

COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS OF LOCAL FOODS:

A MIXED METHODS APPROACH IN STATE COLLEGE, PA



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We would like to thank the State College area residents who participated in our focus group sessions. Their contributions and wisdom formed the foundation of this research project.

Lastly, we owe a great debt of gratitude to Dr. A.E. Luloff for guidance and encouragement throughout the duration of this study.

Foreword

Over nearly 40 years in academia, it has not been routine for me to become involved with a team of graduate students in the supervision of their self-designed and -driven applied research project. I was indeed fortunate to have such an opportunity this past year. Lauren Abbott, Austin Barrett, Sarah Eissler, Carolyn Fish, Lacey Goldberg, Stephen Mainzer, and Max Olsen, all students in the Fall 2014 course, HDNRE 574: Integrated Perspectives of Human Dimensions of Natural Resources, provided this opportunity. Challenged with identifying a research project that would capitalize on their unique disciplinary training, skills, and abilities, they focused their efforts on a significant and increasingly important issue – local foods. They spent countless hours conceptualizing the research problem, discussing the issues with locally involved citizens, thoroughly researching the extant literature on the topic, designing the most effective way to implement a mixed-methods study, raising the needed funds to conduct it, hosting a widely successful event where they gathered invaluable information from a large number of local citizens, analyzing the data, and writing this report. Essentially, they conducted a full research project over the course of the year – and received credit for only one course. Such dedication and commitment speaks volumes about who these students are and what they represent, not only to their home disciplines and departments, but to the Human Dimensions of Natural Resources and the Environment Dual-Title Intercollege Graduate Degree Program. Their research represents a solid contribution to the ever-expanding literature on local foods, providing important insights into definitions, boosters and barriers, and willingness to pay for and value of a local food cooperative. The implications of these findings will find purchase in locations far from Happy Valley and they should. This is a well-crafted and produced study and I commend this group of talented students for choosing this task and completing it with such vigor.

A.E. Luloff
Professor of Rural Sociology and
Co-Chair, HDNRE Dual-Title Intercollege
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Abstract

Local food has become a common and loaded term in public discourse. To use the term local food effectively, researchers must better understand the public's understanding and conceptualization of it. This study sought to better understand the definitions, perceptions, and values related to local food in the State College area of Pennsylvania. It utilized a transdisciplinary framework that encouraged purposeful engagement with the public, as well as contributions from scholars across various academic disciplines. Drawing from focus group discussions with State College area residents, a number of key findings arose related to how participants defined local foods. Initially, focus group participants framed their definition based on geography (i.e., miles, hours of travel time, and regional/political boundaries). Delving deeper, participants also mentioned elements of community and social interaction as part of their definition. To further define local foods, we identified a number of boosters and barriers that either encouraged or discouraged participation in local foods. Boosters identified by participants included supporting the local economy, developing interpersonal relationships, eating healthier, and reducing their impact on the environment. Barriers to purchasing local food were related to cost, seasonality, inconvenience, and the presence of multiple publics (i.e., college students and permanent residents). Finally, through the use of a survey instrument, we were able to understand how willing participants were to pay for a lifetime membership to a local food cooperative. The results suggested participants' willingness-to-pay for a membership to a local food cooperative was lower than the price point of an existing membership. Further, the value placed on membership was primarily derived from access to either an online or a brick-and-mortar store. Value associated with fringe benefits, such as discounts to local restaurants and access to community classes or events, was comparatively minimal. The findings conveyed within this report will be valuable to members of the public and community groups who are interested in growing the presence of local foods within the State College area.

Introduction

This report chronicles our research related to perceptions State College area residents have about local foods. It is broken into sections, including: (1) a context and review of relevant literature that helped to refine our research questions and design; (2) a methodology section that chronologically details how we carried out the data collection; (3) a results and analysis section that presents our findings; and (4) a conclusions section that discusses key outcomes from our study.

This project was originally conceived to satisfy the course requirements for Fall 2014 HDNRE 574: Integrated Perspectives of Human Dimensions of Natural Resources. We were tasked with identifying a research project that would be transdisciplinary and yield findings that would have an impact for the broader State College community. This project grew from these two parameters and evolved into a large-scale, student-driven research effort yielding actionable data that has both practical and theoretical value.

Work session, from L to R: S. Mainzer, L. Abbott, A. Barrett, C. Fish, S. Eissler, M. Olsen. Photo: L. Goldberg



Context & Literature Review

In recent decades, a general consensus has been drawn that the relationships between people and biophysical systems are more complex and uncertain than historically assumed (Francois, 2006; Nowak, Bowen, & Cabot, 2006; Luloff, Bridger, & Theodori, 2013). The traditional producer-oriented interpretation of natural resource management has been critically examined as social and ecological perspectives became more seriously investigated (Kloppenburger, Lezberg, De Master, Stevenson, & Hendrickson, 2000; Thompson, Elmendorf, McDonough, & Burba, 2005; Tregear, 2011). Essential to our investigation was a transdisciplinary approach that valued collaboration between various disciplines, professionals, and publics. Then, the resulting collaborative efforts reflected a synthesis of differing perspectives, derived through interactions, which ultimately contextualized and strengthened the work's results.

As a class, we were tasked with developing a research project that would reflect a transdisciplinary approach. Researching local food provided an opportunity to investigate a multifaceted and complex topic as it evolved on the ground in the greater State College community. Our focus on local foods was inspired by the stagnation in recruitment

numbers of a local food cooperative start-up called Friends & Farmers Cooperative. Friends & Farmers began in 2013 as the result of a discussion of like-minded individuals after attending a potluck dinner hosted by the Spring Creek Homesteading organization. Friends & Farmers is a for-profit business focused on reinvesting in the community and growing the local food economy in the State College area. It is legally incorporated and democratically controlled by its members. We initially met with one of the founding members to discuss problems Friends & Farmers faced. From this conversation, we decided that a baseline needed to be established. In essence, we needed to understand how the public defined and constructed the notion of local food.

Local food has become a common and loaded term in public discourse. To use the term "local food" effectively, researchers must elicit the public's understanding and conceptualization of the term. Tregear (2011) stated that research in the field typically focused on the producer-end of the food chain and argued for a reorientation towards the consumer. Exploring and clarifying consumer perceptions, needs, and definitions was essential for moving research in the field forward (Kloppenburger et al., 2000; Tregear, 2011). Democratizing alternative food system's

research contextualizes and strengthens the field, and as a result, increases the capacity of local actors to deal with complexity and uncertainty (Francis et al., 2008; Fernandez, Goodall, Olson, Mendez, 2013).

Demand for local food has mushroomed in recent years, some going so far as to herald it as a new social movement (Macias, 2008; Dunne, Chambers, Giombolini, Schlegel, 2010; Onozaka, Nurse, McFadden, 2010; DeLind, 2011). The push towards local is evident in its increasing share of total U.S. agricultural sales. Local food markets accounted for \$6.1 billion in 2012 from \$551 million in 1997 (Martinez et al., 2010). With increasing consumer demand for locally grown foods, questions arose about what constituted local food and what characterized a local food system.

The term local food lacks a formal definition (La Trobe, 2001; Roininen, Arvola, Lahteenmaki, 2005; Chambers, Lobb, Butler, Harvey, Traill, 2007; Martinez et al., 2010; Onozaka et al., 2010). Often, local is associated with 'organic' and 'sustainable,' assumed to have greatly reduced food miles, or is hazily interchanged with 'regional' foods (Chambers et al., 2007; Dunne et al., 2010; Martinez et al., 2010; Onozaka et al., 2010; DeLind, 2011; Schnell, 2013). The extant literature has used definitions relating to geographic distance, such as a product grown, produced, and sold within an X mile radius from a consumer or political

boundaries (La Trobe, 2001; Roininen et al., 2005; Chambers et al., 2007; Dunne et al., 2010; Martinez et al., 2010; Onozaka et al., 2010). However, no exact range or definition has been generally accepted to categorize a food as local (Dunne et al., 2010; Martinez et al., 2010). Dunne et al. (2010) cite a local food system as a "complex network of relationships between actors including producers, distributors, retailers and consumers grounded in a particular place" (46) working to increase a locality's food security and economic, ecological, and social sustainability. Moreover, there seems to be a definitional divide between what is 'local' food and what is 'regional' food (Chambers et al., 2007; Onozaka et al., 2010; Dunne et al., 2010).

Despite this lack of definition, federal, state, and local governments have increasingly supported local food systems and initiatives, and there is generally a positive response from consumers about purchasing locally grown products (Martinez et al., 2010). A review of the literature indicated consumers were motivated to buy local based on their general perceptions of local foods and personal values. Consumers felt local foods were more authentic, higher quality, fresher, more nutritious, tasty, safe, and socially and environmentally responsible (Lee, 2000; La Trobe, 2001; Weatherell, Tregear, Allinson, 2003; Seyfang, 2004; Roininen et al., 2005; Chambers et al., 2007; Dunne et al., 2010; Martinez et al., 2010; Onozaka et al., 2010; Schnell, 2013). Further, by purchasing locally grown foods, consumers felt they supported local farmers,

the local economy, and the national economy instead of foreign producers (Chambers et al., 2007; Dunne et al., 2010; Martinez et al., 2010). Other motivations to purchase local foods included personal contact with the farmer when purchasing food and building a community (Macias, 2008; Dunne et al., 2010; Onozaka et al., 2010; Schnell, 2013). Empirical studies showed that expanding local food systems could increase economic benefits within the community, but were insufficient to determine whether local food had an impact on food security, environmental concerns, or diet quality (Martinez et al., 2010).

On the other hand, many factors seemed to direct consumers' choice to not purchase local foods. Perceived barriers of purchasing local food included inconvenience compared to purchasing all groceries at one supermarket, increased time allocated to food shopping, lack of availability of products due to seasonality, and the higher costs perceived to be associated with purchasing local (Chambers et al., 2007; Onozaka et al., 2010). Food retailers indicated market conditions, quality standards, and product availability as issues when considering purchasing local (Dunne et al., 2010).

Concerns arose in the original conversation we had with a founding board member that revolved around the determination of an

appropriate price for membership in the Friends & Farmers' Cooperative. Friends & Farmers had already conducted a suitability analysis and learned there were enough consumers in the State College area to support shopping at a food cooperative. The problem they faced was getting enough member-owners to open a brick-and-mortar store. The lowest possible member enrollment for opening a store was estimated to be 1,300 members at a cost of \$300 for a lifetime membership. At the time of discussion, enrollment had plateaued at less than 270¹. Based on this information, this study also incorporated willingness-to-pay metrics to investigate what the greater State College community viewed as an appropriate price for the services attributed to the Friends & Farmers' membership.

Willingness-to-pay is a common tool for evaluating environmental-based issues (Carson & Mitchell, 1993; Pate & Loomis, 1995; Roe, Teisl, Levy, & Russell, 2001). It is generally agreed that analyzing consumers' willingness-to-pay helps to better target and market to consumer groups (Braidert, Hahsler, & Reutterer, 2006). The Van Westendorp Price Sensitivity Model and conjoint analysis are particularly useful in assessing the value of local food. The Van Westendorp Price Sensitivity Model (VWPSM) assumes that decisions are made through an evaluation of value or quality

¹The established membership fee also has multiple payment plans designed to reach a less affluent audience.

versus the price of a product. The model uniquely assumes that consumers of all types can evaluate a product. Further, the VWPSM can evaluate the perception of “cheapness” or low value of a product (Lipovetsky, et al., 2011). Low value is particularly relevant when studying something that may not be valued by the population.

Conjoint analysis has proven to be a good option for determining the aspects of a product to which consumers are most attracted (Breibert et al., 2006). Conjoint analysis is “any decompositional method that estimates the structure of a consumer’s preferences” (Green & Srinivasan, 1990, p. 4). It is completed through the use of indirect surveys (Breibert et al., 2006). Identifying consumers’ ideal costs for purchasing local foods helps providers of local foods (for example, Friends & Farmers’ Cooperative, among others) better adapt to their market. Understanding willingness-to-pay for environmental factors is difficult, but could prove a viable and useful tool to target why consumers increasingly demand local food.

Additionally, understanding consumer behavior and decision-making can be challenging. Perception of local food is critical to understanding related actions, such as the choice to purchase a membership providing access to locally sourced foods. The rationale that drives an individual’s actions is a complex series of relationships between the person and

his or her environment. Many external and internal factors influence individual decision making related to the performance of a specific action spanning institutional, economic, social, and cultural fields (Kollmuss & Agyeay, 2002). Ajzen’s Theory of Planned Behavior illustrates a fundamental need to understand both the intention and the perception of an individual in terms of his or her behavioral control and social norms (Ajzen, 1991; Turaga, 2010). Simply, the easier a person perceives an action to be, within a personal and social context, the more likely the person is to perform the action. Thus, it is critical to unravel an individual’s perception of local food in order to understand their propensity for purchase.

Our research questions, guided by a transdisciplinary approach and established from our contact with a founding Friends & Farmers board member, investigated two topics:

- (1) How does the greater State College community define/perceive/construct local food?
- (2) What does the community perceive as an appropriate price for a membership in a local food cooperative?

State College Farmers' Market. Photo: L. Goldberg



Methods

Developing Research Project, Questions, and Design

To address our research questions, we developed a scientifically responsible and logistically feasible research design. As our research focused on State College-area residents' perceptions of local foods, we determined that public input was essential to addressing our questions. Transdisciplinary research inherently implies that the public is respected and considered an integral part of the research process (Luloff, Bridger, & Theodori, 2013). As such, we adopted an exploratory qualitative research approach.

We decided the use of focus groups would be most feasible for us to collect the data required within a reasonable timeframe. After further brainstorming and discussion on the best approach, it was decided to conduct several concurrent focus groups during a single evening. Based on our limited timeline to complete data collection (one semester), the research team decided to host a single event with up to seven concurrent focus groups (See "The Event" section).

Each team member facilitated one of the seven focus groups. Informed by the literature and

previous experience, we decided the ideal number of attendees for each focus group would be between 8 and 12 people (Bernard, 2013). We recruited fellow graduate students, outside of our HDNRE 574 class, to assist with note-taking during the focus group sessions. We instructed the note-takers to record any body language and/or non-verbal cues that could be of interest while analyzing the qualitative data. Additionally, the focus group sessions were audio-recorded for transcription and analysis purposes. A thorough collective analysis of the seven focus group sessions is presented here (See "Results & Analysis").

To augment the qualitative focus of our study, a quantitative survey instrument was developed. The survey instrument was designed to provide data on sociodemographics (e.g., gender, age) and willingness-to-pay items related to the membership pricing concerns initially expressed by our contacts at Friends & Farmers. Additionally, the survey instrument included several different batteries related to other conceptual questions designed to inform future studies (See Appendix 3). These additional batteries will not be presented here.

This report primarily addresses the original

research questions by drawing on the qualitative responses from the seven focus group discussions and the sociodemographic and willingness-to-pay quantitative findings from the survey instrument. Moving forward, the research team intends to continue their analysis of this qualitative and quantitative dataset, as well as conduct member-checks to validate our interpretation of the focus group attendees' perceptions of local food.

Developing the Data Collection Instruments

The purpose of the focus group sessions was to elicit rich, qualitative data regarding participants' perceptions and thoughts regarding local food. The focus group facilitation guide was developed in a collaborative effort among group members with directed guidance from Dr. Luloff. The guide was developed to be semi-structured and contain open-ended questions appropriate for a facilitated focus group session. The questions were divided into three themes: (1) definitions of local food; (2) experiences with local food; and (3) importance/value of local foods. An initial "ice-breaker" question was included at the beginning of the focus group. The focus group script included open-ended umbrella questions to initiate dialogue among the participants; follow-up and prompting questions were included to stimulate and facilitate conversation as well. The questionnaire was developed to facilitate a 50-minute conversation (See Appendix 2 for the Focus Group Facilitation

Guide).

The quantitative survey design was intended to accomplish three goals: (1) evaluate two compatible willingness-to-pay metrics; (2) collect sociodemographic information; and (3) generate future lines of research related to local food perception and valuation. The Van Westendorp Price Sensitivity Model (VWPSM) and conjoint models were used to evaluate willingness-to-pay. Two willingness-to-pay models were included to measure two different types of evaluation. VWPSM evaluated a range, or elasticity, of price values. The conjoint model analyzed the values placed on individual components that made up a consumer product. Both models were based upon a description of the current Friends & Farmers membership. Sociodemographic factors included in the survey are presented in the "Results" section. See Appendix 3 for a presentation of additional survey elements.

IRB

As this study is classified as human subjects research, Internal Review Board (IRB) approval was required, and received. The IRB study number assigned to this project was #00001325.

Securing Funding

Based on the research design, we recognized the need to secure funding to successfully execute

our project. The Hamer Center for Community Design, housed in the H. Campbell and Eleanor R. Stuckeman School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, pledged \$1,600. Research team members' home departments (Agricultural Economics, Sociology, and Education; Geography; Landscape Architecture; and Recreation, Parks, and Tourism Management) pledged \$600 each.

Securing the Venue

The group decided to hold the event at the State College High School South Building due to availability, location, and size. The cafeteria and three classrooms were reserved for the event. This allowed for seven focus groups, with three in the classrooms and four in the cafeteria.

Advertising the Event

It was critical for validity of the study that the sample population attempt to reflect the State College community. As such, we were careful to implement a balanced advertising strategy. We also tried to reach the largest number of people for the least possible cost. The majority of our recruitment efforts were free or inexpensive. The following methods reflect that approach.

- Posting printed flyers (See Appx. 4)
 - All of campus
 - Downtown areas of State College,

Bellefonte, Boalsburg, and Lemont

- Local places of business (either on community boards or in break rooms) such as Starbucks, Subway, Panera Bread, Café Lemont, and the Gallery in Lemont
- Local grocery stores (either on community boards or in break rooms) including Wegmans, Weis, Walmart, Giant, and Nature's Pantry
- Digital flyers and/or emails with pertinent event information
 - Local churches and places of faith
 - Contacted 55 places of faith; 5 agreed to advertise the event in their bulletin, send out to multiple student organization advisor listservs, hang a flier on a community board, or run a digital version in their lobby
 - Local service organizations such as Rotary Club International, Kiwanis, Knights of Columbus, and YMCA
 - Local community organizations such as State College Delta Organization, State College Woman's Club, Women's Welcome Club of State College, Junior Women's Club of State College, and the Ridge & Valley Outing Club
 - Penn State Outreach list-serv

- WSPU, local public radio station
 - Posting on their online community calendar with on-air announcements
- Online sources/social media
 - Research.psu.edu posting
 - Open forum for Penn State studies seeking volunteers
 - Posting included summary of event, participant criteria, exclusion criteria, and incentive of dinner and dessert for participation
 - Local “Meet-Up” groups
 - State College and Centre County Facebook groups such as West College Heights Neighborhood, Center Region Parks and Rec Women’s Softball, Downtown State College Improvement District, State College Borough, School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture Grads, Happy Valley Moms, Central PA Outdoor Gear Exchange, Penn State Parents
- Faculty/staff and graduate student list-servs
 - List-servs in the departments of Health and Human Services, Human Dimensions of Natural Resources and the Environment, Geography, Rural Sociology, Recreation, Park, and Tourism Management, and Landscape

Architecture

- Collegian advertisement
 - One-time 3” x 3” ad ran in the Monday, November 10th edition in the sports section (see Appendix 4).

As part of our survey instrument, we asked that people identify where or how they heard about our event to help us understand the effectiveness of our advertising strategy. Of 61 responses, two were classified into multiple categories, yielding a total of 63 responses. The responses were:

- 24 (38%) Word-of-mouth
- 16 (25%) Email
- 10 (16%) Flier
- 6 (10%) Social Media
- 4 (6%) Website
- 3 (5%) Collegian Ad

More than three-quarters of our attendees (79%) heard about the event via word-of-mouth, email, or from fliers. Notably, the cost of advertising was disproportionate to effectiveness. Expensive options (Collegian ad) yielded the least attendees, whereas inexpensive options (email and fliers) were very effective. Despite this, we were pleased with the number of people who attended our event. The RSVP and turnout rate exceeded our initial expectations.

RSVP Procedure

An RSVP procedure was established to effectively communicate with individuals who were interested in attending the event. The first step of the RSVP process was to create an email account that was both easy for the potential participants to remember, but also accessible for all team members. To accomplish both goals, the email address whatislocalfood@psu.edu was created as an alias for one of the team members within his Penn State ITS secure server account. This email address was then explicitly stated within the subject recruitment/advertising materials as the primary way for potential attendees to RSVP for the event.

After this email address was secured, a Gmail email account was created under the name HDNRE574@gmail.com. This new Gmail account was set up to be accessible for all of the team members through a shared username and password. Finally, the incoming email for whatislocalfood@psu.edu was routed to the HDNRE574@gmail.com email account.

When potential attendees RSVPed for the event, a team member replied to them, informing them that their place at the event had been secured. The team member also included additional information about the event and a copy of the informed consent form for them to read over. As potential attendees RSVPed for the event, their names were recorded on a spreadsheet to

keep track of how many people had committed to attending the event. RSVPs were accepted until the day of the event. Due to the amount of interest the event received and the logistical limitations of venue (amount of food available and targeted focus group size), a number of last minute RSVPs were informed the event had reached capacity and we would be unable to accommodate them.

Catering the Event

As a way to entice community members to participate in the Local Foods Event and to compensate attendees for their efforts, a free dinner was promised to all who agreed to participate. Initially, the research team debated the merits and potential problems of serving food that was drawn from local sources. After some discussion, the group decided it was important to pursue locally sourced foods so we remained consistent with the topic of our research project. Harrison's Wine Grill and Catering was selected to cater the event because of its breadth of locally sourced foods, the comprehensive nature of their services (they assist with menu development, prepare the food, and deliver it ready-to-eat), and the affordable pricing options. However, we did not promote the fact Harrison's menu was locally sourced as that might have introduced bias into our study.

Executing the Event

The event began at 5:30 p.m. at the State College High School cafeteria and concluded around 7:30 p.m.. Participants began arriving around 5:15 p.m., were greeted, signed a consent form, and were randomly assigned to a focus group by the color sticker on their nametag. Each of the seven focus groups had between 8 and 11 participants. After signing the consent form and being assigned to a focus group, participants chatted and waited for dinner to be served. Dinner was served at 5:45 p.m. and continued until 6:15 p.m..

The team announced to the participants how the focus groups would be divided and where each colored group would be located. Three groups were located in the classrooms (Purple, Orange, Blue) and four groups (Yellow, Pink, Green, and Red) were located at different corners of the cafeteria. The focus groups began at approximately 6:25 p.m.. Facilitators welcomed the participants, reiterated the presence of the recording device, and began the facilitated focus group. Note takers took detailed notes during the focus groups and a combination of iPhones (using the Voice Memo application) and Apple computers (using the Garage Band application) were used to record the event. Facilitators were given the option of skipping some questions if they were answered via previous questions. During the last ten minutes of the focus group period, cookies were delivered to each of the groups. After about 50 minutes, facilitators

accepted final comments and introduced the survey. Surveys were handed out to each participant and were labeled with the participant number and color of the group. During the survey, participants asked facilitators questions when there was confusion.

Data Analysis

Qualitative

Because our research was exploratory in nature, we used an inductive approach to elicit broad themes from the qualitative data applying an open-coding technique. This in vivo technique derived meaning directly from the words and phrases used by attendees during focus group discussions. Furthermore, the descriptive analysis of the qualitative data was a collective, iterative process. As previously mentioned, the focus groups were digitally recorded while a dedicated note-taker kept notes for each group throughout the discussions. The digital recordings were sent to transcribe.com for transcription. The hand-taken notes were scanned and uploaded in a shared project folder. After reading through notes taken at all of the focus group sessions, the team developed common themes that would be utilized in the coding process. Themes were developed based on recurring concepts that emerged throughout focus group transcriptions.

After initial themes were determined, a member of the team coded the transcription

of one randomly chosen focus group using QSR International's NVivo 10 data analysis software. NVivo software was chosen as an effective way to code content and then support findings quantifiably (Bazeley, 2007). To initially test the validity of our themes, we decided to comprehensively analyze one focus group for a preliminary report. We randomly chose the "Red" focus group for analysis using a random number generator. To ensure reliability, a second researcher coded the transcription (Creswell, 2008). The results from this focus group session served as a pilot study and lessons learned from it were used to help guide analysis of the entire data set.

Noting inconsistencies in how the two team members coded the "red group" data, we decided to revise the codebook with more explicit details on how to enter the data into the NVivo software. Following the trial-coding, four team members volunteered to code all seven transcripts using the revised codebook. All codes were entered under seven "nodes," including Accessibility, Boosters, Barriers, Community, Definitions, Tradition, and Values. Our agreement between coders was 95%². We then reconvened as the full team to decide on the most pertinent themes to our original research questions. We were each randomly assigned, controlling for gender and department, to read

two other group members' codes. This ensured an individual would read one female's and one male's codes as well as the codes of at least one person outside his/her own department. This step elicited: (1) common definitional components and (2) prominent boosters and barriers, reflected in representative quotes. Findings can be found in "Results" section.

Quantitative

A total of 65 surveys were collected from participants at the event. To enter these surveys into a centralized database, we utilized IBM's Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 22. An SPSS database was created that included 119 variables, which were coded as either categorical or interval data. A codebook was also created to guard against any confusion about how to analyze the data in the future. Additionally, open-ended responses were coded according to major themes.

As described in the survey design section, the survey instrument included many different batteries of items that related to various conceptual questions of the study. Willingness-to-pay variables were collected to address research question #2. Sociodemographic variables were collected to understand sample composition. For the purposes of this report,

²"Percentage agreement is the percentage of the source's content where the coders agree on whether the content may be coded at the node" (<http://help-nv10.qsrinternational.com>).

only the results from the following batteries are comprehensively examined:

- The willingness-to-pay batteries:
 - The Conjoint model
 - The Price Sensitivity Model
- Sociodemographic variables:
 - Gender
 - Age
 - Employment
 - Education
 - Political affiliation
 - Household composition
 - Income
 - Level of involvement with local food groups
 - Length of time they have lived within the current neighborhood

Percentages were the primary analyses for the sociodemographic variables. The willingness-to-pay findings have been translated into graphs and pie charts. The sociodemographic variables are presented in tables as the aggregated response for all attendees.

Focus group study. Photo: Andy Woodruff



Results & Analysis

Sample Description

A total of 65 focus group participants at the public event completed the survey instrument. Included at the end of the survey instrument were a number of sociodemographic items. These items were used to better understand the sample population. For this report, the sociodemographic data for the entire sample (all seven focus groups) will be presented.

The average age for the participants was 40 years of age (Table 1). The youngest participant was 21 and the oldest participant was 86. The overall sample was predominantly female (Table 2). Females represented 72% of the study sample and males 28%. The two most prominent

employment statuses represented were those employed full-time (44%) and those identified as students (22%). Other respondents indicated they were employed part-time (14%) or retired (16%). Only 3% of respondents were non-employed and 2% were homemakers (Table 3).

We also asked about household income level (Table 4). About one in four (24%) of the respondents said his/her household income was between \$50,000 and \$74,999. About one in six (17%) of the respondents indicated his/her income was less than \$15,000. Another 17% said their household income was between \$100,000 and \$149,999. The mix of students and professionals that comprised the study sample

Table 1: Age

What is your age?	Red Group			Total Sample		
	Mean	Median	Range	Mean	Median	Range
	42.4	39.0	49.0	40.1	32.5	65.0

Table 2: Gender

What is your gender?	Red Group		Total Sample	
	% Male	% Female	% Male	% Female
	37.5	62.5	28.1	71.9

explained the diversity in household income levels.

Respondents reported a high level of educational achievement (Table 5). The vast majority replied the highest level of education they had completed was either “completed degree” (48%) or “graduate or professional school” (41%). In addition, 8% of respondents said they had

completed some college or technical school. Less than 4% of respondents said their highest level of education was completed high school or less. This high level of educational achievement is explained by the presence of Penn State within Sample Description

We also asked about political identity (Table 6). The vast majority of respondents identified

Table 3: Employment Status

What is your current employment status? (Please check one)		
	<i>Red Group</i>	<i>Total Sample</i>
% full-time	50.0	43.8
% part-time	0.0	14.1
% retired	25.0	15.6
% non-employed	0.0	3.1
% student	25.0	21.9
% homemaker	0.0	1.6

Table 4: Income Level

What is your household income level? (Please check one)		
	<i>Red Group</i>	<i>Total Sample</i>
% Less than \$15,000	25.0	16.9
% \$15,000 to \$24,999	0.0	10.2
% \$25,000 to \$34,999	12.5	15.3
% \$35,000 to \$49,999	0.0	6.8
% \$50,000 to \$74,999	37.5	23.7
% \$75,000 to \$99,999	12.5	6.8
% \$100,000 to \$149,999	0.0	16.9
% \$150,000 or more	12.5	3.4

themselves as either liberal (41%) or moderately liberal (32%). Sixteen percent of respondents classified themselves as moderate. Only 8% of the sample identified themselves as moderately conservative and 3% as conservative.

The length of time respondents had lived in their current neighborhood and the length of time they intended to stay in their current neighborhood was also addressed (Table 7). This question was important for better understanding the transient nature of State

College residents and its influence on local food consumption/support. The average number of years all respondents had lived within their current neighborhoods was eight. However, outliers skewed this average (i.e., range=42). Thus, the median of 1.5 years would be a more responsible statistic to consider because it is not as influenced by outliers.

The respondents were also asked how long they planned on living in their current neighborhood.

Table 5: Education Level

What is the highest level of education you have completed? (Please check one)		
	<i>Red Group</i>	<i>Total Sample</i>
% None	0.0	0.0
% Grade school	0.0	1.6
% Some high school	0.0	0.0
% Completed high school or GED	0.0	1.6
% Some college or technical school	0.0	7.8
% Completed degree	50.0	48.4
% Graduate or professional school	50.0	40.6

Table 6: Political Identity

How do you describe yourself politically? (Please check one)		
	<i>Red Group</i>	<i>Total Sample</i>
% liberal	50.0	41.3
% moderately liberal	37.5	31.7
% moderate	0.0	15.9
% moderate conservative	12.5	7.9
% conservative	0.0	3.2

Nearly one-third (31%) indicated they planned on staying indefinitely. Of those who were not planning to stay indefinitely, the mean number of years for the entire sample was four (and the median was two). These statistics tended to reinforce the conception that, for those not planning to live in State College indefinitely, the population was rather transient (i.e., residents only plan on living in State College for a few years).

We also asked about household composition (Table 8). The mean number of adults, including the respondent, living in their household was 2.6, with a median of two. Respondents were asked how many members of their household were under the age of 18. Among the aggregate sample, the mean was 0.3 and the median was zero (with a range of 3). These findings indicated the sample was primarily composed of adults who did not have anyone under 18 years old living in their household. In fact, only 10 respondents (out of 65) said that they had a member of their household who was under the age of 18.

Finally, a number of measures were asked about respondents' involvement with local food-related organizations (Table 9). These organizations included community supported agriculture groups (CSA), food or grocery co-ops, and community gardens. The vast majority of respondents were not members of these types of organizations. For example, only 19% of respondents indicated they were a member of a CSA. Nearly 10% said they were a member of a food or grocery co-op. And, only 5% of respondents said they were a member of a community garden.

Based on the data, this sample can be described as predominantly female, middle-aged, well-educated, and liberal in their political views. Variation existed within the sample in terms of employment status and annual income levels. This variation reflected the presence of students, working professionals, and retirees. Residency within respondents' current neighborhoods could be described as temporary and transient. Respondents primarily lived in households with two adults, and few lived with individuals

Table 7: Residence in Neighborhood

	<i>Red Group</i>			<i>Total Sample</i>		
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>Range</i>
How long have you lived in your current neighborhood?	9.0	4.3	29.8	7.9	1.5	42.0
How long do you plan on living in your current neighborhood?	3.3	4.0	5.5	4.3	2.0	39.9

under the age of 18. Finally, though some respondents were involved in local food-related organizations, the majority was not.

Qualitative Results

A primary focus of this study was to understand how the greater State College community defined, perceived, and constructed local food (research question #1). From the focus group dialogues, a number of qualitative findings arose related to how attendees defined local foods. Additionally, many attendees gave responses related to boosters and barriers that either

increased or decreased their ability (or the ability of others) to participate in local foods. The following sections convey our qualitative findings related to the first research question.

Defining Local Food

Geographic Proximity

When asked to define local foods, the focus group sessions commonly began with a discussion related to geography. Yet, none of the focus groups decided on a definitive spatial delineation in which to frame local foods. Frequently, miles would be referenced to explain

Table 8: Household Composition

	<i>Red Group</i>			<i>Total Sample</i>		
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>Range</i>
Currently, how many people, including yourself, live in your household?	2.5	2.0	4.0	2.4	2.0	4.0
How many members of your household are under the age of 18?	0.4	0.0	2.0	0.3	0.0	3.0

Table 9: Membership in Local Food Related Organizations

Are you currently a member of any of the following organizations? (Please check all that apply)	<i>Red Group</i>		<i>Total Sample</i>	
	<i>% Yes</i>	<i>% No</i>	<i>% Yes</i>	<i>% No</i>
Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)	37.5	62.5	18.5	81.5
Food or Grocery Co-Operative	0.0	100.0	9.2	90.8
Community Garden	0.0	100.0	4.6	95.4
Other	0.0	100.0	3.1	96.9

what it means to have a food be considered local. This is highlighted by the following exchange among three attendees in the Pink focus group:

Woman 1: I would say 100 miles.

Woman 2: I would say like 20 or 50 miles.

Woman 3: I would say like 200 miles.

Clearly, different people brought different opinions to the table. Interestingly, attendees did not perceive distance in a consistent manner. Many deviated from a definitive mileage and instead suggested time as the unit of measure. A member of the Green focus group stated:

Generally, for me, ideally local would be food grown less than an hour away.

Other people would offer political boundaries such as Centre County, Pennsylvania, or the Pennsylvania/New York area. And on a few occasions, focus group attendees said within the watershed, usually without designating the watershed level (i.e., micro: Spring Creek or macro: Chesapeake Bay).

A statement made by a member of the Purple focus group summarized the ambiguous consensus achieved within most focus groups:

It seems like distance has something to do with it... I don't know whether it's 50 miles, or 100 miles, or 10 miles; but there's a

distance factor somewhere.

The disagreement demonstrates the lack of a definitive and commonly held geographic definition of local foods. However, the consistency across focus groups to begin their discussion by considering the geographic component of local foods suggested it is an essential foundation of most definitions.

Interestingly, multiple attendees, typically with group agreement, articulated the notion that local foods entailed more than a simple issue of geographic distance. One man, in the Purple focus group, concisely expressed this idea:

I think there's more [to local foods] than just the distance thing.

The discussions budding from its geographic foundation branched out to several topics that revealed community as the second common component to the definition of local foods.

Community

All seven focus groups wrestled with the idea of community in relation to their understanding of local foods. For example, one focus group attendee explained:

[M]aybe it is not even always tied to geography, but tied to how they serve their customers or where their sense of community comes from. Something like that.

This quote demonstrated the focus group attendees moved beyond simple proximity and began to articulate sense of community. A man in the Orange group echoed this sentiment when he agreed with two other members of his group, saying:

I completely agree, as well. I don't feel that I can just think of local foods defined as being within a certain radius... And then disentangle that from the community aspect ... I don't know, something in here, not vocalizing it well.

As the discussions across focus groups continued, conversations reached new depths. The attendees investigated complex, hard-to-articulate elements of local foods such as local economic prosperity, social interaction, and personal values. These elements were more easily understood when the boosters and barriers that encouraged or discouraged participation in local food were considered.

Boosters

Boosters are defined in this report as those things that encouraged participation in local foods. Throughout the course of the focus group dialogues, many attendees directly or indirectly stated reasons why they purchased local foods. This section will identify the most salient boosters that encouraged participation in local foods.

Supporting Local Businesses

The first booster focus group attendees identified was related to supporting local businesses. Specifically, they felt that purchasing their food locally helped keep money within their local community. Instead of spending their money at large corporations, such as Walmart or Wegmans, they would rather have it go towards a local farmer, who would then spend that money again within their local community. This way, the money didn't leave the area; it stayed within the local economy:

I think of it more of the money's staying within our community and going to people that need it, and not the company.

Buying locally was also associated with supporting the livelihood of others. Many focus group attendees said they personally knew the individuals involved in producing their food. Attendees said they developed relationships with the farmers and/or knew their relatives to be members of the community. By purchasing locally, they ensured their money was going to go directly to those individuals that they cared about:

What I really focus on is the livelihoods that are attached to these things. I mentioned this before, but I think it's just so easy to forget about all of the hands that go into this in order to put a plate of food in front of us. That's why I say I will pay more because I think that as a human being, it's my

responsibility to be more just and to be more fair to the hands that are preparing the food.

The booster of supporting local businesses had two facets related to how the focus group attendees wanted to spend their money. They wanted to ensure their money stayed within the local area (to further stimulate the local economy), as well as ensure their money was directed towards furthering the livelihood of people they knew and cared about (such as farmers and their families). Both dimensions represented the ethical bonds focus group attendees had with their community and local food producers.

Interpersonal Relationships

Focus group attendees frequently mentioned participating in local foods was a way to grow their social network. The first booster-related interpersonal relationship was developing friendships. By going to a farmers' market or by participating in a community-supported agriculture (CSA) program, focus group attendees were able to develop common ground with people with similar interests. In these environments, they were able to have consistently meaningful interactions with likeminded people. Along the same lines, many attendees expressed gratitude to the team for hosting the public event (where the focus groups were held). The public event provided a forum for people who were passionate about local food to meet and get to know each other. Therefore, this social dimension of local foods was not just

present within the focus group discussions, but also prevalent in the way that attendees reflected on the public event itself:

My friends and I view the fact that we have localization of our food system as manifested through farmers' markets. We find that [sic] a great gathering place and a place to socialize. So we find it as a big cultural asset in addition to it being nutritious. Also social, getting to know the people around you. Sort of like it has increased our bond. It's given us a place to go.

Getting to know the farmer who produced their food was identified as another booster related to interpersonal relationships. For many of the focus group attendees, it was important for them to know the producer of their food. Having a relationship with the farmer of their food allowed some of the attendees to feel more comfortable about the food they consume. Many focus group attendees also mentioned it was helpful to know their farmer because the farmers could teach them new skills and techniques about how to better grow their own food:

I'd agree with you about [sic] that there's a relationship in local food that you are closer to the people that produce the food, and they become people, humans.

I'm in agreement in terms of local producers and for me it's just really important to know where I'm getting my food from to build that

relationship. So, I love the farmers' markets here.

Focus group attendees made it known that there was a strong social dimension to participating in local food. By purchasing local food, new social opportunities arose to meet other likeminded individuals, as well as the opportunity to meet the farmers responsible for producing their food. These social elements were presented by focus group attendees as reasons why they continued to participate in local foods.

Personal Values

Focus group attendees also mentioned a number of boosters related to personal beliefs/values. The first belief/value frequently identified was that local food tastes better, fresher, and healthier. A number of attendees spoke about how non-local food was picked before optimum ripeness, packaged with preservatives, and shipped across the country, and as a result, was not going to taste as good or be as healthy as locally produced food. With local food, the produce could be picked at optimum ripeness, quickly transferred to market, and consumed soon after it was harvested:

I don't know why this is, but when I think of local foods, I think of more fresh, healthier foods, with fewer ingredients.

For me, it is important if I could get it because of the [sic] health. I would be eating way better if I was eating fresh things

rather than canned everything and boxed everything.

Another booster related to personal values was the belief that purchasing local food reduced negative environmental impacts. Transporting non-local food thousands of miles was identified as a main source of environmental impact. The concept of “food miles” resonated with many attendees. Food miles were defined as the number of miles a food had to travel to go from where it was produced to where it would be sold/consumed. Many attendees said purchasing their food from local producers reduced the number of food miles their food had to travel.

I think it's important to support just the local economy, but in the greater scheme of things, the environmental impact of stuff that travels 7,000 miles to get here versus stuff that the guy drove down the street in a pick-up truck, just put up a gazebo and sells. It's vastly different. The water and petroleum, and all of that that is expended in the process of getting a banana here versus apples from Way Fruit Farm [a local farm]. I think that's really important.

The personal beliefs/values indicating local food tasted better and purchasing locally reduced environmental impact were reasons why many focus group attendees continued to participate in the local food movement. These values reflected both personal and societal benefits. On a personal level, eating local food was perceived

to taste better and be healthier. On a societal level, local food reduced the number of food miles a product travelled.

Barriers

Here, barriers were defined as anything inhibiting or discouraging participation in local foods. Understanding what some of these barriers were would be particularly helpful to Friends & Farmers (and other related groups) in their initiatives to grow the presence of local foods within the State College area. The following section details the most salient barriers identified by the focus group attendees.

Cost/Expense

Focus group attendees identified the cost of purchasing local foods as the primary barrier inhibiting widespread participation in local foods. Attendees said, by and large, it was cheaper to purchase non-local foods produced by large agribusinesses and transported thousands of miles to supermarkets. This was because large-scale farming operations could afford a smaller profit margin while offering a price often below that of a smaller-scale local farm. Due to the latter's premium pricing, it was more difficult for consumers on tight budgets to purchase local foods. As a result, it was not surprising to find that local foods were typically purchased by those with expendable income:

When I talk to other people about why they don't or they do eat locally, the reason is

expense, where people find a lot of local foods are more expensive than mass-produced foods from outside.

But that's one of the problems with local food; it's what you would call a boutique market. Mentioning the cost of the food; it's a market for people who do have disposable income, who can support a lifestyle.

The expense of purchasing local foods was identified as a particularly important barrier to participating in local foods within the State College area. A large portion of this area's population consists of Penn State students. Focus group attendees said students generally did not have the money to pay the extra price for locally grown food. Because these students made up a significant percentage of the total area population, not having their buy-in for purchasing local food was a major obstacle to growing the importance of local food within the State College area:

What I see is a lot of college students and grad students and so their monetary constraints are restricting choices, so you have to buy what's cheapest and convenient.

Seasonality

Adhering to a local food diet greatly restricted the types of food a person consumed. Growing seasons also limited the types of foods a person could eat. Building on this, focus group attendees identified seasonality as a barrier

for many people to participate in local foods. Many focus group members chronicled their struggles with trying to stay local in their food purchasing, but also wanting to have certain types of food not currently in season (such as fruit in the winter or asparagus in the fall). Focus group attendees said it was much easier to not pay attention to seasonality (and to purchase non-local food) than it was to stifle one's own desire for out-of-season food:

Local foods tend to be a supplement to getting other things because you can't get everything or you can't get it at the right time. It might not be the day in which you need or the season in which you want to eat something. I think our taste in seasons have... [sic] We've, as you've said, food available from all over the world anytime you want it. We've gotten used to that and that's not the way it used to be.

So, you can go into the supermarket in January, you'll find strawberries, which are grown somewhere not locally, obviously. The question is, is the consumer really willing to [only purchase food when it is locally available], if you really want to buy the majority of your food locally, then you begin to be very aware of the season availability of foods. Are you willing to do that?

Focus group attendees conceded that even though they were self-identified supporters of the local food movement, they were not always

willing to adhere to in-season eating. They also acknowledged that seasonality would be an even more significant barrier for other, less committed local food consumers to overcome. Modern conveniences allowed people to expect the opportunity to purchase any type of produce any time of year. For everyday consumers to sacrifice this luxury, and instead purchase only local in-season foods, was very difficult to imagine.

Transient Population

The transient nature of the State College population was also mentioned as a barrier to the growth of the local food movement. Many focus group members recognized that Penn State students and young faculty/staff did not intend to stay in the area for an extended period of time. In the case of students, nearly all leave the area after graduation. Focus group attendees stated the vast majority of students did not view the State College area as home. Due to this lack of identification with State College, focus group attendees said students did not have as much inherent stake in supporting local businesses and, by extension, local food:

I think that's a big thing, because our population as a city, or a town, is pretty much 50 percent people who are between the age of 18 and 22. For the most part, they're not from here and they don't really care about our local economy.

Focus group attendees also stated students had

different values and priorities than permanent residents. They indicated students were generally not as concerned with issues related to eating locally sourced food. Further, attendees said college students did not prioritize the time to purchase and cook local produce. Instead, college students often preferred to eat out at cheaper restaurants that did not source their food locally. These different lifestyles and value-systems were recognized as a source of disconnect between students and permanent residents:

But the average person does not...some 22-year-old does not think, "Let me think fair trade, and the tomatoes in the winter..." That's not normal. I hope everyone knows that, because it should be said. We are not the average person.

We have a very transient population that's not cooking for themselves. We have a lot of college kids who are eating out. We have a lot of grad students who don't have time to cook who are eating out.

The transient nature of the State College population was an interesting, site-specific barrier the focus group attendees identified. Getting buy-in from Penn State students to support local foods was reported to be a key obstacle to the growth of the local food movement in State College. Although, as a few focus group attendees mentioned, if purchasing local foods was made more convenient for

students (i.e., being able to purchase local food in on-campus convenience stores, having a downtown food cooperative, and/or having a CSA deliver their shares on or close to campus), they might be more willing to participate.

Both Boosters and Barriers

Focus group attendees identified two themes that were both boosters and barriers to participating in local foods. The first was related to the convenience and ease (or lack thereof) of purchasing local foods. The second related to the eclectic (and often confounding) mix of food consumers received when they were dependent on what was in-season and what the farm was producing. The following sections discuss both of these themes and present the related boosters and barriers associated with them.

Convenience

Convenience was identified as both a booster and a barrier to participating in local foods. Many focus group attendees spoke about how convenient it was to both source and purchase local food within the State College area. Because the State College area is surrounded by agricultural land on all sides, many local farmers who produced high quality local food were located nearby. Additionally, focus group members applauded the number of different venues where people could purchase locally grown foods. These venues included multiple farmers' markets, community supported agriculture programs, roadside food stands, and

farms where they could directly buy food:

Being in rural Pennsylvania, you're easily at the point of buying local. There's a lot of food out there available to buy locally if you go to a farmers' market or we're part of a CSA. I found there was quite a bit of information out there for people that just do a little bit of reading.

A lack of convenience was also identified as a major barrier for people to participate in local foods. A number of focus group attendees stated that a trip to the farmers' market or CSA did not provide the variety of food required to adequately prepare one week's worth of meals. This necessitated additional trips to other stores to purchase the rest of their food. Focus group attendees mentioned the need to go to multiple venues to purchase local produce, dairy, meats, and grains was a hassle that prevented them from purchasing local foods. Instead, many attendees said it was easier to go to a supermarket where they could buy a wide array of different types of food. However, they also mentioned these supermarkets did not consistently provide locally sourced foods for consumers to purchase:

For me, the way my lifestyle is, I don't want to have to go to five different places to get everything I need for the week. I want to go to one place, buy it, and come out, and come home, period, done. That's what I want to do. You can't really do that if you go to

the farmers' market, I don't find. There's no consistency of [sic] what you're going to find.

Focus group attendees also mentioned the inconvenient timing of farmers' markets or CSA drop-offs. They indicated farmers' markets were often held on weekdays during business hours. This made it difficult for professionals to purchase their local food at those markets. Again, it was much more convenient to go to a supermarket open late in the evening or 24 hours a day to purchase their food. For many attendees, the incongruous timing of farmers' markets was enough of a barrier to keep them from consistently purchasing local food.

Time is a big one as well. I'm working most of the day and farmers' market is open during the day and Wegmans is open twenty-four hours. So 8:00 or 9:00 p.m. I can go to Wegmans. I can't do that at the farmers' market.

An Eclectic Mix of Food

Purchasing locally sourced foods required a commitment to consume in-season foods. This also meant farmers only brought to market (and fill CSA shares with) in-season foods ripe for harvesting. Being so reliant on what the farm was producing often yielded an odd assortment of foods that were passed on to local food consumers. This was particularly the case for CSA members. Also, if a farm is only producing a few types of food, this could lead to lack of culinary diversity. For example, one of the focus

group attendees described how for six weeks he received nothing but turnips and kohlrabi in his CSA share. Many of the focus group members commented on these types of situations, but had two different ways that they reacted to them.

Some members said receiving an eclectic mix of foods encouraged creativity in their meal planning. By being forced to cook with a less familiar (and/or less diverse) assortment of food, they were challenged to try new recipes and expand their knowledge about how to cook unfamiliar food. For many of these attendees, this was a fun and creative process. In this sense, having to cook with unfamiliar foods was viewed as a booster that encouraged participation in local foods:

As far as the CSA's go, I really enjoy the whole process of just being given a bunch of stuff that I wouldn't normally have anything to do with and being like well, you have to use this. I don't want to waste it.

Other focus group members were much less enthusiastic about having to cook with an eclectic (or limited) mix of foods. These focus group members stated they often did not know what to do with the food, and as a result, it would spoil before they could decide how to integrate it into a recipe. This type of experience led a few attendees to say they decided to not renew their CSA share in future years:

It was kind of difficult integrating some of

the variety that comes with the CSA in meals that we would all eat together. Unfortunately, a lot of that did go to waste for me. We didn't renew and I just made efforts to go to farmers' markets and pick what I know, that everybody would like.

Implications

These findings will be of practical interest to Friends & Farmers as they continue their efforts to establish a food cooperative in State College. By better understanding the elements that encouraged and discouraged participation in local foods, Friends & Farmers (and other likeminded groups) will be better able to target their messaging and communicate to a broader audience. With this knowledge, Friends & Farmers can work to maximize the boosters that encouraged participation in local foods, and minimize the barriers that discouraged participation.

Willingness-to-Pay Results

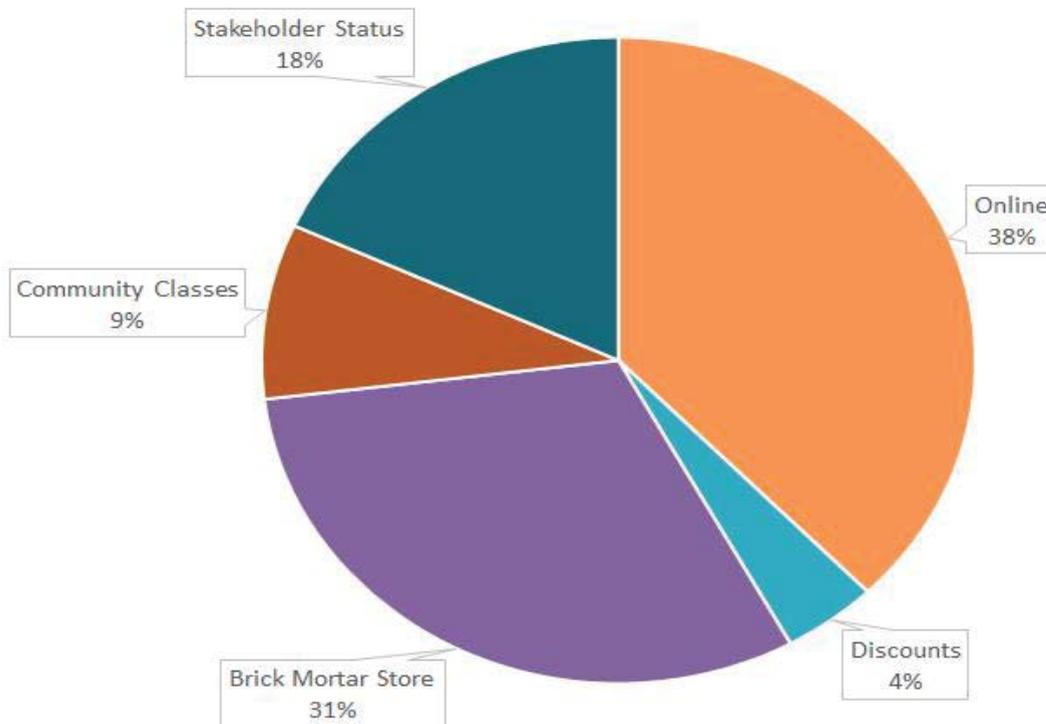
Understanding State College area residents' willingness to pay for membership in a food cooperative was another primary interest of this study. Research question #2 asked what the community perceives as an appropriate price for membership to a local food cooperative. The results of this question are presented below and will be of considerable interest to the Friends & Farmers Cooperative.

Conjoint Analysis

The conjoint analysis revealed a significance preference among respondents to pay for access to locally sourced food (Figure 1). The membership's value was primarily derived from access to an online store (38%) and access to a brick-and-mortar store (31%). The high percent of value placed on these items suggested availability of locally sourced food was a priority over other associated community, financial, or educational benefits.

Respondents indicated a slight interest (18%) in becoming stakeholders with decision-making power within the co-op. Notably this item contained elements of community engagement through the ability to inform co-op improvement or community improvement projects and a potential to earn dividends from the co-op profits. The duality between self-gain and altruistic community improvement muddled which values respondents were most willing to pay for.

Figure 1: The Conjoint Model

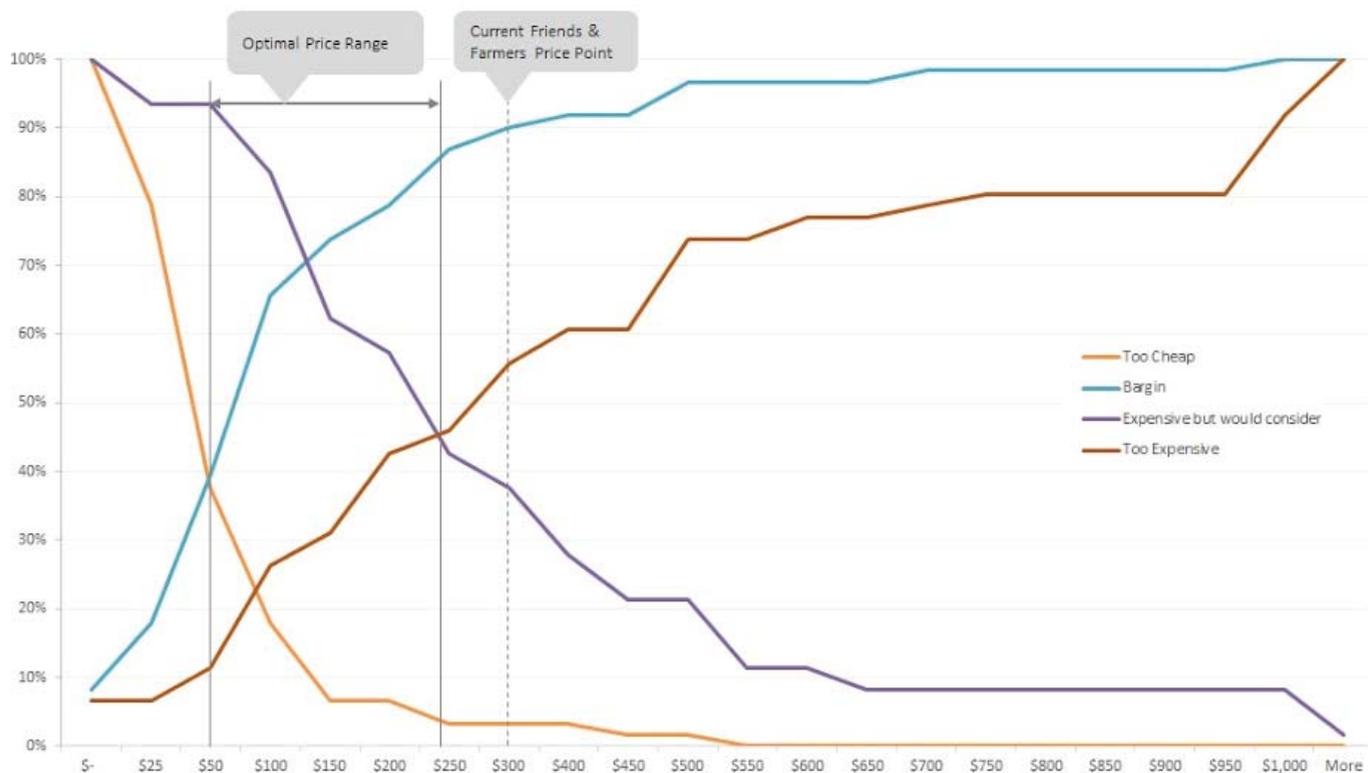


Fringe benefits, including discounts to local restaurants and access to community classes or events, were not highly valued at 4% and 9%, respectively. However, these benefits were not well defined in the existing Friends & Farmers membership program. Low interest may reflect the lack of clarity as to what the tangible benefit was from either item.

Price Point Sensitively Model

The Price Point Sensitivity Model illustrated wide variation in how people monetarily valued local food (Figure 2). The model illustrated the optimal price range for a locally sourced grocery store membership was between approximately \$75 and \$250. In addition, there was wide variability within the estimated range suggesting disagreement among the respondents about the

Figure 2: The Price Sensitivity Model



value of membership (Table 10). For example, the outer boundaries of the price range lacked strong defining points. On the high end, forty-five percent (45%) of respondents believed the price was too expensive at \$250, but fifty-five percent (55%) considered purchasing a membership at that price. On the low end, fifty percent (50%) of respondents believe \$75 was too cheap, whereas fifty percent (50%) believed that price to be a bargain. These points supported the notion that the optimal price range is both wide and poorly defined.

limited our ability to speculate on causality, the evidence presented suggested that barriers lowered our sample’s willingness to pay for the existing Friends & Farmers membership at the specified price point.

Despite the disagreement mentioned above, a significant percentage of the respondents believed the current Friends & Farmers price point was too high/expensive (Figure 2). The optimal price point was approximately \$125, well below the price point (\$300) of the existing Friends & Farmers membership. Further, a large percentage of respondents (60%) believed \$300 was too expensive. While the scope of the study

Table 10: Descriptive Statistics of Price Point Sensitivity Measures

	Too cheap	Bargain	Expensive, but would consider	Too expensive
Mean	\$45	\$134	\$289	\$785
Standard Deviation	\$62	\$139	\$293	\$1,621
Range	\$350	\$700	\$1,470	\$9,965

Conclusions

This report detailed our research related to the perceptions State College-area residents had about local food. We approached this research using a transdisciplinary framework that encouraged contributions from team members across various disciplines as well as purposeful engagement with the public. From the seven focus group discussions held at our public event, a number of key findings arose related to how participants defined local foods. Boosters and barriers were also identified that either encouraged or discouraged participation in local foods. Finally, through the use of a survey instrument, we were able to understand how willing participants were to pay for a lifetime membership to a local food cooperative. The findings conveyed within this report, and summarized below, are of great value to members of the public and community groups who are interested in growing the presence of local foods in the State College area.

A total of 65 State College area residents participated in our focus group sessions. Survey demographic data indicated the sample was best typified as female, middle-aged, well-educated, and liberal. Students, working professionals, and retirees were represented within the sample and contributed to the variation in employment status, annual income level, and length of

residency within the State College area. The survey indicated the majority of attendees were not involved in local food-related organizations. However, through the course of the focus group dialogues, it was clear nearly all of the attendees were involved in purchasing, producing, or championing local foods in the State College area.

Focus group attendees tended to initially gravitate towards a geographic definition of local food. Many attendees considered a food to be local if it had traveled less than “x-amount” of miles from where it was produced to where it was sold. Others considered a similar geographic conception of local foods based on hours traveled, political boundaries (by state or region), or watersheds (both micro and macro). Focus group attendees tended to move beyond these geographic components and considered the social and communal dimensions of local food. For many focus group attendees, buying local was a way for them to support their local economy and develop friendships with farmers and other local food enthusiasts. Our data indicated their definition included a strong intersection between local foods and community.

Through the focus group dialogues, attendees also identified a variety of boosters and barriers

that encouraged or discouraged participation in local foods. These boosters and barriers emerged during the coding of the transcriptions, and revealed a number of critical findings related to reasons why State College area residents did or did not participate in local foods. The primary boosters were related to a desire to support local businesses, develop interpersonal relationships with likeminded individuals, reduce environmental impacts, and the belief that local food tasted better, fresher, and healthier. Major barriers were the expense of purchasing local food, the impact of seasonality on what (and when) a food can be produced/ consumed locally, and the presence of a transient population (mainly students) who did not stay in the State College area for extended periods of time. The convenience of purchasing local food as well as the eclectic mix of food provided by local producers were identified as both boosters and barriers to participating in local food.

A final goal of our study was to understand what State College area residents would be willing to pay for a membership in a local food cooperative. Two forms of economic analysis were utilized to address this question. The conjoint analysis revealed respondents cared more about access and availability of local foods than they did about other benefits of a co-op membership. Together, access to an online store and a brick and mortar store accounted for nearly 70% of the value respondents placed on a co-op membership. The Van Westendorp Price Sensitivity Model suggested disagreement about

the price value of local food and that significant barriers existed that discourage purchasing a membership to a food cooperative. The price point sensitivity model revealed focus group attendees (who were self-reported supporters of local foods) considered the Friends & Farmers' membership price (\$300) to be too expensive. The model indicated the optimal price point was approximately \$125, but ranged from \$75 to \$250. This level of variation suggested disagreement among respondents about how much a co-op membership was worth. Additionally, this variation could be accounted for by different values individuals placed on local foods, sociodemographic means, as well as the multi-dimensionality of how people define local foods. Regardless, this information should be useful to Friends & Farmers as they move forward in their marketing and member-recruitment initiatives.

This report provides insight into how State College-area residents defined, perceived, and constructed local foods. It also strove to understand what community members perceived to be an appropriate price for a membership at a local food cooperative. Its findings have both practical and theoretical value. Through presentations to community members and community groups, we hope these findings will contribute to shaping the future of the local food movement in the State College area. Through peer-reviewed manuscripts submitted to scholarly journals, we intend to contribute to the scholarly dialogue about the

value of local foods within communities.

Local food is a complex phenomenon. We are thankful to the focus group attendees who lent their voices to this study. Their voices rang out clearly that local food was about more than just miles; it included elements of community and meaningful interaction among individuals. Though there were many boosters that encouraged participation in local foods, many

barriers also stood in the way. The first step in overcoming a barrier is to acknowledge that it exists. This study will help interested individuals and community groups reduce these barriers and encourage greater widespread participation in local foods amongst residents of the State College area. True to the transdisciplinary spirit of the study, we believe our findings will be of practical use to those working to further the presence of local foods within communities.

State College Farmers' Market. Photo: L. Goldberg



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Appendices

Appendix 1: Research Team Members

Lauren Abbott:

Lauren Abbot is a Ph.D. student in the Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Management. She holds a Master of Science degree from Penn State and a Bachelor of Science degree from Colorado State University. Her research interests include soundscapes in natural areas, outdoor recreation behavior, and natural resource management.

Austin Barrett:

Austin Barrett is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Management as well as the Human Dimensions of Natural Resources and the Environment program. He holds a Master of Science degree from Penn State and a Bachelor of Science degree from Clemson University. His research interests include outdoor recreation management, informal education/interpretation at natural and cultural sites, and human dimensions of natural resources.

Sarah Eissler:

Sarah Eissler is a M.S. student in the Rural Sociology and International Development and Agriculture dual title program. She holds Bachelor of Science and Bachelor of Arts degrees from Penn State. Her research interests include community-based management of natural resources and commodity production, particularly as it relates to climate change.

Carolyn Fish:

Carolyn Fish is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Geography at Penn State. She holds a Master of Science degree in Geography from Michigan State University, and a Bachelor of Science degree in Geography from Penn State. Her research interests include cartography, cognitive limits of map reading, climate change, GIS, and natural resource management.

Lacey Goldberg:

Lacey Goldberg is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Architecture with a focus in landscape architecture. She holds a Master of Arts degree in Landscape Architecture from Penn State and a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Allegheny College. Her research interests include scenic conservation, natural resource management, and energy landscapes.

Stephen Mainzer:

Stephen Mainzer is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Architecture, specializing in human dimensions of natural resources and the environment. He holds a Master of Science degree in Landscape Architecture and a Bachelor of Landscape Architecture degree from Penn State. His research engages the intersection of design, community, and natural resources.

Maxwell Olsen:

Maxwell Olsen is a M.S student in the Department of Recreation, Parks and Tourism Management. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Environmental Studies-Sociology from St. Lawrence University. His research interests include outdoor recreation behavior and human dimensions of natural resources and the environment.

Appendix 2: Qualitative Instrument

Focus Group Facilitation Guide

Introduction

1. Hello, thank you for coming. What would you be doing if you weren't here?

Definition

1. Before you saw our signs today, do you ever think about local foods?
2. How do you define local food? What does local food mean to you?
 - a. If prompting needed... [What makes a food local?]

Experience

1. Tell me about your experiences with local foods...
 - a. If positive experience... [Why?]
 - b. If negative experience... [Why not?]
2. Where do you get your local foods? [Why?]

Importance

1. How are local foods important to you? How do you view local food?
 - a. If prompting needed... [What role do local foods play in your weekly food plan?] [Why?]
 - b. [What are the positives?]
 - c. [What are the negatives?]
 - i. If respond in \$\$, [Can you describe value in something other than money?] [What does this monetary value mean to you?]
 - d. [What percentage of your food budget do you allocate for local foods?]
2. In what ways do you think local foods are important to the State College community?
 - a. If prompting needed... [How do your neighbors, friends, coworkers, family view local foods/in what ways are local foods important to them?]

[Does anyone has anything else to share?]

Thank you so much for your time and participation. We hoped you enjoyed the meal!

Dessert and surveys at focus group.

Mechanism for splitting up groups: put a color dot on name tags and randomly split the groups.

Appendix 3: Quantitative Instrument

Survey Instrument

Local Foods Dinner and Discussion Follow-up Survey

1. Please check the box that best matches your feelings about each of the following statements.

	strongly disagree	disagree	unsure	agree	strongly agree
We are approaching the limit of the number of people the Earth can support.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Humans have the right to modify the natural environment to suit their needs.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
When humans interfere with nature it often produces disastrous consequences.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Human ingenuity will ensure that we do not make the Earth unlivable.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Humans are seriously abusing the environment.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
The Earth has plenty of natural resources if we just learn how to develop them.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Plants and animals have as much right as humans to exist.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
The balance of nature is strong enough to cope with the impacts of modern industrial nations.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Despite our special abilities, humans are still subject to the laws of nature.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
The so-called "ecological crisis" facing humankind has been greatly exaggerated.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
The Earth is like a spaceship with very limited room and resources.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Humans were meant to rule over the rest of nature.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
The balance of nature is very delicate and easily upset.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Humans will eventually learn enough about how nature works to be able to control it.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
If things continue on their present course, we will soon experience a major ecological catastrophe.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Please answer each of the following questions using the space provided.

2. How far can each of the following foods travel and still be considered "local?"

food	distance (in miles)	food	distance (in miles)	food	distance (in miles)
Beef		Eggs		Beans & Legumes	
Poultry		Cheese		Grains	
Pork		Dairy (general)		Wine	
Fish		Vegetables		Beer	
Seafood		Fruits		Prepared foods	

3. How far do you have to travel to acquire a local option for each of the following foods?

food	distance (in miles)	food	distance (in miles)	food	distance (in miles)
Beef		Eggs		Beans & Legumes	
Poultry		Cheese		Grains	
Pork		Dairy (general)		Wine	
Fish		Vegetables		Beer	
Seafood		Fruits		Prepared foods	

Please check the amount that best matches what you are willing to pay for each item described below.

4. How much would you pay for lifetime access (via a membership) to... (Please check one)

	\$0	\$50	\$100	\$200	\$300	\$400	\$500	Other
...an online grocery store that sells locally sourced food?	<input type="checkbox"/>	___						
...an online grocery store that sells locally sourced food and includes discounts to select local restaurants?	<input type="checkbox"/>	___						
...a brick-and-mortar grocery store that sells locally sourced food and includes discounts to select local restaurants?	<input type="checkbox"/>	___						
...a brick-and-mortar grocery store that sells locally sourced food, includes discounts to select local restaurants, and offers culinary classes and/or events?	<input type="checkbox"/>	___						
...a brick-and-mortar grocery store that sells locally sourced food and includes the following benefits? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discounts to select local restaurants; • Offers culinary classes and/or events; • The ability to make decisions about how the store invests in itself; • The ability to make decisions about how the store invests in community projects; • The ability to make decisions about how the store distributes its dividends for investors. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	___						

Please check the box that best matches how often you engage in the following actions.

5. How often do you get together or meet with the following types of people?

	more than once a week	once a week	a few times a month	once a month	a few times a year	never
Family	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Close Friends	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Acquaintances	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Neighbors	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Community council / groups	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Other social groups / organizations	<input type="checkbox"/>					

6. Do you participate in any community or volunteer activities? yes no If yes, how many? _____

7. On average, how many hours a month do you spend on community or volunteer activities? less than 1 hour 1 to 4 hours 5 to 10 hours more than 10 hours

8. I participate in community or volunteer activities because...

	strongly disagree	disagree	unsure	agree	strongly agree
I believe the community needs new ideas.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I believe the community needs better services.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am dissatisfied with the way things are.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I enjoy local politics.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I believe others will eventually return the favor.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
The community needs volunteers to reduce costs.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am required to participate in community service.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I feel it is my public duty as a citizen.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

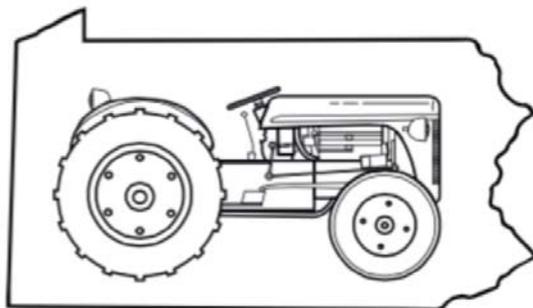
Finally, we'd like to ask you a few questions about yourself and your family. All information will be treated confidentially and will never be linked with your name.

14. Are you currently a member of any of the following organizations? (Please check all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> community supported agriculture (CSA)	<input type="checkbox"/> food or grocery co-operative (co-op)
	<input type="checkbox"/> community garden	<input type="checkbox"/> other _____
15. If you checked any of the previous boxes, please provide the name of the organization(s).	_____ (name of organizations)	
16. Are there CSAs or co-ops in State College that you are aware of, but are not currently a member?	_____ (name of organizations)	
17. What is your...	_____ (zipcode)	_____ (township) _____ (neighborhood)
18. Which grocery store is closest to your home? (Please include the store name and the nearest street)	_____ (store name) _____ (nearest street)	
19. How long have you lived in your current neighborhood?	_____ (number of years in home)	
20. How long do you plan on living in your current neighborhood?	_____ (number of years), or <input type="checkbox"/> I plan to stay indefinitely	
21. What is your gender?	<input type="checkbox"/> male	<input type="checkbox"/> female
22. In what year were you born?	_____ (year you were born)	
23. What is your current employment status? (Please check one)	<input type="checkbox"/> full-time	<input type="checkbox"/> part-time
	<input type="checkbox"/> student	<input type="checkbox"/> homemaker
24. What is the highest level of education you have completed? (Please check one)	<input type="checkbox"/> none	<input type="checkbox"/> grade school
	<input type="checkbox"/> some college or technical school	<input type="checkbox"/> some high school
		<input type="checkbox"/> completed high school or GED
		<input type="checkbox"/> completed college
		<input type="checkbox"/> graduate or professional school
25. How do you describe yourself politically? (Please check one)	<input type="checkbox"/> liberal	<input type="checkbox"/> moderate liberal
		<input type="checkbox"/> moderate
		<input type="checkbox"/> moderate conservative
26. Currently, how many people, including yourself, live in your household?	_____ (number of people)	
27. How many members of your household are under the age of 18?	_____ (number of people)	
28. What was the total income of your household (before taxes) last year?	<input type="checkbox"/> Less than \$15,000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$15,000 to \$24,999
	<input type="checkbox"/> \$25,000 to \$34,999	<input type="checkbox"/> \$35,000 to \$49,999
	<input type="checkbox"/> \$50,000 to \$74,999	<input type="checkbox"/> \$75,000 to \$99,999
	<input type="checkbox"/> \$100,000 to \$149,999	<input type="checkbox"/> \$150,000 or more
29. How did you hear about this event?	_____	

THANK YOU!

Those are all the questions we have. Thank you very much for your time and cooperation in completing this survey! If you have any comments that you would like to share with us, please use the space below:

Advertisement placed in the Monday, November 11, 2014 edition of The Daily Collegian (size 3" x 3")



**Penn State's Human Dimensions of
Natural Resources and the Environment Presents
Free Dinner and Discussion:
Local Food in State College**

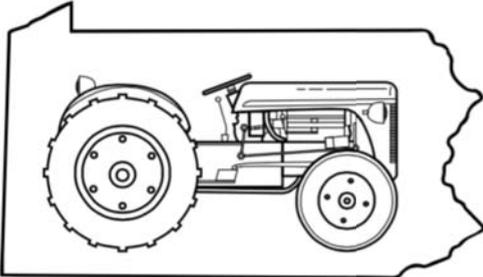
Would you like to share your thoughts on local foods? If so, please join us for a **free dinner and discussion**. Students and community members with any level of knowledge or interest in the topic are encouraged to attend.

When: Wednesday, November 12th from 5:30pm to 7:30pm
Where: State College High School South Building
RSVP to whatislocalfood@psu.edu to secure yourself a plate and a spot in the study.

Flier placed at various locations around the State College area and on the Penn State campus:

Human Dimensions of Natural Resources and the Environment presents

Dinner and Discussion: Local Food in State College



Part of the Greater State College community? Want to share your thoughts on what local foods mean to you? Do you like free dinners?

Please join the students from the Human Dimensions of Natural Resources and the Environment program for a free dinner and an evening of discussion about local foods in our region.

Human Dimensions of Natural Resources and the Environment is an interdisciplinary class of graduate students interested in talking with you about local foods in the State College region. We are interested in hearing from a wide variety of people and perspectives. Therefore, all people with any level of knowledge or interest in the topic of local foods are encouraged to attend.

There is no cost and dinner/desserts will be provided. Anyone State College area resident 18 years or older is welcome to participate.

Please RSVP if you would like to attend the event by emailing the research team at whatislocalfood@psu.edu by Monday, November 10th, to guarantee yourself a plate. Your participation in this research will be completely voluntary and any information collected will remain confidential. If you have any questions about this research project, please contact the research team at the email address specified above.

State College Area High School (South Building)
Wednesday, November 12th from 5:30pm to 7:30pm

RSVP to: whatislocalfood@psu.edu
 (RSVP by Monday, November 10th, to guarantee yourself a plate.)

<p>Dinner and Discussion: Local Food in State College</p> <p>Date/Time: November 12th 5:30pm to 7:30 pm</p> <p>Location: State College Area High School (South Building)</p> <p>RSVP to: whatislocalfood@psu.edu</p>	<p>Dinner and Discussion: Local Food in State College</p> <p>Date/Time: November 12th 5:30pm to 7:30 pm</p> <p>Location: State College Area High School (South Building)</p> <p>RSVP to: whatislocalfood@psu.edu</p>	<p>Dinner and Discussion: Local Food in State College</p> <p>Date/Time: November 12th 5:30pm to 7:30 pm</p> <p>Location: State College Area High School (South Building)</p> <p>RSVP to: whatislocalfood@psu.edu</p>	<p>Dinner and Discussion: Local Food in State College</p> <p>Date/Time: November 12th 5:30pm to 7:30 pm</p> <p>Location: State College Area High School (South Building)</p> <p>RSVP to: whatislocalfood@psu.edu</p>	<p>Dinner and Discussion: Local Food in State College</p> <p>Date/Time: November 12th 5:30pm to 7:30 pm</p> <p>Location: State College Area High School (South Building)</p> <p>RSVP to: whatislocalfood@psu.edu</p>	<p>Dinner and Discussion: Local Food in State College</p> <p>Date/Time: November 12th 5:30pm to 7:30 pm</p> <p>Location: State College Area High School (South Building)</p> <p>RSVP to: whatislocalfood@psu.edu</p>	<p>Dinner and Discussion: Local Food in State College</p> <p>Date/Time: November 12th 5:30pm to 7:30 pm</p> <p>Location: State College Area High School (South Building)</p> <p>RSVP to: whatislocalfood@psu.edu</p>	<p>Dinner and Discussion: Local Food in State College</p> <p>Date/Time: November 12th 5:30pm to 7:30 pm</p> <p>Location: State College Area High School (South Building)</p> <p>RSVP to: whatislocalfood@psu.edu</p>
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