



Alicia Rihn  
arihn@utk.edu

Volume 8 Number 8 April 2023

## The Benefits of Marketing Food-Producing Plants as Local

*This e-GRO Alert covers information related to marketing the benefits of local plants with an emphasis on research related to consumer behavior toward food-producing plants.*

Local foods and plants have been gaining in popularity for many years. During the economic downturns of the 2008 Great Recession, consumers wanted to keep more money in their local economies by buying local produce. Additionally, they wanted to help their household budgets resulting in an increased interest in growing their own food. Since the Great Recession, demand for local produce and interest in growing produce have increased with a big bump during the Covid-19 pandemic when more people stayed home and had more time to invest in their home landscapes and gardens.



Figure 1. Vegetable Transplants For Sale in North Carolina in 2022.

Photo credit: A. Rihn

The USDA defines local as less than 400 miles from origin of the product or within the state where the product was produced. Given this definition of local, one means of promoting the local origins of food-producing plants is using state marketing programs (e.g., Minnesota Grown, Pick Tennessee Products, Fresh from Florida). These programs communicate the connection to the specified state and have marketing materials (e.g., brands/logos, signage, website directories/availability) available to growers. The goal is to encourage awareness and purchasing behavior through using these materials. As the programs gain recognition, consumer purchasing behavior is positively impacted.

[www.e-gro.org](http://www.e-gro.org)

### 2023 Sponsors



Funding the Future of Floriculture



P.L. LIGHT SYSTEMS  
THE LIGHTING KNOWLEDGE COMPANY

Reprint with permission from the author(s) of this e-GRO Alert.

Knowing who buys local products and what factors drive consumer preferences for local food-producing plants is important. This information can be used to position products and tailor marketing efforts to better align with consumer needs.

Millennials are more receptive to local plant production than older consumers (McGinnis et al., 2020). This is beneficial given that Millennials are starting families, first-time homebuyers, and have disposable income. They are tech savvy and experience-oriented. They also are the largest generation with the highest spending potential. As a result, they are a great group to target with local food-producing plant promotions.

Some of the main drivers of local food-producing plant sales are the local economy, improved quality perceptions, and environmental benefits (Khachatryan et al., 2017). Factors that improve purchase likelihood include in-state and U.S. origins, visual attention to the state marketing program logo (Fresh from Florida), and organic production methods. A 2021 study found that consumers' state food identities impact buying behavior but vary widely and do not always align with actual agriculture production within the state (Moreno & Malone, 2021). However, consumers were more likely to purchase local products that aligned with the identity. The implication is that knowing what people expect (i.e., the "identity") and aligning locally produced products with those expectations, may encourage sales.

Together, the research indicates that consumers have positive associations with plants grown locally, many of which have remained consistent over time. Based on these studies, several marketing insights were generated.



Figure 2. Locally Grown Microgreens in Tennessee in 2022.

Photo Credit: A. Rihn

### Key Marketing Insights:

1. If you sell your products within the state where they are grown, communicate that information to your customers (e.g., signs, online content, tags, branding).
2. Consider ways to engage Millennial consumers.
  - Experience activities or events
  - Child activities or events
  - Online promotions and content
3. Use point-of-sale information to inform customers about the benefits of purchasing local plants. Align the benefits with information that is valuable to customers (i.e., economic, quality, and environmental benefits).
4. Consider joining your state's marketing program to leverage their brand awareness, online platforms, network and marketing materials.
5. Assess your state's or market's "food identity" and what people expect. Is there transferable information that could apply to local plants?

**e-GRO Alert**

[www.e-gro.org](http://www.e-gro.org)

**CONTRIBUTORS**

Dr. Nora Catlin  
Floriculture Specialist  
Cornell Cooperative Extension  
Suffolk County  
[nora.catlin@cornell.edu](mailto:nora.catlin@cornell.edu)

Dr. Chris Currey  
Assistant Professor of Floriculture  
Iowa State University  
[ccurrey@iastate.edu](mailto:ccurrey@iastate.edu)

Dr. Ryan Dickson  
Greenhouse Horticulture and  
Controlled-Environment Agriculture  
University of Arkansas  
[ryand@uark.edu](mailto:ryand@uark.edu)

Thomas Ford  
Commercial Horticulture Educator  
Penn State Extension  
[tgf2@psu.edu](mailto:tgf2@psu.edu)

Dan Gilrein  
Entomology Specialist  
Cornell Cooperative Extension  
Suffolk County  
[dog1@cornell.edu](mailto:dog1@cornell.edu)

Dr. Chieri Kubota  
Controlled Environments Agriculture  
The Ohio State University  
[kubota.10@osu.edu](mailto:kubota.10@osu.edu)

Heidi Lindberg  
Floriculture Extension Educator  
Michigan State University  
[wolleage@anr.msu.edu](mailto:wolleage@anr.msu.edu)

Dr. Roberto Lopez  
Floriculture Extension & Research  
Michigan State University  
[rglopez@msu.edu](mailto:rglopez@msu.edu)

Dr. Neil Mattson  
Greenhouse Research & Extension  
Cornell University  
[neil.mattson@cornell.edu](mailto:neil.mattson@cornell.edu)

Dr. W. Garrett Owen  
Sustainable Greenhouse & Nursery  
Systems Extension & Research  
The Ohio State University  
[owen.367@osu.edu](mailto:owen.367@osu.edu)

Dr. Rosa E. Raudales  
Greenhouse Extension Specialist  
University of Connecticut  
[rosa.raudales@uconn.edu](mailto:rosa.raudales@uconn.edu)

Dr. Alicia Rihn  
Agricultural & Resource Economics  
University of Tennessee-Knoxville  
[arihn@utk.edu](mailto:arihn@utk.edu)

Dr. Debalina Saha  
Horticulture Weed Science  
Michigan State University  
[sahadeb2@msu.edu](mailto:sahadeb2@msu.edu)

Dr. Beth Scheckelhoff  
Extension Educator - Greenhouse Systems  
The Ohio State University  
[scheckelhoff.11@osu.edu](mailto:scheckelhoff.11@osu.edu)

Dr. Ariana Torres-Bravo  
Horticulture/ Ag. Economics  
Purdue University  
[torres2@purdue.edu](mailto:torres2@purdue.edu)

Dr. Brian Whipker  
Floriculture Extension & Research  
NC State University  
[bwhipker@ncsu.edu](mailto:bwhipker@ncsu.edu)

Dr. Jean Williams-Woodward  
Ornamental Extension Plant Pathologist  
University of Georgia  
[jwoodwar@uga.edu](mailto:jwoodwar@uga.edu)

Copyright ©2023

Where trade names, proprietary products, or specific equipment are listed, no discrimination is intended and no endorsement, guarantee or warranty is implied by the authors, universities or associations.

**Cooperating Universities**

**Cornell CALS**  
College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

**Cornell Cooperative Extension  
Suffolk County**



**PennState Extension**

**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**

**UTIA INSTITUTE OF  
AGRICULTURE**  
THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE

**UCONN**



**College of Agricultural &  
Environmental Sciences**  
**UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA**

**MICHIGAN STATE  
UNIVERSITY**

**UofA DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE  
RESEARCH & EXTENSION**  
University of Arkansas System

**P PURDUE  
UNIVERSITY**



**THE OHIO STATE  
UNIVERSITY**

**NC STATE  
UNIVERSITY**

**In cooperation with our local and state greenhouse organizations**

**MAUMEE VALLEY GROWERS**  
*Choose the Very Best.*



**Metro Detroit Flower Growers Association**

