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THE FOOD MOVEMENT: BRINGING LOCAL FOODS TO THE TABLE

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ABSTRACT

Local sourcing of products for restaurants is a growing trend and competitive strategy in the industry. More and more restaurateurs and chefs are taking a sustainable approach to sourcing and operating their kitchens meanwhile consumers are seeking out these establishments. While it represents a current trend, it is also an incredibly valuable strategy for the environment and economy. Despite these favorable characteristics, sourcing locally is a difficult strategy to implement. Distribution channels, product availability, product consistency, and pricing are all evident challenges faced by the restaurants, while economies of scale, seasonality and reliability are struggles for the farms involved on a local level. Through an in-depth case study of the restaurants and farms in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, this study aimed to explore the logistics behind this strategy and the financial impacts of adopting local foods in independent restaurants. Unlike other related research, this study involved both parties involved in the farm to table relationship to identify where the systems are flawed and how to enhance success. The research was conducted through a series of personal interviews with independent restaurants, and farm representatives from the area. The results reveal that Bucks County is a very well suited area for the farm-to-table restaurant strategy to succeed for both parties involved. This study found that supply chain channels exist for distribution, and landscape lends itself to seasonal production of foods in demand by independent restaurant. The success of this strategy however could be aided by more promotion of the use of local ingredients, and improvements in the distribution channels to aid in the sourcing process.

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INTRODUCTION

Farm to table restaurants are an emerging trend in the hospitality industry, particularly in the independent restaurant sector where chefs can exercise their creativity in menu design, adapting recipes and menus to reflect seasonality and unique local products (Sharma, et al., 2009). Each year the National Restaurant Association releases a publication on the outlook for the industry – locally sourced meats and seafood, locally grown produce, hyper-local sourcing, sustainability, locally-produced wine and beer and sustainable seafood are in the top ten for restaurant trends in 2012 (National Restaurant Association, 2012). Additionally, there is a growing number of consumers who are aware of the benefits of eating local and seek out restaurants with this concept, with nearly three-quarters of adults polled stating they are more likely to visit a restaurant that offers locally produced food items (National Restaurant Association, 2012).

The innovations in production, processing, transportation and retailing in the last century have transformed the restaurant industry. Where sourcing locally was once the norm for obtaining food products, it is now being reinvented and the first chefs to popularize this strategy are thought of as visionaries. Alice Waters, the creator of Chez Panisse in Berkeley, California, was one of the first to emerge on the sustainable culinary scene in 1971. Waters ignited a revolution in the restaurant industry, insisting cooking be done with the freshest, sustainable and local ingredients (“Alice Waters”, 2011). Now 87 percent of fine dining restaurants and 63 percent of casual dining offer locally sourced produce and 73 percent and 54 percent respectively offer locally sourced meat or seafood (National Restaurant Association, 2012).

Local sourcing is not only trendy in the current market – it also offers many benefits to personal health, the environment and the economy. “Positive impacts of new local markets are

support of regional economies through retention of revenue in the community, reduced transportation miles and energy consumption, and service of fresher foods” (Strohbehn, 2003). Additionally, the structure of the local supply chain is much shorter, creating greater certainty and predictability in delivery and often lower delivery costs. This shorter supply chain is also more reactive, as small-scale, local producers are able to adjust schedules or fix problems quicker than national companies (Morrell, 2010). As environmentalism struggles, the food movement is gaining momentum. The support for local farms and departure from major national brands can increase awareness of large-scale environmental issues such as carbon emissions and greenhouse gases (Walsh, 2011).

With growing consumer demand for sustainable dining options and intense competition in the restaurant industry, chefs are incorporating locally sourced products into their menu to gain a competitive advantage. However there are challenges and barriers to adopting this strategy. Geographic and producer limitations force restaurants to have many different suppliers and to be very flexible in their menu design to account for changes in product availability and seasonality. Restaurants that source locally logically would be most successful in areas with proper topography and climate for growing produce and sustaining farms. “Farmers marketing food locally are most prominent in the Northeast and the West Coast regions and areas close to densely populated urban areas” (Low, 2011). Bucks County, Pennsylvania is a suburban area with rich farmland and a moderate climate, and it is in close proximity to urban Philadelphia. The farm to table trend is gathering steam here, with both limited service and fine dining restaurants opening and gaining consumer attention for their use of locally sourced products.

RELATED LITERATURE

The diffusion of innovation framework (Inwood et al., 2007) is a model that demonstrates how a new concept or innovation evolves over time. The model guided the research questions, aiming to explore attitudes towards local and organic foods, purchasing and advertising behavior, barriers and opportunities for purchasing and organizational affiliations. The research was done through both field research and a closed-ended survey. The responses were grouped by extent of local food used: no to low having 1% or less local foods in their inventory, medium having between 1% and 8.25% and high having 8.25% or higher. The results reveal that taste and freshness are two relative advantages of local foods and are the two qualities chefs are most interested in. Price and convenience appeared to be potentially limiting for some restaurants, as primarily only the high volume purchasers were willing to pay more for local. Nearly three-quarters of the restaurants surveyed reported they actively tried to educate customers on the use of local ingredients. This was done primarily through signage and communicating with wait staff. The barriers that exist in this market are a lack of product to fully service their needs and a lack of marketing to restaurants. Many restaurants prefer to maintain their relationships with distributors for the assurance of product availability and because it is more convenient than personally seeking out local sources. (Inwood et al., 2007).

Zepeda and Deal (2009) assessed local purchases through the use of the Alphabet Theory, which is a combination of the Value-Belief-Norm and Attitude-Behavior-Context theories, in addition to the impact of knowledge, information seeking, habit and demographics.

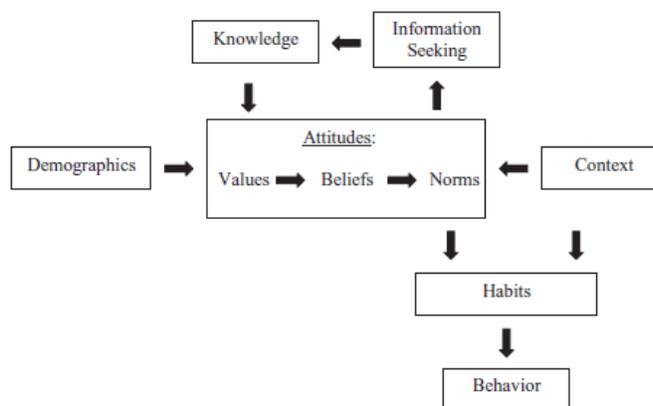


Figure 1 Conceptual framework of Alphabet Theory.

The study was conducted using a convenience sample and semi-structured interviews to allow interviewees openness in their responses. The primary reasons for buying organic were to avoid pesticides/hormones, avoid degradation and quality/taste. The primary reasons for buying local were concerns over supporting local economy, trust issue (referring to the desire to know the farmer), and quality/freshness. Additionally, the interviews revealed that many organic and local shoppers are aware of the current trends and practices and this influences their behavior. Overall, the results shed light that knowledge and information seeking are related to how attitudes are shaped (Zepeda & Deal, 2009). Restaurants and local farms can utilize these findings by educating consumers on the benefits of local ingredients and encouraging them to taste the difference.

Murphy and Smith (2009) analyzed the local foods relationship from the chefs’ point of view, examining chefs’ perception, motivations and experiences buying and promoting local foods in their restaurants. This research was done through a self-completed questionnaire and phone interview, utilizing both open-ended questions and questions using a Likert scale. The chefs replied that product quality and product knowledge were the most important characteristics of suppliers, and willingness to share sensitive information, delivery flexibility and ability to satisfy changing requirements as the potential problems affecting menus and the chef-supplier

relationship. The chefs stated they choose to feature local ingredients on their menus for their freshness and quality, their representation of the local region and the consumers' desire for local (trendiness). Additionally, the chefs supported their decisions to source locally by illustrating the relationships they have with suppliers. Local producers have a competitive advantage, as chefs are able to have active interactions: to work to adapt the product for mutually beneficial relationships, to ensure consistency and quality and to share a passion for the ingredients. From the farm to the table, guests appreciate the use of local ingredients as the menus reflect seasonality and chef creativity and they are able to interact with staff, to have the food tell a story (Murphy & Smith, 2009).

Demand for local food continues to grow, despite the recession, therefore in today's economic climate, cost effective local sourcing is incredibly important. Morrell (2010) cites some of the cost benefits of local sourcing include a short supply chain, lower delivery costs, and greater certainty and predictability on delivery. The local restaurant to farm relationship is also much more reactive, allowing for more immediate adjustments to problems that arise. Local food may be more expensive at times, but there are many trade-offs to this higher price. While local foods may have less cost effective production, this can be weighed against the cost of shipping and the cost on the environment of trans-Atlantic shipping. Improved public relation in the community is one non-cost benefit of local sourcing. By supporting local farmers and reinvesting in the local economy, restaurants can improve their public image and have form of built-in philanthropy. Additionally, with the widespread use of the internet, most small farms have websites today and are able to utilize their sites for ordering. This tool makes the business-to-business operations much more accessible, particularly when both parties (farms and restaurants) have very time-stressed schedules (Morrell, 2010).

Curtis (2009) presented the key factors for local sourcing relationships from the producer stand point, including assuring quality, providing variety, and adapting service. Assuring quality includes attention to flavor and taste, consistency across harvests/deliveries, and precautions to prevent damage to appearance and taste from farm to restaurant. Many chefs that source locally do so to have assurance that the products were freshly picked and delivered shortly after harvest time, therefore farmers must work quickly and efficiently to maintain the quality of the products. Chefs stated that in regards to quality assurance, they most value consistent high quality flavor and taste, followed by appearance and sizing. Providing variety includes offering heirloom varieties, diversifying into rare or special varieties of otherwise familiar products, exploring cultural produce, and working with chefs to identify ways to extend the season (i.e. freezing or pickling). It is much more cost effective to purchase general produce from large farms or major vendors; therefore by providing differentiated products, niche-styled farms can compete for business. This can be a mutually creative process between the farm and restaurant, where the restaurant can recommend products they would be interested in and farms can introduce new products to the inquisitive chef. Adapting service includes optimizing delivery options, having open dialogue with chefs, reaching out to the local market and developing an understanding of the needs of the market to better provide the desired products. For many farms, this means taking on the responsibilities of the distributor. Many local markets lack an intermediary so in many cases the farm must adapt their business model to include transportation and delivery. Farms can also increase their success by creating strong working relationships with restaurants, where there is open communication and feedback to improve the farm-to-table process. “Close partnerships between producers and chefs seems to make the most longest-lasting and most mutually beneficial relationships” (Curtis, 2009).

STUDY DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

Bucks County Farms and Restaurants

This study was designed as a case study to explore in-depth the “how” and “why” pertaining to restaurants implementing a farm to table strategy and the financial and logistical implications of such strategy. “The essence of a case study...is that it tries to illuminate a decision or set of decisions: why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result” (Yin, 2009). The goal of this research was to break down the processes and procedures taken to source products locally and determine, and investigate how those decisions were made, the considerations taken in the decision-making process and the chef/restaurateurs’ rationale of these decisions. Before beginning research, IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval was obtained.

The case study was designed to assess the practices in the targeted area of Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Bucks County is located north of Philadelphia and was chosen for its proximity to both rural farmland and populated towns with diverse and trendy restaurants. There are already a number of restaurants promoting and practicing sustainability in the area. The restaurants chosen for this study were selected to represent a varied sample of the restaurant market in the county: the three restaurants interviewed have varying cuisines, target customers and percentages of items sourced locally. The three farms interviewed were chosen through their relationships with the interviewed restaurants.

Restaurants and Farms' Profiles	
Restaurant A	Mid-scale, American-fusion cuisine (focus on steak and seafood) Seasonal menu, changing 3-4 times per year Targets young adults, couples < 25% local products
Restaurant B	Fine dining, new American cuisine (focus on regional cuisine) Seasonal menu Targets couples, middle aged individuals About 75% local products
Restaurant C	Fine dining, Italian cuisine (focus on homemade pasta) Concise menu, weekend specials offered Targets families, couples 50-60% local products
Farm A	Seasonal produce farm (wide variety of products) Sell through intermediary, farmer's market and CSA Family-owned and operated
Farm B	Niche market farm, specializing in micro greens and herbs Small-scale production Sell through intermediary and on-site store
Farm C	Large dairy farm In development stages to market locally Planning to produce artisan cheeses

The first phase of this qualitative research was to interview representatives from three restaurants. The interview process was designed to walk through the process of sourcing locally, from the first stage of finding and establishing relationships with producers to the final stage of customer feedback and the financial impact at service. The second phase of the research was to meet with the farmers the restaurants were sourcing from. This step was designed to draw information from the other side of the sourcing process, to see where the restaurants and producers had similar or different thinking about the relationship. The restaurants and farms were contacted via phone with 30 minute interviews conducted face-to-face. E-mail was used for follow up questions and any clarification. The face-to-face discussions were recorded using an audio recorder and then transcribed to utilize direct quotations. The qualitative data was analyzed

to find common themes among the respondents and identify where there are gaps or opportunities for improvement.

Questionnaires

The questionnaires were used as guides for the discussions, as to maintain semi-structured interviews. These types of interviews allow time for additional inquiry, avoid 'group think,' and avoid replacing thoughts of interviewees with examples or standardized answers (Zepeda, 2009). Both the restaurant and farm questionnaires were designed using open-ended questions to assess the current operations and rationale for how the farm-to-table process works. The questions were aimed to answer the primary research question: what are the steps necessary for a restaurant to implement a farm to table concept, logistically and financially? The questionnaire development was aided by referencing an existing set of questions as well as guidance from the research advisor. Sharma, et al (2009) conducted a similar study using an open-ended questionnaire therefore this was used as a reference for the content and design.

The 23-question restaurant questionnaire was comprised of six sections: background information on the current state of their menu and products, sourcing and selection processes, purchasing and receiving, storage and preparation, service and overall questions regarding the challenges in sourcing locally and other sustainable practices in the restaurant. An initial pilot study was conducted with a university-affiliated restaurant to determine the clarity of the questions and progression of the discussion as led by the questionnaire. The pilot test helped to finalize the questionnaire by ensuring the questions made sense to an outside audience and helping to eliminate any redundant or less important questions.

The farm questionnaire was 13 questions long with five sections: background information on the farms' products and certifications, sourcing and restaurant relations, production, the distribution channel and overall challenges presented by the farm-restaurant relationship. The complete questionnaires can be referenced in Appendices A and B.

RESULTS

Restaurants

There were many common themes revealed in the results. As reflected in many past studies, the restaurants unanimously answered they do source locally or would like to source more locally for product freshness and quality, diverse or unique products, and to support local farmers and local economy. Restaurant A is a full service restaurant offering upscale American fusion cuisine. Most of the menu items change three to four times per year, typically with the change of the season. This style of restaurant appears to be conducive to a local menu, however the chef here noted that local sourcing doesn't necessarily work for every restaurant. "Local sourcing works best when that is the primary concept or reputation of the restaurant. Customers must be aware of the local relationship and be flexible to a changing menu. Our customers want to come to the restaurant and have the same risotto or sandwich every time – we cannot deliver consistent menu items when the products are not available or not available at a price that works for us." The chef here was also limited by time-constraints in the ordering process. He currently works with six different vendors for baked goods, dry goods, produce, meat and seafood. Due to the size of the restaurant, he is primarily in charge of all menu design and ordering and does not have the available time to organize ordering with many smaller vendors. Ultimately in this restaurant, the quality and freshness are desired in the products, but financial and time constraints limit purchasing.

Restaurant A currently sources a limited number of products and would like to source more from the local market but is limited by seasonality, a lacking distribution channel and price variances. The restaurant currently sources greens, mushrooms, bread, desserts, beef and organic chicken from local sources on a consistent basis. Other seasonal produce at times comes from

Pennsylvania and New Jersey; however these products are delivered through a major national vendor. When the restaurant does use local products (like micro greens from Farm B), the wait staff is trained to advertise this and it is noted on the specials menu. The chef at Restaurant A described, “Seasonality plays a major role. Many products come locally when they are in season, but otherwise there is a major price differential between locally grown produce from greenhouses and our major vendors. Most of our meat comes from local markets because its production doesn’t vary season to season.” He also commented that the distribution channels must improve in the area to ease the process of local sourcing. Many farms do not deliver or reach out to restaurants, making it difficult to begin a working relationship from farm to table. Major vendors like SYSCO and US Foods are so successful because they have representatives that ease the ordering and delivery processes for the time-constrained chef.

Restaurant B is an upscale, full-service restaurant with a very innovative, seasonal menu. The restaurant emphasizes and advertises the use of local ingredients on their menu, noting the farms where the products came from. The wait staff is also educated on the farms and ingredients on the menu to better educate guests on the product origins. Restaurant B currently sources from 15-20 different farms and works with Zone 7, a local intermediary, to simplify their ordering and delivery processes. Product quality and consistency are the top priorities when selecting local producers, followed by organic/sustainable practices and unique products. The customers whom frequent this restaurant also come seeking the local/organic trend and unbeatable quality. The restaurant experiences some price differentials when using local farms, but their menu prices allow for this and their customers are interested in the product origins. The biggest challenges they face are designing menus that are seasonal and innovative to incorporate as many local products as they can.

“We have been sourcing locally for some time now, but have emphasized the use of the products on our menu more recently, as more consumers are aware of the movement. For our restaurant, quality and precision is of utmost importance. Our customers come for an exceptional experience – our local producers are equally dedicated to their produce as we are to our customers, creating an unbeatable relationship.” The chef at Restaurant B describes that while sometimes there is a financial trade-off to purchasing locally, particularly in the off-season, the customers notice the difference and keep coming back.

Restaurant C is a mid-scale Italian restaurant, specializing in homemade pasta and an entirely homemade menu. The menu is relatively concise, with appetizers/salads, daily specials (fish, meat, ravioli and pasta of the day) and 11 different signature pasta dishes. Due to the Italian theme, the restaurant relies heavily on tomatoes, peppers, and semolina and Durham flours which cannot be purchased locally year-round. The restaurant strives to source the remainder of their products from local sources, consistently purchasing dairy, meat, cheeses and greens. The chef and owner at Restaurant C noted, “Since we make everything fresh every day, we need to start with the freshest possible ingredients. Whenever possible, I shop local farmers markets and work our local purveyors to select the finest ingredients. I use simple cooking techniques to allow the flavors do the work so I need the best. I have created relationships with our producers and have confidence that every gallon of milk or box of micro-greens will have the same excellent, consistent quality.” Pasta naturally has a lower food cost, therefore spending more on local products balances their food cost and doesn’t impact menu prices.

Summarized Results from Restaurant Interviews

	Restaurant A	Restaurant B	Restaurant C
Menu	Seasonal menu, changing 3-4 times/year; specials offered	Regional/seasonal menu, specials offered	Italian menu, specials offered weekly
Local purchases	Greens, mushrooms, bread, desserts	Produce, dairy, cheese, some dry goods, chicken, beef, bread; works with Zone 7	Dairy, cheese, meat, greens
Reasons for purchasing locally	Product quality, freshness, support for local farms	Quality and consistency, taste, customer demand, build community relationships	Superior product quality; consistency
Price/financial impact	Price differential limits purchases (can't compete with national vendors)	Some price differential, but customers willing to pay for the quality	Some price differential, but works into food cost
Service/advertising	Advertise use of product on specials menu	Educate servers on product origin	Educate servers on product origin; denote product origins on specials menu
Limitations/challenges	Price variance, time for finding/setting up supplier relations, seasonality	Time for creative menu design to revolve around local products	Seasonality of necessary products

Farms

The farms also had similar responses and shed light on how the market in Bucks County could improve from their perspective. The three participating farms as well as one of the restaurants indicated that they rely on Zone 7, a distribution company that connects farms and restaurants. Zone 7 picks up produce from 45 different farms in New Jersey and Eastern Pennsylvania and delivers to a number of restaurants in these areas. Farm A said about Zone 7, “We love Zone 7 because we tell them what we have to harvest, they call their restaurants, sell

the product and then pick it up. We are not the type of farmers to juggle a dozen different restaurants and the restaurants who deal with Zone 7 have the advantage of choosing from different farms and crop diversity throughout the year when we may not have product.”

Farm A is a family-owned and operated farm, offering a range of seasonal produce, including greens, root vegetables and fruit. This farm works with Zone 7 to sell a majority of their crops, but also operates a community-supported agriculture (CSA) program, sells their produce at three local farmer’s markets and works personally with two restaurants. Farm A received GAP (Good Agriculture Practices) training and currently grow to organic standards but are not certified. This farm values consistent quality most in the produce and has buffers in place (like Zone 7) to account for lack of product. The farm has also established relationships with restaurants that allow for flexibility and understanding when problems arise. The farm is adamant about not selling a poor quality product and takes great pride in their crop quality and consistency. In addition to Zone 7, Farm A works with Suburban Organics which acts as an intermediary for co-ops and CSAs. “We are very fortunate to work with Zone 7. As I mentioned we also personally work with and deliver to two restaurants. We have personal relationships with these chefs, but it time consuming to produce, organize and deliver individual orders.” The primary differences when working directly with the restaurants versus Zone 7 lie in the deliveries and intimacy of the relationship. The pricing and feedback are very similar, but the direct farm to restaurant requires an extra commitment to make deliveries and maintain the personal relationship in addition to the business relationship. The farmers here are very passionate about their community, as reflected in their farming practices and involvement with their CSA and local markets therefore maintaining a family-run operation and sourcing locally has always been their priority.

Farm B works in the niche market, exclusively growing greens, with a focus on micro greens, flowering plants and herbs. Farm B also works with Zone 7 and Suburban Organics to distribute their products, along with operating a small retail space for community members to shop. Farm B grows organically and utilizes greenhouses throughout the year. The farm takes most pride in delivering excellent quality products and service, as well as their organic practices. The farm is relatively small, but works hard to produce top quality micro greens. Farm B is very receptive to restaurant feedback and is continually trying to be creative in their growing to offer unusual products not offered by most major vendors. Their pricing is competitive primarily because there are few substitutes or competitors in their market, therefore many restaurants are willing to pay a slightly higher price for the quality and uniqueness of the micro greens. The most predominant challenges they face are keeping up with demand and maintaining consistent products throughout the year. With organic practices, greenhouses and the four seasons in Bucks County, the farm is in constant motion to maintain the quality of their greens.

Farm C is in the beginning stages of establishing itself as a local producer. This dairy farm has sent their product to a major processor for many years and is slowly converting their business model to market to local farmers' markets and restaurants. "Dairy farms have a unique advantage at the local level since, at least at our farm, the cows are not grass fed and therefore are milked year-round." The farm will begin by marketing to several local farmers' markets and expanding to grocery stores. Future plans also include processing their milk into cheese to create a unique artisan product. "We are very involved in the local community and are very interested to begin sourcing at the local level. We'd like to learn more about what restaurants and grocers are looking for and adapting our product accordingly." Initially, the farm knows it will be difficult to adjust their business model to include processing and marketing, but locally sourced

dairy is an open opportunity in the Bucks County market and therefore a very competitive opportunity for the farm.

Summarized Results from Farm Interviews

<i>Farm Results</i>	Farm A	Farm B	Farm C
Products	Wide variety of seasonal produce	Greens, micro greens, herbs, produce	Dairy, artisan cheese
Organic/certifications	Good Agriculture Practices (GAP), grow to organic standards	GAP, certified organic	GAP
Values	Consistent product quality	Organic/sustainable practices	Local community/economy, quality product
Avenue for sales	Zone 7, Suburban Organics, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), farmers markets, directly to 2 restaurants	Zone 7, on-site store, second store coming soon	Still in development stage
Limitations/challenges	Producing consistent quality, managing different sales avenues	Niche market; limited product offering	Building marketing to begin local distribution

DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

The results of the study were similar to the previous literature on the farm-to-table relationship. Bucks County represents a small sector of the industry and therefore replicated many of the dynamics and findings for the restaurant industry as a whole. The restaurants indicated they source locally for superior quality and assurance of quality from their producers (consistent with Murphy & Smith, 2009). By working with farmers and producers in close proximity, the chefs have developed personal relationships and have confidence in their purchases. The restaurants reported the local products they use in their restaurants have superior quality and freshness when compared to other national vendors. In general, pricing is similar, particularly when the product is in season. However when there is a price differential, such as with the niche Farm B's micro greens, the assurance of quality and personal relationships with the vendors are cost trade-offs (consistent with Morrell, 2010).

In addition to price, delivery and distribution systems set some local producers apart from national vendors. There are two companies, Zone 7 and Suburban Organics currently facilitating between the farm and consumer however these are working on a small scale and are still unfamiliar to some chefs who may be interested in local products. Logistically, delivery is the primary differential between local and national purchasing. Restaurants must plan and accommodate for many smaller deliveries, rather than a few bulk orders (affecting the frequency of order placement and storage). Most small-scale farmers and producers have developed online ordering systems and have similar, if not the same, payment systems in place as national vendors.

For chefs, the major logistical difference exists in the time required to set up and maintain local relationships (consistent with Sharma, et al., 2009). National vendors employ sales representatives who are solely responsible for facilitating this relationship, by calling and/or visiting restaurants to promote products, take orders and solve any issues that arise. This relationship on a local level requires a greater time commitment from the restaurant as well as the farm. Depending on the location, the chef must seek out local producers and develop a system for assessing quality and consistency. This relationship must then be actively maintained to exchange information (consistent with Curtis, 2009). Though it can be a creatively stimulating relationship to personally work with the producer, chefs indicate this consumes an additional five to ten hours of their week.

From the farm perspective, many local producers are or desire to be involved with restaurants but are also pressed for time. Farmers on the local level take great pride in their product and take time ensure the highest quality on a consistent basis. Local farmers also have the opportunity to differentiate themselves and market specialized or unique products to gain a competitive advantage. Restaurant A does not use an intermediary and sources most produce from a national vendor, however with Farm B in the area offering a competitive price for micro-greens, the chef orders from there.

Farmers and local producers can increase their success by personally marketing to restaurants or employing an outside company or marketing coordinator. The business-to-business relations of farms and restaurants can be improved with more mainstream marketing and purchasing systems. Farmers are very willing to interact with restaurants and create mutually beneficial decisions. Farmers can make this very evident to the restaurants they work with. An

opportunity exists in this gap, to improve and ease the communication between the farm and restaurant. Distributors and wholesalers could facilitate the ordering and delivery processes.

The local purchasing relationship is incredibly versatile and flexible and as demonstrated in this study, can work for a range of restaurants. The restaurants interviewed were mid- to upscale with menus offering a variety of cuisines. This relationship does require more effort at the onset to establish but in time pays off exponentially: reinvesting in the local market, offering the freshest product and drawing in customers who seek out this emerging trend.

Industry Implications – Adopting this Strategy

More and more chefs are exploring the new markets and possibilities presented by local producers. The results from this study helped to identify the areas for improvement in the system and how other restaurants can utilize this competitive strategy. The biggest downfall for many areas is the lack of an intermediary. Both restaurants and farms agree the relationship is most successful when there is a third party present. Chefs and farmers use every hour available to them, therefore the third party decreases the need to coordinate orders from a multitude of places and ensures accurate ordering and delivery.

For restaurants to be successful, they must incorporate the values and use of local ingredients into their menu concept. Particularly when a restaurant works with a limited number of vendors, the menu must emphasize the use of fresh ingredients and must have flexibility to adapt ingredients when issues arise. As Restaurants A and C implied, guests return to their restaurants craving the same dish time and time again, therefore they are either limited in their local purchases or must have systems in place to maintain their orders throughout the year. Therefore the menu design (and chef creativity in turn) is incredibly important to the success of a

farm-to-table restaurant. Similarly, the restaurant should take initiative to educate consumers on the benefits of using locally sourced ingredients and illustrate the local items on the menu or highlight specialty products through specials.

LIMITATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

While informative on the outlook for Bucks County, Pennsylvania, this research study encountered several limitations and could be enhanced with future research. The nature of the restaurant industry is fast-paced and demanding where every minute on the job is used. Because of this, the breadth of the study was limited due to lack of response from the market. Though there were many congruencies between the restaurants' and farms' responses, more subjects could have shed more insight on the subject.

The responses and conclusions reached in this study also point to several avenues where additional research could be conducted. The literature on local sourcing and the respondents from Bucks County indicate that the local relationship could be enhanced by more support of local farms. Another common theme is the demand for collaboration of the farms to improve their economies of scale, distribution, and product reliability. The results of the study also indicate a much greater proportion of restaurants using and farms marketing fruits and vegetables. There is a great opportunity for farms to market meat, seafood and dairy to local restaurants. In general, dairy and cattle farms are not seasonal, which is a common challenge for produce farms. Future research could be done to investigate the seasonality and promotion of meat, seafood and dairy specifically. Additional research could also explore the challenges to implementing a farm collaboration and/or intermediary for local distribution.

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APPENDIX A – Restaurant Questionnaire

Farm to Table Restaurant Survey

Background

1. How long has the restaurant been purchasing locally grown foods? _____
2. Why do you purchase locally?
(Ex. Product availability, taste, variety, food safety, more nutritious, customer requests, environmental concerns, price, community support, other...)
3. Operational information:
 - a. Average number of menu items:
 Appetizers: _____; Entrees: _____; Desserts: _____
 - b. How many of these menu items are prepared using locally produced foods?
 Appetizers: _____; Entrees: _____; Desserts: _____
 - f. Annual expenditure on local foods of total food purchases: _____%
4. Do you promote the use of locally produced food items?
5. If yes, how do you promote these items? How often?
(Ex. Menu, staff word of mouth, restaurant mission/reputation, website, signage, other...)
6. Local Product Overview – products and associated number/name of vendors

	Seafood	Meat	Poultry	Dairy	Vegetables	Fruits	Other
Product type and vendors used to source the product							

7. With which of these products do you face the most challenges sourcing locally (or according to your expectations for your restaurant – organic, sustainable, free-range, wild-caught, etc)?

Sourcing/Selection

8. How did you find local producers?

(Ex. They came to my restaurant, I sought them out (ex: word-of-mouth, actively searching, farmers markets), personal relationships, publicly available information)

9. What is most important to you in determining the source of your products?

Ex. Certifications/organic – which ones? Why?

Location/distance from restaurant – how far?

Product availability?

Product variety?

Product quality?

Personal relationship with vendor?

Other:

10. What process (if any) do you use for determining quality of the producer or product before signing a contract? (How do you decide?)

11. Are your local producers open/receptive to feedback/suggestions on their operations or product offerings? Explain.

Purchasing and Receiving

12. How does pricing differ when purchasing from local vendors as opposed to major suppliers?

(Ex. Availability of pricing information, consistency in pricing, value in prices, payment period, cash or credit application)

13. How do you organize delivery schedules and payment schedules with many small deliveries (vs. several larger deliveries as with major vendors)?

Storage and Preparation

14. How does the shelf life differ when using fresh, local ingredients?

Shorter – how do you manage this?

Longer?

No difference?

15. How does purchasing locally effect product versatility or menu creativity?

(Ex: requires a more innovative chef to create menu, products are used in more innovative ways, products are cross-utilized across the menu, more/all menu items from scratch)

16. What specialized equipment or tools (if any) did you need to purchase to work with your products?

Service

17. Do you train your staff about the origin of the products on the menu? How do you do this?

18. What kinds of customer feedback do you receive regarding the use of local ingredients?

19. How does the use of local ingredients influence your menu prices (if at all)?

20. Where do you see the most financial impact from sourcing locally?
(Ex. Food cost percentage, food expenditure, labor costs, promotion costs, product quality, personal relationship with vendor)

Overall

21. What major challenges do you face when using locally sourced products?

22. What resources are necessary to overcome these challenges?
(Ex. Tangible – money, equipment; intangible – time, labor)

23. Besides sourcing locally, what other ways do you practice sustainability in your restaurant?
(Ex. Recycling, composting, local artwork, local beverages (wine, beer, other), furniture/décor, other...)

24. Would you benefit and/or utilize a local farm-to-restaurant collaborative if it were available? *(Ex: a local food wholesaler; Chef Connection – linking food producers and buyers together)*

APPENDIX B – Farm Questionnaire

Farm to Table Producer Survey

Background

1. How many years have you been in business? _____
How many years have you been distributing product to local restaurants? _____
2. What products do you produce? (If significant variability between seasons, specify production by season)
3. Are your products organic? Does your farm have any other environmental/farming certifications?

Sourcing

4. How do you establish relationships with restaurants?
(Ex. advertising on website/publicly available information, restaurants come to me, “cold calls” with chefs/restaurateurs, etc.)
5. What do you value most in your products?
(Ex. revenue/financial gains, positive customer feedback, product quality, product freshness, product appearance, etc.)
6. How receptive are you to feedback/suggestions from restaurants on product offering/quality/etc.?

Production

7. What systems do you have in place to recover from lack of product/poor product quality/etc.?
8. What systems do you follow to ensure product safety/quality?

Distribution Channel

9. Do you work with any intermediaries? Any additional links in the distribution channel aside from farm and restaurant?

10. In your opinion, how does your pricing differ from that of major vendors?

11. How is your payment system structured? (Ex. COD, credit system, etc)

12. How does your delivery system work?

(Ex. daily deliveries, pick-up only, flexible system based on customer, etc)

Overall

13. What major challenges do you face when working with local restaurants?

a. What resources are necessary to overcome these challenges? (tangible or intangible)