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Purchasing Organic Foods in New York State

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As part of a three year study of opportunities for organic food and agriculture in New York State, a survey of New Yorkers was conducted in the spring of 2011 to gain a better understanding of the purchasing patterns of New Yorkers buying organic foods. The first phase of the project reported the production of organic farm products in New York State - see *Organic Agriculture in New York State*, <http://www.aem.cornell.edu/outreach/extensionpdf/2010/Cornell-Dyson-eb1013.pdf>. The second phase examines organic food and beverage processing in New York State. The final phase of the project is looking at the market for organic foods produced in New York State. This article describes one process for this last phase of the project, New Yorkers' consumption of organic products. Data for this article were collected by inserting two questions into the Empire State Poll (ESP) on where and how often New York State residents purchased organic food.

Poll Background

The ESP is an annual general survey of adults, age 18 and over, who are residents of New York State. The Poll is conducted in the spring of each year. The first ESP was conducted in 2003. All interviews are conducted using a Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) software system. The ESP is a combination of an annual core of workplace, community, governmental, economic, media measures, omnibus modules, and special topical issue questions. Approximately 800 statewide interviews are conducted each year.

The listed household sample was selected proportionally between upstate and downstate New York to reflect the population proportion between the two regions. Downstate was defined as Kings, Richmond, Westchester, Suffolk, Queens, Nassau, and Bronx counties, with the remaining counties of the state defined as Upstate.

Selection of individual respondents came in two steps: first a household was randomly selected, and then a household member who was 18 years or older was randomly selected from within the household using the Most Recent Birthday Selection Method. An additional eligibility requirement was that all respondents had to be residents of New York State. These selection procedures ensured that every listed telephone household in New York State had an equal chance to be included in the survey, and once selected each adult in the household had an equal chance to be selected for the ESP as well. The random sampling frame used within the ESP allows for the poll results to be generalized to the

entire state. For more information see: <http://www.sri.cornell.edu/sri/files/esp/2011/Report%201%20-%202011%20-%20Introduction%20and%20Methodology.pdf>

Questions

Telephone surveys took place between February 1, 2011 and March 31, 2011. Survey participants were asked two questions related to purchasing organic foods

1. How often do you purchase organic foods?

The choice categories and related responses are summarized in the following table.

Response	Number	Valid percent
Never	331	41.4
Every day	34	4.3
Every week	212	26.5
Once per month	221	27.5
Did not respond	2	0.3
Total	800	100.0

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Although, 41 percent of respondents reported never purchasing organic foods, over 55 percent reported did report purchasing organic foods with over 30 percent making purchases at least once a week.

2. How Available Are Organic Foods to You?

The choice categories and related responses are summarized in the following table.

Response	Number	Valid percent
Do not buy as a matter of choice	279	34.9
Do not buy because not available	52	6.5
At my regular food store	321	40.1
At a specialty food store	93	11.6
Direct from organic farmers	53	6.6
No response	2	0.3
Total	800	100.0

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Most of the respondents who purchased organic foods (41.4 percent didn't) did so at their regular food store. A small percentage responding (7 percent) purchased organic foods directly from farmers. A similar percentage, part of the 41.4 percent never purchasing, did not purchase because organic foods were not available.

Limitations

There are a number of potential limitations to any survey and to the data collected. Some of the limitations to this survey and data can include: a sample limited to those respondents with listed phone numbers and phone service, potential misinterpretation of the terms used in questions such as "organic" foods or types of stores, and other aspects. However, these results can still provide a useful snapshot of New York consumer purchasing of organic foods.

Implications

Although there is a group of consumers who report never purchasing organic foods, there is another segment of consumers who purchase organic foods on a customary basis. Regular food stores

may be a major outlet for marketing organic foods. Although smart marketers of organic foods will still have to examine their individual markets and opportunities, they should not overlook mainline food stores in some cases as viable marketing option.

“Smart Marketing” is a marketing newsletter for extension publication in local newsletters and for placement in local media. It reviews elements critical to successful marketing in the food and agricultural industry. *Please cite or acknowledge when using this material.* Past articles are available at <http://marketingpwt.aem.cornell.edu/publications.html>.