

Greater effort needed to move local, fresh foods beyond 'privileged' consumers

October 29 2012



This is a farmer's market. Credit: Indiana University

An Indiana University study that looked at consumers who buy locally grown and produced foods through farmer's markets and community-supported agriculture programs found the venues largely attract a "privileged" class of shoppers.

"Our findings present a need for broadening local food opportunities beyond the privileged, higher-income consumer, through alternative payment plans and strategic efforts that make fresh foods accessible to a diversity of people," said James Farmer, assistant professor in the Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Studies in the IU School of Public Health-Bloomington.

Farmer is discussing his research on Oct. 29 and Oct. 31 at the American

Public Health Association's annual meeting in San Francisco.

The study focused on farmer's markets and CSAs in Indiana, which has more than 130 farmer's markets and more than 50 CSAs. In a CSA, individuals pay an upfront fee, usually \$250 to \$700, in exchange for a routine allotment of a farm's bounty. This can include [fruits and vegetables](#), along with eggs, meat, dairy products and other goods.

Nationally, the popularity of both has grown exponentially, Farmer said, with farmer's markets seeing a 450 percent increase since 1994. More than 12,500 CSAs operate across the U.S. Generally speaking, [local foods](#) are more often produced using sustainable farming practices that eliminate or decrease the use of chemical applications that can be found in conventionally produced farm products.

"When you consider freshness as an important value for consumers, hands down local foods that are distributed directly from the farmer to the consumer get from the field to the table in a much shorter period of time," Farmer said. "Also, when you shop at a chain grocery store, the money you spend quickly leaves the local economy, as opposed to being spent several times over within one's own town or city."

Farmer said that alternative payment models do exist for CSAs and farmer's markets, but they need to become more widespread. Many farmer's markets accept WIC Program vouchers and other government assistance for food. Many CSAs have incorporated payment installment plans and work-exchange programs, with a smaller number offering a sliding payment scale.

"Additionally, the need for farmer's markets and CSAs to be positioned in locations proximate to people who are food insecure would also increase access," he said.

Provided by Indiana University

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