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Defining local food in New Zealand
A study in the Manawatu region

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Abstract

Local food is an emerging consumer trend in countries such as the United Kingdom, United States, and Japan (Knight, 2013; Kimura & Nishiyama, 2008). However, the definition of local food varies by context, and from country to country (Kneafsey, 2010). Variation in the definitions of local food and in the attributes associated with local food may lead to disjunctions between intentions and outcomes of local food initiatives, and cause miscommunications among social actors (DeLind, 2011). In order to respond to growing demand for local food, it is important to understand how consumers define local food within different social and demographic contexts.

While there is a substantial body of literature on local food internationally, limited research has been undertaken in the context of New Zealand. For the purpose of analysing how consumers define and understand local food in New Zealand, an exploratory study was conducted using a quantitative method based on self-administered questionnaires. A sample of 240 food shoppers was taken by convenience sampling in the Manawatu region of New Zealand. Data collection took place in different locations, including supermarkets, a farmers' market, and public places in and around Palmerston North City. The data were processed and analysed using the SPSS statistical package.

This study identified that a majority of the respondents considered that local food may be defined both as food that was produced and sold in New Zealand, and as food that was produced and sold in a more geographically constricted area. It also highlighted that support for community was the most important attribute associated with local food. The study further found that many of the respondents bought what they considered as local food from supermarkets, yet at the same time identified that local food was associated with a food supply system that is alternative to the mainstream food supply systems. Additionally, the study demonstrated that household income had a limited relationship with consumers' perceptions of local food.

This study provides a basis for further research into understandings of local food in New Zealand. It is suggested that further studies be undertaken to improve communication among different social actors with respect to demand and supply of local food.

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List of Abbreviations

AOC	appellation d'origine contrôlée
CSA	community-supported agriculture
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs of the United Kingdom
ERS	Economic Research Service
EU	European Union
GHG	greenhouse gas
GMO	genetically modified organism
MAFF	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries of Japan
PDO	protected designation of origin
PGI	protected geographical indication
SFSC	short food supply chain
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
USDA	Department of Agriculture of the United States