
2015 LOCAL FOODS SURVEY

FOR NORTH ALABAMA AND THE TENNESSEE VALLEY

About the Survey

In February 2015, Southern Foodscapes created a short online survey to identify pain points in our local food system and gauge customer attitudes. The survey was advertised on Social Media (Facebook, Twitter), via the mailing lists of local food-based organizations and individuals, and via paper survey copies at the 3rd Annual Tennessee Valley Community Garden Association Seed Celebration. Responses from 188 individuals and 35 unique zip codes were collected.

The survey should not be considered a scientific sampling, but rather the opinions and attitudes of users who self-selected themselves to take the survey, who largely represent people interested in food, gardening and local businesses.

Raw data from the survey is available by contacting Nicole Castle Brookus of Southern Foodscapes at nicole@southernfoodscapes.com

Results

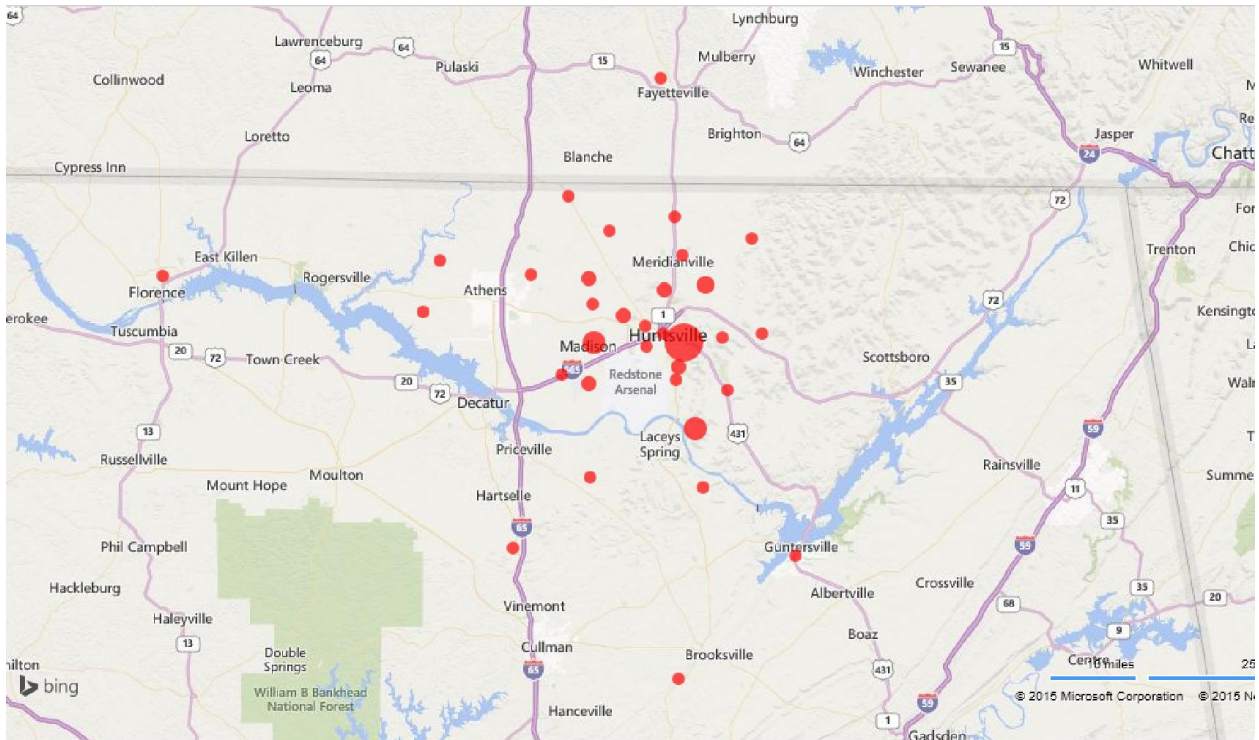
Question 1

In what ZIP code is your home located?

Responses from 35 unique zip codes were collected. 2 zip codes were outside the targeted area, one from central Georgia and the other from Appalachian Virginia.

The top 3 responding zip codes were:

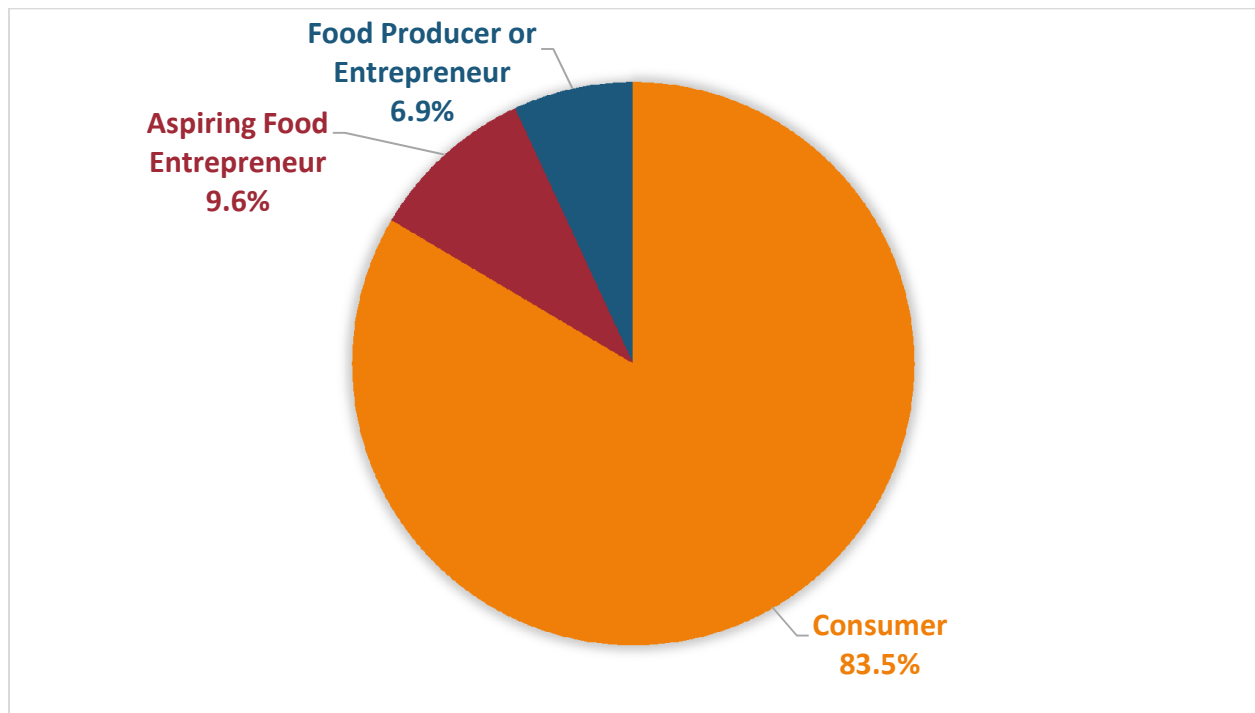
Zip Code	count
35801	47
35758	22
35803	21



Question 2

Do you consider yourself mostly a consumer or a producer of food?

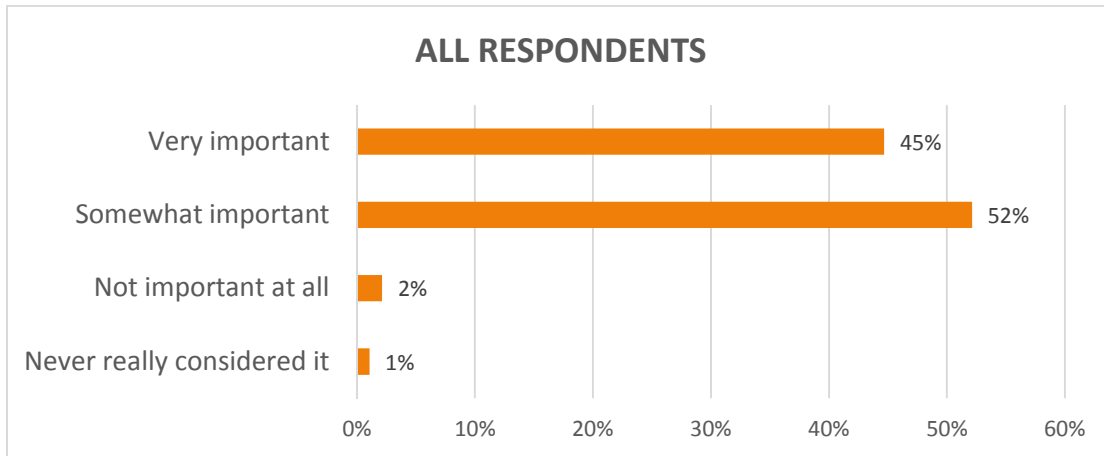
While 83.5% of respondents identified themselves as primarily a consumer of food, the survey seems to have attracted a relatively high percentage of entrepreneurs (16.5%).



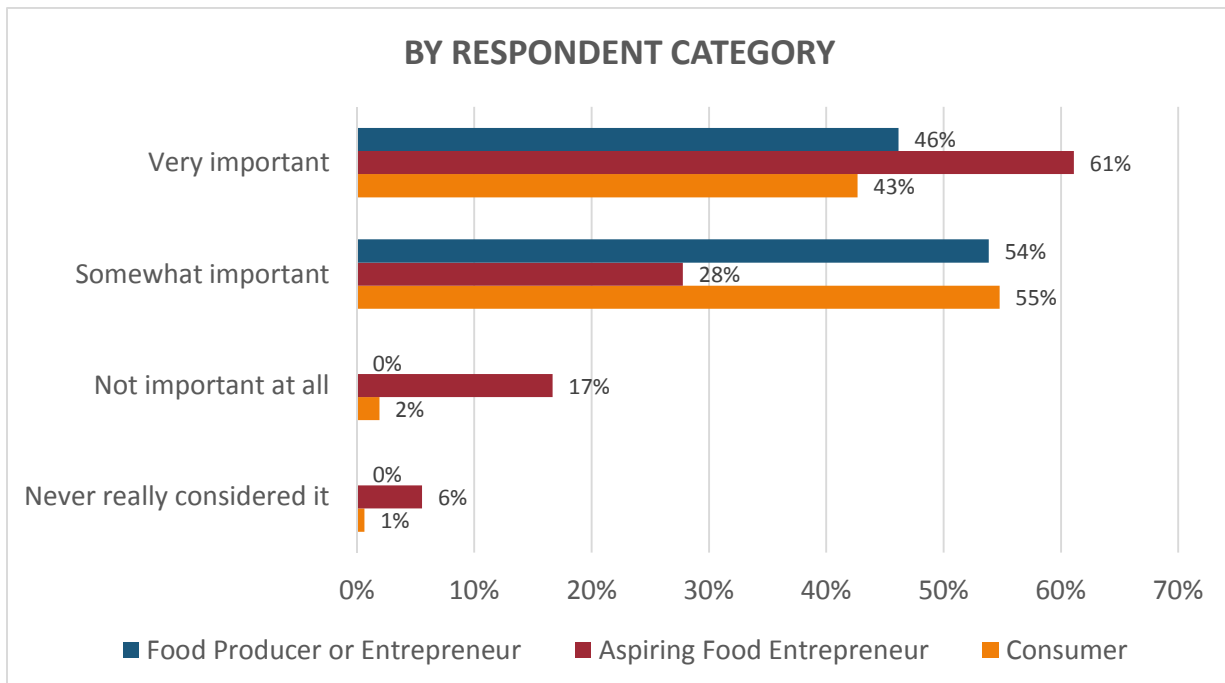
Question 3

How important is purchasing local food to you?

96.8% of respondents indicated that purchasing local food was “Very important” or “Somewhat important.” This figure most likely represents the nature of the respondents self-selecting themselves to take the survey and is not applicable to the general population.



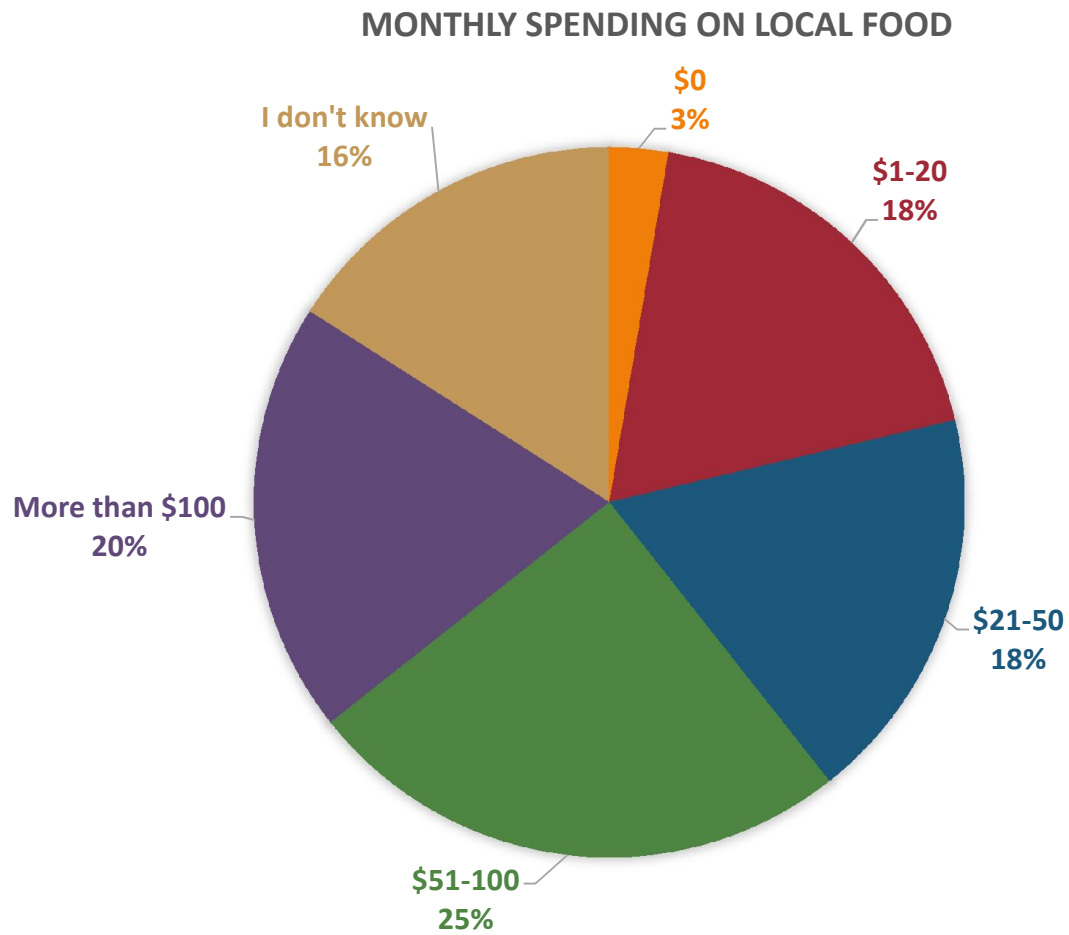
The group that identified themselves as “Aspiring Food Entrepreneurs” were the group least likely to indicate that purchasing local food was “Very important” or “Somewhat important,” at only 88.9%; but also the group most likely to select “Very important” (61%).



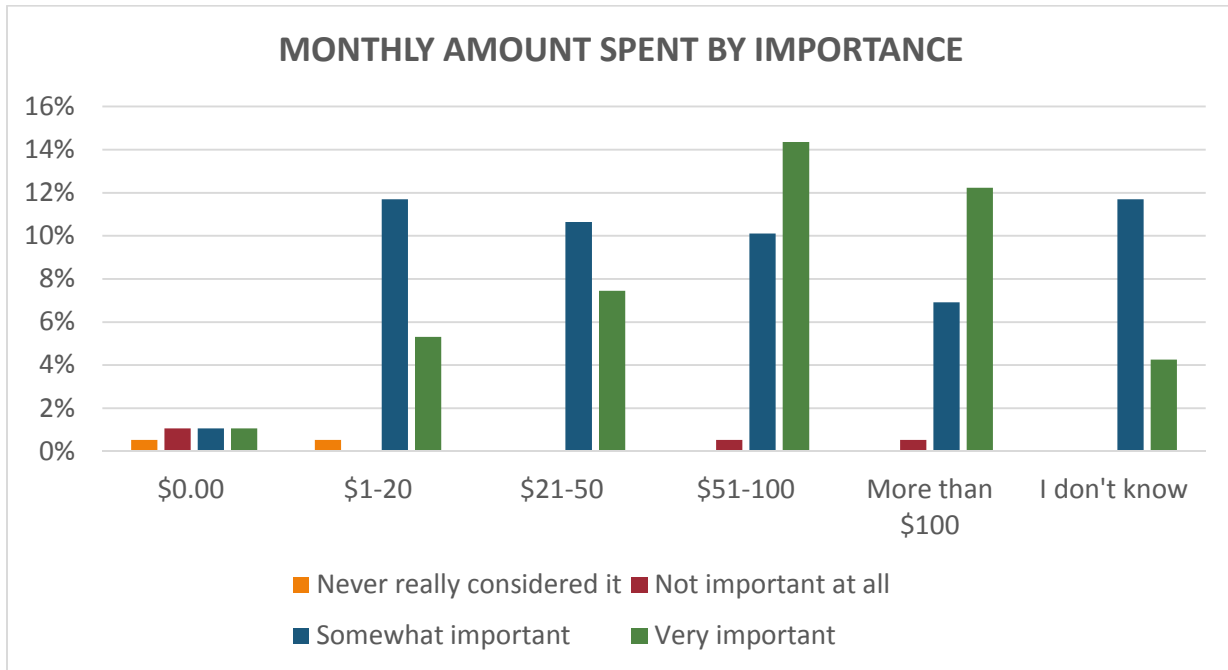
Question 4

Approximately how much do you spend on locally produced food each month? Include money spent at locally-owned, non-franchise restaurants.

The distribution of food dollars spent locally was relatively even across the ranges provided.



Those who indicated local food was important to them were much more likely to state they purchased higher quantities of local food. These respondents may also be more likely to correctly identify which food dollars they spend as going to local producers.



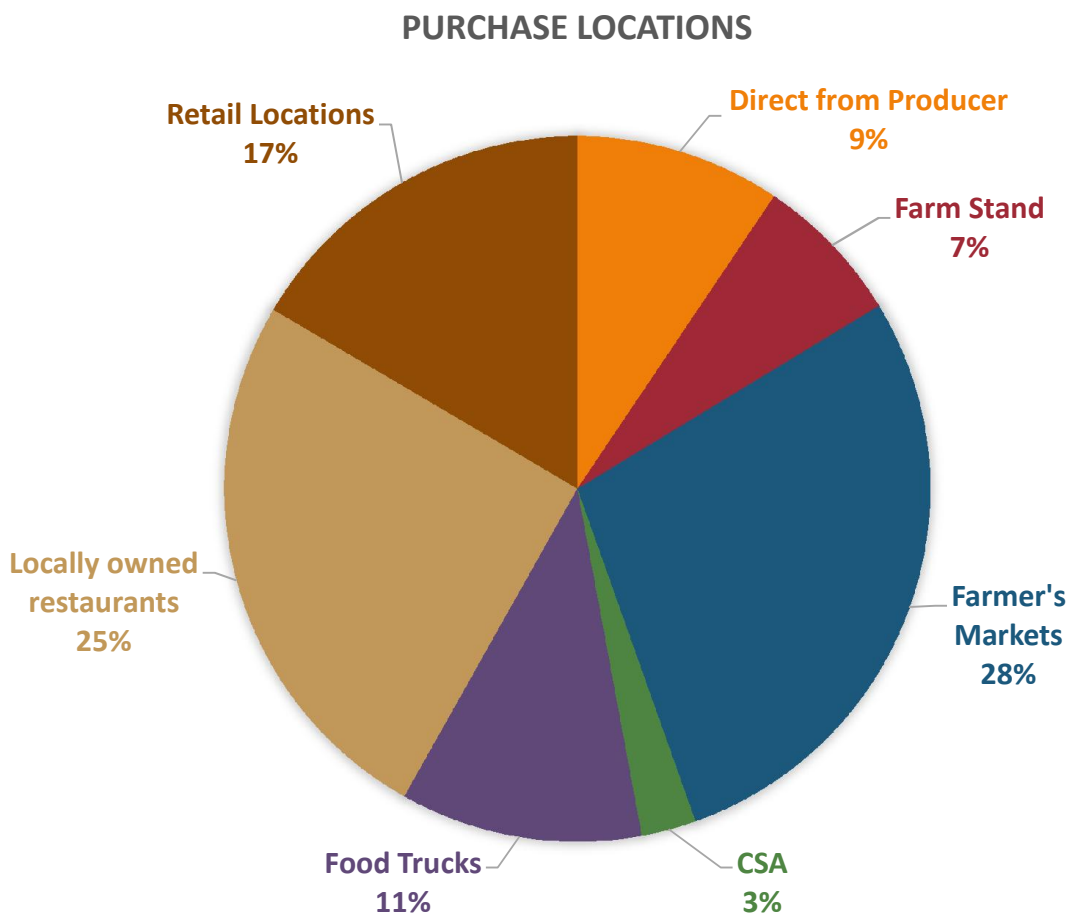
Question 5

Where do you purchase your locally produced food?

Survey takers were permitted to select multiple options for Question 5, plus an “Other” option for write-in comments. In a few instances, user data was modified to add a selection for “Retail Locations” or “Direct from Producer” when those were indicated in the comments. (For example, users called out specific retail locations, but left “Retail Locations” unchecked.)

All “Other” comments stated the respondent grew their own food (5), save a single response of “n/a” for a survey taker who indicated they did not buy local food.

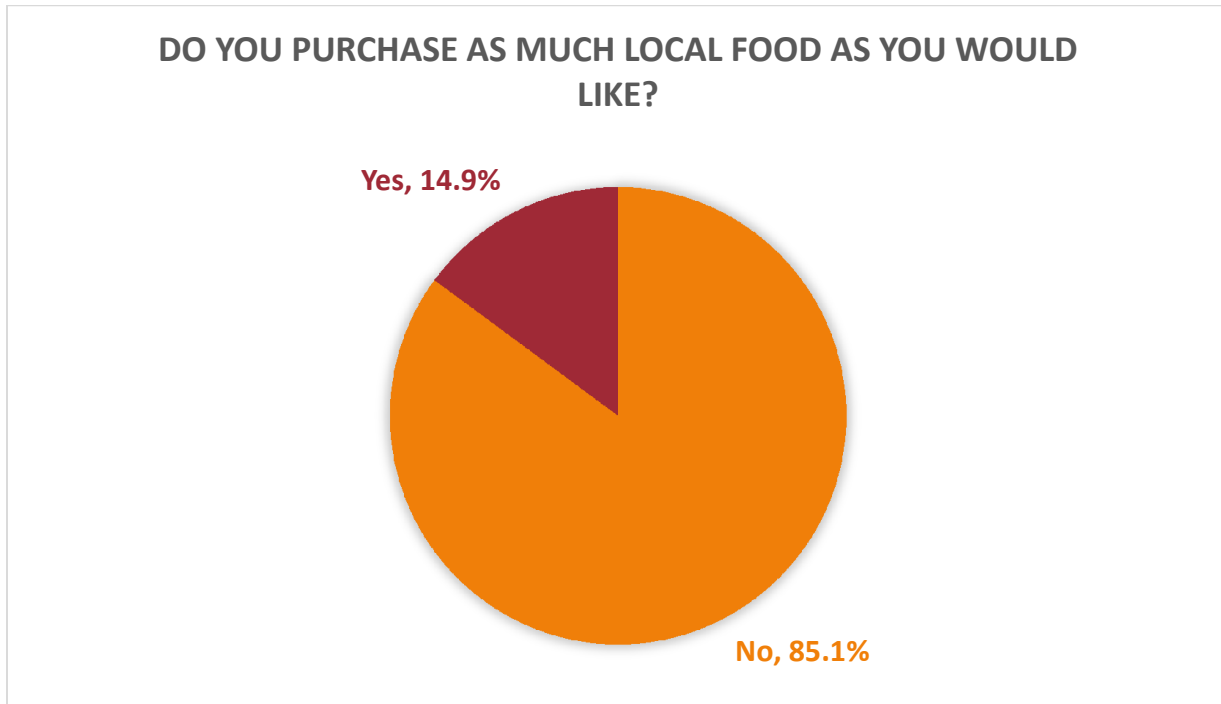
Some of the options deliberately overlap, for example “Farm Stands” and “Direct from Producer,” in order to offer options survey takers were most likely to recognize.



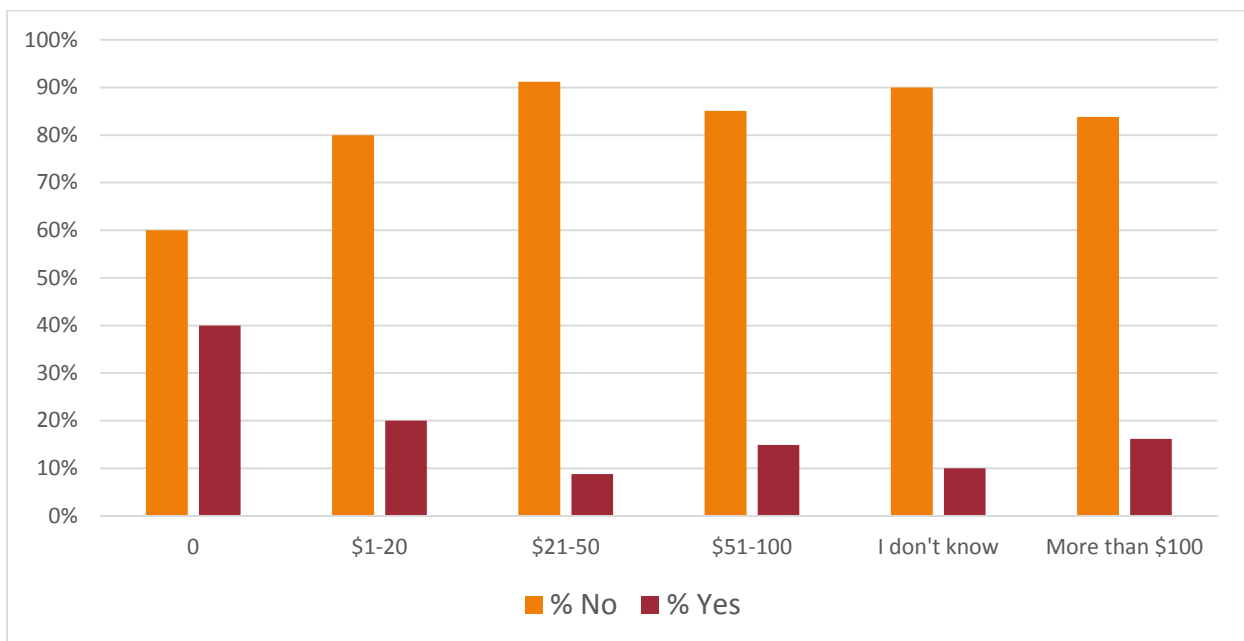
Question 6

Do you purchase as much local food as you would like?

Even among the respondents, who were heavily weighted to support of local food, question 6 shows there is room for growth.



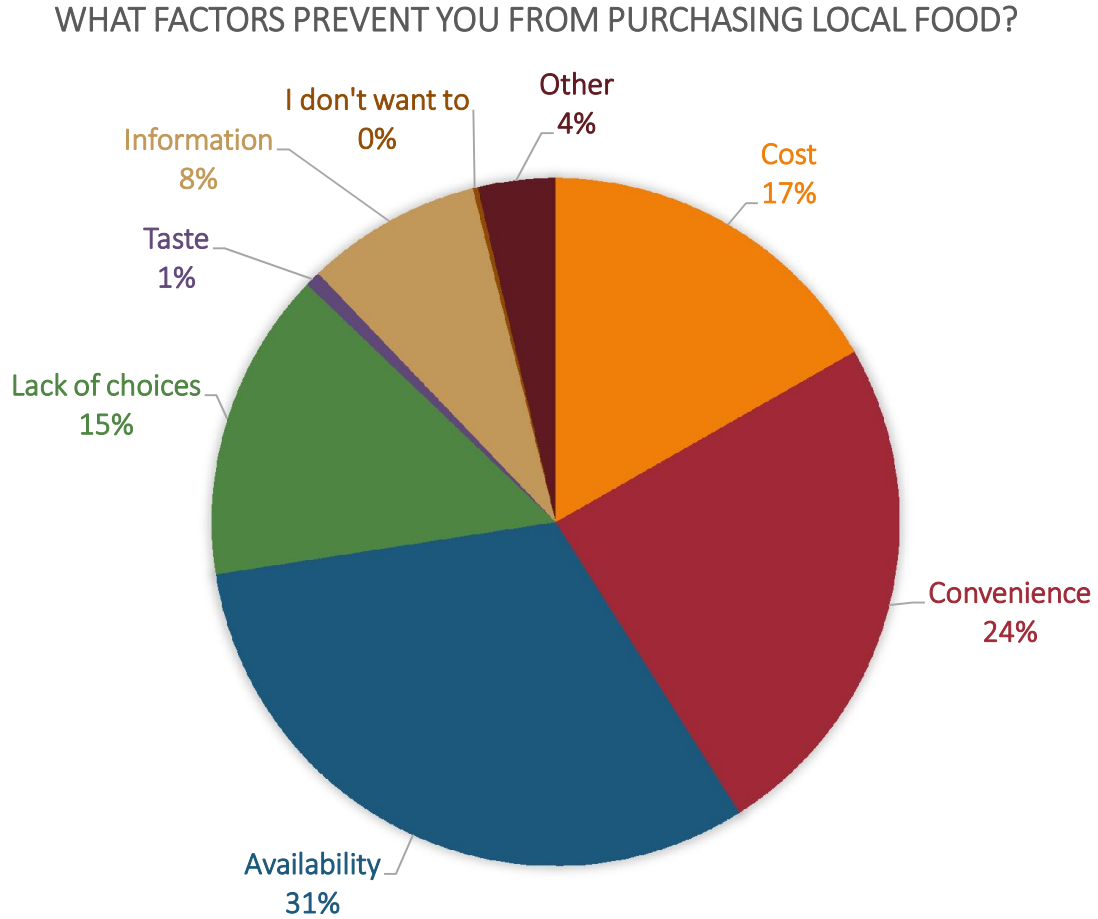
This room for growth is seen across all levels of current spending.



Question 7

What factors prevent you from purchasing more local food?

Like Question 5, in a few instances user “other” comment was used to select the corresponding choice, and some users (3) indicated they grew their own food.



Selected “Other” comments:

- *“time, I must go out of my routine to purchase local food and make more stops”*
- *“availability of organic local produce”*
- *“...sometimes locally produced is substantially more expensive than large scale, commercially produced food. For example, I love chocolates from Pizzelle's Confections, but at \$2 a piece, that's an expensive treat. I believe the chocolates, and the artistry that goes into them, is worth the price...but sometimes it's just not feasible. Some locally produced food is difficult to acquire...for example, when a restaurant has a single location 30 minutes or more from where I live, or when food trucks have irregular/intermittent/unpredictable appearances, and fail to inform potential customers well in advance.”*
- *“Lack of organic options”*
- *“Quality and trust”*
- *“I buy it seasonally, but don't know how to get items if they are not in season”*

Question 8

Is there anything you would change about local food in North Alabama?

An optional comment area was provided, and survey takers responded with a generous amount of comments. These comments often referred back to a their choices in question 7. Many survey takers wished for a greater variety of local foods and improvement in availability or information about that availability.

Text of all comments below. Some comments have been split up to address different topics.

- On Variety:
 - *"More variety"*
 - *"More variety of produce"*
 - *"More small farmers are needed and more CSA's."*
 - *"I would like to buy grass fed organic cow milk in glass jars and butter"*
 - *"More Coops?"*
 - *"Lots of local food available in season but not organic."*
 - *"More local truly organic choices."*
 - *"Offer many more options. Maybe through schools - farmer's day in parking lots?"*
 - *"More ethnic."*
 - *"Places in winter months to get locally grown produce."*
 - *"more availability"*
 - *"I would love more non-gmo, pesticide free locally grown foods, grass fed beef, grass fed milk and butter."*
 - *"more of it."*
 - *"more produce of different variety"*
 - *"Increase possibilities for more choices"*
- On Availability & Purchasing:
 - *"I work until 6:00 and some of the farmer's markets close too early for me to get there on weekdays. Also more publicity for local food"*
 - *"Need more it it"*
 - *"More availability"*
 - *"More availability"*
 - *"I would like more to be available!"*
 - *"More locally sourced restaurants with an emphasis and proof of non-GMO vegetables, meats and dairy used. More food markets with the same emphasis and affordable."*

- *"Would like to see more availability of locally sourced foods at big chain grocery stores because of convenience."*
- *"Available outside of farmers markets"*
- *"I would like to see more locally produced food in all supermarkets."*
- *"Cheaper, available at Kroger"*
- *"Make it more accessible"*
- *"Make it easy for me to buy it I grow it, too."*
- *"I like the many options, just the hours are a problem sometimes to make it easier to support."*
- *"More availability."*
- *"Grocery stores should have a section labeled locally grown."*
- *"My work hours prevent me from taking opportunities with the few who are in place. More local markets willing to carry local growers/farmers."*
- *"It would be great if more grocery stores offered a local selection, because I don't have a lot of time to go to several different stores to buy food."*
- *"I'd love to see more in local restaurants."*
- *"I'd like to see a local food section in grocery stores."*
- *"More local produce in grocery stores, etc."*
- *"More of it"*
- *"Would like it to be more available. It would also help if there was a central source where you could find local food."*
- *"Would like it to be more available"*
- *"More places to get it."*
- *"More locally produced food at an easy location."*
- *"I like to buy Fred Bread but since the Switch House is closing I'm not sure if there's a place I can buy it any day. I also like Belle Chevre cheese but it's hard to find too."*
- *"More of it...would love to have the local markets (Publix, Star Mkt Wal-Mart etc) carry more."*
- *"Convenience is key."*
- *"Restaurants using more locally sourced ingredients, co-ops/subscriptions for meat, more visibility for local options."*
- **On Growing your Own:**
 - *"Grow MORE Community Gardens"*
 - *"More of it readily available, also I would like ot grow more of it myself"*
 - *"Grow more of it myself...coordinate with other local growers who live around me"*

- *"I grow my own berries and some veggies. Planting more fruit trees each year to add to what is available for my family."*
- On Cost:
 - *"The cost is too high for someone on a fixed income. I would encourage raised beds in senior housing areas to help them grow their own food."*
 - *"I'd like to see it be more accessible cost wise to families below the poverty line. Local produce and meats are often more than their cheaper counterparts on the shelves at grocery stores."*
 - *"affordability availability"*
 - *"I just don't know where to find it at a reasonable price convenient to S Hsv other than the growers who come to Latham church on Tuesdays."*
 - *"Greene Street Market is good but a bit too pricy..."*
 - *"There would be more if it and more affordable organic local food."*
 - *"More accessible to it and people to realize that the supply is there. With let's say 30 vendors selling the same thing, there's no need for them all to be priced high. This deters us from shopping locally a good bit when Costco produces tastier food at a lower cost."*
 - *"Availability to lower income families."*
 - *"And keep costs reasonable."*
- On Farmer's Markets:
 - *"Help famers have a venue to sell their produce"*
 - *"Charge less at churches for smaller growers to sell"*
 - *"I wish there was as much enthusiasm about the Madison County Farmers Market as there is for all others. I hope that, when this place closes (and it will certainly close soon with the lack of support from the city) the farmers have other places to sell their produce directly to community members. The Madison County Farmers Market is my go-to Saturday morning spot because the Madison City market (on Hughes, walking distance from my house) is so much more expensive and there is too much of a focus on prepared foods and non-food items."*
 - *"A farmer's market similar to the market in Montgomery. B'ham doesn't havd a markey like that one.."*
 - *"More openings for farmers markets in more places."*
 - *"..I would like to see a stand at Cook Ave. for local farmers to sell foods as they do @ Greene St. Mkt...."*
 - *"I would like to see a real farmer's market here, similar to the one in Chattanooga. Our current options are very limited."*
- Information:
 - *"Educate more folks in its value, benefit, and availability."*

- *“more information and accessibility”*
- *“Education. On all benefits”*
- *“The general public is not very well educated about where their food comes from.”*
- *“More visibility and advertising”*
- *“Tesch younger generation the importance of it”*
- *“Advertising on availability”*
- *“Understanding which farmer's provide what produce & establishing a purchasing routine for local restaurants.”*
- *“More communications regarding local health food stores that provide locally grown food. If I knew what stores were selling local produce, I could shop those locations.”*
- *“I would like to know where we can find locally grown foods and where it's sold.”*
- *“More focus on exactly what we produce locally and how to get it into the supply chain so it is more readily available.”*
- *“More press/visibility for local locations would be helpful”*
- *“Where can I purchase?”*
- *“Establish a marketing page on the internet either as a standalone web page, or on Facebook (or other social media such as Twitter, Pinterest, etc.) that would broadcast purchasing opportunities, farmer's market schedules, pick-your-own etc. Put all that info in one place and allow people to subscribe so they stay up-to-date on purchasing opportunities. ALSO could be useful for trade / barter opportunities (e.g., "too many tomatoes, will trade for melons”).”*
- **On Potential Quality Concerns:**
 - *“I don't buy at roadside stands because I don't have a clue about their quality. Hope this helps.”*
 - *“Locally produced produce should be inspected.....”*
 - *“Finally, when I have purchased shares from a CSA, the first time the food quality was not great. Rotten food, under ripe food. The second time (Doe Run) the food was very nice, but the selection.....oh my. How many weird green things can you use, and will they never end?”*
- **Major Changes:**
 - *“More food choices....fewer national chains”*
 - *“Yes, Huntsville or non profits should work to provide free or low cost growing space for Aspiring Food Entrepreneurs who don't have access to land for growing local crops.”*
 - *“I think a local food distributor would be a good idea, as a supplement to Sysco or US Foods.”*

- *"I would love to see local food be the first choice for local restaurants and schools. I wish every school would have a food garden program for students, staff and interested family members. I would LOVE to see sales tax exemptions and a waived or reduced license fee for directly sold local produce, so more people could afford to start selling what they grow, without having to jump through bureaucratic hoops to get started."*
- *"Greater support for sustainable growers, less mass/commercially chemically enhanced foods. We have historically been an agricultural state and now we are becoming corporate growers that push out the local farmers. Local growers are burdened by laws and regulations commercial growers are allowed to legally ignore. How about more regulation on those large commercial growers."*
- *"More local food growing in public spots that can source to nearby cafeterias and restaurants"*
- *"More opportunity for community and urban farming through zoning, education and economic and social infrastructure."*
- **Encouragement & Other Comments:**
 - *"Send more to Georgia :)"*
 - *"No"*
 - *"More!"*
 - *"Nope!"*
 - *"The local food I purchase has always been on or above par with anything else available."*
 - *"no"*
 - *"I think we are moving in a great direction. Making progress."*
 - *"No"*
 - *"No experience with the local food"*
 - *"More information, but it is getting so much better over the last few years!"*