

THE DEVELOPMENT AND MOTIVATION OF COMMUNITY-SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE.

CASE STUDY: THOMPSON OKANAGAN FARMERS' MARKETS

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INTRODUCTION

How is community-supported agriculture [CSA] a significant area for potential growth and development in the tourism industry?

My proposed research aims to explore the connection between community and agriculture tourism, in particular, Farmers' Markets. As part of the slow food movement and local food movement, this initiative strengthens the relationship between a community's wellbeing and the connection to its local economy, culture, and food supply. While I plan to address previous research on Farmers' Markets, the majority of the data is discussing how to increase profits and attendance at the markets, which will not be the focus. Instead, I plan to look into the consumer's motivation to attend the market and the sense of place and community that a Farmers' Market creates.

I propose a case study investigation looking at the 24 Farmers' Markets located in the Thompson Okanagan region as part of the BC Farmers' Market Trail (2020).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pulling from a collection of reports and articles across the world, you can see the importance of our relationship to food. Looking back at the beginning when Carlo Petrini founded the Slow Food Movement in 1989 (Guthrie et al., 2006; Pietrykowski, 2004; Stanciu, 2015) which desires "the preservation of local foods and cuisines by creating and strengthening networks of social relations between consumers and producers" (Pietrykowski, 2004, pg318). Farmers' Markets were historically the way in which cities were fed, local farmers and producers would bring their extra produce to the city or small towns and set up markets to sell (Stanciu, 2015). It was the primary way to source your food until the railway and refrigeration options took off, and food was able to travel long distances much quicker and safer (Stanciu, 2015). That transition led to the creation of supermarkets, which started the disconnection of the community found at Farmers' Markets and uncertainty for what food we are putting into our bodies (Parkins & Craig, 2009; Stanciu, 2015).

Over the last few years, it has become more and more relevant to the public of where our food is coming from, not only that, but a debate of organic vs local (Delind, 2006; Dodds et al., 2013), much less if you even know the difference (Baker et al., 2009). This concern became pertinent with past pandemics such as mad cow, SARS, and now with COVID-19, it can only bring into question what precautions will take place in the future (Delind, 2006; Guthrie et al., 2006; Pietrykowski, 2004).

With the interest in slowing down, sparked the next wave for the slow food movement called the local food movement (Delind, 2006). Which brings us back to Farmers' Markets, the outdoor fresh local food, and the community that it brings with it (Delind, 2006). Delind talks about connecting with the community, knowing what you are eating, and that people are becoming more cautious of their health and nutrition (2006). Consumers want to know the farmer that grew the food that they are buying and be able to ask them questions and get real answers (Delind, 2006). There is some research found suggesting the motivations to going to a farmers' market, but those same authors speak to the lack of research in those areas and what research there is, is outdated (Byker et al., 2012; Dodds et al., 2013). The majority of the research found addresses the demographic in Farmers' Markets are around older wealthy white females (Byker et al., 2012; Dodds et al., 2013). Most recently, Byker addresses that lack of clarity in demographics from their surveys, which Byker suggests to be that the demographic is changing to represent the community where the Farmers' Market is located (2012).

A common theme the authors can agree upon is that Farmers' Markets are beneficial both economically and socially to the community and are growing in popularity (Connell, 2012a,b; Dodds et al., 2013; Guthrie et al., 2006; Stanciu, 2015). British Columbia has created an association and a trail dedicated to Farmers' Markets; they also conducted surveys across the majority of their markets to better understand their consumers (Connell, 2012a,b; The BC Farmers' Market Trail, 2020). However, that data is now becoming outdated with how quickly the markets are taking off. With that, it is evident that the larger part of consumers are repeat customers, and one study found that less than 3% were first-timers at the market; as well there was a more significant difference in motivations between the market regulars and the first-time attendees (Dodds et al., 2013).

There is also the school of thought that not only does food transfer traditions and create meaningful connections but it is a way of connecting to place through the food you eat (Parkins & Craig, 2009; Pietrykowski, 2004). That thought is along the lines of you are what you eat, that by eating locally sourced food, you are, in fact, acclimatizing to the location where you live (Delind, 2006; Pietrykowski, 2004). For example, there has been research into eating locally made honey and how it could help with outdoor allergies because you are already introducing them into your system through the honey (Delind, 2006). It is mentioned that when we travel, certain foods do not digest properly for us, but the locals have no problem (Delind, 2006; Pietrykowski, 2004). If you are regularly eating food that is shipped long distances and that are not grown near you, then your body could continue to see these items as foreign and not digest them properly (Delind, 2006). Though further research needs to go into this area, Delind speaks to the connection of body, place and culture through local food (2006).

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

QUESTION

What are the motivations of consumers who attend Farmers' Markets in Thompson Okanagan?

As stated previously, there is no conclusive research into the consumer side of Farmers' Markets; this area leaves much to the unknown. The proposed research is exploratory in nature, and it will focus on diving into the motivations of consumers, with a particular interest in the discovery of any differences between first-time vs regular attendees. It will also look at the sense of community or place that a Farmers' Market creates, with interest in connection to local food, the social interactions that take place, and if there are any evident issues to address.

METHODOLOGY, METHOD AND DATA ANALYSIS

QUALITATIVE

The proposed research will be qualitative and use surveys to collect data from the consumers at the Farmers' Markets. The research will be using the Rapid Market Assessment [RMA] model created at Oregon State University's Small Farms department, which is a model to help collect data from Farmers' Markets in the most effective way (Lev et al., 2008). This method is the same RMA used by the BC Farmers' Market Association during their benefits report (Connell, 2012a,b). The surveys will be 'Dot Surveys' in the form of four flip charts that are set up at the markets to collect primary research. Also, there will be field notes taken through environmental observations by the lead researcher during the market to gain insight into further areas of study.

There will be secondary data required to help compare and contrast with the data collected through the dot surveys, leading up to the fieldwork in the summer. The secondary data will be in the form of academic papers, resources and reports from agriculture associations, and previously collected data from the BC Farmers' Market Association.

CASE STUDY

The case study used for this research will be the 24 Farmers' Markets that make up the region of Thompson Okanagan, this will be a sample of the BC Farmers' Market Trail (The BC Farmers' Market Trail, 2020).

DATA ANALYSIS

After collecting the dot surveys at each market, the data will be entered into an excel spreadsheet to organize the raw data. Following that, the data is analyzed, and it will be transformed into infographics.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As there are humans involved in the gathering of data at Farmers' Markets, the participants are required to be 18 years of age or older. However, if parents choose to give the stickers to their children to place on the board, that is acceptable. When guests approach the flip charts, they will each be given a short spiel, which will be requesting their consent to use the information they provide. The overall risk of this research project would be considered minimal, the participants would not be regarded as part of a potentially vulnerable group, and there is no monetary compensation for participating. If guests decide that they no longer wish to have their stickers on the four flip charts, they can easily be removed.

During the research and specifically the fieldnotes for environmental observations it is worth noting the bias of the lead researcher. Having grown up on a dairy farm and is currently a contract worker with the Ontario Association of Agricultural Societies, her perception does support the passion of the project and experience will be beneficial. However, that does give her a potential barrier on the motivations of consumers and why the environmental observations are required to explore all possibilities.

SCHEDULE

With COVID-19 currently taking place, that would significantly affect the functionality and the reliability of results this summer; therefore it would be held off until next summer and possibly longer depending on the impact of COVID-19. If timing allows the research would ideally take place over two summers, first looking strictly at the 24 Farmers' Markets in the Thompson Okanagan, then the following year at the rest of the BC Farmers' Market Trail.

Initially the fieldwork would be compiled over the span of one operational summer, the earliest markets start-up mid-April and the majority continue until early December. Participation would require three volunteers, either from the market or Thompson Rivers University, to assist onsite. Training for them would require 10-15 mins before starting the market to understand the operation of the flip charts. The volunteers would cover the flip chart surveys, while the lead researcher would intermittently be conducting environmental observations. By the time the summer is complete, the data should be entered and the following couple of months allocated to analyzing the results.

One year in total would be required to have the data available before the beginning of the coming years market. If time allows and funding is possible, then continue the same process with any needed alterations to accommodate the other regions.

STATEMENT OF RELEVANCE

This research is essential to understanding consumer motivations at BC Farmers' Markets as a way to continue the growth in local communities. The slow food movement and, in turn, the local food movement is instrumental in contributing to the sense of place found through connecting your wellbeing to your food supply.

This proposed research is relevant for the BC Farmers' Markets Association as it will provide an updated comparison of motivations currently vs the surveys Connell conducted previously (2012). Furthermore, by looking at the 24 Farmers' Markets in an exploratory manner, allows for discoveries that were not addressed in previous research. This research will benefit the BC Farmers' Market Association by enabling them to understand any changes in their consumers as the popularity of attending markets is increasing yearly. This research will provide vendors at each market an updated idea of who their consumers are and what interests them. In addition, FarmFolk CityFolk will benefit by reaching their audiences of farmers by informing them of the motivations and where they may adjust to meet their needs (*Young Agrarians*, 2019).

DISSEMINATION AND POLICY RELEVANCE

An infographic of information will be provided to BC Farmers' Market Association for their comparison of previous surveys. It will be supplied to the individual Farmers' Markets that were attended as part of the study (The BC Farmers' Market Trail, 2020). Additionally, the infographic will be provided to FarmFolk CityFolk and their sub-company Young Agrarians to present as a resource for their upcoming young farmers. Young Agrarians also have a blog and podcast; pending their approval, the research will also be disseminated through those platforms (*Young Agrarians*, 2019).

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Appendix:

Flip Chart - Dot Survey Questions:

BOARD 1: WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF COMING TO THIS FARMERS' MARKET?

- The local produce
- The social environment
- Equally the local produce and environment
- Crafts
- Supporting the local economy
- Going to the market and other local stores
- Knowing where my food comes from
- Value of money and quality of products
- Locally made products

BOARD 2: DO YOU PREFER LOCAL, ORGANIC, OR NO PREFERENCE/IS THERE A DIFFERENCE?

- Local
- Organic
- No preference
- There's a difference?
- Whichever is cheaper
- Depends on the product

BOARD 3: WHAT FEELING DO YOU GET FROM THE MARKET?

- Joy
- Sense of community and belonging
- Just a place to grab food
- Stressed and busy
- No connection
- Like I'm home

BOARD 4: HOW OFTEN DO YOU VISIT THE MARKET?

- First Time and won't return
- First time and can't wait to come back
- First time here but I've been to other markets
- A few times a summer
- Every month
- Every few weeks
- Every week
- I attend several markets in addition to this one
- When I can - sometimes the hours/dates are hard
- All the time, best produce around