

Taste of Place Preliminary Market Study

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State of Vermont
Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets
Montpelier, Vermont

Submitted by:
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Introduction

Vermont is widely recognized as a national leader in the place-based marketing of the state's food products. This has been accomplished through the work of Vermont farmers and producers, and the support and programs of the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets and a variety of nonprofit organizations. Together, these groups have been able to take advantage of the connection made by many consumers between Vermont products and the idea of "quality." This connection has often enabled "Vermont products" to command a price premium, both in markets within the state and in other areas of the country.

Increasingly, place-based marketing is gaining popularity in other states (Patterson et al., 2003). It will benefit Vermont to explore new marketing and labeling strategies, including Protected Geographic Indicators (PGI) and Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) certifications similar to France's Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée (AOC), Italy's Denominazione di Origine Controllata (DOC), and Quebec's Appellations Réservées (AR). The PGI labeling system goes beyond the *buy local* movement by including product and process, as well as place, in its definitions (Ilerby et al., 2005). PGI labeling systems have been found to enable product differentiation for consumers, the result of which is to lower consumers' sensitivity to price of products they feel loyalty towards (Porter, 1979).

Perhaps the best and most widely recognized example of the PGI system is Champagne, the French, sparkling white wine made from grapes in the Champagne region and following a strict set of standards developed by the Comité Interprofessionnel du Vin de Champagne (CIVC), the trade association for grape growers and wine houses in the region (see Champagne Bureau, 2010). Recently, a PGI certification and labeling system was developed for "Charlevoix lamb" products from Quebec, Canada (see Conseil des Appellations Réservées et des Termes Valorisants, 2010). In the US, the closest example of this concept may be the place-based marketing of Florida Oranges, although it is clearly not an AOC-style system since it is simply a generic place-based marketing campaign without standards.

This preliminary study examines whether there are sufficient indications of interest in a Vermont-based, PGI-style labeling system in markets outside of the state of Vermont to justify further research on and development of such a program.

Methods

For this preliminary study, the design and methods were selected and developed collaboratively by the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (VAAFAM) and the Center for Rural Studies (CRS) at the University of Vermont (UVM). The survey sample was randomly drawn from a list of telephone numbers of households in two study areas, and included households in Brookline, Massachusetts (Location A) and Fairfield, Connecticut (Location B). The study areas were selected due to their proximity to Vermont and specific socio-demographic characteristics. The survey instrument (questionnaire) was developed by CRS and approved by VAAFAM staff (see Appendix A). The instrument was pre-tested by trained professional interviewers prior to the implementation of the survey. The study methods, sample, and instrument were reviewed and approved by the UVM Committees on Human Research (CHR).

The survey was conducted a UVM by telephone between the hours of 4:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. beginning on January 4, 2010 and ending on January 12, 2010. The telephone polling was conducted by a trained staff of interviewers using the Sawtooth Software Ci3 computer-aided telephone interviewing (CATI) system. Only residents of the two study areas who were over the age of eighteen were eligible and interviewed for this study.

In total, 787 eligible households in Brookline, Massachusetts were successfully contacted yielding 395 usable, completed questionnaires; therefore, the response rate was 50.2 percent. In Fairfield, Connecticut, 390 of the 864 eligible households that were researched completed the survey for a response rate of 45.1 percent. Based on groups of this size, the results for each study area have a margin of error of plus or minus 5 percent with a confidence interval of 95 percent. This means that if the survey were repeated, 95 percent of the time the results would be plus or minus 5 percent of the number reported. For questions with approximately 300 responses, the confidence interval is 92 percent.

The survey results were analyzed using the statistics program SPSS 17.0 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), and frequencies and descriptive statistics were calculated for each of the variables. For the categorical variables, frequency counts and percentages were calculated and reported. Tables presenting the frequencies and results of the descriptive analysis and statistical tests were created using Word 2010. The *n value* in each table signifies the size of the group. The report was formatted using the American Psychological Association (APA) style guide, but deviates in regard to section headings and table titles.

Results

Question 1. The state is considering a labeling system to help consumers find Vermont food products that are (a) produced using traditional techniques and (b) have flavors that reflect the natural environment of the region where they are produced.

Does this labeling concept interest you?

Respondents (Non-Respondents not included)

Response	Percent	
	Location A	Location B
Yes – This concept sounds interesting to me	78.0	77.7
No – This concept does not sound interesting to me	22.0	22.3
Total	100.0 (n=395)	100.0 (n=390)

Respondents and Non-Respondents

Response	Percent	
	Location A	Location B
Yes – This concept sounds interesting to me	39.1	35.1
No – This concept does not sound interesting to me	11.1	10.1
No – I don't want to respond to this study	49.8	54.9
Total	100.0 (n=787)	100.0 (n=864)

Note. This table presents the results to this question in two ways. First, the section of this table that is labeled Respondents (Non-respondents not included) only presents the values of actual respondents who participated in the study. The second part of the table, which is labeled Respondents and Non-Respondents, includes both people who participated in the study and those who did not participate in the study after the initial screening question. These values have been presented in this way to display the maximum and minimum levels of interest in this concept, which would not have been possible if the non-responses were not included in the table.

Question 2. Please listen to the following statements and indicate after each one whether you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with that statement. If you don't have an opinion on a particular statement, just say "don't know." Remember, we are interested in your personal opinion.

Foods grown in a particular region may have a unique taste

Response	Percent	
	Location A	Location B
Strongly agree	23.8	19.7
Agree	55.0	70.7
Neither/nor	8.5	3.0
Disagree	2.9	2.0
Strongly disagree	9.8	4.7
Total	100.0 (n=307)	100.0 (n=300)

Question 3. Please listen to the following statements and indicate after each one whether you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with that statement. If you don't have an opinion on a particular statement, just say "don't know." Remember, we are interested in your personal opinion.

Foods produced in small quantities at family farms or specialty food facilities are generally superior to food produced at large scale processing plants.

Response	Percent	
	Location A	Location B
Strongly agree	32.9	30.3
Agree	51.5	51.0
Neither/nor	8.5	10.0
Disagree	4.6	4.3
Strongly disagree	2.6	4.3
Total	100.0 (n=307)	100.0 (n=300)

Question 4. Please listen to the following statements and indicate after each one whether you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with that statement. If you don't have an opinion on a particular statement, just say "don't know." Remember, we are interested in your personal opinion.

Champagnes have qualities that sparkling white wines generally lack.

Response	Percent	
	Location A	Location B
Strongly agree	10.5	7.4
Agree	30.4	27.8
Neither/nor	15.7	11.0
Disagree	11.4	12.0
Strongly disagree	0.7	1.3
Don't know	31.4	40.5
Total	100.0 (n=306)	100.0 (n=299)

Question 5. Please listen to the following statements and indicate after each one whether you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with that statement. If you don't have an opinion on a particular statement, just say "don't know." Remember, we are interested in your personal opinion.

Florida oranges have qualities that oranges generally lack.

Response	Percent	
	Location A	Location B
Strongly agree	4.6	6.7
Agree	27.4	38.0
Neither/nor	18.9	15.7
Disagree	27.0	22.7
Strongly disagree	1.0	1.3
Don't know	21.2	15.7
Total	100.0 (n=307)	100.0 (n=300)

Question 6. Please listen to the following statements and indicate after each one whether you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with that statement. If you don't have an opinion on a particular statement, just say "don't know." Remember, we are interested in your personal opinion.

Cabot cheeses have qualities that cheddar cheeses generally lack.

Response	Percent	
	Location A	Location B
Strongly agree	6.9	10.4
Agree	35.0	37.5
Neither/nor	16.0	14.7
Disagree	20.6	16.4
Strongly disagree	0.7	0.7
Don't know	20.9	20.4
Total	100.0 (n=306)	100.0 (n=299)

Question 7. Please listen to the following statements and indicate after each one whether you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with that statement. If you don't have an opinion on a particular statement, just say "don't know." Remember, we are interested in your personal opinion.

Organic foods taste better than their non-organic counterparts.

Response	Percent	
	Location A	Location B
Strongly agree	12.5	16.4
Agree	31.5	31.1
Neither/nor	20.7	19.7
Disagree	26.9	23.1
Strongly disagree	1.6	2.0
Don't know	6.9	7.7
Total	100.0 (n=305)	100.0 (n=299)

Question 8. Please listen to the following statements and indicate after each one whether you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with that statement. If you don't have an opinion on a particular statement, just say "don't know." Remember, we are interested in your personal opinion.

Napa Valley Wines have qualities that wines generally lack.

Response	Percent	
	Location A	Location B
Strongly agree	1.6	3.7
Agree	21.0	24.7
Neither/nor	15.4	16.7
Disagree	31.8	25.1
Strongly disagree	2.0	0.7
Don't know	28.2	29.1
Total	100.0 (n=305)	100.0 (n=299)

Question 9. Have you ever visited or lived in Vermont?

Response	Percent	
	Location A	Location B
Visited Vermont	82.6	81.3
Visited and lived in Vermont	7.2	6.7
Lived in Vermont	1.0	2.3
Never visited or lived in Vermont	9.2	9.7
Total	100.0 (n=305)	100.0 (n=299)

Question 10. Have you ever purchased Vermont food products, while visiting the state?

Response	Percent	
	Location A	Location B
Yes	82.1	86.3
No	12.4	9.9
Don't know	5.5	3.8
Total	100.0 (n=274)	100.0 (n=263)

Question 11. Have you ever purchased Vermont food products at your local grocery store, food co-op, or any other food provider in your area? This includes buying Vermont products online.

Response	Percent	
	Location A	Location B
Yes	90.8	90.6
No	5.2	6.7
Don't know	3.9	2.7
Total	100.0 (n=305)	100.0 (n=299)

Discussion

Is there interest in the place-based marketing and labeling of Vermont food products in the two study areas? Yes; based on the findings from this study, there appears to be *at least* a general interest in “a labeling system to help consumers find Vermont food products that are (a) produced using traditional techniques and (b) have flavors that reflect the natural environment of the region where they are produced.” Both study areas have the same level of interest in this concept, statistically. At a minimum, just over a third of the population is interested in this concept, if you include the responses of both the respondents who participated in the study and the non-respondents who did not want to participate in the survey after the initial screening question was read. At most, perhaps approximately 78 percent of the population is interested in the concept, if actual study participants are counted.

There is general agreement among the majority of both study populations that “foods grown in a particular region may have a unique taste” and that “foods produced in small quantities at family farms or specialty food facilities are generally superior to food produced at large scale processing plants.” These two points may be critical when promoting the Taste of Place concept, but it is important to note that although there was agreement, less than a quarter of the population *strongly* agreed with the statement regarding the importance of region on taste. This suggests that although there may be general agreement on this concept, it’s not strongly held at this time. Likewise, approximately one-third of the population strongly agrees with the concept that small-scale operations generally produce superior food products. Again, although a majority of the population generally agrees with this concept, the view is not *strongly* held by most people.

When we look at the series of questions 4 through 8, regarding particular food products and categories (e.g., Champagnes, Florida oranges, organic), we see that overall there is less agreement that the specific, placed-based products that were studied have qualities that other, similar products lack. For each of these questions, the majority of the population did not agree (i.e., strongly agree or agree) that the place-based product had qualities that the other products without the placed-based designation lacked. There are several reasons that levels of agreement may not be as high when examining specific food products and categories as they were when discussing general concepts. First, some consumers may not have been familiar with the specific product examples were used in this study. This may have been why some consumers said that they “didn’t know” if the product had qualities that other products

lacked. Second, some consumers may have been familiar with the products, but may hold other place-based products in higher regard. For instance, other regionally-promoted wines may have been in the minds of respondents when asked whether they agree that “Napa Valley Wines have qualities that wines generally lack.” Since there were no follow-up questions, due to the preliminary nature of this study, we do not know the reasons respondents answered the way that they did. Follow-up questions will be important in any comprehensive study.

It is important to note that over 90 percent of the population in both study areas have either visited Vermont, lived in Vermont or both. Thus, the vast majority of the respondents to this study have some direct connection with Vermont. This connection is further demonstrated by the fact that over 90 percent of the population in both study areas have purchased Vermont food products where they currently live. It would be interesting to know if there were similar levels of connection with the state among the non-respondents to this study, but of course, this is not possible since they did not participate. Future studies should include some measure of connectivity among non-respondents, if possible.

Conclusions

Based on the results from this study, we can conclude the following:

1. There is interest in the concept of a place-based labeling system to help consumers find Vermont food products that are (a) produced using traditional techniques and (b) have flavors that reflect the natural environment of the region where they are produced;
2. The majority of the population agrees that *“foods grown in a particular region may have a unique taste;”*
3. The majority of the population agrees that *“foods produced in small quantities at family farms or specialty food facilities are generally superior to food produced at large scale processing plants;”*
4. A rather sizable percent of the population, but not a majority, agrees that the specific food products and categories examined in this study have qualities that other products do not

possess, but many people simply don't know if certain, specific food products have unique qualities;

5. A vast majority (over 90 percent) of respondents to this study either have visited Vermont, lived in Vermont previously, or have both visited and lived in the state at some point in time. This suggests that interest in Vermont-based products *may* come from having a prior connection to the state, but that hypothesis cannot be examined fully with any data from this study; and
6. Likewise, most of the respondents have purchased Vermont food products in their local community, in addition to buying Vermont products when they lived or visited the state. This indicates a level of awareness and connectivity with the state, which may be necessary for there to be interest in this concept.

Overall, there is reason to believe that there is enough interest in the concept of a place-based labeling system in the two study areas (Brookline, Massachusetts and Fairfield, Connecticut) to justify further, more-detailed research on the topic. Now that a baseline level of interest has been shown, the next phase of this research should be (a) more robust in its examination of consumers' motivations when purchasing place-based food products and (b) the specific attributes that will appeal to these consumers, outside of the current Vermont-based marketing that is already occurring. Also, in the next phase, the research should be broader in scope, so the results can be generalized to other market areas.

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