

## **Local Food Marketing As a Growth Opportunity for Small Producers in Tennessee**

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### **Abstract**

Various food programs present opportunities for marketing local food in Tennessee. Health-conscious consumers prefer the health benefits of local food over processed foods. To satisfy consumer demand, local restaurants are utilizing the services of local food vendors. Conventional grocery stores are broadening their food aisles to accommodate locally produced foods. Using data collected from an online survey of 250 producers, this research update reports on opportunities for marketing local foods in Tennessee.

**Keywords:** local foods, producers, marketing, online survey, Tennessee

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## **Introduction**

Local food systems are frequently touted as economic development strategies for rural communities (Rossi, Johnson, and Hendrickson, 2017). Although they are a small portion of the U.S. agricultural sector, their rapid growth has been remarkable in recent years. Trends show that a growing number of consumers purchase more of their foods from alternative food markets than conventional grocery stores. This is due to consumers' interest in food that is fresh and traceable to producers (Rodrigo et al., 2010). The expanding demand for locally produced foods is one of the factors responsible for the rapid growth of local foods in the United States and around the world. According to the Tennessee Department of Health (2015), two out of three Tennesseans live in urban areas, which have higher population density with greater marketing opportunities. In Tennessee, the average distance between some farms in rural areas where food is produced or processed and marketed may be farther than 400 miles. Therefore, this research defines local food as food grown, processed, distributed, and marketed within 500 miles in Tennessee.

## **Objective**

This research examines the opportunities in local food marketing for Tennessee small producers. The contributions of the local food system (LFS) to the economic growth of small food agribusinesses are analyzed.

## **Methodology**

Secondary data from the U.S Census of Agriculture, the U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, and the National Agricultural Statistics Service provide the background information needed for this research update. To accomplish the objective of this research, a 16-item online survey was used to collect data from 250 local food producers in Tennessee. In addition to collecting socioeconomic data from producers, the survey solicited responses to identify opportunities for marketing local foods in Tennessee. As part of a project funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, this research highlights growth opportunities for local foods in Tennessee. Data collected are analyzed using qualitative and quantitative methods. Findings will add to existing literature and shed light on the importance of local food marketing as opportunities for businesses in Tennessee.

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