

Local Produce Labeling Evaluation

An evaluation of local produce labels in grocery stores



In the summer of 2016, a small pilot evaluation was conducted to better understand consumer opinions on grocery store local produce labels. Most consumers purchase their food at grocery stores, and due to consumer demand, more grocery stores now carry local produce. A survey of Wisconsin consumers in 2015¹ found that Wisconsin consumers have a positive opinion of local food and frequently purchase local goods. At the same time, a substantial minority (40%) said they felt challenged buying local produce at the store. Signs at the grocery store were an information source that most respondents said they used to get information about food. Therefore, this small pilot evaluation sought to better understand which messages are most preferred and most effective at identifying local food to consumers.

Sixteen participants were approached randomly at two grocery stores around Madison, Wisconsin. Participants were asked their opinions and impressions on six sample apple labels. A \$10 grocery store gift certificate was provided as an incentive. Apples were chosen for three key reasons: apples are commonly used in other food studies, apples are one of America's favorite fruits according to the USDA, and apples are locally grown in Wisconsin. Each of the sample labels had a different emphasis, and were created based on prior research, known psychological constructs, and common marketing practices of grocery stores throughout the area. Each label, displayed on the right side of the page, is listed below along with the theoretical reasoning behind each selection.

Label	Reasoning
Specific Farm and Location	Listing the specific farm and location is a common practice in area grocery stores. "Clarke Family Farm, Arena WI" is a sample farm created to represent a generic family farm in southern Wisconsin.
Food Miles	Food Miles is a practice found in select area grocery stores indicating the number of miles a food item traveled prior to reaching the store.
Support your local farmers	The 2015 Wisconsin consumer study found participants generally agreed local produce helps local farmers and suggested messages related to this may resonate with consumers.
Fresh and Tasty Wisconsin Produce	The 2015 Wisconsin consumer study found participants agreed local produce is fresh and tasty, and researchers suggested messages around this theme may resonate with consumers.



Specific Farm and Location



Food Miles



Support Your Local Farmers



Fresh and Tasty Wisconsin Produce



Join Our Community in Buying Local



Locally Grown in Wisconsin

¹ The full Wisconsin Consumers and local food report can be found at <http://fyi.uwex.edu/localfoodmarketing/reportspublications/>

Join our community in buying local	This label was designed to explore the influence of social norms on local produce messaging.
Locally grown in Wisconsin	According to the 2015 Wisconsin consumer study, a majority (86%) of consumers agree Wisconsin is local.

All participants were white and between the ages of 45 and 74. The sample was evenly distributed among males and females. On average, the household income of the respondents was between \$75,000 and \$99,999 (the medium household income for Wisconsin in 2014 was \$52,738). Half the respondents (51%) indicated they had less than a 4-year bachelor degree. Politically, while the sample was evenly distributed among conservatives, moderates and liberals on social issues, the sample trended more conservative on economic issues.

Participants were asked their opinion and impression of each label individually, their favorite label collectively, and which label was most clearly labeled as local.

Listing the farm and location is the preferred label

Half of the respondents (50%) ranked the label “Specific Farm and Location” as the label most clearly identifying the apples as local. Additionally, nearly half the respondents (47%) ranked this label as their favorite.

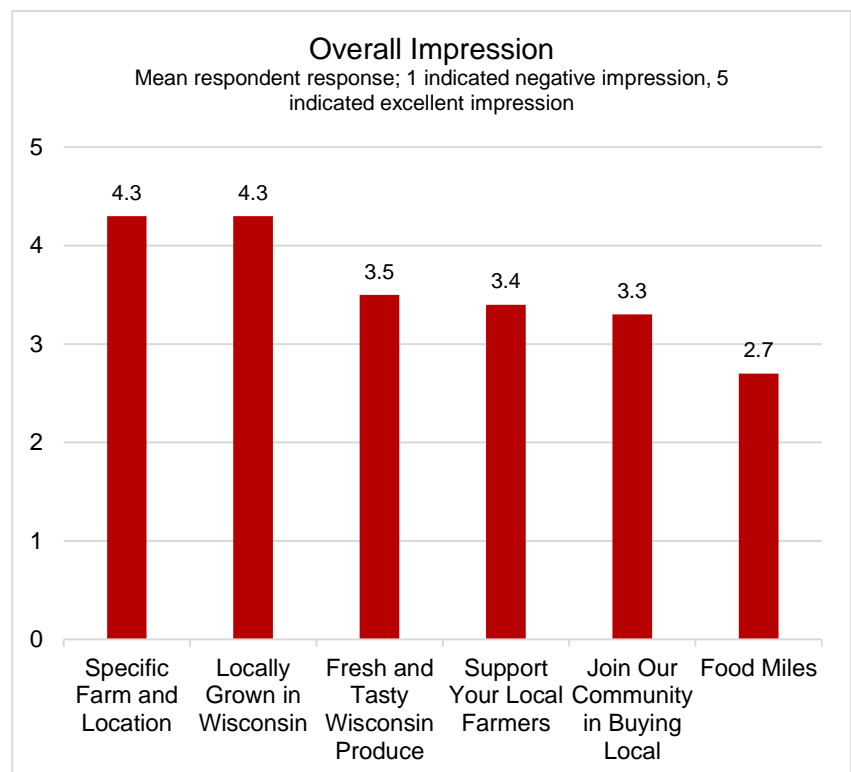
“Locally Grown in Wisconsin” is a close second

While the label “Specific Farm and Location” was the favorite with 47% of respondents, the label stating “Locally Grown in Wisconsin” was the favorite for 41% of participants. When asked to rank each label in terms of overall impression, the label “Locally Grown in Wisconsin” and “Specific Farm and Location” received the highest ranks on average. There was a considerable gap between the average rank for these two and the label with the next highest average rank, “Fresh and Tasty Wisconsin Produce.”

While participants responded favorably to the label “Locally Grown in Wisconsin,” there was limited criticism by two individuals who questioned whether the geographic area of Wisconsin was too broad. The label “Specific Farm and Location” also ranked favorably, however, the responses were somewhat polarized. A few participants noted they liked knowing the farm and/or the location, however, multiple respondents stated they were not familiar with the location or the farm and consequently didn’t care for the label.

Consumers liked the messaging ‘Support Your Local Farmers’

While the label “Support Your Local Farmers” was the favorite with only one respondent, we see that the majority of participants liked the messaging though a few noted they would also like to know where the product was grown. Three individuals noted they would be more willing



to buy a product with this language, suggesting it may be beneficial to include this messaging along with other information on local produce labels.

Consumers were unfamiliar with food miles

Half the respondents (50%) indicated they were unfamiliar with food miles, or didn't understand what the label meant. Others indicated they didn't care about food miles. One participant noted, "Food Miles. What does that mean? How many miles these apples went to get here? I really don't care about that."

Additionally, the relationship between overall impression of the "Food Miles" label and political position on social issues is statistically significant. ($\chi^2 = 6$; $p < .05$) The majority of moderates and conservatives had an overall negative impression of that label, while liberals had a more positive impression. Considering the "Food Miles" label points to the number of miles a food traveled before arriving at the store (and consequently the amount of CO₂ released), this data could support the hypothesis that many conservatives and moderates do not identify mitigating global climate change as a motivation for eating local.

Overall impression of 'Food Miles' label by political affiliation on social issues

Impression	Liberal	Conservative	Moderate
Positive	60%	20%	0%
Negative	40%	80%	100%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%
N	(5)	(5)	(4)

$\chi^2 = 6$; $p = .0498$

Some consumers lack trust in their grocery stores

Of note, two participants indicated in different contexts that they hoped their grocery stores were being honest about where their food was grown. The sentiment expressed was not necessary one of mistrust, however these participants voiced how they had limited control as to whether their grocery store was telling them the truth. For instance, one participant noted, "I have no way of knowing other than trusting that my grocery store is buying local."

This evaluation demonstrates several findings; first, listing Wisconsin or the specific location on local produce labels appears to be preferred, however, the effect could be decreased when individuals do not recognize the specific location listed. Second, consumers appear to be unfamiliar and unconcerned with food miles.

All findings discussed in this brief are a result of a small pilot evaluation. Further research is needed in order to investigate any findings.

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Anne Nardi

Department of Life Sciences Communication, University of Wisconsin-Madison
Annenardi@gmail.com