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## "GOOD. FRESH. LOCAL." AN EXAMINATION OF LOCAL FOOD INITIATIVES IN COLLEGE SYSTEMS IN LINCOLN, NE

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"GOOD. FRESH. LOCAL." AN EXAMINATION OF LOCAL FOOD INITIATIVES IN COLLEGE  
SYSTEMS IN LINCOLN, NE

By: Jennifer Simons

AN UNDERGRADUATE THESIS

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**Abstract**

In September of 2005, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln University Dining Services/University Housing set out to try an innovation at the cutting edge for this region's universities. The Good. Fresh. Local. (GFL) initiative was the product of a team of people and organizations looking to implement a program integrating the local food movement at the university level. The program has since grown in scale and prominence within the UNL setting. Students living in the dorms were surveyed to acquire an inside look at students' definitions of "local," measures of its value, awareness of the GFL program, and desire for more locally sourced food, among other questions. Through distribution of 500 surveys among all residence hall dining centers on City and East campus, not only was information obtained that could assist in evaluation of the GFL program, gathered data functioned as indicators of where students stand in terms of awareness of the local food movement. While awareness of the GFL program and value placed on locally produced products varied across the surveyed population, nearly 70% of 378 responses answered "yes" to a desire for an increased amount of locally sourced products on campus, only 1.3% answered "no," and the remaining were "indifferent." While further initiatives could be pursued to educate the student population on the meaning and importance of local food products, the GFL program has clearly been provided to a population base with similar desires. As a further component of this study, the feasibility of implementing a similar program in two nearby colleges (Nebraska Wesleyan University and Union College) was lightly examined. Due to unique components of these two schools, a GFL program executed mimicking the one at UNL would likely not be feasible, but potential for locally sourced food within their dining halls is neither inconceivable or unheard of and data gathered from UNL students in this study may serve to assist implementation of a similar program.

**Acknowledgements:**

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## Introduction

With rising fuels costs and disassociation from our food sources, it's imperative that we take action to both reduce our global footprint (via reduced food miles) while beginning to notice and care about the origins of what we're putting into our bodies. Food traveling by plane, train, or truck poses serious stress on our environment, injecting large amounts of carbon dioxide into our atmosphere contributing to eventual health problems for many individuals. Further, in order to transport this food, a method of retaining "freshness" must be used. Artificial ripening of tomatoes is just one illustration of this. Local food avoids these travel burdens while supporting a local economy. Individuals buying food locally also have the opportunity to know their farmer and potentially go visit and see where their food is actually grown. Knowing where our food was grown provides the opportunity to investigate our food source and refrain from ingesting anything we'd rather not and also vouch for the quality or other values of the product purchased. This study primarily concerns the success and receptiveness of UNL's "Good. Fresh. Local." (GFL) program and secondarily the abilities and limitations of providing local food in three different college food systems in Lincoln, Nebraska. The GFL program at UNL will be described in addition to an analysis of surveys distributed to current students to determine the success for the program and provide recommendations for future changes or similar programs. As such, the objectives of this study are as follows:

- A) To gain a deeper understanding of UNL students' perception of the concept of local food and consumption of local products;
- B) To evaluate the Good. Fresh. Local. (GFL) program based upon awareness, student suggestions, and attendance; and

- C) To offer recommendations for the GFL program and examine the potential for similar local programs within existing dining programs at nearby colleges Nebraska Wesleyan University and Union College

This problem has been studied in the field, and in this case, a college setting—particularly the dining centers. Though, it should be noted that, the structure of food systems affects everyone whether directly or indirectly. The structure of the food systems and college practices, as well as students exposed to the food and regulations must be considered. Unless the individuals providing the dining center options are capable of and willing to offer local food, it won't be offered. The students' desire for local food is large part of my research questions and may influence a college's decisions to provide local food. Institutional struggles will be illustrated via public information and general data concerning the university's food system, whereas college student aspects are measured by means of hand-distributed surveys.

Frances Daly undertook a similar, more comprehensive study in 2007 for completion of a master's degree from the University of Cincinnati (UC). While the primary thesis question concerned whether or not it would be feasible to implement a farm-to-college program at the University of Cincinnati, several sub-questions were asked concerning logistical structure at UC, administrative support and interest, and student interest and support. This latter question utilized similar means of gathering data concerning students by randomly surveying 135 UC students for five days and then analyzing the results with the assistance of Excel using a series of charts and graphs. The survey structure methods of analysis used by Daly were influential in the content design of the survey used in this study. The results concerning students at UC showed a general lack of knowledge concerning the term "local food," but they understood that such a strategy could result in economic and environmental benefits. Around 79% of students surveyed agreed

that they would like to see more local food in the UC dining halls, and many were willing to pay more to make it happen. This study also examined nearby college food systems, using a table format to evaluate particular characteristics that may or may not prove conducive to establishment of a local food program. Prior to delving into the logistics of researching struggles within the local food provision, we must clearly define this concept of “local,” motivations for buying local, and the structure of UNL’s GFL program.

## **Literature Review**

### *What is local?*

While “local” is often associated with “organic” foods, the two words are far from synonymous. Foods deemed “local,” may still be grown via “normal farming practices” (Smithers, Lamarche, and Joseph 2008). “...The core notions in local food systems thinking is ‘otherness’ and opposition based on a common desire to de-couple from the industrial agro-food complex” (Smithers et al. 2008: 339). Local food is, simply put, food grown locally, near to the region of purchase, thereby reducing cost and emissions due to longer transports (Macias 2008). In a study by Ostrom (2006), the origin of the food must be in a distance ranging from “within sight” to within state borders in order for it to be considered local. Macias (2008) notes the fact that local food is often unprocessed and a means for social interaction between the consumer and the farmer. Smithers et al. (2008: 340) explained that the “idealized local food system” removes the ‘middlemen’ to allow consumers a promise of “fresh food of known provenance.” Local food further offers a means of income for small family farms and food policies providing healthy, affordable food choices (Gasteyer, Hultine, Cooperband, and Curry 2008).

### *Why buy local?*

Increasing consciousness of a variety of factors—including origin, quality, and sustainability of food—have resulted in a preference for alternative foods (Smithers et al. 2008; Macias 2008; Brehm and Eisenhauer 2008). Consumers are affected by their perceptions of the food they're shopping for; whether or not something appears to be fresh or not can make all the difference (Smithers et. al. 2008; Macias 2008). According to a study by Sabine U. O'Hara and Sigrid Stagl (2002), a primary motivation for participating in a community supported agriculture group was for fresh or organic vegetables and for health reasons. Local foods are often unprocessed (consider fruits and vegetables) and thus lower in unhealthy additives used to preserve the food such as sodium (Macias 2008).

Factors not relating to the actual product may also encourage people to purchase particular foods. "Though an ideological view of agricultural production certainly mobilizes many farmers and consumers to take a seat at the local food dinner table, the institutional forms of local agriculture and the face-to-face relations inherent in them are the organizational basis of the movement (Macias 2008: 1099)." Smithers et al. (2008: 340) show that "both material and symbolic factors are important in purchasing decisions." We must look into factors such as socialization, cost/convenience, one's region, and the "connection" motivation. Gaystayer, Hultine, Cooperband, and Curry (2008) state that a higher level of community well-being is found in communities with smaller, more local agriculture provisions. Gaystayer et al. (2008: 60) also discovered that "urban consumers were more likely to visit the farmers' market for the atmosphere and entertainment" whereas rural farmers' market consumers were more likely to respond that they visited the farmers' market "strictly to purchase food." Although when all consumer responses, rural and urban, were considered, buying to support local farmers and



purchasing naturally grown, healthy food were the most important factors. Further, class differences may pertain to food choice. “The connections among property, privilege and paler skin are evident in alternative food practice,” states Slocum (2007: 526). “The capacity to shop for alternative food tends to be an economically and culturally middle class thing to do,” Slocum (2007: 527) goes on to say. Macias (2008), too, declares that often high costs of high quality and locally produced food deter consumers in lower-income households. Further, time used on preparation of fresh, unprocessed food is often greater than that of pre-prepared, processed food (Macias 2008). Lower income families, oftentimes working multiple jobs just to cover the bare necessities, therefore can’t afford the time cost of buying unprepared food.

*“Good. Fresh. Local.” Sustainable Food Program<sup>1</sup>*

The effects of the alternative food market spreading into school systems are more promising. Farm-to-school initiatives provide a stable back-up market for local farmers and a (minimal) source of extra income. Students also receive “social benefits” of being exposed to nutritious foods and a greater awareness of where food actually comes from. Farmers, too, get these “social benefits” of “contributing to [others’] social benefits through direct action” and attaining a more diverse market (Izumi, Wright, and Hamm 2010: 374).

A meal plan at UNL is required by those living in on-campus residence halls (Harper/Schramm/Smith, Cather/Pound/Neihardt, Abel/Sandoz, Selleck, Burr/Fedde, Kauffman, Knoll) and is optional for off-campus students or those living in on-campus apartments (Courtyards and Village) or alternative halls (Husker Hall). As such, each of the major residence hall complexes is located near one dining center for a total of five dining centers

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<sup>1</sup> Dining Services Administrative Personnel, personal interview, November 18, 2011, University of Nebraska—Lincoln, Lincoln, NE.

(Harper/Schramm/Smith, Cather/Pound/Neihardt, Abel/Sandoz, Selleck, and Burr/Fedde—located in the East Campus Union). Students have the freedom to decide between a plan excluding weekends (a “5-day unlimited access plan”) or a 7-day unlimited access plan (with a price difference hovering around \$90 for both semesters). Visitors are also allowed to eat at the dining centers for a guest price for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. University Dining Services/University Housing has a “prime vendor” contract with CashWa for the majority of their food products. There is no minimum order requirement, and orders are placed on a daily basis by each dining center based upon the requirements of a five-week menu cycle.

In September of 2005, University Dining Services at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln set out to try something at the cutting edge for this region’s universities. According to survey data gathered since Fall 2004 by the Center for Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC), the average start date for farm-to-college programs was 2003. According to Sarah Murray (2005), Hendrix College in Arkansas pioneered one of the premier original farm-to-college programs in 1989. The Good. Fresh. Local. (GFL) Sustainable Food Project at UNL was the product of a team of people and organizations looking to implement a program in support of the local food movement at the university level. An article about the Yale University Sustainable Food Project served as a spark in University Dining Services to gather a team and begin brainstorming ideas for a local food program. The team consisted of individuals from University Dining Services administration, Cather/Pound/Neihardt Dining Center, the UNL Food Processing Center, the Nebraska Cooperative Development Center, and the Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society. With the support of students, area farmers, producers and manufacturers, the GFL program grew from a tentative idea to a full-blown service integrated into current meal offerings primarily at Cather/Pound/Neihardt (CPN) and Nebraska East Campus Union (ECU/East) Dining Centers. As

stated on the UNL GFL homepage (2012), the foundation of the GFL program is one that:

- Serves traditional menu items that promote the value of local food
- Educates students about sustainable agriculture and the positive impact it has on the environment, local economy and communities
- Provides a new distribution opportunity for local farmers and producers in the world of university food service

At present this is accomplished with special monthly local meals at CPN and ECU Dining Centers where the majority of menu items are prepared with local food. CPN and ECU Dining Centers also incorporate different local foods in the daily menus throughout the year. In addition, all five dining centers Harper-Schramm-Smith (HSS), Selleck Hall (Selleck), Abel-Sandoz (AS), CPN, and ECU offer local jellies, tomatoes, potatoes, GFL granola, oats, pecans, and limited produce. In addition, table-tents, brochures, reports, and posters located in the dining centers help educate students about sustainable agriculture. Menu labels posted on the serving line include the origin (farm/producer and location) for the different local food items. Approximately 5% of CPN food purchases and 1-2% of ECU purchases are identified as GFL products.

The pathway from GFL as an idea to becoming a reality wasn't without its challenges. The first was establishing connections with nearby farmers (a task that began with a meeting on a Saturday after a July farmer's market with approximately twenty area farmers) when the idea of a local foods program at University Dining Services was presented. The results of the meeting were very positive with farmers indicating an interest in participating in the program. Other topics for discussion included considerations of cost differences with non-local products, labor requirements, preparation space, and storage space needed for local products. Initially,

additional labor was needed and preparation space, special equipment, and storage systems were inadequate for the task that was about to be undertaken. In order to address equipment needs (and educational support for the program), University Dining Services partnered with The Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society and were fortunate to receive an Agricultural Opportunities and Value-Added Partnership Grant from the State of Nebraska Department of Economic Development for approximately \$35,000. These grant funds allowed for the purchase of preparation and storage equipment in the ingredient room at CPN Dining Service to be used with the local food program. These physical changes also made it possible for the restructuring of the employee job responsibilities. A complete alteration of how dining service operations were carried out and a new paradigm of food acquisition were developed by University Dining Services administrators and CPN Dining management and staff members. Further, the enthusiasm to have two-three local dinners each month had to be balanced with the reality of a unique dining program and it was agreed by all to take 'baby steps' in getting the program started. Because of this, in 2005, the GFL program had eight special meals (one per month) throughout fall and spring semesters in CPN Dining Center. Daily local menu items were incorporated in this same dining center in spring of 2006. From 2006 to 2007, a few of these daily menu offerings expanded to the other dining centers. In fall of 2006, four special, local meals were served in two dining halls, CPN and ECU, and four in the spring 2007. Seven years since its inception, monthly special dinners are offered in two different dining halls, CPN and ECU, in addition to local menu items integrated in the daily menus. The GFL program became a reality despite initial road bumps and ventures into new territory through a mutual dedication and willingness to work together toward a common goal by those involved.

GFL operates via an annual bid letter sent to local farmers for meat, poultry, eggs, fruit and vegetables. With their definition of local products being those grown or produced in any area within Nebraska state limits, this means farms as far as Scottsbluff (which happens to be UNL's farthest farm and supplier of Kelly Beans) and farms closer to Lincoln like Common Good and Shadowbrook are included in the bid process. Bid letters are sent out requesting pricing for designated amounts of certain local products that are used during the academic year (August – May) in Dining Services. Bid letter qualifications also require a description of sustainable farming practices and the completion of a GAP (Good Agricultural Practices) checklist. In particular farmers and producers looking to partner with University Dining Services have to be aware of the requirement to receive products both fall and spring semesters and the ability to meet the food safety and operating standards for all products.

Some Nebraska food manufacturers are also identified as GFL products – such as Robert's Dairy, Rotella Bakery and Dorothy Lynch salad dressing. In addition, any products created with a minimum of one local ingredient are also considered a GFL product. It's important to reiterate that contrary to popular misconceptions, “local” is not synonymous with organic and UNL's definition of local reflects that. Early on it became apparent that the focus of choosing food products should be on sustainability as a whole rather than the singular concept of organic.

At the outset of the GFL program the proposal to the farmers was for the menus to be developed based on a discussion of the products farmers had available at certain points in time. Instead, the farmers/producers requested they would prefer to have Dining Services develop the five-week menu cycle followed by orders for designated amounts (the same procedure used for developing all other menus). Local items ordered on a regular basis include chicken, different

beef and pork cuts, eggs, grains, flour and various dressings, and jellies/jams. Produce is seasonal and is therefore ordered primarily in the fall, but increasingly different vegetables and fruit are being processed (frozen) and therefore used throughout the year.

As a result of the capitalistic nature of the system, prices start going down as more things are being sold. By making their prices competitive and meeting all the other bid requirements, farmers benefit from being awarded the bid and establishing a connection with UNL's dining services and UNL benefits by purchasing from new local farmers and producers who meet the selection criteria set forth in the bid. Aware of the need for the program to be self-sustaining, dining services prepares a budget so that funding from student fees for room and board supports the local program with its unique qualities.

Some of the biggest challenges expressed in operating a system that uses local products include the distribution channels and the seasonal variations found in Nebraska. Farmers and producers have partnered with the Dining Services staff in order to be able to deliver the agreed upon quantities and qualities of food to UNL on a particular schedule with little flexibility based on operating standards. If questions arise about quality issues, quantities, etc. there is discussion between the two parties to identify a solution. UNL is dependent upon fulfillment of these contracts and successful interactions between such a large institution and multiple smaller-scale providers. In terms of seasonality, space to process and store food in the dining centers is limited and as such provision of products only produced in the warmer seasons can be a struggle in the cooler seasons and vice versa.

All in all, UNL dining services is proud to be able to recognize all kinds of farmers and agricultural producers populating an agriculturally-centric state and provide them with the opportunity to participate in an institution that is made up of a huge portion of Nebraska's

current young adult population. Through the GFL program it is hoped that students' (and their parents') eyes are opened to the concept of local food and the huge influence of agriculture on life—especially coming from a state where survival relies on agriculture. Another desire is to recognize farmers and producers for the incredible things that they do and help communities statewide.

## **Materials and Methods**

### *Survey Tool Construction*

The tool used to evaluate student knowledge concerning local food and the GFL program at UNL was a survey composed of respondent variables at the ordinal and nominal levels. The data desired were largely qualitative in nature with a few quantitative components. While focus groups tend to be the best resource for gathering an extensive array of qualitative data, surveys offer an opportunity to easily access large numbers of individuals. In addition, they are typically quicker to administer, assist in eliminating personal influences of the researcher, allow time for respondents to think about their answers, and convenient for respondents (Walliman 2006). Unfortunately, surveys also limit knowledge that could be gained through body language, require extra time to create and analyze, need to be short to encourage completion and return, must be structured so as not to create a bias (i.e. leading questions), and can have low response rates (Walliman 2006). In an attempt to minimize these disadvantages, the surveys were limited to one page (front and back), phrased in a manner to discourage any bias toward local food products, and personally handed out to people who were already seated in the dining centers where they faced minimal distractions aside from consuming their meal.

The survey tool consisted of twenty-two questions. The first four were related to demographic data including year at UNL, major, dorm, and nationality. Any individuals who

indicated they were not UNL students living in a UNL housing unit were excluded on the grounds that this project aims to evaluate the current GFL dining program based upon the perspective of students with a meal plan. Those who don't regularly eat at the dining center, unlike those who have a meal plan, are unqualified to evaluate the GFL service in accordance with the project's goal. Questions four and five pertained to what kinds of geographic location students were from and whether or not the student or his parents were raised on a farm. These questions were included to get a sense of what kind of relationship the majority of students may have had with farms and the rural landscape prior to attending UNL. This question is largely to determine if future research on this topic should assess whether or not a student's upbringing might influence local food awareness and decisions at UNL.

Questions seven through twelve related to how students defined "local" in terms of food, value they place on purchasing local foods, how often students ate local food prior to and while in college, motivators for purchasing local food, and whether or not they looked at labels on food products to see where it was grown or processed. These questions help to determine whether or not students' definitions and value assessments of "local" food correspond with that of the GFL program planners, whether or not they are now eating local foods more or less often than they had previously, and identifying motivators for choosing local foods that could influence the GFL's campaign to encourage students to pick local options. Questions thirteen and fourteen concerned whether or not students would be willing to pay extra for locally sourced foods and which foods they would be most likely to purchase locally. Responses will serve as feedback to the GFL program and as potential indicators of what NWU or UC might consider including more of locally. Questions fifteen and sixteen utilized a Likert-scale and asked whether or not it was important when purchasing food to know who produces that food and where it is produced.



To avoid influencing student responses, local food was never defined on the survey. These questions serve as an indicator of student opinion on the importance of the concept of understanding the origin of one's food (a component of local as described in this paper).

Questions seventeen through twenty assessed whether or not the respondents were aware of the GFL program, what expectations they had about it, if it met those expectations, and if they make it a goal to attend the monthly GFL meals in the dining centers. All of these responses directly affect the evaluation of the GFL program. The final two questions concerned what factors students considered when choosing food from the dining centers and whether or not they would like to see more locally sourced food on campus. Responses will help to direct what UNL Dining Services should consider when choosing local food for the dining centers and whether or not there would be support for increased local food provisions.

#### *Survey Distribution*

“The preference for a large sample must be balanced against the practicalities of the research resources, that is, cost, time, and effort (Walliman 2006:79).” A product of time constraints and feasibility, it was decided that 500 surveys would be distributed throughout the dining centers. The majority of UNL students living in the dorms are required to subscribe to a meal plan are 1st year college students and thus in the 18-19 age range. In order to gain a large enough sample, it's essential to be able to utilize this age base in the time frame allotted and thus approval from UNL's Internal Review Board (IRB) was acquired allowing a waiver of informed consent. The distribution between the four dining centers at UNL campuses was as follows: 70 surveys at HSS, AS and Selleck dining centers and 145 surveys per dining center at CPN and ECU. The rational behind a greater number of surveys at CPN and ECU relates to the fact that these are the only dining centers that host the monthly local food dinner and advertise the GFL

program. As such, as a means to gain the most information concerning GFL and suggestions for improvement, it was necessary to survey people who would likely be informed about the program. Surveys distributed at the three other dining centers would largely serve as a means to understand whether or not information concerning the GFL program had reached the awareness of students at all dining centers on campus. Sampling methods can thus be referred to as a type of cluster sampling which is characterized by using cases where “the population forms clusters by sharing one or some characteristics but are otherwise as heterogeneous as possible...” with the “shared characteristic” being students in a UNL dining center (Walliman 2006:78). Students in the dining centers were chosen by means of non-probability convenience sampling as the respondent base was contingent upon using students present during the particular day, in that particular dining center, and at the meal that the surveys were distributed (students with a meal plan are allowed to use all dining centers regardless of which UNL housing unit they live in). It is necessary to note that, as one can see in Table 2 under “Results,” the number of surveys distributed in each dining center is not a representative portion of the typical number of students during that meal. Regardless, it is hoped that this study will still serve as an insight into students’ knowledge and awareness of local food and the GFL program and as a means to lend direction to further research projects.

With the exception of the ECU dining center, surveys were distributed for two hours during the supper hour on one day from Monday to Friday during the week of October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2012. The box of finished surveys was retrieved one hour after the final survey was distributed for that day. Because of the typically lower number of attendees for meals at ECU, the original intention was to distribute surveys during both lunch and dinner. However, it proved possible to distribute all surveys during the lunch hour. The decision to distribute the surveys during the

supper hour was because of 1) typically higher attendance rates and 2) students being less rushed as most classes are held during the morning and afternoon periods. In order to aid in preventing students from taking the survey more than once, surveys were distributed in each dining center during their (one) assigned weekday. This made it possible for students who subscribe to a 5-day unlimited meal plan to also participate in the survey. In the case where students happened to be approached at a different dining center during that center's assigned survey date, upon revealing that they had already taken the survey, they were asked to not take the survey again (this happened only twice). Surveys were issued on Monday in HSS, Tuesday in ECU, Wednesday in AS, Thursday in CPN, and Friday in Selleck.

Individuals were approached by the researcher and informed that the surveys were for a senior thesis project concerning the GFL program at UNL and local food. They were informed participation was voluntary, responses were confidential, and the survey should only take around fifteen minutes. Students that agreed to participate were handed the survey and a pencil and allowed to fill it out where they were currently seated with one hour of working time guaranteed before it needed to be turned into a box located at the exit to the dining center. If there were any questions, the researcher would be available during the allotted completion time. Data were entered into a password-protected computer within 24 hours of the surveys being returned and paper copies were disposed of to ensure confidentiality.

### *Interviews*

To learn more about the dining halls at NWU<sup>2</sup> and UC<sup>3</sup>, face-to-face, semi-structured

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<sup>2</sup> Dining Services Administrative Personnel, personal interview, October 2, 2012, Nebraska Wesleyan University, Lincoln, NE.

<sup>3</sup> Dining Services Administrative Personnel, personal interview, August 28, 2012, Union College, Lincoln, NE.

interviews lasting an hour were conducted with Dining Services administrators at their respective dining centers. An interview guide was created and tailored to each college. This guide was primarily used to acquire the basic data necessary for an analysis and the *Buy Local Food and Farm Toolkit* (Oxfam America 2002) assisted in determining essential questions to ask.

However, the interviewee was allowed to address any other relevant topics and the researcher extemporaneously added subsequent questions. Responses were hand-recorded by the researcher in a notebook. In compliance with the approved IRB protocol, information concerning these individuals must be reported in a manner that the subjects cannot be identified from.

Supplemental data concerning the Dining Services at NWU and UC was obtained through researching public sources such as their webpages (NWU 2009; UC 2012).

### *Data Analysis*

Results from the surveys were entered into an Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Any individuals who indicated they were not UNL students living in a UNL housing unit were excluded on the grounds that this project aims to evaluate the current GFL dining program based upon the perspective of students with a meal plan. Those who don't regularly eat at a dining center, unlike those who would have a meal plan, were deemed unqualified to evaluate the GFL service in accordance with the project's goal. As students are allowed to use all dining centers regardless of which UNL housing unit they live in, there is no consistent mix of particular students in each dining center. Because the objectives of this study relate to evaluating GFL awareness by general knowledge across the five dining centers rather than across dorm units, the responses were still grouped according to dining center rather than dorm to generate conclusions. Standardized responses were coded with numerical values to assist with calculation of the modes. Relevant percentages were also calculated and displayed in bar and pie charts. Open-

ended responses were coded according to the coding frame shown in Table 1. The variety of responses gained assisted in determining coding categories. Coding for multiple categories was allowed and subsequent percentages were calculated out of the total number of coded responses rather than the total number of question responses. This happened primarily on Questions eight, eleven, and twenty-two and occasionally with questions seven and eighteen. Open-ended questions are beneficial in obtaining student-formulated rather than constrained, standardized responses. Because they are “more demanding and time-consuming for respondents,” these questions were, unfortunately, the most often skipped by respondents (Walliman 2006:91). In order to analyze results, responses had to be coded—a subjective practice that leaves ultimate interpretations up to the researcher and can often simply otherwise complex responses.

With any form of qualitative data, the reliability is largely subjective to interpretations of the researcher. “Qualitative data, because they cannot be dispassionately measured in a standard way, are more susceptible to varied interpretations and valuation (Walliman 2006:55).” Data were analyzed and reported in a manner that explains explicitly how all judgment calls were made so as to make the reader aware of potential variances or discrepancies that might occur if others were to take the data from the raw form to the final aggregated results. The reader must be critical of all forms of data and understand where it originated before deciding upon its validity in a situation. While statistical analyses like measuring variance of significance of results were not undertaken due to this being a non-representative sample of the population and primarily an explorative study to encourage further research on the situation, such analyses would further verify the reliability of the results.

Interview results were organized in a table similar to one created in the study by Frances Daly from 2007. Categories were based upon key factors that must be considered in inclusion of

a farm-to-college program. Based upon similarities to UNL, or special considerations further researched via secondary sources, the schools were evaluated on what could be done to increase the amount of local products served.

CATEGORIES FOR EACH QUESTION	CHARACTERISITICS DEFINING EACH CATEGORY
<b><i>Q7: Definition of Local</i></b>	
Specific Distance	Within any particular measured distance in miles, kilometers, etc.
Political/Regional Boundaries	Within boundaries that have been defined by humans, i.e. anything from continent, to country, to state, to county, to town, etc., along with terms like “in the region” or “Midwest.”
Time Distance	Within lengths measured via days, hours, minutes.
Type of Food	Specific foods (“corn,” “watermelon,” “beef”), foods from specific areas (restaurants, “traditional,” “common,” “farm-grown”), or characteristics pertaining to the actual product (“fresh,” “nutritious”)
“Near”	Generalized terms like “local,” “close,” or “nearby.”
<b><i>Q8: Value of Local</i></b>	
Economic	Includes any versions of the term “economic;” related to benefitting/supporting economy, business, or other monetary expressions i.e. “cheap,” “increase incomes”
Food Attributes	Characteristics of the actual food product not related to health, i.e. “taste,” “fresh,” “quality,” knowing origin, “good”)
Health	Consequences of the food products in relation to personal health, i.e. “healthy,” “nutritious,” “less disease,” “helping allergies,” “better for me”
Environmental Impacts	Includes anything that is beneficial environmentally, i.e. “less pollution,” “smaller carbon footprint,” “environmentally friendly,” “reducing mileage,” “chemically free,” “sustainable”
Ranking	Terms related to a general proclamation of foods having high, medium, or low value
Community	Beneficial community impacts (without specifying economic components), i.e. “helping communities,” “helping farmers,” “supporting families”
<b><i>Q11: Motivators for Local</i></b>	
Economic	Includes any versions of the term “economic;” related to benefitting/supporting economy, business, or other monetary

	expressions i.e. “cheap,” “increase incomes”
Food Attributes	Characteristics of the actual food product not related to health, i.e. “taste,” “fresh,” “quality,” knowing origin, “good,” “for the experience”
Health	Consequences of the food products in relation to personal health, i.e. “healthy,” “nutritious,” “less disease,” “helping allergies,” “better for me”
Environmental Impacts	Includes anything that is beneficial environmentally, i.e. “less pollution,” “smaller carbon footprint,” “environmentally friendly,” “reducing mileage,” “chemically free,” “sustainable”
Relationships/Community	Beneficial community impacts or because of relationships (without specifying economic components), i.e. “helping communities,” “helping farmers,” “supporting families” “knowing farmers”
<b><i>Q14: Foods to Purchase Locally—categories and characteristics from USDA “MyPlate” groups (2012) with “desserts” added</i></b>	
Dairy	“All fluid milk products and many foods made from milk are considered part of this food group...Foods made from milk that retain their calcium content are part of the group. Foods made from milk that have little to no calcium, such as cream cheese, cream, and butter, are not.”
Vegetables	“Any vegetable or 100% vegetable juice counts as a member of the Vegetable Group. Vegetables may be raw or cooked; fresh, frozen, canner, or dried/dehydrated; and may be whole, cut-up, or mashed.”
Fruits	“Any fruit or 100% fruit juice counts as part of the Fruit Group. Fruits may be fresh, canned, frozen, or dried, and may be whole, cut-up, or pureed.”
Grains	“Any food made from wheat, rice, oats, cornmeal, barley or another cereal grain is a grain product. Bread, pasta, oatmeal, breakfast cereals, tortillas, and grits are examples of grain products.”
Proteins	“All foods made from meat, poultry, seafood, beans and peas, eggs, processed soy products, nuts, and seeds are considered part of the Protein Foods Group.”
Desserts	“Empty calories;” i.e. solid fats and added sugars.
<b><i>Q17: Expectations of GFL</i></b>	
Food Quality	Relating to food attributes, i.e. “quality,” “healthy,” “taste,” “delicious,” simply “good”
Frequency	Related to how often GFL products or meals are offered
Food Source	Expectations concerning solely where the food was grown or processed, i.e. “locally sourced,” from places or businesses

	“near,”
Values	Related to promoting some type of a practice or concept, i.e. “integrity,” “responsible farming,” “no lies,” “enhance student awareness,” “support farmers”
“Good. Fresh. Local”	A word-for-word reiteration of “good, fresh, and local” or “GFL”
<b><i>Q19.2: GFL Improvements</i></b>	
Frequency	Concerns how often local food is offered, i.e. “more often,” “more local items”
Food Quality	Concerns attributes of or specific foods, i.e. “fresher,” “more veggie dishes,” “organic,” “home-feeling recipes”
Awareness	Concerns increasing awareness of the program, i.e. “show providers’ names,” “better promote GFL,” “more information”

Table 1: Variable coding schemes

## Results

### *Survey Demographics*

Of the 500 distributed surveys, 394 were returned, many with uncompleted questions.

Complete details of each dining center’s response rate are shown in Table 2.

Dining Center	Average Total Meals Served 8/20/12-11/15/12	Number of Surveys Returned	Percentage of Total Population
<i>HSS</i>	884 (Dinner)	66/70	7.5%
<i>AS</i>	957 (Dinner)	40/70	4.2%
<i>CPN</i>	679 (Dinner)	129/145	19.0%
<i>Selleck</i>	1,051 (Dinner)	66/70	6.3%
<i>ECU</i>	205 (Lunch)	93/145	45.4%

Table 2 Response rates at each dining center

Here one can clearly see how the responses are not representative of the total population and rather a small, investigative portion. Two surveys included clearly fictionalized responses and were subsequently not included in the calculations. Nine students lived off campus and were also not included in the total. The majority were freshmen and sophomores, 55% and 20% respectively (Figure 1). With the exclusion of Selleck, the mode for each dining center was the



associated dorm. In Selleck, 32% of students lived in Selleck and 39% lived in CPN. Likely this is a product of Selleck being surveyed on a Friday. CPN doesn't serve supper on Fridays and Selleck is the closest dining center that does. Figure 2 shows the dorm distribution across all responses. Responses concerning student majors were not included due to the many students using short hand/abbreviations to describe there major—making it difficult for standardized responses. Likewise, the question concerning nationality was deemed invalid. Responses ranged from “white,” “African-American,” “Caucasian,” to “Greek and Polish,” “German,” and, the intended responses, “American,” “Chinese,” etc. Clearly the question was misunderstood, and any calculated percentages would hold no value.

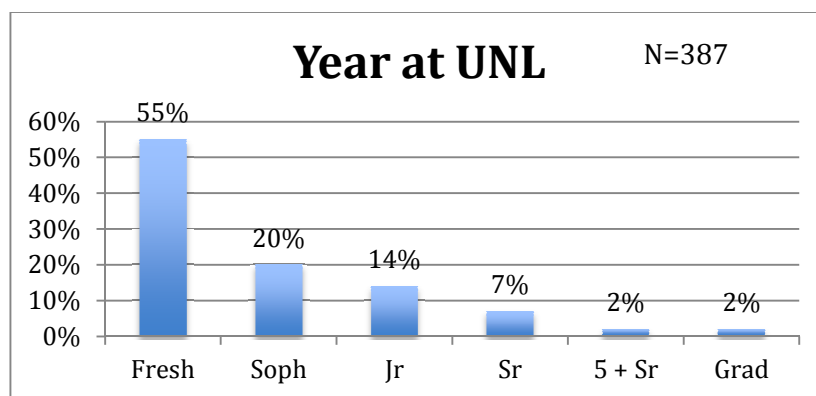


Figure 1: Question #1 Student Year at UNL

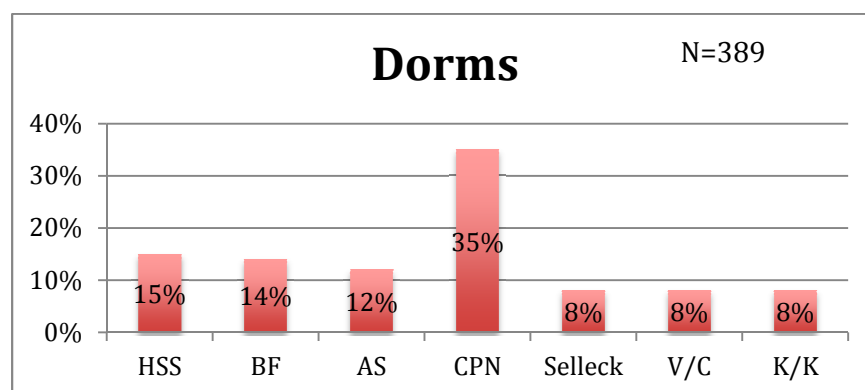


Figure 2: Question #3 Student Dorm Rates Out of All Surveys (V/C=Village/Courtyards, K/K=Kauffman/Knoll)

Looking at Figure 3, one can see that the ECU dining center was the only dining center where 64% of students surveyed responded that they or a parent were raised on a farm. HSS, AS, Selleck were made up of 55%, 62%, and 70% students originating from urbanized areas (50,000 or more people) respectively. CPN had no clear majority of students from a particular region, with 43% from urbanized areas being the highest. ECU was made up of 51% of students from rural (less than 2,500) locations. This coincides with the increased number of individuals having a “farm connection.”

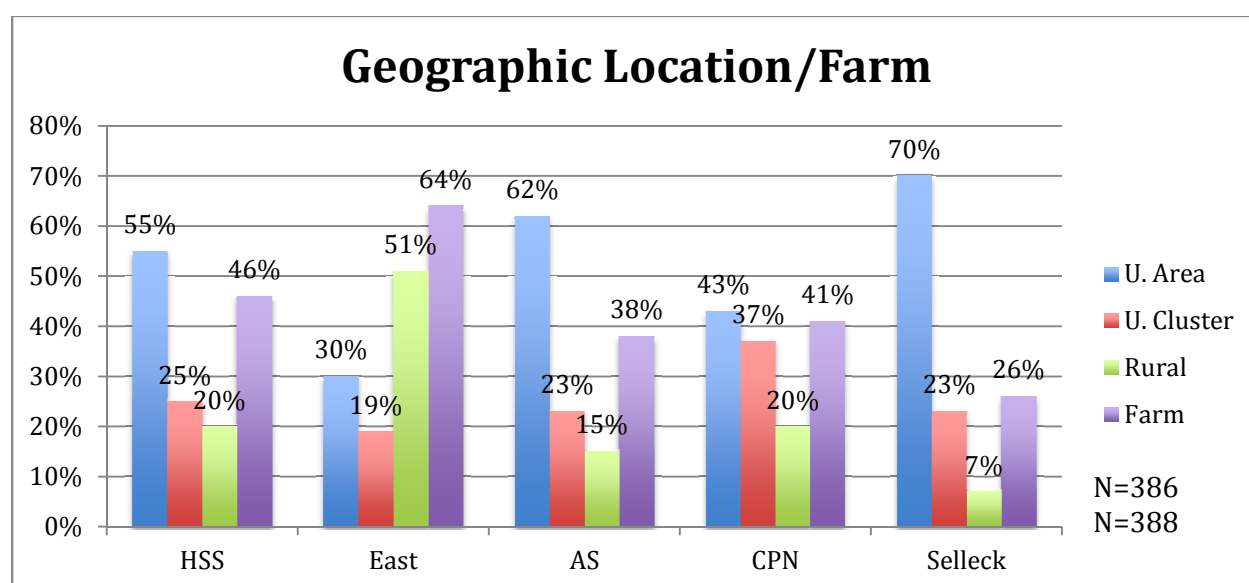


Figure 3: Questions #5 & #6, Geographic Location and Farm Connections

### *Students and Local*

As a whole, the student body associated the definition of “local” largely with political or regional boundaries (Figure 4). Students with responses ranging from “foods from 0-15 miles” and “food from within 500 miles” made up 34% of the population. The second most common definition of local, with 28% of responses, was coded as “local.” This included vague responses like “locally grown,” “nearby,” or “close.”

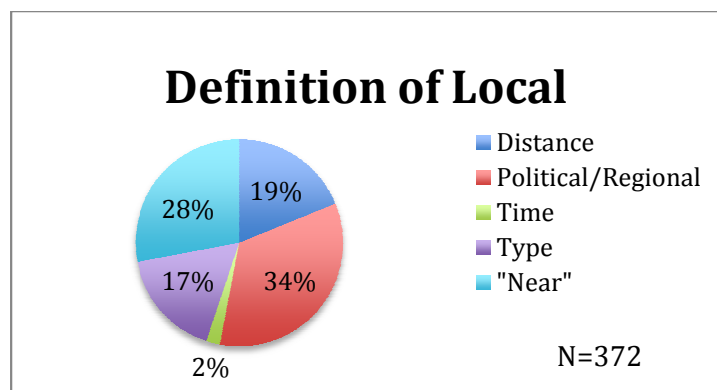


Figure 4: Question #7 Definition of "Local"

While students appeared to see value in the economic, “freshness,” and community-friendliness components of local foods (35%, 30%, and 15% respectively as shown in Figure 5), there was little mention of the environmental gains from local foods, and many assumed that if a food was “local” it was also healthier—a quality not necessarily guaranteed although often present. A small portion of responses, 9%, simply responded that local had “high” value. Question eight was one of a few where responses could be coded as multiple things. The inflated “N” value is an indicator of how 481, the resulting total of coded responses, was used as the denominator for calculating percentages.

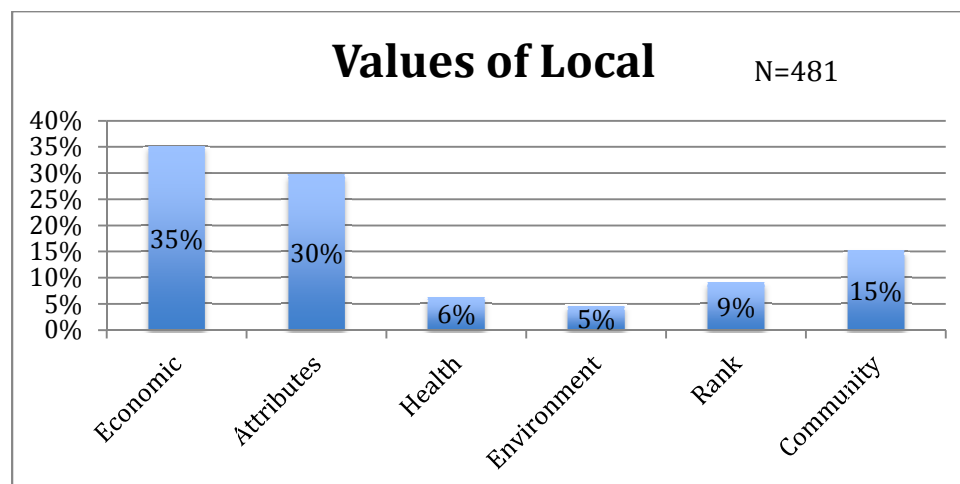


Figure 5: Question #8 Value in Purchasing Local Foods

Around 48% of students indicated that they ate local food “once a week” prior to

attending college (Figure 6). At present, only 21% indicated eating local food “once a week” with 40% responding to “never” eating locally. When this is broken down according to individual dining centers (Figure 7), there is not much variation among dining centers concerning frequencies of eating local food as one might expect considering the rural and farm connections observed at ECU.

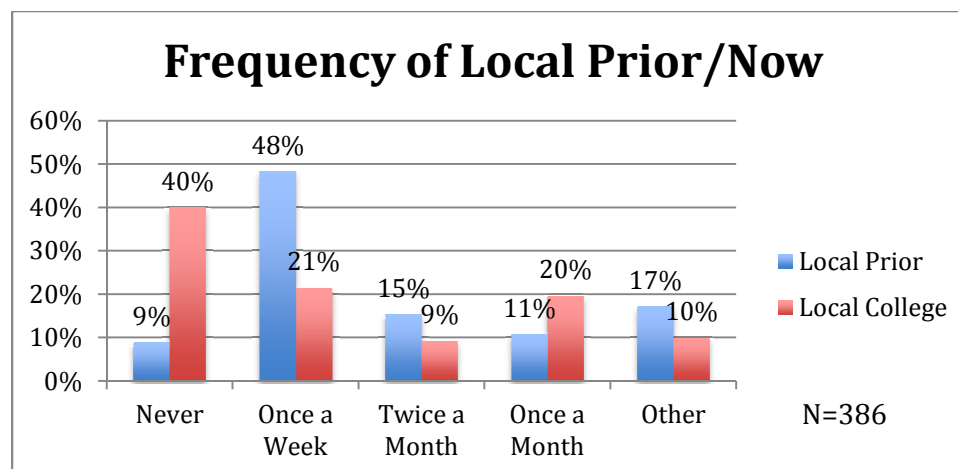


Figure 6: Questions #9 & #10 Frequency of Local Food Prior to and During College, Total

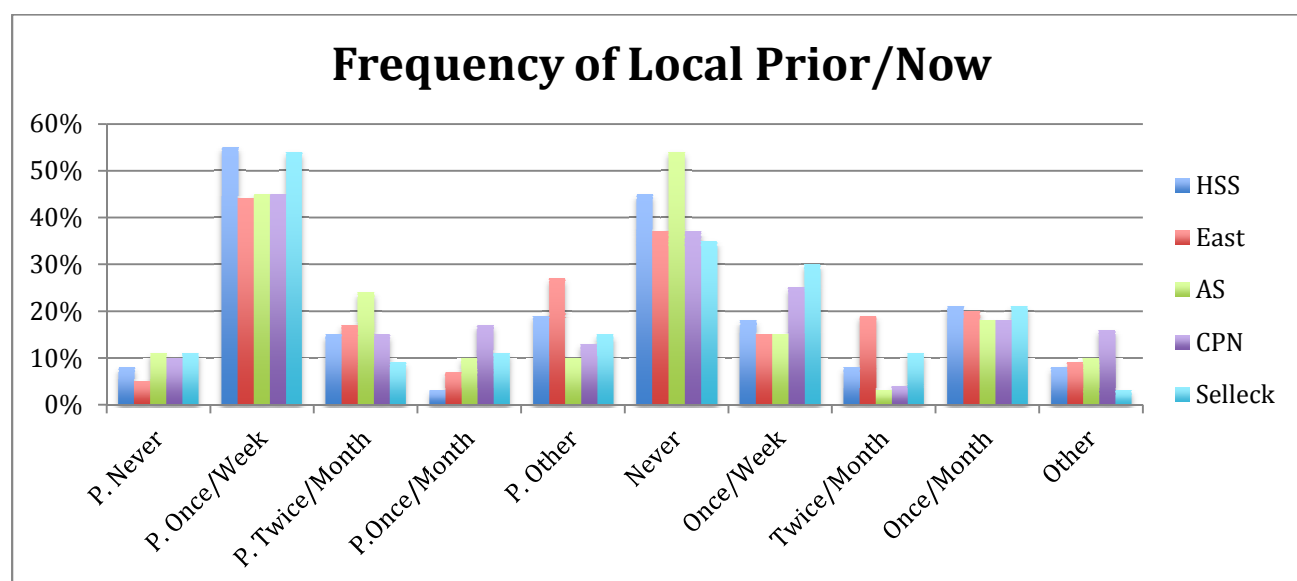
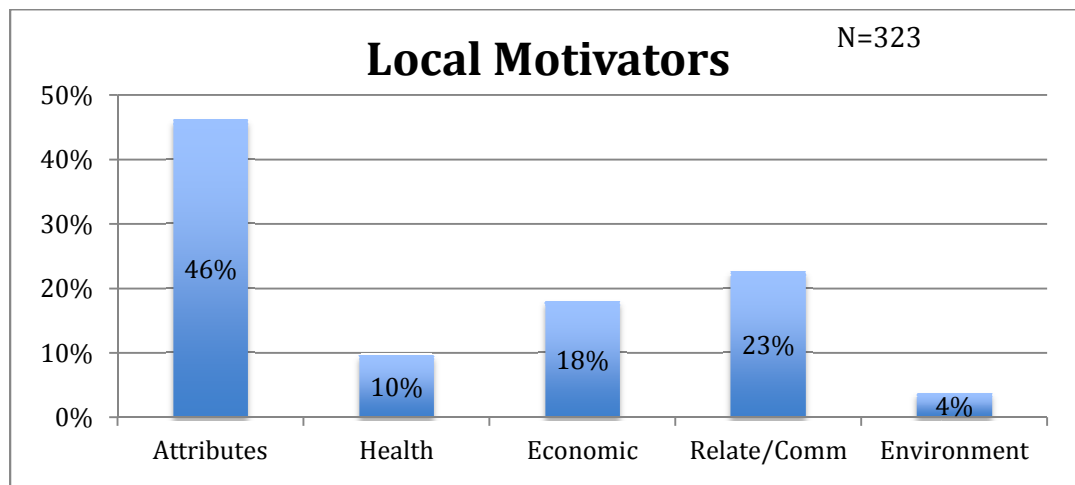


Figure 7: Questions #9 & #10 Frequency of Local Food Prior to and During College, by Dining Center

According to 46% of coded responses, attributes of the food were considered the largest

motivator for choosing local foods (Figure 8). The motivator identified least was “environmental,” with only 4% of responses.



**Figure 8: Question #11 Motivators for Purchasing Local Food**

Only a small portion of students responded to “always” reading labels to see where a product was made or grown (Figure 9). However, 54% indicated they “sometimes” read labels. Respectively, 53% and 55% indicated that it was important to know who produced their food and where it was produced (Figure 10). The next strongest response included those who indicated they had “no opinion” on the matter with 31% and 27%.



Figure 9: Question #12 Look at Labels to See Where Product is Made or Grown

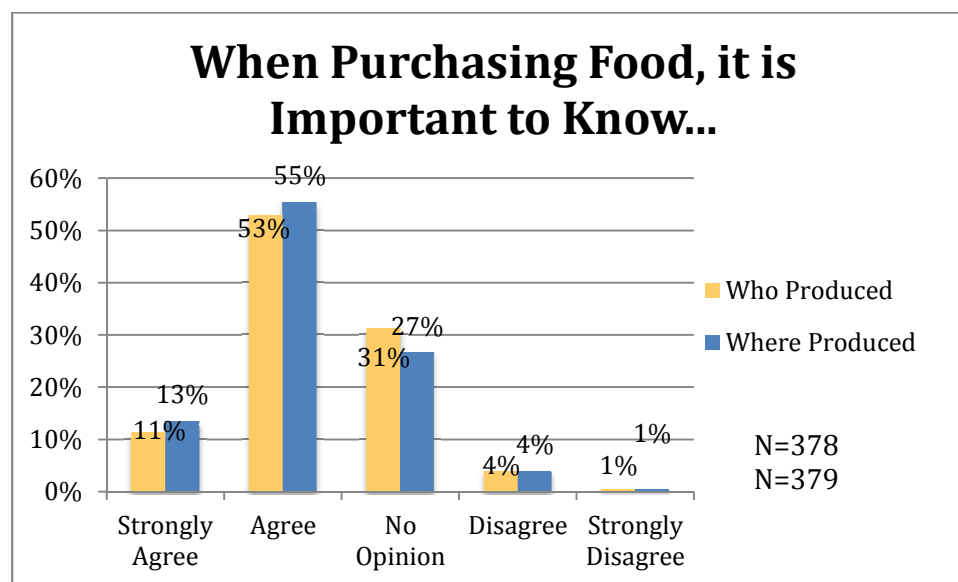


Figure 10: Questions #15 & #16 Importance of Knowing Who Produces Food and Where it is Produced

The split between those willing to pay extra and those not willing was close, with 55% willing and 45% not willing (Figure 11).

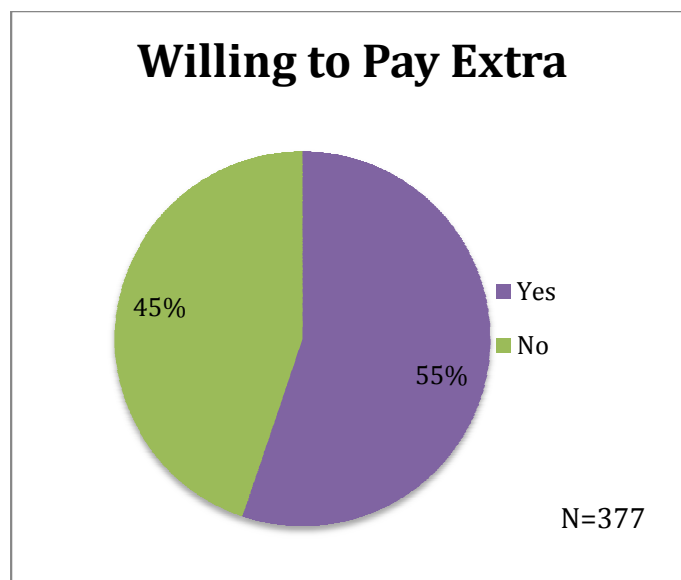


Figure 11: Question #13 Willingness to Pay Extra for Locally Sourced Food

Of the different food groups, vegetables (32%), fruits (29%), and proteins (21%) were the most common responses (Figure 12).



Figure 12: Question #14 Which Foods Most Likely to Purchase Locally

### *Students and GFL*

Seventy percent of all students indicated that they were aware of the GFL program (Figure 13). When results are grouped according to dining centers, AS is the only exception of

more students, 77%, not being aware of the GFL program than those that were (Figure 14).

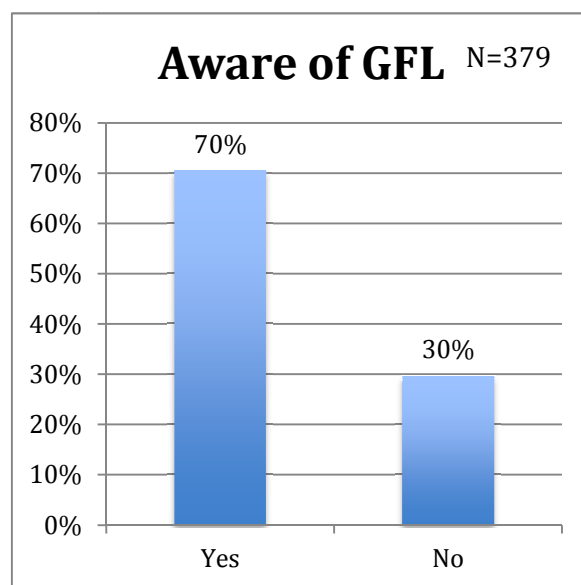


Figure 13: Question #17 Awareness of GFL Program, Total

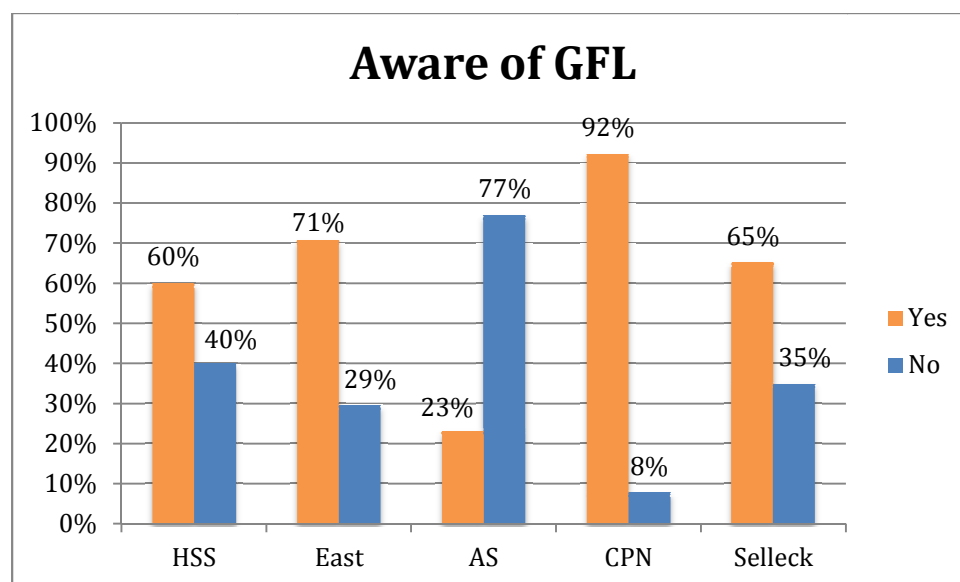


Figure 14: Question #17 Awareness of GFL Program, by Dining Center

Quality was clearly the largest expectations students had concerning the GFL program with 67% of responses including this code (Figure 15). “Source” was included in only 16% of



responses.

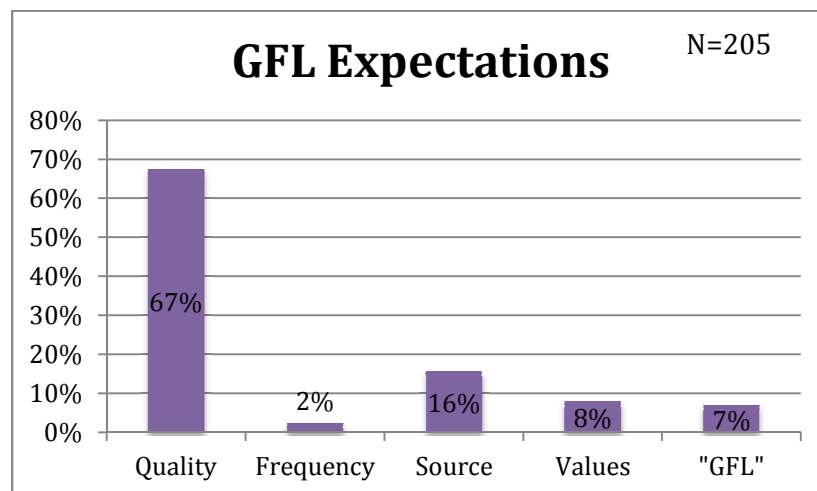


Figure 15: Question #18 Expectations of the GFL Program

In relation to these expectations, one can see in Figure 16 how 61% indicated that the GFL program had met them, with 33% of students indicating that they weren't aware of the GFL program (this number coincides with Q17 concerning whether students were aware of GFL, thus, verifying its validity). Of those who had improvements to suggest, students' most common responses were related to the quality of the food with 57% (Figure 17). The remaining responses were split between having GFL meals/products more frequently and increasing awareness about the program and where the food was coming from.

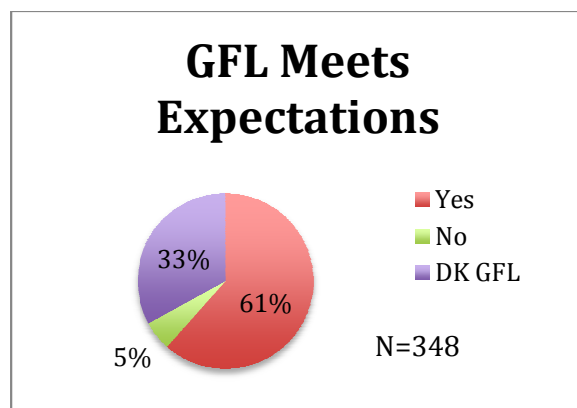
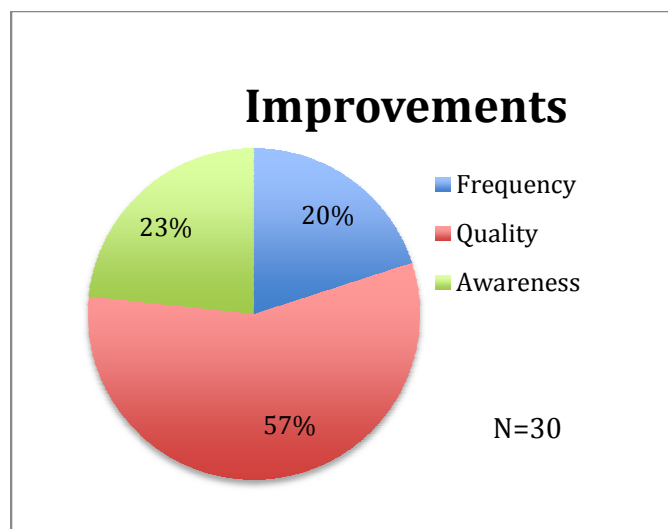
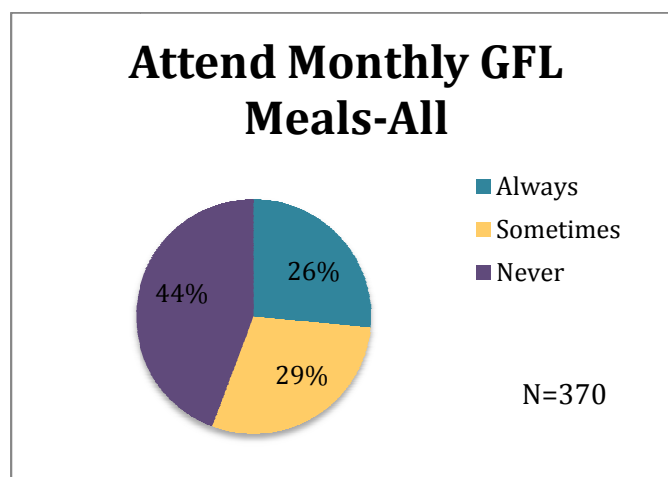


Figure 16: Question #19.1 GFL Meets Expectations



**Figure 17: Question #19.2 Suggested Improvements for GFL**

Only 26% indicated that they “always” make an attempt to attend monthly GFL meals, and 29% responded that they “sometimes” attempt to attend them (Figure 18). Forty-four percent indicated that they “never” make an attempt to attend monthly GFL meals. On several of the surveys, respondents indicated that they didn’t know the meals existed. With the exception of CPN and Selleck, the majority of students in each center responded with “never” making an attempt to attend GFL meals (Figure 19).



**Figure 18: Question #20 Goal to Attend Monthly GFL Dinners, Total**

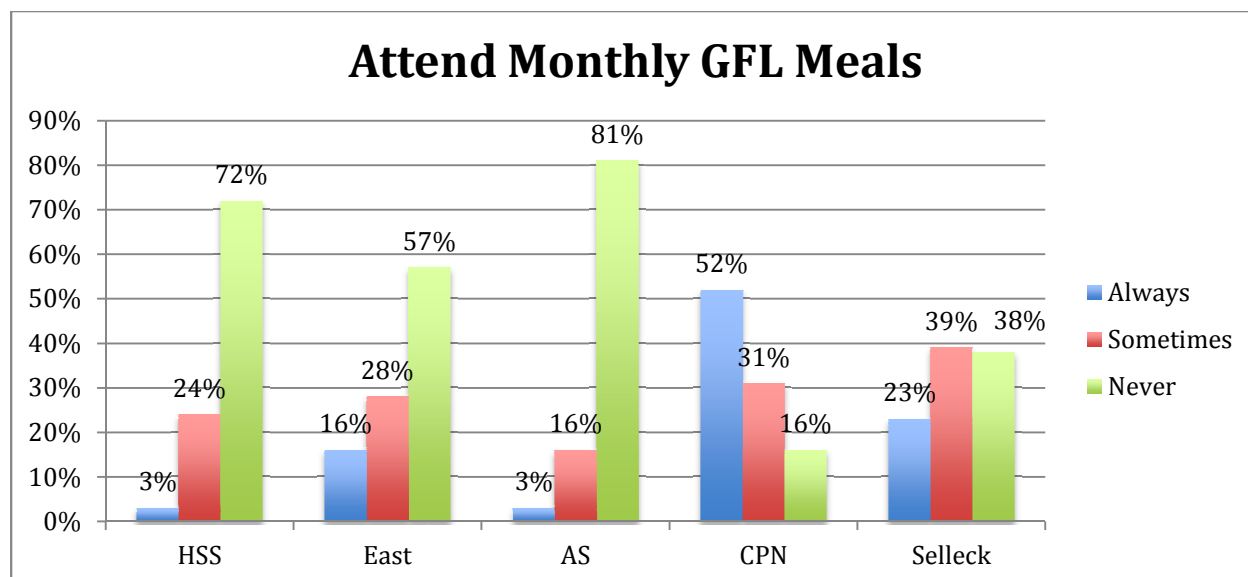


Figure 19: Question 20: Goal to Attend Monthly GFL Dinner, by Dining Center

Most, 43%, of responses concerning factors considered when choosing food from the dining centers included “taste” (Figure 20). The second most common factor was “health” with 27% of responses and then “convenience” with 14% of responses.

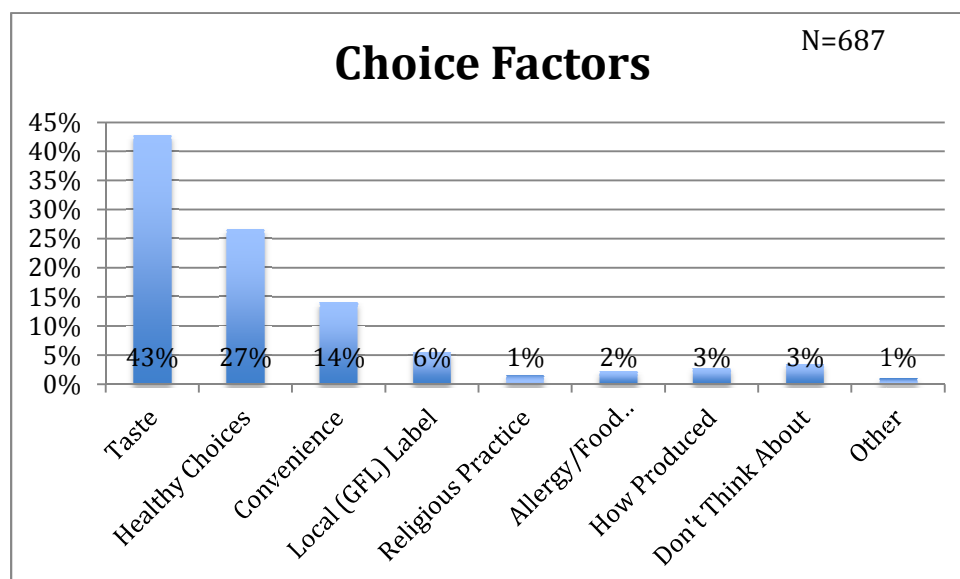


Figure 20: Question #21 Factors Consider When Choosing Food from the Dining Center

The concluding consensus held by 67% of students was that they would like to see more local foods on campus (Figure 21). Only 1% were opposed to the idea and 32% were indifferent.

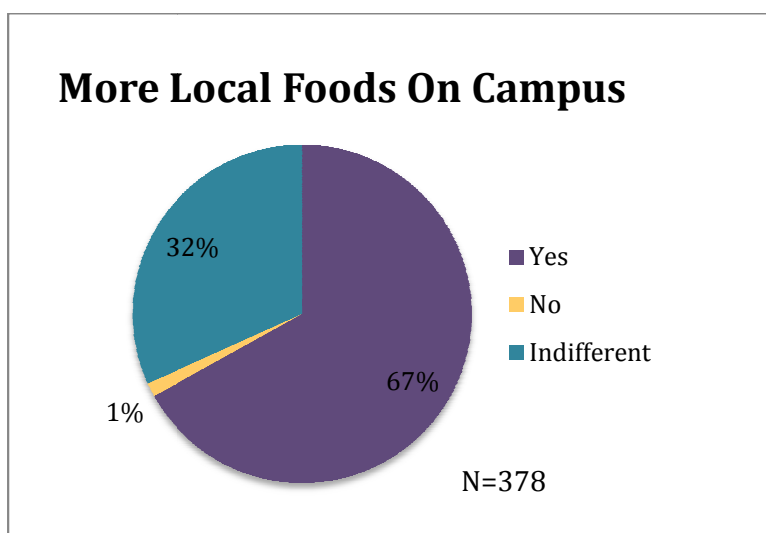


Figure 21: Question #22 Desire to See More Locally Sourced Food on Campus

### *A Look at NWU and UC*

Similar to Daly's (2007) model, categories for each college's dining services include type of operation, type of meal plan, approximate number of meals served daily, food service operation type, equipment/facilities for processing, student support, current local options, the presence of a Sustainability Director or other administrative support, and unique considerations (Table 3). Both NWU and UC are private institutions, with UC having a close tie to the Seventh-day Adventist church. All schools require a board plan for those living on campus. At UNL Lincoln non-resident first-year students are required to live on campus, NWU requires students to live on campus for their first three years, and UC requires students to live in the dorms until age 21. UNL serves the largest number of meals daily with 8,559 split among the five dining centers, NWU has an average of 980 meals served per day in their dining hall, and UC serves and average of 1100 per day. Both UNL and UC have self-operated dining services and NWU

has been contract-managed through Sodexo for the last thirteen years. UNL was able to acquire additional equipment for processing food through grants, NWU stated they had “no real challenges with their current situation and portion of locally sourced foods, and UC said they “had the capacity” to prepare fresh food. In terms of student support for local initiatives, this study has shown UNL students’ desire for local foods, NWU said they didn’t have “much feedback” from the students concerning local initiatives but that they do have a “food committee” that shares likes and dislikes concerning the current dining center situation, and UC had seen “no specific mention of a desire for local food” through mingling and garnering feedback from students in the dining center. UNL’s local food program is GFL, NWU has one provider, Loffredo Fresh Produce, through Sodexo that is based out of Nebraska and sources produced locally “whenever possible,” and UC currently only has occasional tomatoes from O’Neil, Nebraska or bakery products with locally sourced flour. None of the three college systems have a Sustainability Director. At UNL those in administrative positions largely supported the local program. Through Sodexo’s sustainability initiatives, it is required that providers connected with colleges, like NWU, source products locally “whenever possible.” At UC there was no expressed administrative push for more locally sourced foods, but they expressed willingness to accommodate if student support was apparent. Each of the three colleges have specific characteristics that set them apart from the others. UNL is by far a larger, public University than both NWU and UC. NWU is largely constricted by Sodexo, but still sources some products locally. The dining center at UC is entirely vegetarian and thus serves a great variety of alternative meat products like MorningStar burgers.

<b>Dining Services Characteristics</b>	<i>UNL</i> <sup>4</sup>	<i>NWU</i> <sup>5</sup>	<i>UC</i> <sup>6</sup>
<i>Type of School Operation</i>	Public	Private	Private/Seventh-Day Adventist
<i>Type of Meal Plan</i>	Board	Board	Board
<i>Approximate Number of Meals Served Daily</i>	8559 (between five main dining centers)	980	1100
<i>Food Service Operation Type</i>	Self-Operated	Contract-Managed: Sodexo	Self-Operated
<i>Facilities/Labor for Processing</i>	Equipment Grant-Funded	“No real challenges”	“Have capacity”
<i>Student Support</i>	Yes	“Not much feedback”	“No specific mention of desire for local”
<i>Current Local Options</i>	GFL	Loffredo Fresh Produce	Occasional tomatoes, bakery products
<i>Sustainability Director/Administrative Support</i>	No Sustainability Director, administrative support	No Sustainability Director, Sodexo initiatives	No Sustainability Director, no known administrative support
<i>Unique Considerations</i>	Larger University	Some products locally sourced; Sodexo requirements	Vegetarian

Table 3: Dining Services Characteristics at UNL, NWU, and UC

### *Working With Sodexo*

As stated on Sodexo’s website (2012), they’re the “leading quality of Daily Life solutions company in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico.” While they offer a variety of services, the most relevant of their services offered is food services for colleges and universities. As part of their recent Better Tomorrow Plan, started in October 2009, they are working to address issues

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<sup>4</sup> Dining Services Administrative Personnel, personal interview, November 18, 2011, University of Nebraska—Lincoln, Lincoln, NE.

<sup>5</sup> Dining Services Administrative Personnel, personal interview, October 2, 2012, Nebraska Wesleyan University, Lincoln, NE.

<sup>6</sup> Dining Services Administrative Personnel, personal interview, August 28, 2012, Union College, Lincoln, NE.

identified as being essential for sustainability. Of their fifteen identified commitments, number eight is that they “will source local, seasonal or sustainably grown or raised products in all the countries we operate by 2015 (Sodexo 2010:14).” As such all distributors were required by contract to carry local produce, which they defined as “coming from the same state or region (Sodexo 2010:36).” As of 2010, 17.3% of 67% spent on local produce through Sodexo distributors in the United States was sourced within state or geographic region boundaries. Food sourced within 250 miles accounted for 15.5%, and food sourced within 100 miles accounted for 9.1% (Sodexo 2010).

At Colby College in Maine, Sodexo worked with the Environmental Studies Program and increased the percentage of locally sourced items from 12% in 2002 to 20% in 2010 (Sodexo 2010). In 2008 an organic garden was established and the produce is used in campus dining halls with around 3,000 lbs. of produce annually as of 2010 (Sodexo 2010). At the University of Vermont, Sodexo helped to host the first Farm-to-College event in 2005. In 2010 the University purchased CSA shares from the campus Common Ground Farm for first-year orientation and on-campus summer dining services (Sodexo and University of Vermont Dining Services 2012). The University of California-Davis has also succeeded in utilizing organic produce from the student organic farm for both summer and academic year dining service needs. Students were key in devising a plan for delivery of the products and communicating what was available weekly. In 2011 45% of produce was local (within 250 miles) (University of California Davis Dining Services Department of Sustainability and Nutrition 2011).

One of NWU’s providers through Sodexo is Loffredo Fresh Produce. The local grower Loffredo connects with for delivery to the NWU dining center is Garden Fresh Vegetables

located in O'Neil Nebraska—one of the same produce providers UNL uses for their GFL program. As stated on their website, Loffredo Fresh Produce Company (2012) is described as:

Loffredo is the Midwest's leader in specialty produce supply chain management utilizing the buying power of our affiliation with PRO\*ACT, which includes 45 produce distributors and over 60 distribution centers across the country to service multi unit operators. Loffredo provides the coordination of direct grower pricing, cost visibility, information analysis, food safety and consolidated distribution. It brings optimal economic value to foodservice operators by synchronizing their needs into a streamlined supply chain system.

## **Discussion**

The objectives of this project were

- A) To gain a deeper understanding of UNL students' perception of the concept of local food and consumption of local products;
- B) To evaluate the Good. Fresh. Local (GFL) program based upon awareness, student suggestions, and attendance; and
- C) To offer recommendations for the GFL program and examine the potential for similar local programs within existing dining programs at nearby colleges Nebraska Wesleyan University and Union College

### *Objective A*

Results regarding objective A indicate that while there was no clear consensus on what defined a product as “local,” this is an issue across all discourses. Most responses considered local as something within political boundaries or regions or simply “near” indicating a general awareness at least of the concept of “local” products. Students, with those surveyed being



primarily freshmen, are aware of the economic and “freshness” values inherent in local products. They seem to be lacking, however, in awareness of the multiple environmental benefits and sustainability aspects found from sourcing food nearer to where it was produced. These values appear to impact motivators for purchasing local foods, a connection that has been examined in other studies, as the majority of students base their decision for purchasing locally on attributes of the food rather than environmental benefits. Interestingly, around half of all students agreed that it is important to know who produces their food and where it is produced. This corresponds with the results indicating most students always or sometimes read their food labels to see where it was produced. Why they feel it is important, however, to know the “who” and “where” about their food is still questionable—especially considering the general lack of awareness about the environmental benefits of food being sourced locally. Perhaps they feel it is important to be aware of these facts so as to see who and where students are putting their economic support. The lack of variation in students eating more/less local products prior to college in relation to the geographic variances between dining centers doesn’t support the idea that growing up in a more rural geographic region or having farm connections encourages more local food consumption. Further research is necessary to make any definite conclusions.

#### *Objective B*

In regards to objective B, overall student awareness of the GFL program is rather high. However, when broken down across dining centers, AS clearly lacks knowledge of the program. This may be a result of GFL promotion materials only being present in CPN and ECU. In terms of student suggestions, because GFL largely met expectations of students, few were offered. Those that were concerned three areas. Students would like to see fresher, higher quality local products offered, local products offered more frequently, and greater promotion of the GFL

program as a whole and the local farmers/farms providing the products. In general, the response concerning attendance at the monthly GFL meals was mixed. Slightly more students indicated that they “always” or “sometimes” make an attempt at attendance. The relatively large proportion of students who indicated “never” making an effort at attending monthly GFL meals could be a product of a lack of awareness that they exist (as several students noted on their surveys), the inconvenience of having to attend a different, potentially further away dining hall, or a simple lack of desire or interest in attending the meals. Overall, the GFL program appears to be a success as most students are aware of it, few suggestions for improvement were provided, and slightly over half of the students do try to at least sometimes attend the monthly dinners.

#### *Objective C.1*

Objective C first relates to recommendations for the GFL program. Because the majority of students indicated a desire to see more local foods on campus, the first suggestions should be increasing the frequency and amount of local products offered. This also helps in meeting a portion of the suggested improvements and potentially increasing the frequency indicated by students of how often they eat local food now compared to prior to attending UNL. Second, as slightly over half of all students indicated a willingness to pay extra for locally sourced foods, this should be further looked into as the majority of the suggestions for improvement related to improved food quality—something that could potentially be met through higher student fees. Foods that might be looked to first for improved quality might be vegetables and fruits as these were foods that students responded they were most likely to purchase locally. Taste, and secondarily healthiness, should be large indicators of “quality” as students were most likely to base their choice of food on these factors. The third suggestion relates to increased promotion of the various benefits from locally sourced foods. Results that most AS students are not aware of

GFL, 44% of students “never” make an attempt to attend GFL meals, and the third category of suggestions for improvement concerns “awareness,” further support this suggestion. A general lack of awareness of environmental benefits of local foods in combination with the variability in student definitions of “local,” suggests that new means of promotion should be considered as well.

### *Objective C.2*

The second component of objective C is to examine the potential for similar local programs at NWU and UC. A study by Johnson and Stevenson (1998) determined that there is not an exact set of specifics or steps that can be used for establishing a farm-to-college program. However, having certain components present definitely assist in the process. As found at UNL, there must be a leader to push for the project along with appropriate support from the college and surrounding community. Johnson and Stevenson also indicated that if the college functioned with a college-operated dining service system as opposed to that of a contract-managed system, initiatives for altering methods of food provision were more likely to succeed. It’s further essential that there are farms around the college system willing to work with dining services (Murray 2005). Student support is also a great assistance in initiating a program, as found by Murray (2005), but can also be substituted for with strong administrative support. While UNL possessed all these things at the initiation of the GFL program, NWU and UC have different circumstances.

The fact that NWU is contract-managed through Sodexo immediately calls for a different course of action in establishing local connections and provisions. However, other schools managed through Sodexo have established increased local connections and unique farm-to-college programs. Sodexo has encouraged this with their requirement for providers to use local

products whenever possible. In fact, one of NWU's current providers, Garden Fresh Vegetables through Loffredo Fresh Produce is also one of UNL's providers. If NWU hopes to increase their provision of local foods, though, it will call for student and administrative support to work with Sodexo and design their own program. Because Sodexo prefers to not work with individual farmer's and rather go through a distribution company, either an additional distributor of local items will need to be located, or Loffredo Fresh Produce could be encouraged to include more local providers for the Nebraska area.

As UC also functions with self-operated dining services, they could follow the example set by UNL in locating providers around Lincoln for locally sourced products. Because they serve so many fewer meals per day than UNL, this shouldn't detract from UNL's provisions being received from local providers. However, as UC is associated with the Seventh Day Adventist Church, all food served in their dining halls is local. Local providers of alternative meat products will have to be found through their own efforts rather than by looking to where UNL sources their meats. At present, student support appears to be nonexistent and administrative support relies largely on what students would like to see in the dining halls. Student involvement in the local food movement appears to be paramount prior to any shift toward increased local offerings will be seen at UC.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

The prevalence and importance of introducing local food programs on college campuses is growing. Francis Daly (2007) took a look at the potential for a local food initiative at University of Cincinnati. It was found that the logistical structure of dining services on campus would indeed be able to support a program and that administrators and students would be interested in having more local food on campus. This study was conducted to learn about UNL

students' knowledge of local food, awareness of the GFL program, and incorporation of local foods in the dining services at NWU and UC. Surveys were distributed to students at UNL to obtain information concerning local food and the GFL program and semi-structured interviews were conducted at both NWU and UC. Summaries of the results are as follows:

*Students and "Local"*

The majority of those surveyed were freshmen originating from urbanized areas and presently living in one of the seven accepted residence hall combinations. Prior to attending college, the majority claimed to have eaten local food products on a weekly basis and have never searched out local foods while in college. The definition of local was primarily associated with political/regional boundaries, with a general definition of local being "near" or "local" as the second main response. Of those who acknowledged value in purchasing local foods, the primary type of value seen related to economic factors. Of those who purchase local foods, the highest motivator related to perceived food attributes (such as freshness and quality). Similarly, when choosing food from the dining hall, the factor considered most related to food attributes (with "taste" being the highest response). A small percent of individuals always look at labels to see where food products were made/grown, although slightly over half agree that it is important to know who produces food along with where it is produced. A little over half the surveyed students would be willing to pay extra for food products sourced locally, with fruits and vegetables being the top commodity they would be most likely to choose when purchasing locally. As a whole, students appear to have a very basic knowledge of what "local" food is. While they seem to understand that local food has economic advantages to the community, surrounding farmers, and businesses, acknowledgement of potential environmental benefits is scant.

### *Students and GFL*

While a majority of the total student body surveyed was aware of the GFL program at UNL, this wasn't the mode in every dining hall (with AS being a clear exception). Further, the majority of all students responded as "never" making a goal to attend monthly GFL nights. CPN was the one exception where the majority of students responded that they "always" make an effort to attend monthly GFL dinners. Most students' expectations of the program related to the quality of the food product as opposed to frequency or source of local options and promotion of values behind local products. The majority agreed that the GFL program met any expectations, and few recommendations for improvement were provided. Of the recommendations offered, most related to improving the quality of the food offered. As a whole, the majority of students agreed that they would like to see more locally sourced food on campus.

### *A Look at NWU and UC*

UNL, NWU, and UC all have their individual differences. Because of NWU's contract with Sodexo their plan of action for increased amount of locally sourced foods will call for a different initial method of establishing connections and initiating change. Being self-operated like UNL, UC doesn't have this barrier. Neither NWU nor UC appear to have student support for providing more local products or an administrative force pushing toward this goal.

### *Final Conclusions*

*A) To gain a deeper understanding of UNL students' perception of the concept of local food and consumption of local products.*

Students appear to have a general knowledge of what it means for foods to be "local" but no clear consensus on the exact requirements. They see primarily economic value in choosing local foods and are largely motivated by actual attributes of the food. While students indicated

that they eat locally rarely now, most students responded that they also ate local food frequently prior to college.

*B) To evaluate the Good. Fresh. Local (GFL) program based upon awareness, student suggestions, and attendance*

The GFL program should be considered a success in terms of 70% awareness among the total student surveys, minimal student suggestions because most students responded that the expectations they had are being met, and 55% of the student body sometimes or always makes an attempt to attend monthly GFL meals.

*C) To offer recommendations for the GFL program and examine the potential for similar local programs within existing dining programs at nearby colleges Nebraska Wesleyan University and Union College.*

The GFL program should consider increasing the amount and frequency of local foods offered, seeking out higher quality foods, and increasing promotion of the program and awareness campaigns for the benefits of local foods (especially environmental benefits). If appropriate student or administrative support is obtained at NWU and UC, potential for a program comparable to GFL is present. NWU will require meeting specific rules and standards set by Sodexo and searching out distributors with more local connections. UC can look to where UNL has sourced its GFL produce and non-meat items and attempt to obtain similar agreements; they will need to look to different producers for the alternative meat products they offer.

#### *Recommendations for Future Studies*

This study was first and foremost an explorative look into the issues of local food among students at UNL and within the dining centers—especially through the GFL program—along with local initiatives at other Lincoln colleges. As such it should serve as a foundation for future

related research projects. Potential research projects looking to expand and improve upon this study or offer further insight into related issues might concern:

- A larger, more representative study of local awareness at UNL
- A deeper look into the potential for expansion of the GFL program
- Investigating the capability of Lincoln area farms to support multiple farm-to-college food needs
- Methods of effectively raising awareness about local foods on college campuses
- How to garner student support for farm-to-college programs
- The relationship between values seen in local foods and motivators for purchasing them
- The relationship between an individual's upbringing in a specific geographic region/on a farm and how often local food is consumed
- Where to start in creating a larger local food program and NWU or UC
- An examination of the challenges of farmers/producers involved in farm-to-college relationships and their recommendations for improvement



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**Appendix A—IRB Approved Condensed Verbal Consent Transcript**

**Title of Student Research Project:** *An Examination of UNL's "Good, Fresh, Local" Program and Local Food Challenges in College Dining Services in Lincoln, NE.*

“Hello, my name is Jennifer Simons, and I am asking for your voluntary participation in my senior thesis project about the Good, Fresh, Local program at UNL and local food in college settings. If you consent to participate in this research, please just fill out these survey questions to the best of your ability. It should only take around 15 minutes, but one hour will be allotted for completion of the survey.

Feel free to ask questions at anytime; I will be available during the entire hour allotted for completion of the survey.

All responses you provide will remain confidential.”

## Appendix B—Student Survey

### *An Examination of UNL's "Good, Fresh, and Local" Program and Local Food Challenges in College Dining Services in Lincoln, NE*

This survey will be used to assist with the completion of a UNL undergraduate thesis project. The purpose of the project is to evaluate the current GFL program at UNL and learn from student perspectives of local food in college settings. This project will allow for improved understanding about how what can be done to improve the GFL program along with what considerations should be taken if implementing a local food program in a college institution. This survey should only take 15-20 minutes, but you will be guaranteed an hour to complete it.

*Thank you for your time!*

#### 1. What is your year at UNL?

Freshman      Sophomore      Junior      Senior      +5 Year Senior      Graduate

#### 2. What are you majoring in?

#### 3. Which dorm do you live in?

#### 4. What is your nationality?

#### 5. What kind of geographic location did you grow up in?

Urbanized Area (50,000 or more people)    Urban Cluster (at least 2,500 and less than 50,000 people)    Rural (Less than 2,500 people)

#### 6. Were you or your parents raised on a farm?

Yes      No

#### 7. How would you define “local” in terms of food?

#### 8. What kind of value do you see in purchasing local foods, if any?

#### 9. How often did you eat local food products prior to attending college?

Never    Once a week    Twice a month    Once a month    Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

#### 10. How often do you search out local food products now?

Never    Once a week    Twice a month    Once a month    Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

#### 11. What motivates you to purchase local food (if you do)?

#### 12. How often do you look at labels to see where a product is made or grown?

Always      Sometimes      Never

**13. Would you be willing to pay extra for food products sourced locally?**

Yes No

**14. Which foods would you be most likely to purchase locally?**

**15. When purchasing food, it is important to know who produces it.**

Strongly agree Agree No Opinion Disagree Strongly Disagree

**16. When purchasing food, it is important to know where it is produced.**

Strongly agree Agree No Opinion Disagree Strongly Disagree

**17. Are you aware of the Good, Fresh, and Local (GFL) program at UNL?**

Yes No

**18. What expectations, if any, do you have of the GFL program?**

**19. Does it meet those expectations?**

Yes No I don't know about the GFL program

*If no, what would you like to see improved upon/change?*

**20. Do you make it a goal to attend the monthly GFL nights in the dining halls?**

Always Sometimes Never

**21. Which factor do you consider most when you choose food from the dining hall?**

Taste	Healthy Choices	Convenience
Local (GFL) Label	Religious Practice	Allergy/Food Sensitivity
How it was produced	I don't think about it	Other _____

**22. Would you like to see more locally sourced food on campus?**

Yes No Indifferent

## **Appendix C—Interview Guide for UNL Dining Services**

What is your definition of the term “local?”

What is the maximum distance a farm can be located in order for you to qualify it as local?

How far is your closest farm?

Do you consider organic properties as well when choosing local foods?

Do you utilize the farmer’s markets around town?

What was your inspiration for UNL’s GFL model? Was it based off of any other similar programs?

How has the program grown/changed?

What criteria must farmers meet in order to be accepted as a provider?

What is your “top” obtained local food?

How many ingredients in a meal item must be local for it to be labeled as “GFL?”

What amount/percentage of food in the cafeterias is typically local? Does it vary for the different cafeterias?

Do you have a way to monitor how much GFL food is eaten compared to the “regular?”

What are the cost differences for providing local food? How do you manage the (extra) costs?

Is it more difficult/what are the biggest challenges to using local foods/ingredients?

What do you think the benefits of using more local foods are? How does this program benefit UNL and the community?

### **CONSIDERATIONS**

Do you have plans for some sort of expansion? What are your future goals?

Have you ever considered a UNL farm to cafeteria project?

Does this program have a link to the students/student involvement? Do you have plans for more education/outreach efforts?

Composting plans?

## Appendix D—Interview Guide for NWU and UC Dining Services

Who is your current food provider?

What kind of an agreement/arrangement do you have together?

What kind of say do you have in what food is ordered/its origins?

What is your definition of the term “local?”

What is the maximum distance you would qualify it as local?

In what ways have you considered implementing local food into your cafeteria system?

*-maybe have researched other schools*

*-or have some type of student garden providing food*

If you haven’t, would you ever consider it?

*-do you think it’s even possible*

What kind of challenges would you have to overcome to devise a way to offer local food?

*-budget?*

*-storage*

*-availability*

How could it help to have an individual that has already implemented a successful college-local connection with their cafeterias?

*-or to have read a “guide” of how they included locally grown/provided items*

How has your provider offered similar programs to other schools? Or have they?

How could you take student opinions into account when constructing meal plans? Is it something you would be interested in, or already do?

How do you feel students polled about “local” food desires would respond? Would this be something you would be interested in?

How do you feel a local food offering would be received?

### CONSIDERATIONS:

Structure of meal plans; are students required to get dining hall pass, how many years

Is there a director of sustainability?

What kind of agreement is there with the food provider?

Is there someone available to “head” this campaign?

Who would grant approval?