New Crops Assessment Project
Funded by Lakewinds Community Share
Final Report

John Mesko
Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota

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Introduction

The number of consumers seeking specific specialty local food items is growing. Grains such as quinoa and spelt, native fruits such as currants and sea buckthorn, and herbs such as nettle and burdock are growing in popularity among health conscious, local food advocates. Other types of local foods that lack availability are 100% grass-fed dairy products (including sheep and goat products), local bee pollen and royal jelly, rare grass fed meat products such as broths and marrow bones, and fermented foods such as kim chi, kombucha and local beer/wine.

Many people would like to obtain locally produced/processed versions of these foods, but cannot, either because production expertise is lacking among MN farmers or the perceived demand is too low to entice producers to try new crops.

In surveys and discussions with SFA farmer-members, we've learned that finding a market for unique crops that have a higher-than-average return is a real need among Minnesota's sustainable farmers.

The New Crops Assessment Project by Sustainable Farming Association (SFA) was conducted to assess the demand for and interest in hard-to-find crops among Minnesota's growing local, sustainable and organic food consumer base. The majority of the funding for the New Crops Assessment was provided through the Lakewinds Cooperative Community Share Program.

Conclusions from SFA Survey

Organics

- The affordability of organics is a concern for most customers.
- Many customers always purchase organic over conventional options when available.

Local Food

- The majority of customers surveyed strive to obtain as much of their food locally as possible.
- The majority of customers surveyed consider local food to be food that is grown in Minnesota.

Grains

- There is a strong market for locally produced quinoa.
  - 54% would like a local source
  - 9% would purchase weekly, 35% monthly, 37% 4X/year
- There may be potential markets for spelt, teff, white wheat, amaranth, farro, white corn hominy and millet, but many consumers would like to learn more about them before purchasing.
  - For all of the above 18-25% desired a local source, and 26-33% wanted to learn more, and many do not know what they are.
- There could be a good local market for gluten free oats.
  - 27% would like to find a local source, giving it the second highest demand in the category.
  - 10% would purchase weekly, 23% monthly, and 16% 4X/year.

Fruits and Greens

- There is a good market for locally produced currants.
  - 53% looking for local source
  - 33% 1X/month or more
- Many customers would like to learn more about sea buckthorn, nettle and burdock.
  - Customers were very inquisitive about these crops when I was giving the survey; maybe this shows a good demand for more educational initiatives from Lakewinds?

Grass-fed Meat Products

- There is strong market potential for both local grass-fed meat and local grass-fed milk.
  - 67% of respondents either purchase grass-fed milk currently or would like to find a local source for it
    - 73% purchase it once a month or more
  - 73% of respondents either purchase grass-fed meat currently or would like to find a local source
    - 71% purchase it once a month or more
  - This is assuming to some extent that new farmers can penetrate the markets for local grass-fed meat and milk that currently exist.

Fermented Foods

- There is a reasonable market for locally produced sauerkraut.
    - 61% either would like to find a local source or purchase it locally currently.
    - 58% would purchase it 4X/year or more.
- There is a good market for locally produced beer.
    - 67% either would like to find a local source or purchase it locally currently.
    - 58% would purchase it 1X/month or more.
- There is a good market for locally produced wine.
    - 68% either would like to find a local source or purchase it locally currently.
    - 51% would purchase it 1X/month or more.

Distribution

- The vast majority of respondents would purchase the discussed foods at a food co-op.
    - 87.8%
- Many respondents would purchase the discussed foods at farmers markets as well.
    - 59.2%
- Few customers would purchase the discussed foods through CSA's or at regular grocery stores or specialty grocery stores.
    - CSA's - 16.3%
        - Many customers were not familiar with CSA's
    - Regular Grocery Store - 11.2%
    - Specialty Grocery Store - 13.3%
- Some respondents would purchase the discussed foods directly from a farmer.
    - 23.5%

Spending Priorities

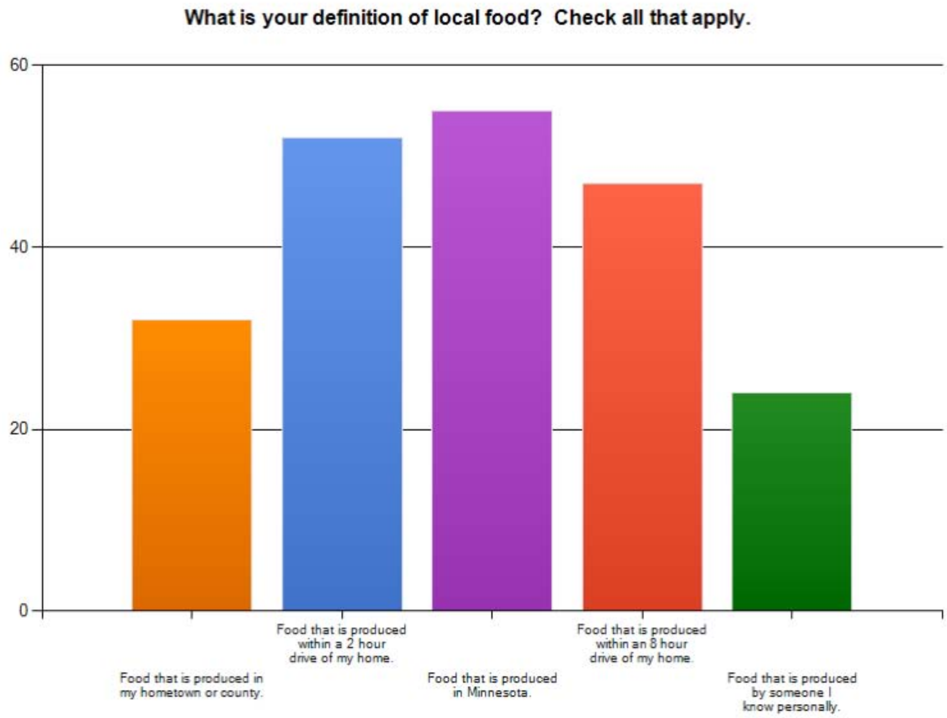
- Many respondents spend 50% or more of their total food budget at food co-ops.
    - 48% responded with 50-75% or 75-100%
- Most respondents purchase their food from a variety of different sources.
- Respondents, in general, shop at food co-ops more than any other source.
    - Food co-ops received 91 responses total, which is higher than any other category.
    - Specialty grocery stores was 2nd highest with 89 total responses

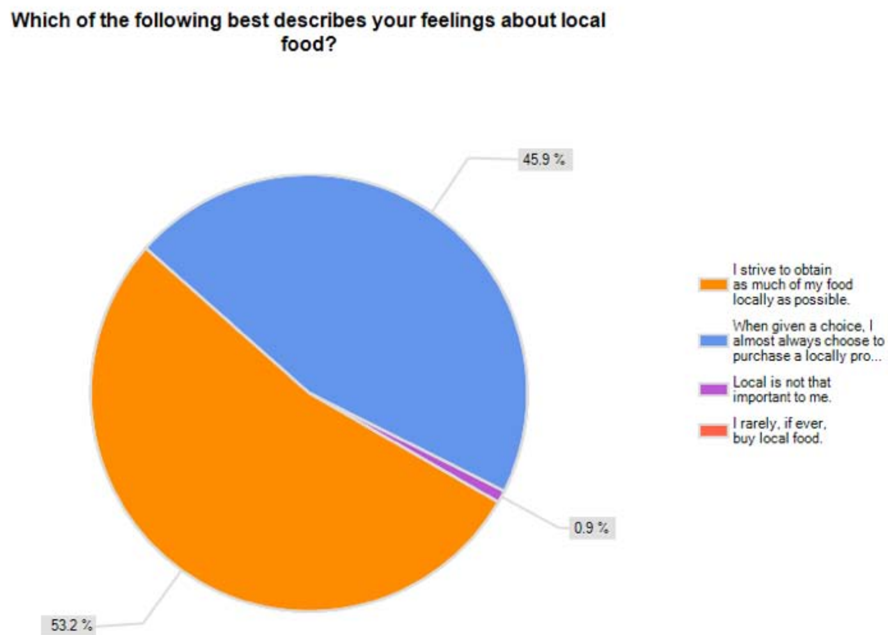
Farmer's knowledge of hard-to-find foods

- The majority of farmers surveyed would be interested in learning more about millet and how to produce it.
    - 52%
- Many farmers would be interested in learning more about currants and how to produce them.
    - 43%

- Many farmers surveyed would be interested in learning more about bee pollen and how to produce it.
    - 46%
- Many farmers surveyed would be interested in learning more about royal jelly and how to produce it.
    - 42%
- For many crops, many farmers are familiar with the food but have no desire to produce it.
    - Quinoa, Spelt, Gluten-Free Oats, Nettle, Burdock, Grass Fed Milk, Grass Fed Goat Milk, Grass Fed Marrow Bones, Bee pollen, Royal Jelly, Kombucha, and Kim Chee
    - All of the above received 50% or more in the "I know what this it, but do not desire to produce it" category
- Many farmers are not familiar with teff, faro or sea buckthorn

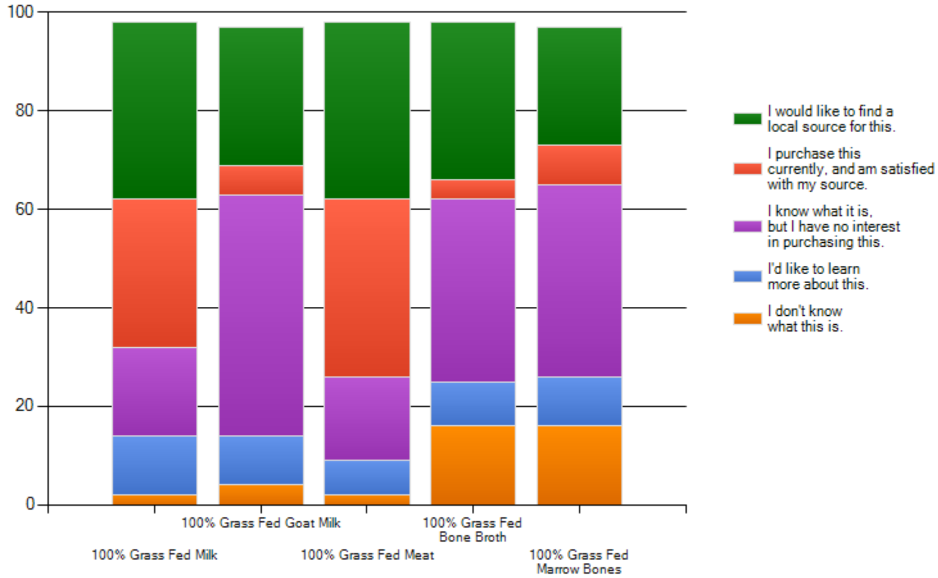
Response Charts of Key Survey Questions



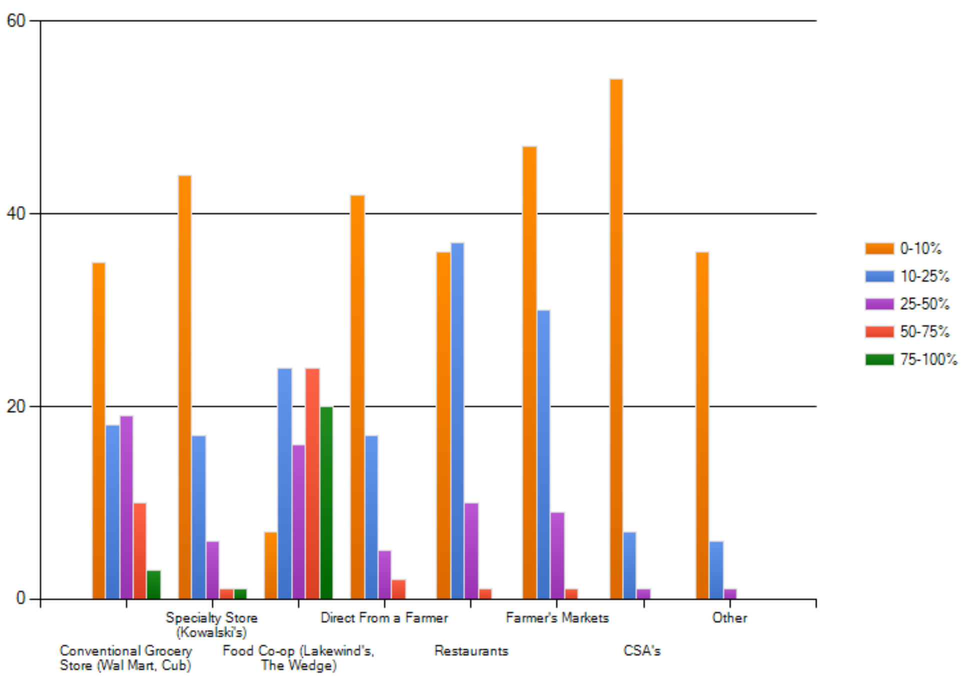


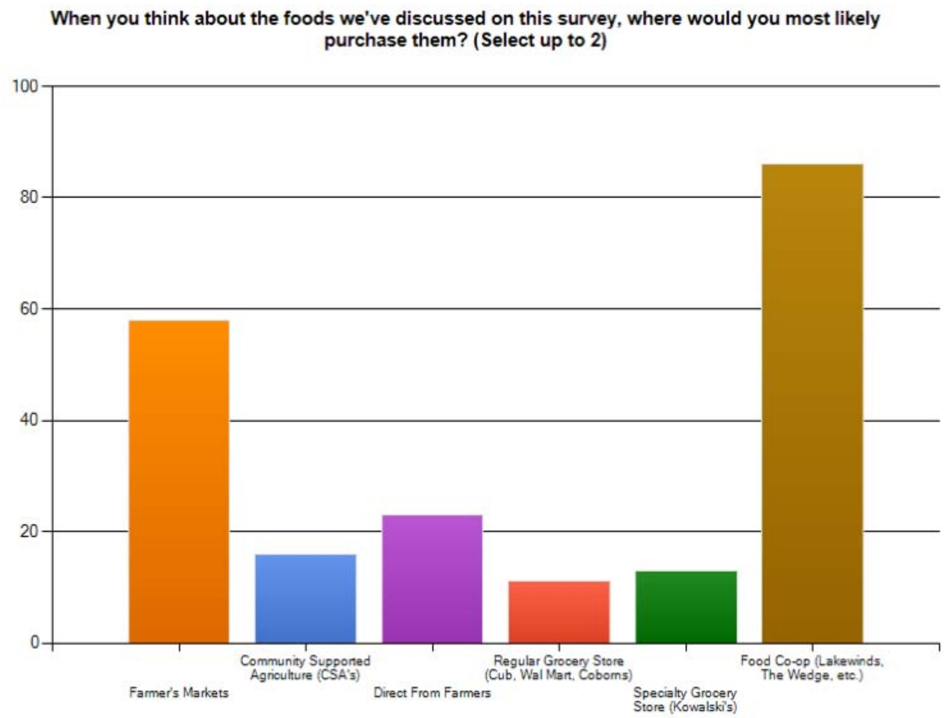
100% Grass Fed Meat Products.
Most meat and animal products are produced from animals that are fed a diet high in grain. 100% Grass-fed meat products are from animals that are fed NO grain at all and offer unique nutritional and flavor advantages.

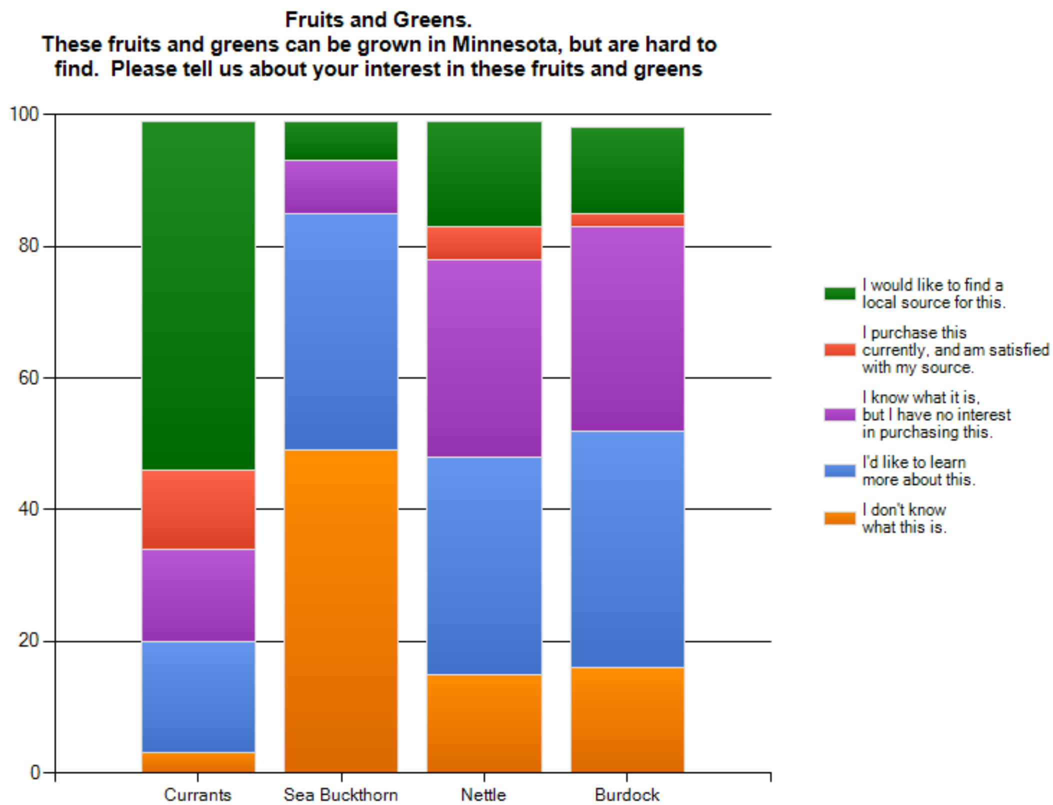
Please answer about your interest in 100% Grass Fed Products.



What percentage of your total food budget is spent in the following places?







Full access to all responses can be found here.

Project Challenges and Successes

The success of the New Crops Assessment Project is as expected. There is a definite interest among consumers regarding hard-to-find, locally grown crops in Minnesota and there is interest among farmers to grow those crops.

The challenge of the project was to get sufficiently complex data to answer the supply and demand questions using a simple enough evaluation tool to encourage more data points.

Many of the survey takers commented on the length of the survey, and were at times frustrated to finish.

All in all, this project was a success, and we are looking to parlay this success into further funding for continuing this work. Thank you Lakewinds!