

Texas Alternative Agriculture: A Brief Comparison of the Beliefs of Consumers and Producers

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Introduction

In recent years, consumers have become increasingly concerned about how food is produced that parallels the increase of smaller farms with particular production methods, which here is termed alternative production (Williams & Hammitt, 2000). There were two surveys which presented questions about aspects of alternative and conventional agricultural production in an attempt to compare producers and consumers.

Objectives

The objectives of this research were to determine 1) how well consumer and producer beliefs about agricultural product labeling align and 2) how well each group's beliefs align with the current scientific literature.

Materials and Methods

Data were collected through two Google Form based surveys which were emailed directly to approximately 250 individuals who have elected to receive such emails and through an email newsletter managed by the Texas Department of Agriculture that is sent to approximately 20,000 Texas residents. Google Forms present the data in aggregate form in a spread sheet without personal identification information. The survey that was directed towards Texas agricultural consumers was open from 15 June 2015 through 31 July 2015; the survey directed toward Texas agricultural producers was open from 5 Nov. 2015 through 8 Feb. 2016.

Results

Consumer survey participants consisted mostly of women whereas the producer survey participants were more evenly split between men and women. Producer participants tended to be older and more highly educated than consumer participants.

Which of the following labeled food products do you believe is the healthiest?

		Local	Organic	Other	Total
CONSUMER	Frequency	44	44	16	104
	Percent	27.33	27.33	9.94	64.6
	Row Pct	42.31	42.31	15.38	
	Col Pct	65.67	65.67	59.26	
PRODUCER	Frequency	23	23	11	57
	Percent	14.29	14.29	6.83	35.4
	Row Pct	40.35	40.35	19.3	
	Col Pct	34.33	34.33	40.74	
Total	Frequency	67	67	27	161
	Percent	41.61	41.61	16.77	100

P= 0.8171

Which of the following labeled food products do you believe is the safest?

		Local	Organic	Other	Total
CONSUMER	Frequency	39	50	15	104
	Percent	24.22	31.06	9.32	64.6
	Row Pct	37.5	48.08	14.42	
	Col Pct	62.9	68.49	57.69	
PRODUCER	Frequency	23	23	11	57
	Percent	14.29	14.29	6.83	35.4
	Row Pct	40.35	40.35	19.3	
	Col Pct	37.1	31.51	42.31	
Total	Frequency	62	73	26	161
	Percent	38.51	45.34	16.15	100

P=0.5757

Results Continued

The beliefs about aspects of alternative agriculture were similar between the two groups of survey participants. However, producer beliefs were more strongly held as evidenced by several survey-parting comments left by producers. Both producer and consumer beliefs did not necessarily reflect results of existing research into the health, safety, environmental health, and sustainability of organic and local production (Claeys et al., 2013; Costanigro, Kroll, Thilmany, & Bunning, 2014).

Discussion and Conclusion

Our results suggest there is a knowledge void, in this instance, within producers and consumers of alternative agriculture. Outreach events and future surveying regarding topics that these consumers and producers want more information about may help to fill that void. Early education may also be key to closing this gap of knowledge.

Literature Cited

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