

# Consumers Willing to Pay for Local, Organic Foods

Ohioans' support for local and organic foods reaches into their wallets — at least sometimes. According to a recent survey, 59% of respondents said they would be willing to pay at least 10% more for locally grown foods, and 39% said they would do so for organically grown foods.

"We're seeing quite a lot of enthusiasm among consumers for locally grown foods and more modest interest in organically grown foods," says Jeff Sharp, rural sociologist with the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center (OARDC) and Ohio State University (OSU) Extension. "Historically, the marketing of organic and locally grown foods overlapped quite a bit. Now, foods labeled 'organic' are widely available, but not necessarily locally grown. Yet, a subset of people is even more interested in locally grown foods. I think we're seeing growing diversity in the attributes

consumers are looking for in the alternative food system."

Sharp was to present these results from the 2004 Ohio Survey last month at the Ohio Fruit and Vegetable Growers Congress in Toledo.

Molly Bean Smith, a doctoral student who helped with the survey, says people still take other factors into higher

consideration when purchasing a product. "Taste, availability, nutritional value and price all were 'very important' to most consumers when making food purchase decisions," Smith says.

But interest in local and organic foods also is strong, she says. In the survey, conducted last

summer, 89% of respondents said they frequently or occasionally buy locally grown foods, and 40% said they frequently or occasionally buy organic foods. For locally grown foods, 50% said they would be willing to pay 10% more, 8% said they would pay 25% more, and

1% said they would pay 50% more.

For organic foods, 32% said they would pay 10% more, 6% said they would pay 25% more, and 1% said they would pay 50% more.

In doing further analysis of respondents, Smith found that those more interested in locally produced foods were also more interested in the well-being of farmers, more supportive of farming and farmland preservation, and significantly more inclined to trust farmers than those more interested in organic foods. On the other hand, those more interested in organic foods tended to be more concerned about water quality, global warming and animal welfare issues.

"It will be interesting to see how producers, marketers and retailers react to this information," Smith says. "These days, you find that organic foods are increasingly labeled as such, but the fact that a food is produced locally is not always evident." Retailers may want to consider highlighting this information, she says, to help consumers recognize which foods are grown locally and to take advantage of some consumers'

willingness to pay at least a small premium for locally grown foods.

The project was funded by the OSU Department of Human and Community Resource Development; OSU Extension; OARDC; and the OSU College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences. The 10-page survey was mailed to 3,500 residents throughout Ohio. A total of 56% responded. Respondents' demographic characteristics matched well with Ohio's population as a whole, Sharp says, except that survey respondents tended to be slightly more educated, reported slightly higher home values, and included a smaller proportion of African American respondents compared with the statewide population.

For more information on the Ohio Fruit and Vegetable Growers Congress, visit [www.ohiofruit.org](http://www.ohiofruit.org) or [www.ohiovegetables.org](http://www.ohiovegetables.org), or contact Susan Gaughan at (614) 246-8292 or [growohio@ofbf.org](mailto:growohio@ofbf.org).

The conference is sponsored by OSU Extension, OARDC, Ohio Vegetable and Potato Growers Association, Ohio Fruit Growers Society, Ohio Direct Agricultural Marketing Association, and Ohio Christmas Tree Association.



**Editor's Note:** This article was written by Martha Filipic, technical editor, communications & technology, with the OSU College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences, which supplied this article.