

## **Understanding Consumer Attitudes and Habits in Knox County: The Role of Local Foods**

During the summer of 2006, students and faculty from the Department of Anthropology at Kenyon College, in association with the Rural Life Center and the Food for Thought Initiative, investigated consumer buying habits and attitudes about local foods in Knox County. Surveys designed to measure a consumer's interest in and use of local foods were administered at the Mount Vernon Farmers' Market and local non-market venues (Knox County Fair, Lanning's, and the Miller Farm Stand). The results represent a total of 104 surveys, and are supported by on-going follow-up interviews. Overall, the Farmers' Market and non-market samples are similar in their responses, and unless otherwise indicated, trends reported here reflect the combined sample.

### **Demographics**

- Most common age category was 45-54 (1/3 of all surveyed).
- The majority of the market sample was over 35; majority of non-market older than 45.
- Number of people with a post-graduate education varied.  
(1/2 of the market sample vs. 1/4 of the non-market sample)
- 2/3 of the non-market sample grew up on a farm whereas only 1/3 of the market sample comes from farming backgrounds.

### **Interest in Local Foods**

- 3/4 of the sample want to know where their food is grown and who grows it.
- "Local" is defined as Knox and adjacent counties by over 3/4 of the sample.
- 3/4 purchase local foods at least once a week and are willing to pay more for a local item than one purchased at a supermarket (as much as 1.5 times more).

### **Quality of Local Foods**

- 1/3 of all respondents "frequently" buy foods labeled organic. More people from the market sample buy organic products "regularly" (40%), while non-market respondents "sometimes" buy organic (33%).
- More than 3/4 perceive local foods as higher in quality than supermarket foods.
- 1/3 of respondents believe the price of local foods is higher than supermarket food while only 1/5 believe that local foods are less expensive.

### **Extending the Season**

- The non-market sample exhibited more season-extending practices:
  - non-market: 50% practice canning, 71% practice freezing
  - market: 25% practice canning, 50% practice freezing
- More than 3/4 of the sample was interested in buying local foods outside the traditional growing season.
- Interviews suggest that aside from the Farmers' Market, people don't know where to purchase local foods.
- Strong interest exists for a central locale with local foods outside the growing season.
- Interviews identify meat, eggs, dairy (cheese, milk), breads, and grains as desirable off-season goods.