

Fresh and local is in, organics is out for farmer's market shoppers

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A new research study by Ted Rogers School of Management students finds that shoppers visit farmer's markets for their fresh, local vegetables and fruits more than organically grown food. Credit: RUEats

Goodbye organics, hello fresh local fruits and veggies. Shoppers heading to their neighbourhood farmer's market this spring may be more interested in fresh local produce than buying organic food, says a new report conducted by student researchers at Ted Rogers School of Management at Ryerson University.

"People are going to farmer's markets because of their perception that

the produce is fresher, tastes better and is grown within a 100-mile radius. It's a farm-to-table mentality and about promoting local farmers," says Professor Rachel Dodds, the students' academic supervisor at Ted Rogers School of Hospitality and Tourism Management. "There's also a feel-good factor happening here."

Farmer's markets have been in existence for more than 200 years in Ontario, but have experienced a growing popularity in recent years, in part due to consumers' interest in the source of the foods they purchase and generally being more health conscious. Previous studies have also shown that Canadians will pay more for healthier foods, are willing to support their local economy and believe that food grown locally is better for the environment because of the shorter travel distance between farms to the dinner table.

St. Lawrence versus Liberty Village

As part of the undergraduate students' final-year project, they surveyed 350 people shopping at two distinct farmer's markets in Toronto: St. Lawrence Market, Toronto's oldest purveyor of farm-grown wares, and Liberty Village, a gastronomic emporium that was established in 2007. The researchers asked people about their primary motivations, perceptions and benefits of visiting these markets.

What they found: fresh and local is best

Despite the different audiences that both markets attracted (St. Lawrence Market attracts older adults and tourists versus Liberty Village, which draws in mostly the neighbourhood's urban, younger residents), they were mostly interested in purchasing fresh, locally grown produce and were willing to spend a little more money to support local farmers.

The shoppers were also interested in knowing how their food was grown. "People want to eat healthy and are interested in knowing whether or not the food they consume has a positive or negative impact on their health," says Minjee Park, one of the student researchers who frequently shops at farmer's markets, especially the one at Ryerson, which opens today on Gould St. and will run every Wednesday from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. until October 7.

As a first-year student, Park was concerned about convenience and affordable prices when it came to grocery shopping. When she realized that she was eating too much processed food almost every day, a friend introduced her to farmer's markets. "I was amazed by how fresh and colourful the foods were so began to take more of an interest in healthy eating." This interest led her to change her eating habits, but also spurred her research interest in farmer's markets.

Organics not a big priority

What was surprising to the researchers was that purchasing organically grown food was not a primary motivation to shop at local [farmer's](#) markets. Dodds attributes the lack of desire to the strong local food movement by organizations as well the confusion over regulations around certified organic produce and foods. However, she sees having produce that is both organic and locally grown as the best scenario. "Organic and local is probably the best answer because you get the best of both worlds — produce that is grown without harmful pesticides from a farm a few kilometers away."

Provided by Ryerson University

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