

MODULE 1: What do people think about locally grown food?

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- * Understanding the consumer mindset
- * Understanding what people think about local food
- * Thinking local

More people are buying locally grown food, but why? This module takes a look at the characteristics of local food that appeal to consumers and how consumers define “local” when it comes to food. Understanding these characteristics and definitions of local food will help you communicate with consumers and relate to them on a more personal level.

By the end of this module, participants will be able to:

1. Identify characteristics of local food that appeal to consumers.
2. Recognize consumer flexibility on the definition of local food.
3. Identify food that consumers accept as local.
4. Explore the similarities and differences in how participants think about local food compared to consumers.
5. Design a promotional plan using your own product line and incorporate messages related to the favorable characteristics of local food, as well as a local food definition.

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Pertinent symbols and behaviors



Activity → This symbol denotes the start of an activity.

Italicized and indented text designates instructor material and does not need to be read as a script.

Materials you will need for this module:

- Easel pad or white board for you to record participant objectives for the day or any prevalent issues or questions
- Markers for you
- Pencils or pens for participants
- Activity worksheets
- Evaluations

Time for module presentation with activities

- 1 hour and 15 minutes

Begin Module

Slide 1 – Title

Hello. My name is _____. I work with _____ and will be your facilitator for this presentation. Today we will be discussing consumer perceptions of local food. I believe that you will find this information enlightening and useful as you conduct your business in the future. Before we explore the research on this subject more thoroughly, we will start with an introductory activity.

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Slide 2 – Ice Breaker



Refer to *Ice Breaker Worksheets* found after the module portion of this document for instructions and materials.

The purpose of this icebreaker is to allow participants to get to know others in the group. This should facilitate group discussion and teamwork throughout the remainder of the module.

We will be working together a lot today, so it is important that we get to know each other and find out how each of us are currently involved in the local food industry. Please pair up with someone you don't know. Interview each other and be ready to introduce your partner to the group. You can be a little creative if you wish to make your report more interesting, but please include your partner's name, where they are from, their reason for attending today, and one way that they contribute to the local food industry. Please take about 3-4 minutes for your interviews. Your goal is to prepare a 30-second introduction of your partner. We will report out after the interviews.

Slide 3 – Agenda

We began today's program with short introductions. Next we will cover our presentation objectives and an overview of Florida's local food industry. Since this is a short session, we will not have a break, but restrooms are located _____ (point out). We will participate in a couple of exercises today and review current research on local food. Later we will discuss the definition of local food. In our wrap up, we'll talk about how you can use this information to improve your business. At the end of the module we will have a short evaluation.

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Slide 4 – Objectives

Thank you for participating today. I hope that you all find something you can take home and use to further your business. By the time you leave today, I hope you will be able to identify consumer perceptions of local food. You will better understand consumers' flexibility in defining local food. Hopefully you will also recognize the similarities and differences between your perception of local food and those of the consumers you may serve. Lastly, you will be able to apply what you have learned to the development of a promotional plan for your business.

Slide 5 – Florida's Billion-Dollar Industry

You may wonder what possible significance consumer perceptions of local food may hold for you. As members of agricultural industries, we face many challenges to our ability to sustain our business and profitability. Local food is a growing business. Within the state of Florida, local food has become a multi-billion dollar industry. Recent figures show the local food industry is valued at \$8.3 billion annually within the state of Florida alone. That means that each Florida household is spending about \$1,114 annually on the purchase of local food. A better understanding of consumer perceptions of local food may help you determine if the market is right for you and how to participate in or increase sales.

Hodges, A. W., & Stevens, T. J. (2013). Local food systems in Florida: Consumer characteristics and economic impacts. Gainesville, FL: University of Florida, Food and Resource Economics Department.

Hodges, A. W. (2013). Local Food Systems in Florida: Consumer Characteristics & Economic Impacts. (Report No. PIE2012/13). Gainesville, FL: University of Florida/IFAS Center for Public Issues Education.

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Slide 6 – Intro to Perceptions of Local

Local food is a very important topic today and is gaining importance rapidly as people become more interested in the origin of their food. Many studies have been conducted in attempts to discover how consumers look at local food and what qualities they feel are important. Being aware of these perceptions is vital to you as you talk to others about local food and about your own products.

*Conner, D., Colasanti, K., Ross, R., & Smalley, S. (2010). Locally grown foods and farmers markets: Consumer attitudes and behaviors. Sustainability, 2(3), 742-756.
doi:10.3390/su2030742*

Zepeda, L., & Li, J. (2006). Who buys local food? Journal of Food Distribution Research, 37(3), 5-15. Retrieved at: <http://ageconsearch.umn.edu/bitstream/7064/2/37030001.pdf>

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Slide 7 – Activity A



Refer to Exercise A worksheets found after the module portion of this document for instructions and materials.

Exercise A is designed to help producers start to think about how they view their products, and how consumer thoughts might differ. The goal of this exercise is for participants to think about consumer perceptions of local food, and how they may be different from their own perceptions, and may not actually be true. All of these points are essential to the participant's growing understanding of consumer perceptions.

For our first exercise, I would like for you to divide into groups of 2 or 3 people. On the left column of your worksheet, please record your perceptions of qualities and attributes of local food. In the right column, report what you think consumer perceptions of the qualities and attributes of local food are.

Continue session with group sharing once each group has had time to fill out the worksheets.

I'm going to ask one person from each group to briefly review your lists with everybody. For those groups going later, please concentrate on new perceptions not covered by previous groups. Do we have a volunteer to go first?

Slide 8 – Consumer Perceptions

Now that we've talked about what you feel are important characteristics of local food and how consumers may perceive local food, let's look at the research. A recent study shows that consumers perceive local food to be nutritious, safe, natural, trustworthy, fresh, and wholesome.

Gay, K., & Rumble, J. (2013). Consumer perception of local foods. PIE2011/12-19D. Gainesville, FL: University of Florida/IFAS Center for Public Issues Education.

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Slide 9 – Consumer Perceptions 2

Another study found that consumers believe local food tastes better, is of higher quality and is fresher than those foods produced in other areas. Yet another study added that consumers feel local food requires less transportation, reducing environmental impact. These are positive qualities that many people feel are integral to local food and are reasons that many people would look to local food for their tables.

Goodwin, J. N. (2012). Local choice focus groups report. (Report No. PIE2011/12-19a). Gainesville, FL: University of Florida/IFAS Center for Public Issues Education.

Megicks, P., Memery, J., & Angell, R. J. (2012). Understanding local food shopping: Unpacking the ethical dimension, Journal of Marketing Management, 28(3-4), 264-289. doi:10.1080/0267257X.2012.658838

Slide 10 – Consumer Perceptions 3

There are many studies that include various attributes of local food. Another researcher found that many consumers believe that local food is chemical-free and less expensive than other foods.

Nyob, D. I. (2012). Consumer perception of local food: A study of students of the University of Florida in the United States (Master's thesis). University of Florida, Gainesville, FL. Retrieved at: <http://ufdc.ufl.edu.lp.hscl.ufl.edu/UFE0045128/00001>

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Slide 11- Consumer Perceptions Combined

At this point we have a significant list of possible generalized perceptions consumers may have about local food. Now let's compare the research-generated perceptions with the lists we compiled in Exercise A. Take a few minutes to review in your groups. Pay special attention to similarities and differences. Then we will discuss any insights you may have regarding your understanding of consumer perceptions.

Provide about 2 minutes for participant review of lists. Following the review, start a group discussion about the similarities between the Exercise A list and research. Proceed to discussion of differences. Review and discussion time should last approximately 8 minutes total.

If the question about whether the perceptions are accurate does not come up, please use the following script to introduce the possibility that perceptions may or may not be true.

To help us better understand consumer perceptions, let's dig a little deeper into the validity of the research-generated perceptions. Are these traits true? For instance, just because it is local does that mean it was produced without the use of chemicals? Is all local food less expensive than corresponding products from other areas?

Discuss both sides of other issues as consumer perceptions of local foods may be true, but are not necessarily true. For instance, is it true that local food is more nutritious or safer? Introduce the concept that many of these characteristics may not necessarily be true just because the food was grown locally. Even local farmers may use pesticides that the consumer perceives as harmful.

However, there are possibilities that many of these characteristics are true. For instance, the food may be fresher since less time was required for transport to a farmers market. Perhaps the food is less expensive if the "middle-man" is skipped and the farmer is marketing directly to the consumer.

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Gay, K., & Rumble, J. (2013). *Consumer perception of local foods*. PIE2011/12-19D. Gainesville, FL: University of Florida/IFAS Center for Public Issues Education.

Goodwin, J. N. (2012). *Local choice focus groups report*. (Report No. PIE2011/12-19a). Gainesville, FL: University of Florida/IFAS Center for Public Issues Education.

Megicks, P., Memery, J., & Angell, R. J. (2012). *Understanding local food shopping: Unpacking the ethical dimension*, *Journal of Marketing Management*, 28(3-4), 264-289. doi:10.1080/0267257X.2012.658838

Nyob, D. I. (2012). *Consumer perception of local food: A study of students of the University of Florida in the United States* (Master's thesis). University of Florida, Gainesville, FL. Retrieved at: <http://ufdc.ufl.edu.lp.hscl.ufl.edu/UFE0045128/00001>

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Slide 12 – Exercise B



Refer to Exercise B worksheets found after the module portion of this document for instructions and materials.

The list of products is found on the next slide. The purpose of this activity is to help the producers think about the potential flexibility of the definition of local foods. Understanding this flexibility is important to help determine which of their products could be promoted as local.

Let's review your instructions for this exercise. You'll split into four groups and each group will receive a short list of products. On your worksheet, list each product name in the first column, where you think that product is produced in the second, and if you feel that consumers would consider this product as local in the third column.



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Slide 13 – Exercise B Products

Here is a complete list of all of our food products. After you have taken a few minutes to discuss your products, we will review them all. Please select a reporter for your group.

Assign short list for each group. This list includes sufficient products for 4 groups to have 5 products or 5 groups to have 4 products. You can add or subtract products to adjust for your group size. Please make certain that the origins of the products on each list are mixed. After the groups have had time to discuss, continue with next script.

Now, let's review these products for production areas and whether you would consider them local or not local. Would any group like to volunteer to go first?

Review all products from the groups.

Hopefully, the groups will have mentioned that some products may not be heavily produced in Florida, but are produced in an area nearby so may be considered "local" by consumers. Participants may have also mentioned that local production for certain products is seasonal and may be local at times but not during some seasons. There may even be discussion that while a product is produced locally, the quality may be less desirable than it produced elsewhere. All of these opinions contribute to a greater understanding of what is considered local by the consumer. You may need to introduce any of these points overlooked by the groups.

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Slide 14 – Definitions of Local Intro

By now you probably realize that defining “local food” is very complex. The definitions vary between individuals. There are three broad-based categories that consumers use to define local food. Food may be considered “local” if it is from your immediate area, your state, or from within the country. There is no hard and fast definition of what is local food.

Harris, B., Burrell, D., Mercer, S., Oslund, P., & Rose, C. (2000). Kaw Valley focus groups on local and organic produce (Report No. 254B). Lawrence, KS: Retrieved from University of Kansas, Institute for Policy and Social Research website: <http://www.ipsr.ku.edu/resrep/pdf/m254B.pdf>

Roper, C. G., Rumble, J. N., Ma, Y., & Irani, T. A. (2014). Talking local: Florida consumer definitions of local food (Report No. AEC509). Gainesville, FL: Retrieved from University of Florida, Electronic Data Information Source website: <http://www.edis.ifas.ufl.edu/wc174>

Wilkins, J. L., Bowdish, E., & Sobal, J. (2002). Consumer perceptions of seasonal and local foods: A study in a US community. Ecology of Food and Nutrition, 41(5), 415-439. doi:10.2080/03670240214066

Slide 15 – Definitions of Local

(Begin by reviewing the information on the slide) Based on these ideas, you can see how growing seasons might impact the perception of local. For example, if you live in a tomato-producing county in Florida, you may only consider tomatoes “local” if they come from your county. However, tomatoes from your county may only be available from October to June; therefore, when purchasing tomatoes outside of these months, you are required to buy from another state or country. If you go to purchase tomatoes during August and you are given the choice between a crop grown in Tennessee and others grown in Mexico, you may prefer the Tennessee tomatoes because they are more local, especially compared to those arriving from Mexico.

Rumble, J. N., & Roper, C. G. (2014). Talking Local: Florida Consumers’ Flexibility with the Term “Local” (Report No. AEC515). Gainesville, FL: Retrieved from University of Florida, Electronic Data Information Source website: <http://www.edis.ifas.ufl.edu/wc180>

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Slide 16 – Uses for information

You can use this information about consumer perceptions when considering the marketing of foods you produce. You can communicate with consumers in a way that reinforces the positive perceptions they may hold about local food and even help them generate new concepts as you talk about the advantages of buying locally. There are various groups that specialize in marketing of locally produced food. Hopefully this knowledge will help you make good decisions about your participation in local food campaigns that may be available to you. You may even consider the consumer perceptions of local food when you make planting decisions.

Slide 17 – Conclusions

Based on the information from this module, think about what we now know about consumer perceptions of local food. We know that consumers generally have a very positive view of food they consider locally produced. We know that consumers believe that local food is fresher, safer, and of higher quality than other food that might be available. But we also know there is no concrete definition for local food. This makes it very important for you to realize how flexible these perceptions are and what impacts those feelings. The definition of local food changes with the season and local producers can take advantage of these perceptions in marketing and producing foods.

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Slide 18 – End

I hope you have learned something that may help you get your piece of the multi-billion dollar local food pie. There are five additional modules that discuss additional aspects of and issues surrounding local food. We hope that you will plan to attend.

Next pass out the promotional plan worksheet found in overview document and instruct participants to fill out the section corresponding to Module 1.

Please distribute your evaluation at this point and designate a collection point. If you wish for your participants to complete an electronic evaluation they can complete the evaluation at this link https://ufl.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_1MuyLdRKtWnuRtb. In the electronic evaluation, the participants will be required to enter the name of their instructor as well as the date that they completed the workshop. You can obtain the results of the electronic evaluation by emailing piecenter@ifas.ufl.edu or calling 352-273-2598. For questions contact Dr. Joy Rumble at jnrumble@ufl.edu or calling 352-273-1663.

END MODULE

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Icebreaker – Instructor Worksheet

Materials:

- Pencil or pen for each participant
- Worksheet for each participant

Time: approximately 11 min. for 12 participants

- Allow about 2 minutes each for interview (total 4 min. for each pair).
- Allow another 1 minute for participants to organize their thoughts for introduction.
- Each person should provide a 30 second introduction of their partner.

Instructions: Direct the class to pair up with someone they do not know (you may need a group of three if there is an odd number). Their goal is to prepare a 30 second introduction of their partner for the group. Encourage participants to be a bit creative if they want to make the report more interesting. Minimally, they should include the partner's name, where they are from, their reason for attending today, and one way that they contribute to the billion-dollar industry of local food. Allow about 5 minutes for partners to interview each other and organize their thoughts. Ask partners to stand up (perhaps in front of the entire group) to make the introductions. Call for volunteers to start the introductions.

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Exercise A – Instructor Worksheet

What qualities and attributes does local food have?

Note: The purpose of this exercise is to gather initial perceptions of what session participants feel are the qualities and attributes of local food as well as their perceptions of what consumers think are the qualities and attributes of local food. This list will be used later in the session for comparison to research.

Materials:

- Easel pad or white board for you to record summary of report outs
- Markers for instructor
- Worksheets for each participant
- Pens or pencils for each participant

Time: Approximately 22 minutes for 12 participants in groups of 2

- Allow 10 minutes for groups to brainstorm both perception lists (you may reduce this time to 5 minutes if you have time constraints).
- Allow 2 minutes for each group to report out. Each subsequent group should concentrate on new items to add to the list.

Instructions: Divide group into smaller clusters of 2 or 3 people. The number in each cluster can be adjusted to result in 4–6 groups according to the need for time and session size. Utilize participant worksheet asking groups to fill in each column.

Brainstorm first the group's perceptions of the qualities or attributes of local foods and record in the left column. Brainstorm what the group thinks are consumer perceptions about the qualities and attributes of local food and record in the right column. Select a reporter to report your groups lists to session participants. Please concentrate on new additions to the list rather than recapping previously reported ones. (This should result in subsequent reports taking less time.) Ask for a volunteer to be the first to report the group's findings. Record each group's responses on the white board or easel pad for future use. When each group has reported ask the groups to confirm that all their perceptions are correct, as ideas will be referenced later.

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Exercise B – Instructor Worksheet

Where does it come from? Is it Local?

Note: The purpose of this exercise is to help the audience understand that the definition of local food is not a concrete concept. What is local depends on the consumer’s view, what product is being considered, possible growing areas, and other factors.

Materials:

- Worksheets for each participant
- Pens or pencils for each participant
- List of products you prepared in advance (included)

Time: Approximately 15 minutes for 4 groups

- 7 minutes for group discussion
- 2 minutes each for report out

The Products

Strawberries	Potato
Tomato	Sweet Corn
Chocolate	Peaches
Broccoli	Shrimp
Apples	Iceberg Lettuce
Green Beans	Kale
Grapes	Sugar
Coffee	Peanuts
Tuna	Sweet Potatoes
Carrots	Cantaloupe

Instructions: Split participants into 4 groups. Ask groups to select a recorder to record group input and a reporter to share input with other participants. Distribute one product list to each group. Slide 13 already has products assigned into 4 groups. Other group sizes may be used, however products will need to be reassigned. Prior to lesson please establish which products are grown in your area, state, or country to facilitate discussion. Ask participants to fill in the three columns on the worksheet. The first is the product, the second is where the product is produced and the third column is the group’s consensus on whether or not consumers would consider this product local food and why this would be the case. Group consensus on each product should be recorded. Reporters should use about 2 minutes to share group input and reasoning.

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Evaluation for Module 1

For the following statements, please answer by circling a number where 1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4= agree, and 5=strongly agree.

	Before Workshop					After Workshop						
a. I understand what characteristics of local food appeal most to my consumers.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
b. I am aware that consumers have a broad and contextual concept of “local.”	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
c. I am comfortable determining what foods consumers would likely accept as local.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
d. I can identify how my perceptions of local are similar to consumers.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
e. I can identify how my perceptions of local are different from consumers.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
f. I can think of ways to use my knowledge of consumer perceptions of local foods to help promote my products.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

What are the three most important concepts you feel you have learned in this module?

What have you learned from this module that you plan to implement in the next year?

The amount of time spent on this module was: Too Short Just Right Too Long
(Please circle one)

The amount of material covered in this module was: (Please circle one) Too Little Just Right Too Much