

SMALL SCALE, BIG IMPACT: THE POWER OF LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS IN REPAIRING FOOD LITERACY AND THE CONSUMER- PRODUCER DIVIDE

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BACKGROUND

Over the past century, the relationship between Americans and their food has undergone a profound transformation as a result of the rise of industrial farming. Modern agriculture and agribusiness have created widespread environmental degradation, depleted food knowledge, and produced a stark disconnect between consumers and the origins of their food. Against this backdrop, my research aimed to investigate the role of local food systems in promoting food literacy, drawing on surveys and interviews of Ohio residents to answer the fundamental question:

Does participation in local food systems increase food literacy?

WHAT IS FOOD LITERACY?

The knowledge and skills needed to make informed decisions about food, including how it is grown, processed, and prepared.

RELATED LITERATURE

Two critical points from the literature:

1. **Re-education programs are effective in improving food literacy** (Horning et al., 2017, Artmann et al., 2021, West et al., 2020)
2. **Local food systems have the potential to improve FL and repair the consumer divide** (Hinrichs, 2000, Hinrichs, 2003, Diekmann et. al., 2020, Berge and Caldwell, 2014)

METHODOLOGY

Mixed-methods approach of both **surveys** and **interviews**

1. **Online surveys** were distributed via Qualtrics
 - a. Surveys aimed to assess food literacy skills, confidence in food literacy skills, frequency of participation in local food systems, and specific takeaways from engaging with local food systems
2. 10-20 minute **formal, virtual interviews** were conducted with interested respondents
3. Qualitative research software MAXQDA was used to analyze the qualitative data for patterns and insights
4. Quantitative data was analyzed by converting Likert scale responses to numeric values, creating **index scores** for food literacy, participation, takeaways, and literacy & learning, and performing **correlation analysis**

Table 7: Correlations Between Index Scores

| | Correlation with "Participation" Index Score |
|------------------------------------|--|
| "Food Literacy" Index Scores | 0.50*** |
| "Takeaways" Index Scores | 0.42*** |
| "Literacy & Learning" Index Scores | 0.56*** |

*= 0.01 < p < 0.05 **= 0.001 < p < 0.01 ***= p < 0.001

RESULTS

My fundamental hypothesis was confirmed!

★ **Participation in LFSs is positively and significantly correlated with food literacy!**

Other notable results:

- Data was not representative of the population in its gender or racial distribution, which should be taken into account in further analysis and discussion. It also indicates avenues for future research, such as a project that specifically centers African American populations.
- Engagement with LFSs had profoundly positive implications for my contributors' understanding of food.

CONCLUSION

I believe this project affirms the exciting potential of LFSs, emphasizes the positive impact of immersing ourselves more deeply in the food system, and demonstrates the critical importance of working to establish a food system in which knowledge about and access to good food are accessible for all.