

Hawai'i Residents' Perception of Farming, Weekly Purchases & Willingness to Spend More for Local Products

Introduction

Mental health/well-being is not only an individual endeavor and responsibility, but also a social and collective synergy that contributes to the quality of life across our communities. The Seeds of Wellbeing project aims to sow appreciation, respect, and care for local agricultural (ag) producers via a social marketing campaign. Ag producers care for the community by providing food – but what about our community efforts to reciprocate and extend care for them in return? This is especially important, given the alarmingly high rates of depression and suicide in this profession (Peterson et al., 2020), including among Hawai'i farmers (Le et al., 2022).

The Seeds of Wellbeing (SOW) project, funded by HDOA-USDA-NIFA, contracted with SM Hawaii to develop a social marketing campaign that included assessment of public perception about ag/farming in Hawai'i and their reported willingness to support local products. This report reveals the findings from a random sample of 400 local consumers.



Measures & Procedures

SM Hawaii contracted with Anthology Research, which conducted a randomized digit dialing telephone survey with residents across Hawai'i from April 22 to May 8, 2022. The survey included basic demographic measures (age, gender, island residency, income category, Hawai'i nativity, household number, education), as well as Likert-scale items that assess the perception of ag/farming in Hawai'i, weekly purchases as well as their willingness to spend more in order to purchase local products.

Respondents also provided feedback on three different social marketing messages that were developed in collaboration between SOW and SM Hawaii. Respondents were screened to ensure they were residents and adult consumers, resulting in a sample size of 400, +/- 4.90 percentage points (95% confidence interval) sampling error.

February 2023

Subject Category: Mental Health Issues, MHI-3

Thao Le

Department of Family and Consumer Sciences
thaole3@hawaii.edu, (808) 956-2232

CTAHR SOW Team

THIS INFORMATION HAS BEEN
 REVIEWED BY CTAHR FACULTY

Table 1. Sample Description (N = 400)

	n	%
Socio-demographics		
County		
Honolulu	281	70%
Hawaii	52	13%
Maui	38	10%
Kauai	29	7%
Born in Hawaii		
Yes	261	54%
No	184	46%
Primary Residence		
Own	240	60%
Rent	130	33%
Live Rent Free	30	7%
Household Size		
1	89	22%
2	148	37%
3	66	17%
4+	97	24%
Gender		
Female	218	55%
Male	180	45%
Age		
18-34	63	16%
35-49	120	30%
50-64	119	30%
65+	98	24%
Highest Level of		
Less than a Bachelor	161	40%
Bachelor	135	34%
Post-graduate and	104	26%
Income		
<50K	118	30%
50K-100L	133	33%
100K+	124	31%
unknown	25	6%
Ethnicity		
White	117	29%
Japanese	98	25%
Chinese	20	5%
Filipino	33	8%
Native Hawaiian	69	17%
Other	63	16%

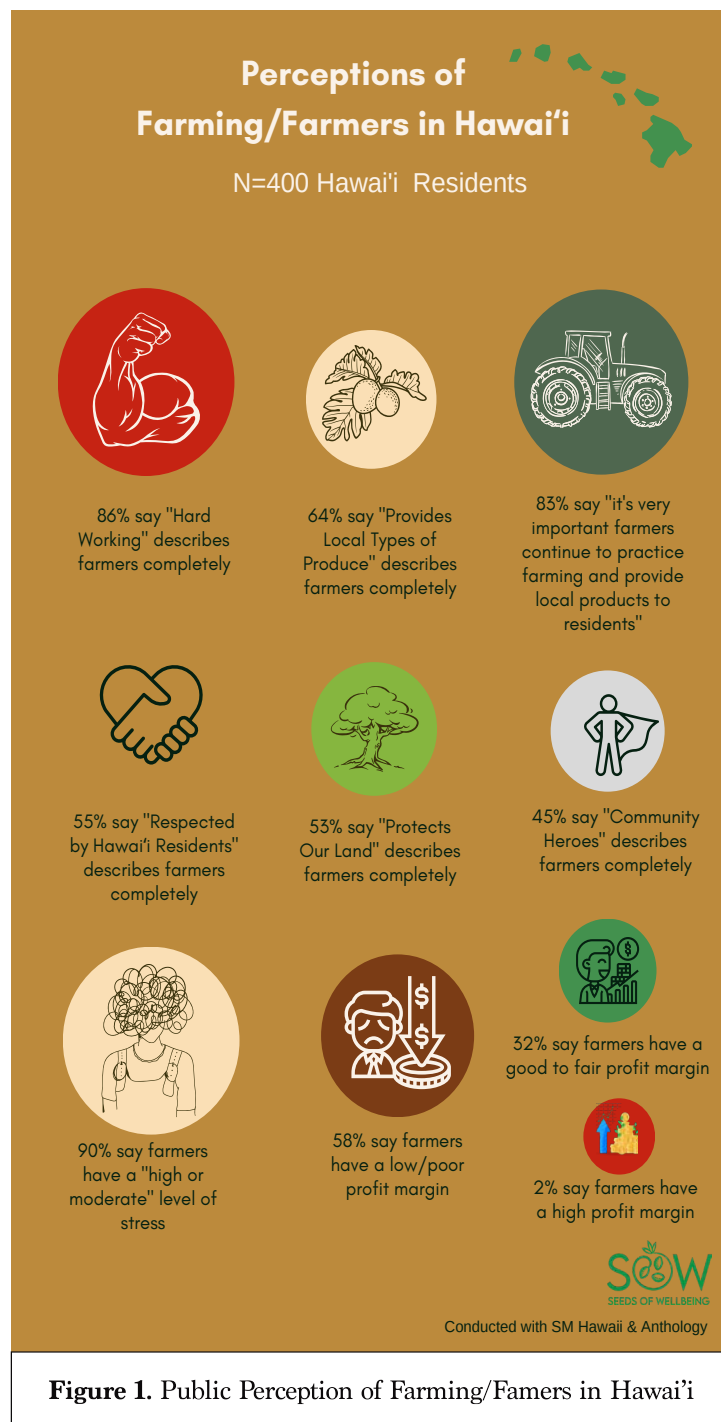


Figure 1. Public Perception of Farming/Farmers in Hawai'i

Sample

As illustrated in Table 1, most of the random sample was from Honolulu county (70%) vs. Neighbor Islands. The majority owned their primary residence, and had an average household size of 3. Slightly more were born and raised in Hawai'i vs. being a transplant. The average age of the sample was 51 years old (range: 18-82 years old). For education, 40% had less than a college degree, 34% were college graduates, and 26% had post-graduate degrees. There were slightly more females than males in the sample. Household income distribution included about a third under 50K, a third 50K to less than 100K, and a third 100K or more.

Results

Public Perception

As shown in Figure 1, public perception of Hawai'i agriculture/farming is highly favorable, with 83% (n=332) saying it is very important for farmers to continue to practice farming and providing local Hawai'i products. Yet, they also regard farming as highly stressful, with 90% (n=359) endorsing the statement that farmers experience a high or moderate level of stress. They also recognize that the average farmer's profit margin is atrociously low, with 58% (n=236) indicating that farmers have a low/poor profit margin, and only 2% (n=7) thought that farmers' profit margin is high.



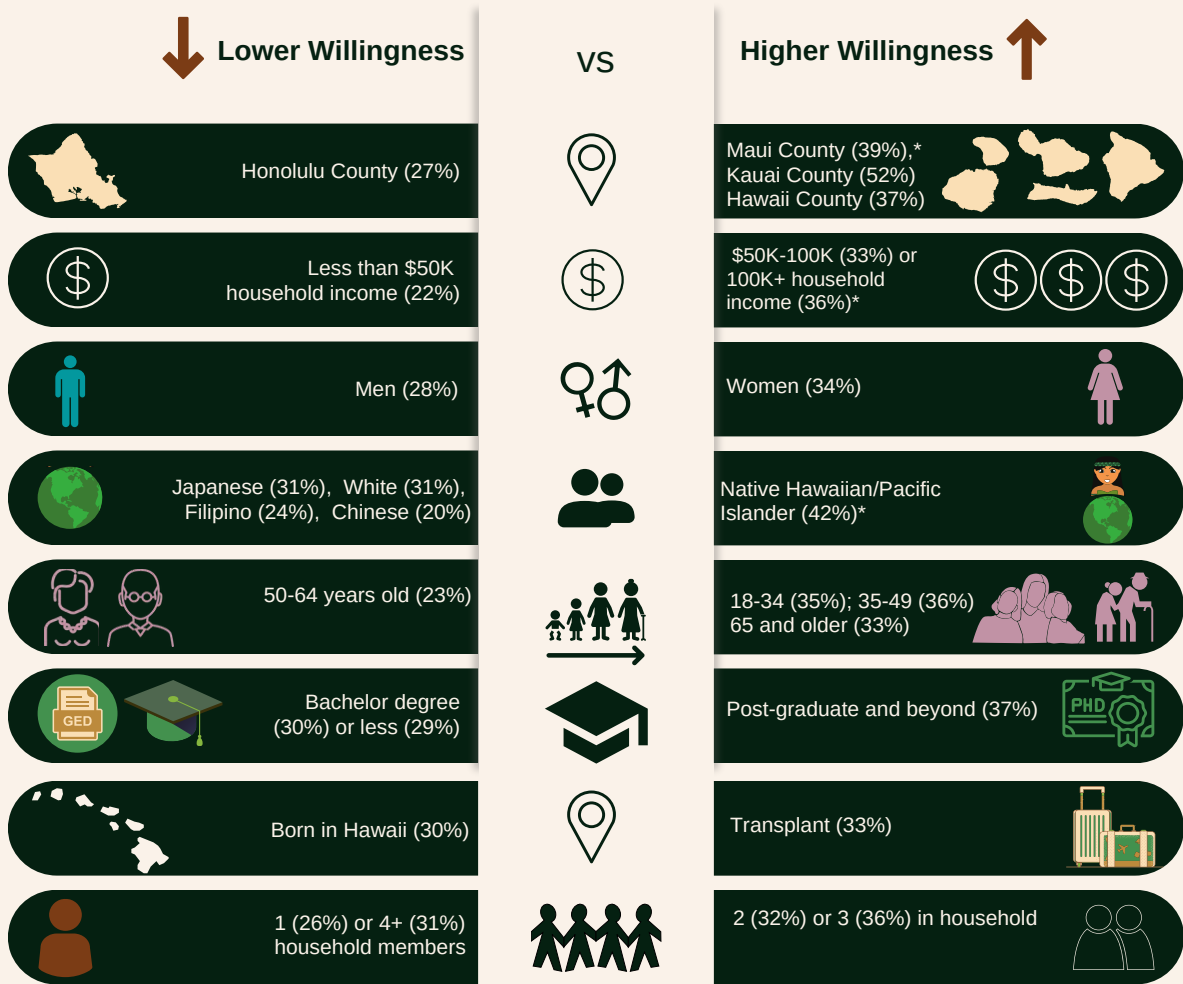
Figure 2. Hawai'i Consumers' Weekly Purchases of Local Products.

Locally Grown Weekly Purchases

When asked about the percent of everyday groceries purchased that are locally grown, 97% said they buy at least some locally grown fruits, vegetables, or meat every week; however, the average proportion of local produce/meat purchased weekly is 30%. Figure 2 illustrates those who reported purchasing more than 30% of local products weekly compared to those who reported purchasing less than 30% of local products. Statistically significant differences (chi-squared test, $p < .05$) were observed with respect to income level, ethnicity, education, and Hawai'i nativity. Specifically, those who were born in Hawai'i, were of Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander ethnicity, had less than a bachelor's degree,

Willingness to Spend 10-15% More on Local Products

N=400 Hawai'i Residents
(31% are willing to spend 10-15% more)



• $p < .05$

SOW
SEEDS OF WELLBEING
Conducted with SM Hawaii & Anthology

Figure 3. Hawai'i Consumers' Willingness to Spend More for Local Products

and reported less than 100K in household income were more likely to report that local products constituted more than 30% of their weekly purchase.

Only 19% were aware of the DA BUX program, which collaborates with food retailers to make locally grown produce more affordable for low-income households (dabux.org). For those paying with SNAP-EBT (formerly known as food stamps), participating retailers discount locally grown produce by 50%. The program reimburses the retailers to cover the total retail cost of sold produce. The survey findings revealed that those on the Neighbor Islands, females, and those less affluent had greater awareness of the DA BUX program than their counterparts.

When presented with a description of DA BUX, 45% percent perceived the program to be very good, with a more favorable perception associated with a greater percentage purchase of locally grown products.

Regarding farmer's/open markets, about a third shop at least once a week. Unsurprisingly, those who reported higher percentages of locally grown weekly purchases were also more likely to shop at farmer's and open markets.

Willingness to Spend More/10-15% More

More than half (n=225; 56%) of local consumers said they would spend more on locally grown produce and meat. Figure 3 illustrates those who said they would be willing

to pay 10-15% more by demographic variables (about 31% of the entire sample). Consumers who resided on Neighbor Islands, were of Native Hawaiian/Part-Hawaiian ethnicity and, in households with at least 50K, indicated they were willing to spend 10-15% more for local products at a statistically significantly different rate than the other demographic groups.

Among those who said they weren't willing to spend more and were asked what would encourage them to do so, the majority expressed 'competitive pricing' and highlighting 'freshness.' Branding, making local products more easily identifiable, as well as access and availability were also mentioned.

Discussion

Twelve years ago, Ulupono Initiative sponsored a study exploring O'ahu consumers' demand for local food. Surveying 1,200 consumers across O'ahu, the majority reported that buying local is very important, and were willing to pay more to support local produce. Seventy-four percent felt that Hawai'i should grow its food locally; interestingly, they reported spending only about 8% of their food budget on locally grown food. Have these sentiments and behavior changed?

The results of this recent study revealed continued strong support among local consumers for local products and support purchase of Hawai'i ag. Average weekly percent purchase of fruits, vegetables and meat being locally grown is 30%, and is even higher among certain demographics, such as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders. It is also highest among those on Neighbor Islands and less wealthy; the proportion of weekly local purchases declines as family income increases. The DA BUX program is considered successful in making locally grown food more accessible for less wealthy families, which the results appear to reflect.

It is interesting that higher income families were willing to spend 10-15% more on local produce and meat even though they didn't purchase more. We need to generate more demand, and target marketing to encourage those with more discretionary income to buy locally-produced products. Encouraging supermarkets, grocery chains, and big-box stores to highlight and position locally sourced products visibly, and to work with more local ag



Malama
THE FARMER

We mālama local farmers, ranchers, and ag professionals.

They work hard to feed us and to achieve a sustainable local economy.

- 
Buy Local Ag Products
 Buying local ag products helps invest your dollars in our local communities.
- 
Support Local Farms
 Follow them on social media, go on a tour of a farm, and learn more about the farms in your community.
- 
Respect the pricing at Farmers Markets
 Most ag producers work with very small profit margins and are careful to price their products fairly.

When you choose to buy local, you support the caretakers of the 'āina.

 @sow.wellbeing
  @sow_ctahr

This work is supported by the Hawaii Department of Agriculture (Contract No. 69794) through the Farm Resilience Stress Assistance Network, State Department of Agriculture (FSAN-508, 2021), National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), U.S. Department of Agriculture Grant No. 2021-70035-35371.

Figure 4. SOW's Malama the Farmer Marketing Campaign

producers to carry their products, would make it more feasible and accessible for those who don't frequent farmer's markets to access local products.

Campaigns that encourage buying local and supporting local products often emphasize the product features or attributes (e.g., freshness, tastes good), and in Hawai'i, as part of caring for the land (malama 'aina) in terms of sustainable ag and reducing food import.

The SOW's marketing campaign seeks to emphasize the relational caring value. Supporting and purchasing local products is because you care about those who care for you (those who do the hard work and labor to grow your

food, to feed you and your family). Indeed, those who purchase more than half of their fruit, vegetables, and meat locally were more likely to endorse the perception of farmers/farming as ‘hard working,’ ‘community heroes,’ ‘provides local types of produce that might not otherwise be available,’ ‘respected by Hawai’i residents,’ and ‘protects the land.’

Not everyone experience food insecurity; access and availability to food manifest differently across socio-economic lines. This can make it hard and difficult to see it as a “we” problem, in that that the challenges of ag producers to make a living in Hawai’i is a “we” issue. In the SOW’s Mālama the Farmer social marketing message (see Figure 4), along with other efforts, we are aiming to create a “we” mindset. That is, our farmers’ health and wellbeing is everyone’s health and wellbeing.

Acknowledgments

This work was conducted in collaboration with SM Hawaii and Anthology, and supported by the Hawai’i Department of Agriculture (Contract No. 69794) through the Farm Ranch Stress Assistance Network-State Departments of Agriculture (FRSAN-SDA, 2021), National Institute of

Food and Agriculture (NIFA), U.S. Department of Agriculture Grant No. 2021-70035-35371. Any opinions, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They should not be construed to represent any official HDOA or USDA Government determination or policy. Appreciation to Emma Brown for illustration support, and to the Seeds of Wellbeing team members.

References

- Le, T., Ahmad, A., Brown, E.I., Crum, J.A., Wong, A.K., Sand, S., Oshiro, M., & Kirk, E. (2022). Rates of stress, depression and suicide among Hawai’i agricultural producers and allied professionals. CTAHR Extension Publications.
- Peterson, C., Sussell, A., Li, J., Schumacher, P.K., Yeoman, K., & Stone, D.M. (2020). Suicide rates by industry and occupation: National violent death reporting system, 32 states, 2016. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 69(3), 57–62. <https://doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6903a1>
- Ulupono Initiative (December 2011). “Local Food Market Demand Study of O’ahu Shoppers.”

