Local Food Systems Response to COVID

Consumer Food Insights

LFS-CFI-02 December 2020

Dawn Thilmany, Colorado State University
Hailey Edmondson, Colorado State University

Consumer Food Insights Series

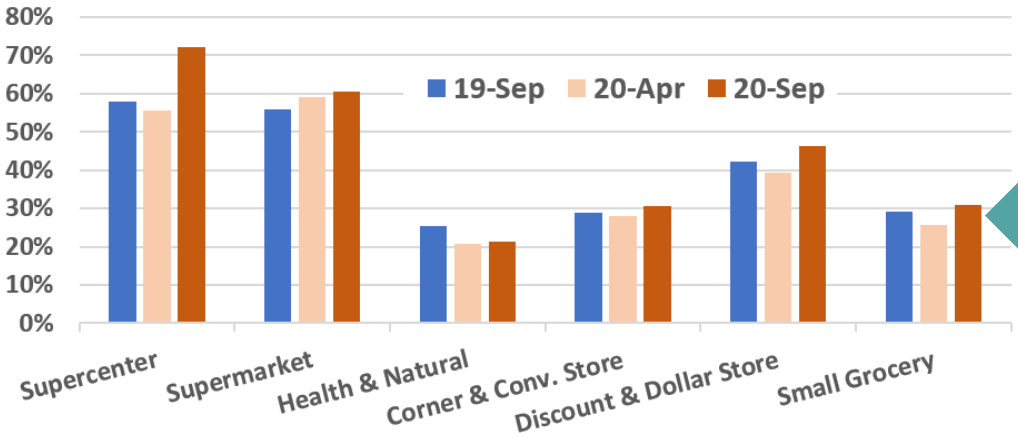
- Highlights from nationwide survey of food behavior during COVID-19 pandemic
- Sample size = 5000 respondents
- Conducted Fall 2020 (Oct. - Nov.) and captures behavior in 3 time periods (September 2019, April 2020, September 2020)
- Objective: Understand changes in U.S. consumer food behavior during COVID-19
- Specific focus on implications for local and regional food systems

Terms

LRFS- Local and Regional Food Systems
FAFH- Food eaten Away From Home
FAH- Food eaten At Home

Use of Food Market Channels

Given significant public health concerns and local regulations for social distancing, both national chain and independent, local restaurants (FAFH) were used by a significantly smaller set of households in April 2020, and although many returned by September 2020, the share of households going to restaurants remained at least 5% lower.

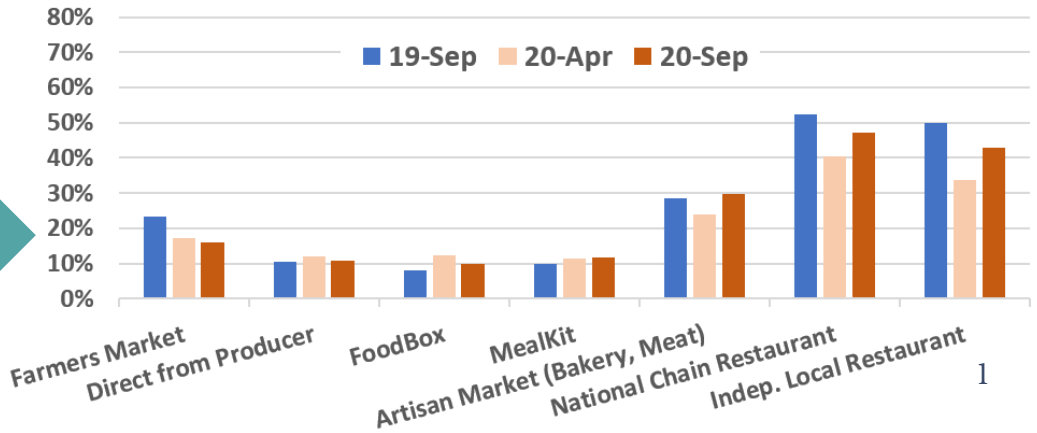


Traditional Markets

Larger format food retailers and superstores continue to be the most common choice for food purchases for US consumers, with increased visitation because of a significant drop in FAFH.

Local Markets

After an initial drop in April, small, independent, artisan markets and dollar stores appear to have become more popular, perhaps due to perceptions that smaller stores were easier to navigate and maintain social distancing.



Although chosen by a smaller share (10-20%) of US consumers, many households are shopping local with direct-from-producer and aggregated food boxes (products from several producers) particularly in April, when farmers markets were still beginning their season and adapting to new protocols.

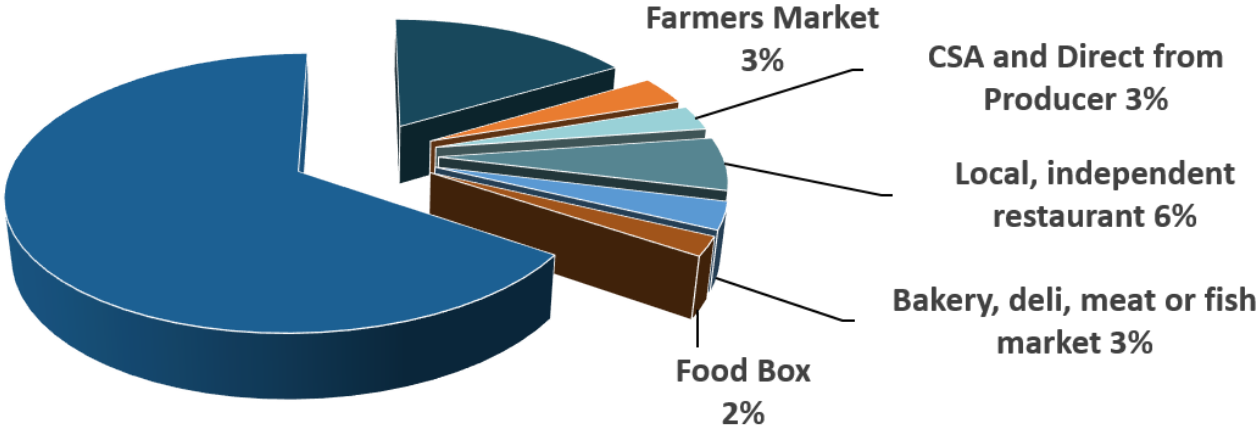
Choosing New Food Market Channels in 2020

Of particular interest were the consumers who did make changes in their choices within food markets, including restaurants, so we explored trends among the 35% of those who did note use of new markets from April 2020 on. The most common response was that households chose to begin shopping at a number of new outlets (17%).

Did you buy food from a new farm or food enterprise?

35%

1684 out of 5000 (35%) tried at least one new outlet in the below market channels. These are target market channels for local farms and food businesses.



3%

Small %, Big Impact

3% of these respondents would represent **36 million** households (assuming the sample is representative of US peers), and another 17% used a mix of these different types of markets.

How did you learn about your new market channel?

Based on the 1000+ responses, we created a word cloud. It seems that word of mouth, particularly from family and friends was important, but that online information and social media were also important referrals. Size of word indicates the frequency of the response.

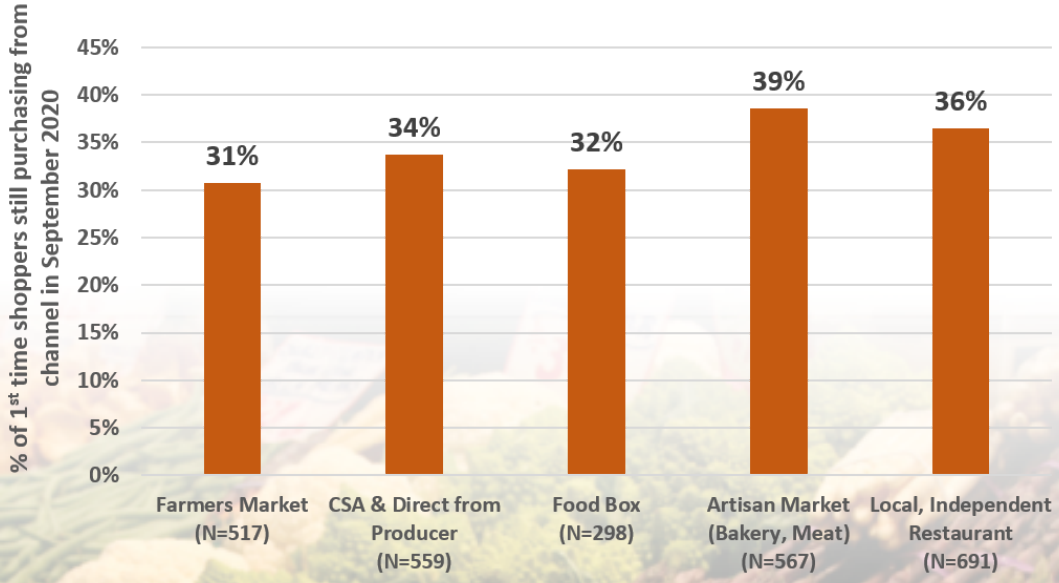
Considerations for Producers

Which Customers Continue to Visit New Markets?

- It is important for producers to connect with new customers to learn about their choice to begin buying from them.
- Given the common themes of word-of-mouth recommendations, social media, and other online awareness, businesses should think of strategies to accelerate such activities.

Persistence of New Shoppers Using Local Market Channels

N = Number of New Shoppers in April 2020 in Each Channel



April 2020

1500 respondents began shopping at local markets

September 2020

1100 respondents still shopping at new markets

This indicates a shift that has persisted 5-6 months beyond the initial shock of COVID-19 restrictions and supply chain disruptions. While this number is smaller than shifts to larger retailers, it still represents a substantial shift into food channels that provide new marketing opportunities for producers, fishers, food businesses, chefs and markets that differentiate themselves by their focus on local foods.