



Farms at Work Local Food Production Survey

Farms at Work conducted an online Local Food Production survey during February 2015. The goal of the survey was to characterize local food producers in Peterborough, Kawartha Lakes, Durham, Northumberland, Haliburton, and Hastings, in terms of the marketing avenues they utilize, and to determine the potential for our Find Local Food platform to increase their access to wholesale marketing opportunities. The Find Local Food platform is intended to increase communication and awareness for producers (about what buyers are looking for); help farmers and the wholesale market (restaurants, schools, hospitals and others) connect with each other; promote forward contracting and encourage scaling up.

Participation was voluntary, and the survey was promoted via a range of email and social media routes. Partner organizations also circulated the survey to farms on their contact lists in some counties. Offering entry into a draw for a \$50 Lee Valley gift card encouraged participation in the survey.

Results

Participation

A total of 68 local food respondents took part in the survey from across the six regions of interest. Participation was distributed as follows: Peterborough – 28 respondents, Kawartha Lakes – 15 respondents, Hastings – 6 respondents, Durham – 7 respondents, Northumberland – 8 respondents, and Haliburton – 4 respondents.

Current Marketing Avenues – Retail

The majority of respondents (78%) currently sell through retail avenues, while only 22% do not. The most common retail avenue used is farm gate sales (59% of respondents), followed by farmers markets (49% of respondents), community supported agriculture or CSAs (16% of respondents), and finally 12% of respondents selling through retail avenues categorized as 'Other' (i.e. craft shows, farm store, deliveries, online).

Current Marketing Avenues – Wholesale

Just over half of the respondents (57%) currently sell through wholesale avenues. The most common wholesale avenues used are restaurants (56% of respondents). 15% of respondents use wholesale distributors, while only 8% sell through institutions such as schools and hospitals. 54% of respondents selected "Other" and listed wholesale avenues including independent grocers, fellow farm marketers,

smaller producers, organic stores, Ontario Food Terminal, shops, florists, organic food delivery services, grocery stores, Dairy Farmers of Ontario, specialty stores, and seed houses.

74% of respondents indicated that they have an existing separate pricing approach for bulk/wholesale sales, while 18% do not. The remaining 8% did not respond to this question.

Potential for the Expansion of Wholesale Marketing Avenues

Of those who do *not* currently sell through wholesale avenues, 48% expressed interest in starting to sell to wholesale outlets like restaurants and schools.

Potential for Use of the Find Local Food Platform

72% of all respondents would like to receive an email whenever a local wholesale purchaser is looking for a food item. Furthermore, 78% of all respondents agreed that it would help to know what wholesale purchasers are looking for, so that they can adjust their production in future years. Finally, 69% of respondents agreed that it would help them to be able to "forward contract", that is, make an arrangement to sell to a purchaser the following season, and then plant extra for that customer.

68% of respondents would like to be able to post the immediate availability of their products online for free (i.e. through the Find Local Food platform), knowing that wholesale buyers could view their offerings and then contact them.

Awareness of the Find Local Food Platform: 37% of respondents had heard of the Find Local Food platform prior to the survey.

What Discourages Farmers from Selling Through Wholesale Avenues?

Many respondents indicated that insufficient production scale was the main reason they do not sell through wholesale avenues. Other discouraging factors are the decreased profit margins (i.e. lower per unit earnings compared to retail sales), sufficient sales through retail avenues already, insufficient wholesale demand, the difficulty of dealing with chefs, lack of time to invest in these avenues, limited transportation (especially in winter), and a lack of commercial kitchen facility.

Conclusions

- Just over half of the respondents currently sell through wholesale avenues.
- There is significant interest from our respondents in beginning or expanding opportunities to sell through wholesale avenues, especially if the respondent could confidently plan for these sales in advance of the season
- There is significant interest from our respondents in using a free platform such as the Find Local Food platform to expand their access to wholesale marketing avenues
- Increased promotion of the Find Local Food Platform is required
- Additional desired functionality would permit farmers/sellers to post the availability of products