5%) and those aged 51-65 (26.7%) who prioritized “support local economy”. “Sustainability” was chosen more often by younger respondents under 35 years old (18.1%) and/or who are white (13.9%) compared to other groups. “Food safety” was chosen more among non-white (18.1%) compared to white (13.3%) respondents. “Health concerns” were selected more frequently by respondents with incomes under \$15K (17.9%) and \$15-\$50K (14.9%).

Influential Factors toward Respondents’ Purchasing Decision

Price was the top influencing factor across all groups, especially among those earning under \$15K (80.4%) and adults aged 51–65 (71.5%). “On-sale” was the second most influential factor for most groups, except white respondents and those earning over \$200K. 40.6% of the white respondents and 50.0% of the respondents with an annual income over \$200K rated “Informational signage” as their second most influential factor. Non-white respondents

were more influenced by sales (52.2%) than white respondents (40.5%), while informational signage had a much higher selection in white (40.6%) than non-white respondents (25.8%).



Discussion and Conclusion

The findings highlight a clear consumer interest in purchasing locally grown or produced foods, particularly among females, older adults, and higher-income individuals. Fruits, vegetables, dairy, and meat were the most preferred local food categories, showing a strong interest in fresh items. Economic motivations, such as supporting local farmers and the local economy, were the most common reasons for choosing local foods. Younger and white respondents valued sustainability, while non-white and lower-income groups prioritized food safety and health. Price remained the most critical factor influencing purchasing decisions across all demographics. The results suggest that improving affordability and informational access could significantly enhance consumer engagement with local food systems.

References

Wie, S., & Thompson, K. (2024).
Baiochi, A., Evans, E., Ramirez, E., Sarabia, H., Thompson, K., & Wie, S. (2023).
IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 29)