

Using Qualitative Analysis to Identify Local Agriculture Constraints in Northern New England



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Introduction

Local agriculture benefits communities on a social and economic level.

Benefits of Local Agriculture	Sources
Increases Local Job Opportunities	USDA, 2015 ¹ ; O'Hara, 2011 ²
Increases Community Income	Brown et al., 2013 ³
Increases Agrotourism	Batie et al. 2003; ⁴ Lyson and Green, 1999 ⁵
Increase in Agro-Research	Batie et al. 2003; Lyson and Green, 1999

New England could produce more local produce by expanding farm land, however, without identifying the views and constraints of local growers and consumers, the success of local agricultural expansion in NE remains undeterminable.⁶

Results

1. What are the main obstacles you face when running your operations?

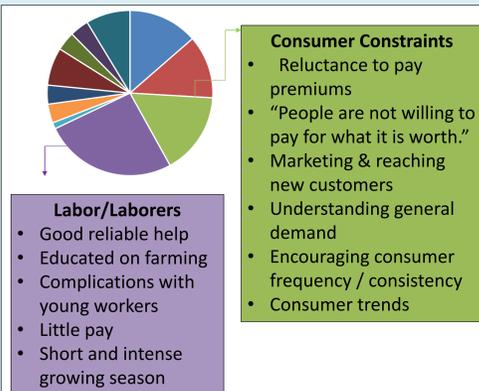


Figure 3. The predominant constraints to running farming operations, discussed by local growers (n = 48 ME, NH, VT, NY) led by labor / laborers and consumer constraints.



2. What considerations go into deciding what production practices and methods to use?

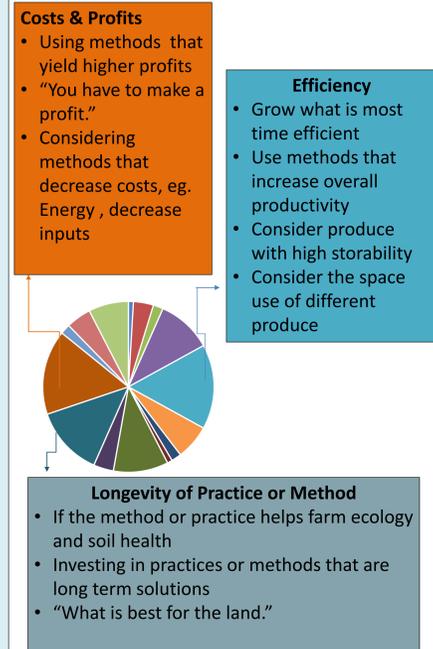


Figure 4. The top influences to growers when choosing farming practices and methods are costs & profits, the longevity of the practice, and the overall effectiveness of the practice or method (n = 48 ME, NH, VT and NY).

3. What information about consumers' fresh produce purchasing habits would be most useful to you?

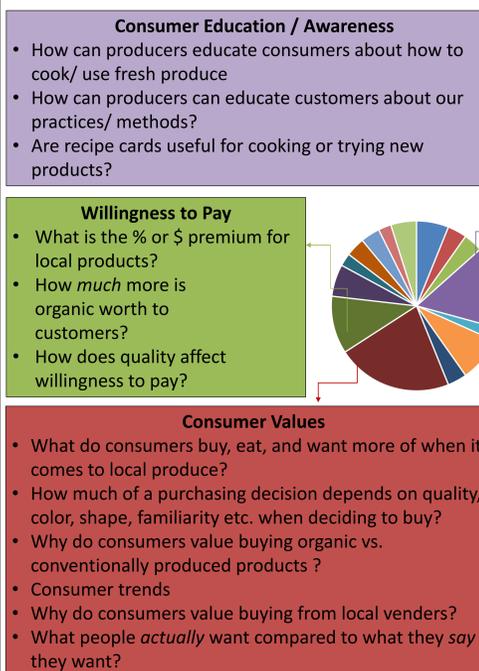


Figure 5. Farmers addressed what they would most like to know about their consumers, which was mostly what consumers value about local food, how knowledgeable / aware their consumers are, and willingness for consumers to pay premiums (n = 48, ME, NH, VT, & NY).

4. What are the obstacles you would encounter if you decided to expand your operations?

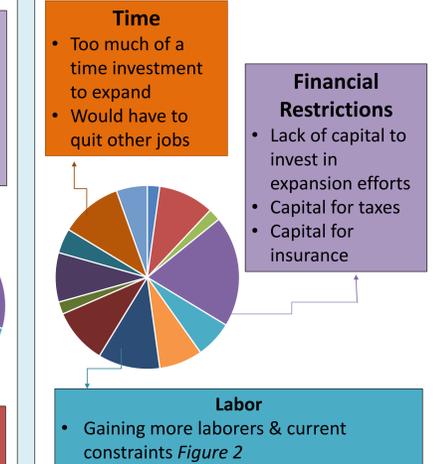


Figure 6. The most discussed issues to expansion explained by local farmers, dominated by financial restrictions, followed by time, and labor constraints (n= 48 ME, NH, VT & NY).



Discussion

After conducting 6 focus group sessions involving 48 growers from northern New England, clear trends emerged on the topics of operational constraints, influences on methods/ practices, consumer knowledge gaps, and barriers to expansion.

Consensuses were fairly consistent across states, however, differences may hint that policy at the state level would be best for addressing production constraints.



These trends can be used to inform policy, programs, and future research, to aid local agriculture expansion efforts.

Research Objectives

1. Identify barriers to local agriculture production in Vermont, Maine, and New Hampshire
2. Identify factors limiting local producers' ability and willingness to expand current farming practices
3. Understand what information about consumer purchasing habits local producers would find useful

1. What are the main obstacles you face when running your operations?

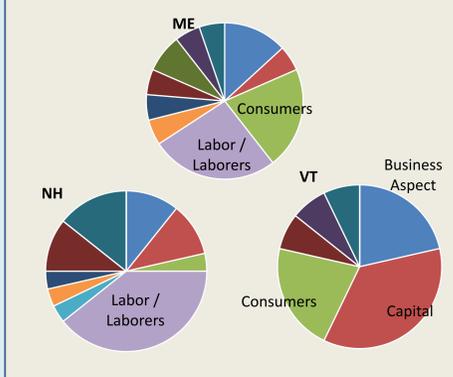


Figure 7a, b & c. Both NH and ME see land and laborers as their top constraint, but VT sees capital as their biggest constraint.

2. What considerations go into deciding what production practices and methods to use?

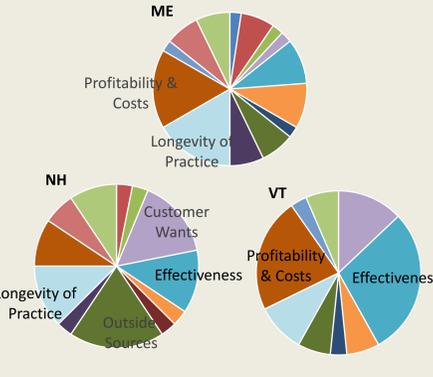


Figure 8a, b, & c. Each state is influenced by different factors, ME by profitability and costs and the longevity of a practice, NH by outside sources and customer wants and VT by profitability and method effectiveness.

3. What information about consumers' fresh produce purchasing habits would be most useful to you?

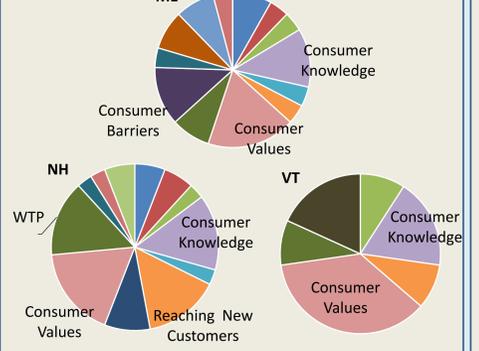


Figure 9a, b & c. Understanding consumer knowledge / awareness and understanding consumer values, are the top answers for all three states for what these growers would like to know about their customers.

4. What are the obstacles you would encounter if you decided to expand your operations?



Figure 10 a, b & c. The major constraints when looking to expand current operations for ME, NH and VT growers is financial restrictions related to capital.

Future Research

Design a stated preference consumer survey influenced by producer focus group data.

Distribute consumer survey to Maine, Vermont, and New Hampshire residents.

Compare the disconnects between the consumers and producers of local agriculture in northern New England by analyzing the results of the stated preference consumer choice survey to the producer constraints and perceptions.

Methods & Data Analysis

Six focus group sessions were conducted during the winter & spring of 2016 to address producer research objectives

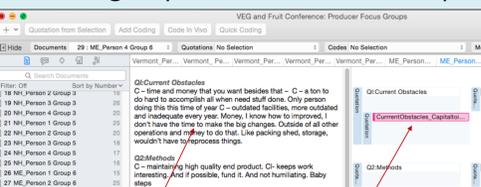
Total Participants	48	Farm Type	
Maine	22	Organic	17
New Hampshire	13	Conventional	27
Vermont	12	Both	1
New York	1	n.a.	3

Gender	Produce Type	
Male	Vegetable Growers	23
Female	Fruit Growers	5
n.a.	Both	20



Figure 1. Residential areas of focus group participants.

Electronic and written transcripts were taken during the focus group sessions to track the participants' dialog



Upload Transcripts To Qualitative Analysis Software
 Thematic Coding

Qualitative analysis software was used for thematic coding and categorization

Tracking Convergence

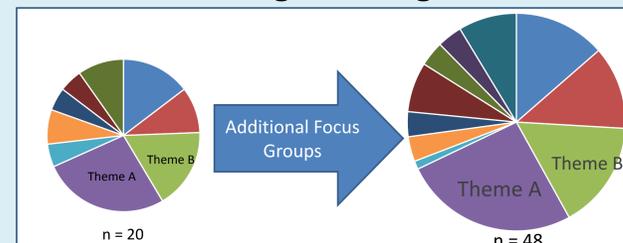


Figure 2. As more focus groups were conducted, graphs were created to visualize how convergence was behaving. The schematic shows the responses to focus group Question One increasing from 20 participants to 48 participants. Note the major themes stay the same as sample size more than doubles.

Literature Cited

- ¹USDA: Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food. United States Department of Agriculture. (2015)
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