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Consumers' opinions, attitudes and use of direct markets in West Virginia

Kitty Lou Blackburn

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CONSUMERS' OPINIONS,
ATTITUDES AND USE OF
DIRECT MARKETS IN
WEST VIRGINIA

Authors

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Consumers' Opinions, Attitudes and Use of Direct Markets in West Virginia

Kitty Lou Blackburn and Robert L. Jack

Introduction

Direct markets include any type of market at which a farmer sells directly to the consumer. In recent years they have been increasing in popularity as a source of fresh fruits and vegetables¹, primarily due to the increasing prices of fresh produce for the consumer and to the increasing energy and transportation costs for the producers.

Because of increasing prices, consumers are more aware of the quality of the produce they purchase. According to the consumers answering the survey used in this study, produce purchased at direct markets is usually fresher, of higher quality, and at a lower price than may be found elsewhere. Direct markets allow producers to increase their earnings because there are no middlemen.

Most of the recent direct market studies have dealt with producers and their opinions and attitudes relating to direct marketing and their use of direct markets. Because of this, there is a need for information from consumers about their opinions and attitudes and uses of direct markets. This study attempted to provide information about consumers in West Virginia.

The four types of direct markets analyzed in this study were:

1. Tailgate markets—produce sold from a vehicle usually parked along a highway.
2. Roadside stands—produce sold from some type of permanent structure which is usually located beside a highway.
3. Farmers' markets—producers sell their produce at one central location. Such markets may be sponsored by city, county, or state governments, or are operated independently.
4. Pick-your-own operations—consumers harvest their own produce at the farm.

¹Fresh fruits and vegetables and fresh produce are used interchangeably.

Purpose of the Study

1. To identify West Virginia consumer views concerning direct markets.
2. To determine consumer expectations and needs that must be satisfied to make a direct market successful.
3. To use the information obtained as a basis for making recommendations for improving direct markets in West Virginia.

Procedures

The questionnaire used in this study was developed by a northeastern committee composed of representatives from Delaware, Maine, and West Virginia. The same questionnaire was used in all three states in order to make a regional analysis and an analysis for each state possible.

The questionnaire was mailed to 5,000 West Virginia households randomly selected from the telephone directories in all West Virginia cities. The first mailing, also including an introductory letter, was made in November, 1981. Approximately two months later a second mailing of a follow-up letter and another questionnaire was made. Slightly more than 16 percent of the questionnaires were returned and used in the analysis.

Data obtained were summarized and frequency tables developed. Chi square analysis was used to test for significant relationships between selected socioeconomic variables and selected responses to questions. All results were tested at the 5 percent confidence level.

General Summary of Respondents

Socioeconomic variables used in this study included place of residence, education of person answering survey, occupation of person answering survey, and household total gross income for 1980.

About 39 percent of the respondents resided in cities, 18 percent in suburbs, 16 percent in towns, and 26 percent in rural areas (20 percent rural non-farm and 6 percent rural farm). More than 43 percent of the respondents completed 13 or more years of school. Retired/disabled persons comprised 24 percent; homemakers 18 percent; professional/technical 15 percent; and laborers 10 percent of the respondents. About 6 percent of the respondents had annual incomes of \$5,000 or less; 29 percent, \$15,000 to \$24,999; 27 percent, \$25,000 to \$39,999; and 9 percent, \$40,000 or more.

A comparison of the above data with mean levels of income and education in West Virginia suggest that respondents were above state averages for income and education.

General Summary of Data

The quality of fresh produce at direct markets was considered much better by the respondents than the quality of fresh produce at grocery stores (Table 1). More than 91 percent ranked quality at direct markets as "Good or Excellent," while only 52 percent ranked quality at grocery stores this high.

Table 1.
Rating of the Quality of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables at Direct Markets and at Grocery Stores

Quality Rating	Direct Markets		Grocery Stores	
	Number	Percent*	Number	Percent*
Poor	8	1.3	41	5.5
Fair	43	6.9	319	42.5
Good	318	51.4	344	45.9
Excellent	249	40.3	46	6.1

*Percentages were calculated using the total number of respondents for each type of market.

More than half of the respondents believed direct market prices to be lower than grocery store prices for fresh produce (Table 2). Almost a third of the respondents believed prices to be about the same at direct markets and grocery stores.

When shopping for fresh produce, quality was chosen as the attribute considered to be most important by the respondents (Table 3). Appearance and price were the next most important attributes. Where produce is grown was only of minor importance to the respondents.

Table 2.
Comparison of Prices at Direct Markets to Those at Grocery Stores*

Response	Number	Percent**
Higher	43	8.1
About the same	171	32.3
Lower	292	55.1
Don't know	23	4.3

*Only those respondents who had previously shopped at direct markets answered this question.

**Percentages were calculated using total number of respondents for the question.

Table 3.
Importance of Selected Characteristics When Shopping for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

Degree of Importance	Appearance		Where it Was Grown		Quality		Price	
	Number	Percent*	Number	Percent*	Number	Percent*	Number	Percent*
Not important	8	1.0	254	33.7	4	.5	15	1.8
Somewhat important	35	4.4	233	30.9	4	.5	62	7.8
Important	165	20.9	170	22.6	104	13.1	220	27.6
Very important	578	73.5	96	12.7	682	85.9	501	62.8

*Percentages were calculated using the total number of respondents for each characteristic.

On a weekly shopping trip, either to direct markets or grocery stores, the most frequently purchased fresh produce items were apples, lettuce, and tomatoes (Table 4). Potatoes, roots (turnips/beets/sweet potatoes), cabbage and peppers were not purchased as frequently.

Respondents who had previously shopped at direct markets were asked to list their reasons for shopping at them. High quality, good prices, convenience, like to help farmers, and good variety/volume were some reasons listed (Table 5). Convenience was not rated high for pick-your-own operations. Nice atmosphere was not a strong point for tailgate markets. These respondents were also asked several questions about their use of direct markets. Most of them made ten or less visits to all types of direct markets in 1981 (Table 6). Over a fourth of these respondents made more than ten visits to farmers' markets in 1981. Pick-your-own operations were visited less frequently than the other types of direct markets.

Except for travel to pick-your-own operations, more than 60 percent of the respondents traveled 10 or less miles per round trip to direct markets (Table 7). A third of the respondents who shopped at pick-your-own operations traveled 26 miles or more per round trip and 21 percent traveled more than 20 miles per round trip to farmers' markets.

Most respondents who shopped at direct markets usually spent less than \$10.00 per visit (Table 8). Almost 19 percent of the respondents indicated that they spent \$20.00 or more per visit to pick-your-own operations.

Table 4.
Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Usually Purchased on a Weekly Shopping Trip

Fresh Fruit or Vegetable*	Number Purchased Weekly (N = 711)		Percent
Apples	746		66.9
Lettuce	459		64.5
Tomatoes	291		40.9
Bananas	270		37.9
Citrus Fruits	266		37.4
Carrots	217		30.5
Potatoes	166		23.3
Roots (Turnips/Beets/etc.)	135		19.0
Cabbage	118		16.6
Peppers	87		12.2

*Respondents could list more than one fresh fruit or vegetable.

Table 5.
Reasons Given for Shopping at Direct Markets*

Reason Listed**	Roadside Stands N = 280		Tailgate Market N = 196		Farmers' Market N = 339		PYO N = 117	
	Number	Percent†	Number	Percent†	Number	Percent†	Number	Percent†
Good prices	183	65.4	136	69.4	210	61.9	99	84.6
Quality	196	70.0	135	68.9	261	76.9	80	68.4
Nice atmosphere	55	19.6	33	26.8	132	38.9	36	30.8
Convenience	125	44.6	78	39.8	127	37.5	13	11.1
Like to help farmers	113	40.4	82	41.8	152	44.8	29	24.8
Good variety/volume	65	23.2	40	20.4	176	51.9	30	25.6
Fresh produce	8	2.8	3	1.5	10	2.9	1	1.0

*Only those consumers who had previously shopped at direct markets responded to this question.

**Respondents were allowed to list more than one reason for each type of market.

†Percentages were calculated using the total number of respondents for each type of market.

Table 6.
Number of Visits Made to Each Type of Direct Market in 1981*

Number of Visits	Roadside Stands		Tailgate Market		Farmers' Market		PYO	
	Number	Percent**	Number	Percent**	Number	Percent**	Number	Percent**
1-5	172	55.5	138	63.6	149	44.9	70	85.4
6-10	91	29.4	60	27.6	92	27.7	8	9.7
11-15	19	6.1	8	3.7	33	9.9	2	2.4
16-25	16	5.2	8	3.7	34	10.2	1	1.2
25 or more	12	3.9	3	1.4	24	7.2	1	1.2

*Only those respondents who had previously shopped at direct markets answered this question.

**Percentages were calculated using the total number of respondents for each type of market.

Table 7.
Round Trip Mileage from Home to Direct Markets at which Respondents Usually Shop*

Round Trip Mileage	Roadside Stands		Tailgate Markets		Farmers' Market		PYO	
	Number	Percent**	Number	Percent**	Number	Percent**	Number	Percent**
1-5	125	50.2	131	65.1	150	42.6	10	11.4
6-10	49	19.7	42	20.9	63	17.9	17	19.3
11-15	35	14.1	7	3.5	31	8.8	9	10.2
16-20	16	6.4	8	4.0	34	9.6	13	14.8
21-25	6	2.4	4	2.0	13	3.7	10	11.4
26 or more	18	7.2	9	4.5	61	17.3	29	33.0

*Only those respondents who had previously shopped at direct markets responded to this question.

**Percentages were calculated using the total number of responses for each type of market.

Table 8.
Average Expenditure Per Visit to Each Type of Direct Market*

Dollar Amount	Roadside Stands		Tailgate Markets		Farmers' Market		PYO	
	Number	Percent**	Number	Percent**	Number	Percent**	Number	Percent**
Less than \$5.00	107	32.1	80	34.6	45	12.8	24	25.3
\$5.00-\$9.99	155	46.5	116	50.3	148	42.0	22	23.2
\$10.00-\$14.99	47	14.1	24	10.4	103	29.3	24	25.3
\$15.00-\$19.00	14	4.2	5	2.2	31	8.8	7	7.4
\$20.00 or More	10	3.0	6	2.6	25	7.1	18	18.9

*Only respondents who had previously shopped at direct markets responded to this question.

**Percentages were calculated using the total number of responses for each type of market.

Table 9.

Responses to—"We would like to know if there are any particular reasons why you haven't bought produce at direct markets or even if you have, whether you have found things about them that you didn't like."

Reason for Nonuse or Dislike**	Roadside Stands N = 450		Tailgate Markets N = 412		Farmers' Markets N = 429		PYO N = 364	
	Number	Percent*	Number	Percent*	Number	Percent*	Number	Percent*
Priced too high	87	19.4	43	10.4	89	20.7	10	2.7
Poor quality	28	6.2	37	8.9	25	5.8	3	.8
Limited variety/volume	102	22.7	121	29.4	61	14.2	22	6.0
None nearby	187	41.6	175	42.5	176	41.0	254	69.8
Inconvenient	131	29.1	90	21.8	142	33.1	118	32.4
Unsanitary	33	7.3	32	7.7	10	2.3	6	1.6
Don't like atmosphere	24	5.3	31	7.5	17	4.0	3	.8
Don't accept checks/food stamps	28	6.2	25	6.0	25	5.8	11	3.0
Grow own	16	3.6	15	3.6	12	2.8	2	.5

*Percentages were calculated using the total number of respondents for each type of market.

**Respondents were allowed to list more than one reason for each type of market.

Respondents who had never shopped at direct markets were asked to list reasons why they had not and those who had were asked to list what they disliked about direct markets. None nearby was the response given most frequently for all markets (Table 9). Inconvenient and limited volume/variety were the next most important reasons respectively for not shopping at direct markets.

When asked to list suggestions for improvements, the most frequently listed were lower prices, better location, and more markets (Table 10). More dependable hours and better service were checked as needed improvements by less than 4 percent of the respondents.

The most common ways in which respondents first became aware of roadside stands and tailgate markets in their area was by passing by them on the road (Table 11). Word of mouth was the most important way of learning about pick-your-own operations and farmers' markets. Advertising was the way over a third of the respondents became aware of farmers' markets.

Analysis of Data

Place of residence and household income were used as independent variables to explain variation in respondents' answers. Income is generally a result of education and occupation so therefore was not discussed. Only significant relationships are discussed.

Table 10.
Suggestions for Improvements to Direct Markets

Suggestions*	Number N = 313	Percent**
Longer hours	18	5.7
More dependable hours	11	3.5
Door-to-door sales	4	1.3
Better locations	50	15.9
More volume/variety	41	13.1
Better sanitation	25	8.0
Better service	10	3.2
More markets	49	15.6
Advertise	42	13.4
Lower prices	69	22.0

*Respondents were allowed to list more than one suggestion.

**Percentages were calculated using total number of respondents for the question.

Table 11.
Way of First Learning About Direct Markets in Area

Source of Knowledge*	Roadside Stands N = 506		Tailgate Markets N = 394		Farmers' Markets N = 533		PYO N = 281	
	Number	Percent**	Number	Percent**	Number	Percent**	Number	Percent**
Word of mouth	97	19.2	68	17.2	246	46.2	110	39.1
Passed by on road	363	71.7	227	57.6	125	23.4	35	12.4
Roadside sign	111	21.9	35	8.9	46	8.6	32	11.4
Advertisement	29	5.7	47	11.9	194	36.4	45	16.0
Don't know of any	69	13.6	73	18.5	67	12.6	108	38.4

*Respondents were allowed to list more than one source of knowledge for each type of market.

**Percentages were calculated using the total number of respondents for each type of market.

Place of Residency

The percentage of respondents who considered quality a very important attribute when shopping for fresh produce decreased as place of residence became more rural except for rural farm residents (Table 12). Respondents who lived in rural areas purchased a smaller percentage of their fresh produce from retail stores than residents in other areas (Table 13). More than 47 percent

Table 12.
Place of Residence vs. Importance of Quality when Shopping for Fresh Produce

Residence	Number	Not Important at All	Very
		to Somewhat Important	Important
		Percent	
City	258	10.1	89.9
Suburbs	122	12.3	87.7
Town	108	18.5	81.5
Rural non-farm	142	20.4	79.6
Rural farm	44	15.9	84.1

Chi Square = 10.000

DF = 4

Prob. = 0.0388

Table 13.
Place of Residence vs. Percentage of Total Annual Fresh Produce Purchased from Retail Stores

Place of Residence	Number	Percentage Amount Purchased				
		10-25	26-70	71-89	90-95	96-100
		Percent				
City	217	11.9	32.7	17.1	21.1	17.1
Suburban	102	22.6	30.4	16.7	18.6	11.8
Town	88	14.8	31.8	22.7	21.6	9.1
Rural non-farm	110	35.4	31.8	16.4	11.0	5.4
Rural farm	26	50.0	23.1	15.4	7.7	3.8

Chi Square = 51.059

DF = 12

Prob. = 0.0001

of city, suburban, and town residents purchased more than 70 percent of their fresh produce from retail stores.

Almost half of the rural farm residents obtained 81 to 100 percent of their fresh produce from their own gardens (Table 14). Over 55 percent of city, suburban, and town residents obtained 40 percent or less of their fresh produce from their own gardens.

Expenditures of less than \$11.00 per week on fresh produce during the growing season was indicated by more than half of the respondents in each place of residence (Table 15). Slightly more than 6 percent of the rural farm residents spent more than \$21.00 per week while over 18 percent of the town residents spent this amount.

Income

The percentage of respondents who rated the quality of fresh produce at grocery stores as good increased as income increased except for those in the \$40,000 or more income level (Table 16). Over half of those in that level of income rated the quality of fresh produce at grocery stores as poor to fair.

As the level of income increased the percentage of respondents rating price as a very important attribute when shopping for fresh produce decreased (Table 17). Almost 24 percent of the respondents with incomes of \$40,000 or more rated prices as not important at all to somewhat important.

Respondents in the lower income categories obtained more of their fresh produce from their own gardens and friends' or neighbors' gardens than

Table 14.

Place of Residence vs. Percentage of Total Annual Fresh Produce Obtained from Own Garden

Place of Residence	Number	Percentage Amount				
		1-20	21-40	41-60	61-80	81-100
		Percent				
City	119	50.4	16.8	14.3	10.1	8.4
Suburban	67	38.8	16.4	23.9	13.4	7.5
Town	53	43.4	20.8	20.8	9.4	5.7
Rural non-farm	105	26.4	18.1	20.0	24.8	10.5
Rural farm	42	14.3	9.5	19.1	11.9	45.2

Chi Square = 71.326

DF = 16

Prob. = 0.0001

Table 15.

Place of Residence vs. Average Weekly Expenditure for Fresh Produce During the Growing Season from All Sources

Place of Residence	Number	Expenditure		
		\$1.00-\$10.00	\$11.00-\$20.00	\$21.00 or More
		Percent		
City	198	58.9	27.8	13.6
Suburbs	89	52.8	37.1	10.1
Towns	65	63.1	18.5	18.5
Rural non-farm	106	68.9	16.0	15.2
Rural farm	31	64.5	29.0	6.4

Chi Square = 15.742

DF = 8

Prob. = 0.0462

Table 16.

Household Annual Income vs. Rating of Quality of Fresh Produce Found at Grocery Stores

Income	Number	Rating		
		Poor to Fair	Good	Excellent
		Percent		
Less than \$10,000	106	53.8	34.0	12.3
\$10,000-\$14,999	102	51.0	44.1	5.0
\$15,000-\$24,999	197	48.7	47.7	3.6
\$25,000-\$39,999	180	44.4	50.6	5.0
\$40,000 or more	57	50.9	47.4	1.8

Chi Square = 17.657

DF = 8

Prob. = 0.0240

respondents with higher incomes (Tables 18 and 19). Over 58 percent of the respondents with incomes of \$40,000 or more obtained 20 percent or less of their fresh produce from their own gardens. Almost 28 percent of the respondents with incomes of \$10,000 or less obtained over 80 percent of their fresh produce from their own gardens. Over $\frac{3}{4}$ of the respondents with

Table 17.

Household Annual Income vs. Importance of Price when Shopping for Fresh Produce

Income	Number	Importance of Price		
		Not Important at All to Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
		Percent		
Less than \$5,000	42	2.4	21.4	76.2
\$5,000-\$9,999	80	5.0	23.8	71.3
\$10,000-\$14,999	105	11.4	22.0	66.7
\$15,000-\$24,999	206	7.3	31.1	61.6
\$25,000-\$39,999	184	10.3	35.3	54.4
\$40,000 or more	59	23.7	32.2	44.1

Chi Square = 31.876

DF = 10

Prob. = 0.0004

Table 18.

Household Annual Income vs. Percentage of Total Annual Fresh Produce Obtained from Own Garden

Income	Number	Percentage Amount				
		0-20	21-40	41-60	61-80	81-100
		Percent				
Less than \$10,000	61	19.7	14.7	23.0	14.8	27.8
\$10,000-\$14,999	62	30.6	17.7	30.6	9.7	11.3
\$15,000-\$24,999	136	41.2	16.9	16.2	16.9	8.8
\$25,000-\$39,999	58	39.6	17.7	13.5	18.8	10.4
\$40,000 or more	31	58.1	16.3	16.1	3.2	6.4

Chi Square = 37.277

DF = 16

Prob. = 0.0019

incomes of \$25,000 or more obtained 1-10 percent of their fresh produce from a friend's or neighbor's garden.

Over half of the respondents in the income category of less than \$5,000 and with incomes of \$25,000 or more purchased more than 70 percent of their fresh

Table 19.

Household Annual Income vs. Percentage of Total Annual Fresh Produce Obtained from a Friend's or Neighbor's Garden

Income	Number	Percentage Amount	
		1-10	Greater than 10
		Percent	
Less than \$5,000	13	53.8	46.2
\$5,000-\$9,999	27	37.0	62.9
\$10,000-\$14,999	36	36.1	63.9
\$15,000-\$24,999	91	60.4	39.6
\$25,000-\$39,999	84	75.0	25.0
\$40,000 or more	21	76.2	5.0

Chi Square = 24.926

DF = 6

Prob. = 0.0001

produce from retail stores (Table 20). More than half of the respondents with incomes between \$5,000 and \$24,999 purchased 70 percent or less of their fresh produce from retail stores.

Table 20.

Household Annual Income vs. Percentage of Total Annual Fresh Produce Purchased from Retail Stores

Income	Number	Percentage Amount				
		1-25	26-70	71-89	90-95	Over 95
		Percent				
Less than \$5,000	22	13.6	18.2	22.7	27.3	18.2
\$5,000-\$9,999	53	24.5	32.1	9.4	11.3	22.6
\$10,000-\$14,999	80	18.8	37.5	21.2	8.8	13.8
\$15,000-\$24,999	173	35.4	32.4	17.3	19.6	5.2
\$25,000-\$39,999	164	20.1	28.7	17.7	20.7	12.8
\$40,000 or more	51	11.7	33.3	19.6	21.6	13.7

Chi Square = 30.997

DF = 20

Prob. = 0.0552

Respondents in the lower income levels generally spent less on fresh produce (at grocery stores and direct markets) during the growing season than those with higher incomes (Table 21).

Table 21.

Household Annual Income vs. Average Weekly Expenditure on Fresh Produce from All Sources During the Growing Season

Income	Number	\$1.00-\$10.00	\$11.00-\$20.00	\$21.00 or More
		Percent		
Less Than \$5,000	27	64.7	23.5	11.7
\$5,000-\$9,999	50	72.0	20.0	8.0
\$10,000-\$14,999	62	67.7	24.2	8.1
\$15,000-\$24,999	159	66.7	23.9	9.4
\$25,000-\$39,999	153	52.9	28.1	18.9
\$40,000 or more	48	43.7	33.3	22.9

Chi Square = 19.655

DF = 10

Prob. = 0.0325

Recommendations

There is room for expansion and improvement of direct markets in West Virginia. Producers need to be made aware that direct markets could be a viable alternative for marketing fresh produce and consumers need to be aware that they could be an alternative to retail stores.

To increase consumer use of direct markets, consumers must know that such markets exist. This could be done through newspaper and radio advertising carrying such information as location of the market, hours of operation, type of produce available, and some sample prices.

The locations of the markets (except for PYOs) should be convenient to consumers, such as near supermarkets or malls, on regularly traveled roads, on town squares that permit such marketing, and near recreation areas such as lakes and parks.

The producer also needs to be sure that his market is sanitary and is in compliance with any laws or regulations governing such marketing. The produce should be displayed neatly, be clean and out of the sun if possible. If produce is being sold from a vehicle, the vehicle should also be clean. The sellers should also be clean, neat, and courteous. This may lead to return visits by consumers and good word-of-mouth advertising.

If possible, the volume and variety needs to be adequate. One way this might be done is by having one seller sell for several producers. Farmers' markets also allow for increased volume and variety because there are several producers selling different items at one location.

Direct markets are used more by city and suburban residents than by rural residents, probably because some rural residents grow most of their own produce. Rural residents should be made aware that they can also benefit by using direct markets. Many of them grow more than they need. They could sell their excess produce through direct markets. This would give them extra income, and would also be beneficial to urban residents who would have more high quality produce available to them.

Summary

Direct markets include any type of market at which a producer sells directly to the consumer. In recent years the popularity of direct markets has been increasing. Few direct market studies have focused on consumers and their opinions and attitudes relating to direct markets. In this study, 5,000 randomly selected West Virginia households were mailed questionnaires which

contained questions about their opinions and attitudes relating to direct markets. Slightly more than 16 percent of these were returned and used in the analysis.

Most of the respondents were favorable toward direct markets in West Virginia. They believed such markets to be a source of fresher, higher quality produce at a lower price than could be found in grocery stores. Respondents were willing to travel further to farmers' markets and pick-your-own-operations and generally spent more per visit at them than the other types of direct markets. When analyzing the effects of income and place of residence on respondents' use of direct markets it was found that consumers with higher incomes generally made more use of direct markets than those in lower income levels. Respondents who reside in rural areas make less use of direct markets than urban residents. Rural residents also generally spend less per year on fresh produce than residents in other areas.

This study showed that there is a place for direct markets in West Virginia, but that consumers and producers both need to be made more aware of them in order to benefit more from them.