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Bringing local food education to workplaces: Assessing needs for a health and wellness program

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Abstract

Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) Extension educators have a long history of providing education to help individuals, families, and communities. Since the 1980s, however, FCS has been described as at a crossroads, lacking a unified vision of how to maintain relevance in a changing society. FCS programs have had reduced enrollment and attendance, leaving FCS educators seeking new audiences. Many workplaces now have employee wellness and education programs that are an emerging opportunity for FCS educators. FCS is inherently interdisciplinary, bringing together many food-related topics such as cooking, nutrition education, and food preservation. This interdisciplinary focus makes local food systems an important opportunity for new FCS educational programs. Workplace community supported agriculture (CSA) programs, which connect local farmers and employees via employer-sponsored cost-offsets, are an emerging model increasingly adopted by employers to support employee health and wellness. Where they

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have been implemented, however, they have often been complemented by only limited education, in part due to lack of a formal local food–focused health and wellness curriculum. The purpose of this study was to gain information to guide the development of a local food health and wellness education program that would complement a workplace CSA program. The study assessed potential workplace wellness program participants' perceived knowledge, attitudes, and barriers to purchasing and cooking local food, and the types of information that would be most useful in the education program and participants' preferred program format. Respondents had positive attitudes about local food, but limited knowledge about how to purchase and prepare it. Respondents indicated that an education program that provided information on those topics, as well as information about unusual fruits and vegetables grown locally and how to reduce food waste would be most useful to them. Respondents preferred online program offerings during weekday lunchtimes. These findings provide guidance for designing a local food health and wellness education program tailored to this audience. We conclude by sharing some recommendations for developing or delivering programs.

Keywords
local foods, Cooperative Extension, health and wellness program, nutrition education, workplace wellness, community supported agriculture

Introduction

Recent evidence suggests that increasing numbers of Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) Extension educators are concerned about the long-term viability of their discipline, about the current state of and future prospects for FCS programming (Harden et al., 2018). It has been suggested that the discipline is "fading," "fracturing," needs a "clear identity," and should partner with emergent program areas in order to "survive" and "strengthen" (Harden et al., 2018, p. 25). One avenue to bolster FCS programming's continuing relevance is to lean further into its inherent interdisciplinary nature, which many consider a core FCS strength (Harden et al., 2018). Bloom et al. (2020) suggest that FCS educators have a significant opportunity to leverage their broad existing expertise with food programming (e.g., nutrition education, food safety classes, cooking classes) by moving towards more systems-focused approaches to food programming. By delivering programming on local food systems, FCS educators may identify new topics and audiences that can help address existing program area priorities (e.g., improved health and wellness for families and communities) while also reinforcing the discipline's future viability and relevance (Bloom et al., 2020). With the sustained interest in local foods among U.S. audiences, FCS educators have opportunities to expand their reach by offering local food programs.

FCS Extension educators are increasingly identifying opportunities to target and engage new audiences at worksites (Bearon & Bird, 2012; Powell, 2016). Recognizing the potential to increase employee satisfaction and productivity and to reduce healthcare costs, employers are offering more workplace wellness programs, many focused on improving diet and nutrition (Cheon et al., 2020; SantaBarbara et al., 2021). A promising opportunity for FCS educators is partnering with medium- to large-scale employee wellness programs to provide local food–focused health and wellness education. Rossi and Woods (2021) have documented health and wellness benefits of a community supported agriculture (CSA) program offered in a workplace setting. The emergence of workplace CSAs present an audience for FCS educators to provide local food–focused health and wellness education at workplaces. While aggregate data on the current number of U.S. workplace CSA programs are not available, case studies and randomized control-trial studies such as those by Rossi and Woods (2021) and Feuerstein-Simon et al. (2019) highlight growing interest and investment in these initiatives in Kentucky and Pennsylvania. In addition, CSA rebates offered through employees' healthcare plans, such as the program for University of Wisconsin and Wisconsin State employees, were discussed in a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) report on new CSA models (Woods et al., 2017). That program saw rapid growth, from 2,000 CSA shares in 2005 to 9,700 in 2012 (Woods et al., 2017).

FCS educators have struggled to maintain enrollment in their programs, in part due to their emphasis on in-person educational programs (Franck & Reeves, 2021). As prospective program participants increasingly prefer online programs rather than in-person, Extension educators are beginning to see the benefit of offering their programs virtually (Eck et al., 2022; Quinney et al., 2022; Witzling et al., 2023). Considering preference for online learning and the documented effectiveness of virtual workplace wellness educational programs, it is worth considering whether potential participants in a workplace wellness local food systems course would be interested in attending such a course virtually or in person. The purpose of our study was to identify a group of Florida consumers' perceived knowledge, attitudes, preferences, and barriers regarding local foods, and their preferences related to the content and delivery of a local food–focused health and wellness education program that complemented a workplace CSA program.

Research Methods

Recruitment

The research team conducted four education and outreach sessions between Fall 2022 and Fall 2023 to educate employees at two large employers in Florida. These sessions provided information about CSA programs, local CSA farms, and the health and nutrition benefits of consuming fruits and vegetables. These education and outreach sessions were hosted at three employee worksites for Clay County District Schools (CCDS) and a wellness fair for the University of Florida Human Resources (HR) Office of Communications and Worklife (UF Worklife). All individuals attending were invited to complete the survey. We received 51 responses from CCDS employees and 135 responses from UF employees.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

We created a 39-question needs assessment instrument regarding knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about local food and nutrition, as well as the perceived usefulness of types of information that could be included in a local food–focused health and wellness education program. We also inquired about employees' preferences for the time and format for the program. We used groups of questions, referred to as "scales," to measure subjective variables such as attitudes and perceptions. Because this study used a researcher-designed instrument, we tested the scales for internal consistency to ensure that the group of questions are measuring the same concept (Robinson et al., 1991). The internal consistency of the scales was calculated using Cronbach's alpha; the standard consistency score for a scale to be considered reliable is .7 or higher (Nunnally, 1978).

The local food purchasing attitudes questions used Likert descriptors (e.g., 1 = *undesirable*; 5 = *desirable*). The reliability score for this scale was $\alpha = .80$. Local food purchasing attitudes assessed what participants believed purchasing local foods would enable them to do (i.e., eat food that tastes better, eat a healthful diet, protect the environment, and support the local economy.). These beliefs were measured using a five-point Likert agreement scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*). The internal reliability for these questions was $\alpha = .76$. Local food knowledge contained six five-point Likert agreement scale items (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*) assessing awareness of and knowledge about how to acquire and prepare local foods. Questions included familiarity with local food, knowledge about where to purchase local food, and knowledge about nutrition and cooking. The internal reliability for these questions was $\alpha = .76$. For the full list of questions, see the survey instrument in the Appendix.

To tailor the program to our target audience, we assessed respondent preferences for informational topics. These questions used a five-point Likert usefulness scale (1 = *not at all useful*; 5 = *extremely useful*). Informational topics questions included ways to use local/seasonal vegetables, information about unusual fruits and vegetables grown locally, information about local heritage foods, ways to purchase from local farms, and health benefits of fruits and vegetables. We also included several questions related to specific dietary patterns and requirements—such as vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free, etc.—to assess whether tailoring the educational program to a specific dietary pattern or eating plan would make programming

more relevant and useful for participants. We included questions about the time and location the program would be delivered to ensure that it would be offered in a format that would best match the target audience's preferences. Questions about preferences for program delivery used a five-point Likert preference scale (1 = *do not prefer*; 5 = *prefer a great deal*). The questions included where the program would be offered (i.e., at the workplace, at the Extension office, or online) and questions about time of day, day of the week, and frequency of program delivery. See the survey instrument in the Appendix for the full list of questions about the usefulness of informational topics and program format.

Because the research team was interested in assessing the viability of pairing the educational program with a CSA, several questions were added to gauge participants' willingness to join a CSA as a part of this program. Participants were provided with basic information about CSAs, including what a CSA is, how they typically work, and what typical costs are. Participants were asked whether they had ever been a CSA member, whether they would be willing to join one as a part of an educational program; and, if not, what were the reasons. See the Appendix for the information provided about CSAs and the questions asked.

An expert panel of Extension educators and social science researchers who work with nutrition and food systems reviewed the survey for face and content validity—i.e., its perceived relevance to and representativeness of the subject matter and appropriateness and usefulness for target respondents (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). We revised the survey based on the review, yielding the final survey instrument shown in the Appendix.

Data Analysis

We analyzed the data using SPSS Statistical software (version 29). We ran descriptive summary statistics to generate response frequency and percentage distributions for nominal variables (e.g., demographics and household characteristics) and measures of central tendency and variability (mean and standard deviation) for the five-point scale ordinal variables that comprise much of the survey.

Results

The majority of respondents were white females, aged 40-49. Most respondents held a bachelor's degree or a graduate or professional degree, and did not receive food assistance nor had children living at home. A majority (70.2%) indicated that they did not adhere to dietary restrictions. Of the approximately 30% who did follow at least one restriction, nine (27.3%) indicated that they were vegan. A smaller number indicated they adhered to "gluten-free," "low-carb," or "other" restrictions, with "minimally processed/anti-inflammatory foods" and "food allergies" as examples provided (Table 1).

Overall, respondents demonstrated positive attitudes towards purchasing local food, with a 4.58 composite scale (Table 2). Respondents indicated that they believe that purchasing local food enables them to support the local economy, protect the environment, eat a healthier diet, and eat food that tastes better, in that order (Table 3). Respondents perceived that they know how to make healthy meals, how to cook local/seasonal foods, and are familiar with the Dietary Guideline for Americans recommendations. Respondents perceived that they have more limited knowledge about local food/agriculture, where to purchase locally grown food, and how to purchase food directly from farms or farmers (Table 4).

For the usefulness of informational topics to be included in a local food health and wellness program, "ways to purchase food from local farms" had the highest mean score. "Information about local farms, farmers, and agriculture" and ways to use local/seasonal fruits and vegetables were tied for the second-highest mean score (Table 5). "Home food preservation and canning" had the lowest mean score for usefulness of the information types.

Respondents preferred either an online-only format, or a hybrid program with virtual/online sessions paired with in-person sessions at their workplace. Respondents did not prefer in-person sessions at an Extension office or other community locations (Table 6). For a program offered online, respondents preferred live, synchronous sessions that are recorded in case they are not able to attend (Table 7). Respondents strongly preferred

Table 1. Respondents' Demographics and Household Characteristics

Variable	*f*	%
Education Level (*n* = 160)		
High school graduate or GED certificate	12	7.5
Some college, technical or vocational training	12	7.5
Associate degree	9	5.6
Bachelor's degree	66	41.3
Graduate or professional degree	61	38.1
Gender (*n* = 159)		
Female	148	93.1
Male	9	5.7
Non-binary	2	1.3
Children living in the home (*n* = 160)		
No	108	67.5
Yes	52	32.5
Received food assistance in last 12 months (*n* = 160)		
No	152	95
Yes	7	4.4
Don't know	1	0.6
Age Range (*n* = 160)		
18–29	17	10.6
30–39	33	20.6
40–49	42	26.3
50–59	40	25
60–69	28	17.5
Race (*n* = 168)		
White	141	83.9
Black or African American	15	8.9
American Indian or Alaska Native	3	1.8
Asian	4	2.4
Ethnicity (*n* = 159)		
Not Hispanic or Latino	143	89.9
Hispanic or Latino	16	10.1
Do you follow specific dietary restrictions (*n* = 114)		
Yes	34	29.8
No	80	70.2
Specific dietary patterns followed (*n* = 33)		
Vegan/Plant-based	9	27.3
Gluten-free	8	24.2
Low-carb	8	24.2
Other (please describe)	8	24.2
Pescatarian	7	21.1
Vegetarian	6	18.2
Lactose-free	6	18.2
Keto diet	1	3
Paleo diet	1	3

weekday lunchtimes for the opportunity to attend in-person program sessions at their workplace. For in-person sessions at an Extension office or community location, respondents preferred weekday evenings. Respondents preferred both weekday lunchtimes and weekday evenings to attend online-only sessions. Most respondents preferred a weekly program schedule, although there was some preference for bi-weekly offerings. It is worth noting that many respondents indicated that some in-person program offerings were formats that they would not be willing to attend at any time, with in-person programs offered at an Extension office a format that 21% would not attend, with just slightly fewer (17%) unwilling to attend a program in person at their workplace.

We sought to assess the viability of connecting a local food health and wellness education program with CSA membership with questions to assess respondents' CSA membership status; their willingness to join a combined CSA and educational program focused on local foods, health, and wellness; and the reasons that they would not be willing to join such a combined CSA educational program. Most respondents had never been a CSA member, and responses to the "willingness to join a CSA paired with an education program" question reflected uncertainty about whether they would be willing to do so, although a moderate proportion of respondents (48.2%) did express they would either "definitely" or "probably" be willing to join a combined CSA and educational program offering. Price was overwhelmingly selected as a primary barrier to joining the combined CSA and educational program (Table 8). Where respondents selected "other" and provided their own answers, a common concern was dealing with the quantity of produce for single individuals, or "one-person households."

Discussion

Our findings show that potential workplace wellness program participants have highly supportive

attitudes and beliefs about local foods. Respondent self-reported knowledge about local food presents opportunities to target specific local food literacy learning objectives. While respondents know how to prepare healthy meals and cook with local and seasonal ingredients, they had low perceived knowledge of local food and agriculture, including where and how to purchase locally grown food directly from farmers. Consistent with this lack of perceived knowledge, respondents indicated that three corresponding topics would be most useful to learn about in an education program: "ways to purchase food from local farms," "information about local farms, farmers, and agriculture," and "ways to use local/seasonal fruits and vegetables." Additional items rated highly included "ways to reduce food waste" and "information about unusual fruits and vegetables grown locally."

Questions about an education program's ideal format, structure, and delivery time elicited modest preferences and clear aversions among respondents. Respondents were split as to preference for an online-only or hybrid-delivery format, with some online and some in-person sessions conducted at worksites. Respondents did not prefer an education program offering in-person sessions at an Extension office or other community location. Respondents' preferences varied across formats and delivery sites, except that respondents strongly favored weekday lunchtimes for attending in-person program sessions at their workplace.

Our findings regarding respondents' CSA membership status, willingness to join a combined CSA and local food health and wellness educational program, and the reasons they would not be willing to join highlighted notable barriers. Most respondents had never subscribed to a CSA although they expressed potential willingness—approximately half indicated they would either "definitely" or "probably" be willing to join a combined CSA and education program. When asked what the primary barriers were to joining, "price" was identified by over 70%, followed by "lack of choice/flexibility in produce received" (39.2%) and "logistics picking

Table 2. Attitudes of Respondents Toward Local Food (*n* = 167)

	M	*SD*
Purchasing local food is…		
Good for farmers – bad for farmers	4.85	.465
Overall bad – Overall good	4.72	.590
Undesirable – Desirable	4.71	.595
Unimportant – Important	4.61	.713
Not a priority – A high priority	4.05	.952
Composite attitude index[a]	4.58	.510

Note. Responses collected using five-point scale
[a] Unweighted composite index variable for local food purchasing attitude scale

Table 3. Respondents' Behavioral Beliefs About Purchasing Local Food (*n* = 168)

	M	*SD*
Purchasing local food will enable me to…		
support the local economy.	4.92	.277
protect the environment.	4.50	.657
eat a more healthful diet.	4.44	.748
eat food that tastes better.	4.40	.798

Note. Responses collected using five-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*)

Table 4. Respondents' Knowledge About Local Food (*n* = 168)

	M	*SD*
I know how to prepare healthy meals and snacks	4.13	.877
I know how to cook local/seasonal fruits and vegetables[a]	3.70	1.101
I am familiar with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommendations	3.62	1.107
I know where I can purchase locally grown food	3.51	1.111
I am familiar with local food/agriculture	3.36	1.069
I am aware of ways to purchase food directly from farms or farmers	3.19	1.252

Note. Responses collected using five-point scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)
[a] *n* = 119

up share" (35.1%). While the focus of this study was potential participants' preferences for an educational program combined with a CSA, rather than simply joining a CSA on its own, our findings parallel those of Chen et al. (2019), who found that the price of shares, the location of provider farms and share pick-ups, and timing of share distribution were influential factors for deciding either to join a CSA initially or to renew membership. While our focus was not CSA membership alone, respondents' concern about the price of the combined CSA and educational program emphasizes the importance of mitigating the cost of CSA membership to get people to enroll in a combined CSA and health and wellness educational program, such as cost-offset CSA programs, which reduce the financial burden for current or prospective CSA members (Sitaker et al., 2021).

Limitations

The convenience sampling technique used in our study limits the generalizability of our findings. Our results may also express both sampling and response biases, without responding control measures, given the study context and subject matter (Bethlehem, 2010; Maravelakis, 2019; Rosenman et al., 2011). Convenience sampling has limitations due to self-selection bias risk: participants held greater interest and willingness to be involved in an assessment of local food-centered health and wellness education topics (Bethlehem, 2010). Our results may reflect a social desirability response bias due to the nature of certain questions asked, i.e., those regarding participant attitudes and beliefs about local food (Larson, 2019; Rosenman et al., 2011). Our study is also limited due to the industry of the two employers surveyed, both being educational institutions. The usual demographics of participants in FCS educator nutrition programs align with the demographics of employers like CCDS, which both highlights the positive potential for offering a program to employees of this type of employer, and the fact that the attitudes, beliefs, and preferences of this audience may not match those

Table 5. How Useful Respondents Find Types of Information for a Local Food Health and Wellness Program (*n* = 168)

	M	*SD*
Ways to purchase food from local farms	4.56	.756
Information about local farms, farmers, and agriculture[a]	4.42	.897
Ways to use local/seasonal fruits and vegetables	4.42	.800
Ways to reduce food waste[a]	4.36	.851
Information about unusual fruits and vegetables grown locally[a]	4.36	.831
How to prepare meals and eat to prevent a health condition	4.29	.999
How to prepare more whole food, plant-based meals	4.24	1.028
Health benefits of fruits and vegetables	4.19	.979
Information about heritage foods[a]	4.02	1.058
Gardening or growing my own food	4.00	1.116
How to cook/eat according to the Mediterranean diet[a]	3.90	1.138
Home food preservation and canning	3.72	1.178

Note. Responses collected using 5-point scale (1 = not at all useful, 5 = extremely useful)
[a] *n* = 119

Table 6. Preferred Formats for Local Food Health and Wellness Program (*n* = 114–116)

	M	*SD*
Online	3.38	1.293
Hybrid (in-person at workplace and online)	3.37	1.088
In-person (workplace)	3.03	1.373
Hybrid (in-person at Extension office or community location and online)	3.03	1.293
In-person (Extension office or community location)	2.42	1.242

Note. Responses collected using 5-point scale (1=do not prefer, 5=prefer a great deal). Response rates varied between questions in category.

of other employer types. UF (via UF Worklife) has a broader employee demographic spread, but its employees may have greater than average interest in local food and agriculture because UF is a land-grant university with considerable research and Extension resources dedicated to agriculture and food systems.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study provided an initial look at potential workplace wellness program participants' knowledge, attitudes, and preferences for a local food–focused education program. It would be beneficial to conduct a larger-scale research project including a more representative sample, other regions of the U.S., and other employment sectors to be able to identify differences in program content and delivery preferences in different regions, workplace sectors, and demographic groups. Future research on the educators who oversee workplace wellness programs would gain more understanding of their reasons for adopting and funding certain types of programs, as well as their expectations and concerns about the programs. If educators better understood the reasons workplaces offer wellness programs, they could be certain to collect evaluation data that would show employers the potential impact of the programs on goals employers have for the program. In addition, as this type of workplace wellness educational program becomes conceptualized to complement a workplace CSA program, research to better understand farmers' needs, preferences, and barriers to working with employers to implement workplace CSAs would be beneficial. And as there are other local food sales/marketing channels such as farmers markets and customizable direct farm orders that could be paired with an educational program of this type, it would be beneficial to assess the program preferences of those channel customers and prospective program participants.

Table 7. Respondents' Preferences for Online Session Formats, Format-Based Schedules, and Overall Program Frequency (*n* = 116)

Variable	f	%
Online Format		
Live real-time sessions that are recorded, so you can watch later	65	54.6
Recorded videos that you can watch live at any time	39	32.8
Live real-time sessions so you can interact with the instructor and others	12	10.1
In-person time (workplace)		
Weekday lunchtimes	43	36.1
Weekday evenings	24	20.2
Weekday mornings	22	18.5
I would not attend this format	17	14.3
Weekend afternoons	5	4.2
Weekend mornings	4	3.4
In-person time (Extension office)		
Weekday evenings	29	24.4
Weekend mornings	28	23.5
I would not attend this format	21	17.6
Weekend afternoons	18	15.1
Weekday mornings	12	10.1
Weekday lunchtimes	8	6.7
Online time		
Weekday lunchtimes	40	33.6
Weekday evenings	39	32.8
Weekday mornings	14	11.8
Weekend afternoons	6	6.7
I would not attend this program format	8	6.7
Weekend mornings	7	5.9
Program frequency		
Every week	52	43.7
Every two weeks	46	38.7
Once a month	18	15.1

Recommendations for Practice

We offer brief considerations for practitioners and educators interested in delivering local food–

centered educational programming at a workplace—either in conjunction with a CSA offering or without one. While these recommendations do not directly stem from our primary research findings presented above, they are informed by our related experiences with planning the delivery of a local food health and wellness program in coordination with two employers' HR offices and FCS Extension educators. Those interested may consider the following in addition to the core needs assessment findings we have presented, recognizing that these suggestions may not be perfectly prescriptive for their particular cases:

Table 8. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Membership and Interest

Variable	*f*	%
Past/Current Membership Status (*n* = 114)		
Yes, I am currently a CSA member	2	1.8
Yes, but I am not currently a member	26	22.8
No, I am not and have never been a member	86	75.4
Willingness to Join a Combined CSA and Education Program (*n* = 114)		
Definitely yes	17	14.9
Probably yes	38	33.3
Might or might not	39	34.2
Probably not	16	14.0
Definitely not	4	3.5
Main CSA Barriers (*n* = 97)		
Price	69	71.1
Lack of choice/flexibility in produce received	38	39.2
Logistics picking up share	34	35.1
Concerns about food waste	25	25.8
Other (please describe)	12	12.4
Don't eat that many vegetables	11	11.3
Incompatible with my schedule/lifestyle	8	8.2
Would not match the way I cook	5	5.2

- *Identify and engage key partners, collaborators, and advisers:* Take time to identify the faculty researchers, state specialists, county Extension educators, and HR office directors or wellness coordinators employed by target worksites. The intentional mapping of individuals who may be an asset can better ensure timely and appropriate guidance, from design to implementation. While the number and appropriateness of potential partners may vary by location, there is a good chance that practitioners will discover useful contacts and connections These individuals may become project partners or advisers capable of providing feedback on program curricula, materials, and evaluation methods.

- *Conduct a needs assessment of the target audience:* As we have demonstrated, collecting formative needs assessment data from a target audience (i.e., employees of a target workplace) can generate valuable insights into the preferences, expectations, and needs of prospective participants regarding a local food–focused education program. Recruiting respondents will likely involve leveraging the contacts made in the preceding step; for example, HR office staff might be willing to help disseminate a needs assessment. Our survey instrument (Appendix) may be adapted and/or added to for use in distinct contexts, and practitioners could consider using additional techniques (e.g., focus groups) to generate rich insights not typically captured in surveys.

- *Review existing informational resources and curricula:* Although workplace wellness programs are still relatively emergent, and local food-centered education programs and/or workplace CSA initiatives are particularly nascent, there are some health and wellness educational curricula and educators who are trained to deliver these programs. Connect-

ing these health and wellness curricula with specific information about local food and agriculture can be beneficial for getting an initial program off the ground.

- *Maintain consistent and strategic communication with HR partners*: Delivering a local food-centered health and wellness education program at a workplace requires coordination with the HR department staff or wellness coordinator. Depending on the type and scale of the institution, organization, or company they represent, they may have substantial experience in providing wellness programming to their employees and would be best positioned to facilitate the integration of a local food–focused education component into their existing offerings.

- *Consider facilitating several local food–focused initiatives in conjunction with education:* FCS educators' local food–focused health and wellness education in the workplace can be bolstered by complementary activities and resources, such as a CSA drop-off at the workplace, a workplace farmers market, or partnering with the agriculture Extension educator to deliver the program.

Conclusions

Our findings provide a snapshot of Florida employees' perceptions about local foods, the types of information and educational content they would prefer featured in a local food-focused health and wellness program, their preferences for delivery formats and times for the program, and their likelihood of joining a combined CSA and local food education program. The findings offer insights into the needs and preferences of an audience segment, employees within moderate- to large-scale organizations, that may be uniquely positioned to support workplace local food-focused educational programming efforts, as well as local farmers' efforts to expand and diversify their customer base via workplace CSA programs. Our sample was primarily composed of white females between 40–49 with a bachelor's degree or a graduate or professional degree, who did not receive food assistance, and did not currently live with dependents in the household. Respondents had positive attitudes and beliefs about local foods. While self-reported knowledge of how to cook local and seasonal ingredients was high, knowledge about broader local food systems—including how to connect with local farmers to directly purchase locally grown foods—was very low. Need for this knowledge was reinforced by feedback on the perceived usefulness of certain education topics, as "ways to purchase food from local farms" and "information about local farms, farmers, and agriculture" had the highest mean score. Our findings demonstrate preferences for the structure offered by a workplace local food-focused health and wellness program, guiding statewide Extension specialists and county educators to consider the optimal format, time, and frequency to design and deliver a local food-centered workplace wellness program. Finally, results regarding respondents' current CSA membership status and their interest in joining a workplace CSA concurrently with a program demonstrated a mixed willingness to join a CSA as part of a workplace wellness educational program, with concerns about program price being the most frequently selected reason for not joining.

These findings—in conjunction with the additional recommendations for practice—serve as a guide for researchers interested in more broadly examining employee's views toward local foods, local food–focused health and wellness education programs at worksites, and/or workplace CSA offerings, as well as guidance for practitioners (e.g., Extension educators) interested in designing and/or delivering programs in coordination with relevant parties.

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Appendix: Needs Assessment Survey Instrument

Local Food, Health and Wellness Program

Thank you for your interest in this program. Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate

Purpose of the research study: The purpose of this study is to evaluate program participants' knowledge and preferences about local food educational programs. The information gathered from this survey will be used to inform the development of future local food and wellness educational programs and materials.

What you will be asked to do in the study: You will be asked to complete a survey answering questions about your knowledge and preferences related to a local food, health and wellness program

Time required: This survey will require approximately 10 minutes.

Confidentiality: There is a minimal risk that security of any online data may be breached, but our survey host (QUALTRICS) uses strong encryption and other data security methods to protect your information. The data will be kept on a password-protected computer to which only the researchers will have access. Your responses and identity are completely confidential and no reference will be made in any oral or written report that would link you to the study.

Risks, benefits, and compensation: There are no anticipated risks or direct benefits to you as a direct consequence of participating in this study. No compensation will be given for your participation.

Voluntary participation: While your response to this survey is greatly valued, your participation in this program is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating.

Right to withdraw from the study: Should you choose to participate, you have the right to withdraw from this program at any time with no penalty. You are NOT required to answer any question.

For any general questions concerning this research study, please contact [Project PI, Contact information]. If you have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, you may contact the University IRB Office at [Contact name and address]. If you would like to participate in this study, please give your consent below to continue to the survey.

- ○ I agree to complete this survey
- ○ I do not agree to complete this survey

Introduction

First, we would like to ask you about your feelings purchasing local food. Please select the circle between each set of words that best represents your beliefs about the following statement:

"Purchasing local food is…"

Overall bad	1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5	Overall good
Harmful	1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5	Beneficial
Useless	1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5	Useful
Unimportant	1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5	Important
Undesirable	1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5	Desirable
Not a priority	1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5	A high priority

Now we would like to ask a few questions about what you think purchasing local food will enable you to do. Please select the answer that best matches your level of agreement with the following statements.

Purchasing local food will enable me to…

eat food that tastes better.
Strongly disagree: _1_ _2_ _3_ _4_ _5_: Strongly agree

eat a more healthful diet.
Strongly disagree: _1_ _2_ _3_ _4_ _5_: Strongly agree

protect the environment.
Strongly disagree: _1_ _2_ _3_ _4_ _5_: Strongly agree

support the local economy.
Strongly disagree: _1_ _2_ _3_ _4_ _5_: Strongly agree

Next, we are going to ask you a few questions about your local food knowledge.

Please indicate whether you strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat agree, or strongly agree with the following statements.

I am familiar with local food/agriculture.
Strongly disagree: _1_ _2_ _3_ _4_ _5_: Strongly agree

I know where I can purchase locally grown food.
Strongly disagree: _1_ _2_ _3_ _4_ _5_: Strongly agree

I am aware of ways to purchase food directly from farms or farmers.
Strongly disagree: _1_ _2_ _3_ _4_ _5_: Strongly agree

I am familiar with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommendations.
Strongly disagree: _1_ _2_ _3_ _4_ _5_: Strongly agree

I know how to prepare healthy meals and snacks.
Strongly disagree: _1_ _2_ _3_ _4_ _5_: Strongly agree

I know how to how to cook local/seasonal fruits and vegetables.
Strongly disagree: _1_ _2_ _3_ _4_ _5_: Strongly agree

How useful would the following types of information be to you as a part of a local food, health and wellness program? Select the circle that best represents your views (1 = Not at all useful; 5 = Very useful).

Ways to use local/seasonal fruits and vegetables
Not at all useful: _1_ _2_ _3_ _4_ _5_: Extremely useful

Information about unusual fruits and vegetables that are grown locally
Not at all useful: _1_ _2_ _3_ _4_ _5_: Extremely useful

Information about heritage foods (traditional foods with cultural significance)
Not at all useful: _1_ _2_ _3_ _4_ _5_: Extremely useful

Information about local farms, farmers, and agriculture
Not at all useful: _1_ _2_ _3_ _4_ _5_: Extremely useful

Ways to purchase food from local farms
Not at all useful: _1_ _2_ _3_ _4_ _5_: Extremely useful

Gardening or growing my own food
Not at all useful: _1_ _2_ _3_ _4_ _5_: Extremely useful

Home food preservation and canning (e.g., making jam)
Not at all useful: _1_ _2_ _3_ _4_ _5_: Extremely useful

Health benefits of fruits and vegetables
Not at all useful: _1_ _2_ _3_ _4_ _5_: Extremely useful

Ways to reduce food waste
Not at all useful: _1_ _2_ _3_ _4_ _5_: Extremely useful

How to cook/eat according to the Mediterranean diet
Not at all useful: _1_ _2_ _3_ _4_ _5_: Extremely useful

How to prepare more whole food, plant-based meals
Not at all useful: _1_ _2_ _3_ _4_ _5_: Extremely useful

How to prepare meals and eat to prevent or manage a health condition, like high blood pressure
Not at all useful: _1_ _2_ _3_ _4_ _5_: Extremely useful

Now we'd like to ask you about your preferences for attending future programs.

What is your preferred format for a local food, health and wellness program?

	Do not prefer	Prefer slightly	Prefer a moderate amount	Prefer a lot	Prefer a great deal
In person at **workplace** (only)	○	○	○	○	○
In person at **Extension office**/other community location (only)	○	○	○	○	○
Online (only)	○	○	○	○	○
Hybrid (some in-person sessions at **workplace**, some online sessions)	○	○	○	○	○
Hybrid (some in-person sessions at **Extension office**, some online sessions)	○	○	○	○	○

If the program were offered virtually (online), what format would you prefer most?

- ○ Recorded videos that you can watch at any time.
- ○ Live real-time sessions so you can interact with the instructor and other participants in real time (such as Zoom).
- ○ Live real-time sessions that are recorded, so you can watch later if you don't attend live.

If the program were offered live <u>in person</u> at your <u>workplace</u>, what time would work best for you?

- ○ Weekday mornings
- ○ Weekday lunchtimes
- ○ Weekday evenings
- ○ Weekend mornings
- ○ Weekend afternoons
- ○ I would not attend this program format

If the program were offered live <u>in person</u> at the <u>Extension office or another community location</u>, what time would work best for you?

- ○ Weekday mornings
- ○ Weekday lunchtimes
- ○ Weekday evenings
- ○ Weekend mornings
- ○ Weekend afternoons
- ○ I would not attend this program format

If the program were offered live <u>online</u>, what time would work best for you?

- ○ Weekday mornings
- ○ Weekday lunchtimes
- ○ Weekday evenings
- ○ Weekend mornings
- ○ Weekend afternoons
- ○ I would not attend this program format

For a six-session program, how frequently would you like the sessions?

- ○ Every week
- ○ Every two weeks
- ○ Once a month

Community supported agriculture (CSA) programs provide access to fresh, local, and seasonal produce. In CSA programs, consumers buy a share of a farm's harvest in advance. CSA members receive a weekly or biweekly box of fresh produce from the farm. The members typically do not have any choice of what is in the box, and receive a share of whatever is being harvested from the farm. Members can pick up their shares at farmers markets or at the farm at specific times. Some farms will also deliver to consumers' homes (for a fee).

The boxes generally have 7–10 produce items, and range in price from $40–65 per box. Paying up front for a full season can range from $500–$1,400.

Have you ever been a member of a community supported agriculture (CSA) program before?

- ○ Yes, I am currently a CSA member
- ○ Yes, but I am not currently a CSA member
- ○ No, I am not and have never been a CSA member

Would you be willing to join a CSA program along with an educational program focused on local foods, health and wellness?

- ○ Definitely yes
- ○ Probably yes
- ○ Might or might not
- ○ Probably not
- ○ Definitely not

What are the main reasons you would not be willing to join a CSA program that goes along with an educational program focused on local foods, health and wellness? (Select all that apply)

- ○ Price
- ○ Logistics (picking up share)
- ○ Lack of choice/flexibility in the produce received
- ○ Don't eat that many vegetables
- ○ Incompatible with my schedule/lifestyle
- ○ Would not match the way I cook
- ○ Concerns about food waste
- ○ Other (please describe) _____

To conclude the survey, we would like to ask you a few questions about you.

What is your gender?

- ○ Male
- ○ Female
- ○ Nonbinary
- ○ Prefer to Self-describe _____

What is your race? (Select all that apply)

- ○ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ○ Asian
- ○ Black or African American
- ○ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- ○ White

What is your ethnicity? (Select one)

- ○ Not Hispanic or Latino
- ○ Hispanic or Latino

Do you follow specific dietary guidelines or restrictions?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Which of the following dietary guidelines or restrictions do you follow? (Select all that apply)

- ○ Vegetarian (excludes meat, poultry, and fish, but may include egg and dairy products)
- ○ Vegan/Plant-based (excludes all animal products)
- ○ Pescatarian (excludes meat and poultry, but includes fish)
- ○ Gluten-free
- ○ Lactose-free
- ○ Low-carb diet
- ○ Kosher diet
- ○ Halal diet
- ○ Keto diet
- ○ Paleo diet
- ○ Other (please write-in answer below) _____

Which county do you live in?

_____

What is your age range?

- ○ 18–29
- ○ 30–39
- ○ 40–49
- ○ 50–59
- ○ 60–69
- ○ 70 or older

What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?

- ○ Did not complete high school
- ○ High school graduate or GED certificate
- ○ Some college, technical, or vocational training
- ○ Associate's degree
- ○ Bachelor's degree
- ○ Graduate or professional degree

During the last 12 months, have you or anyone in your household received food assistance (such as SNAP, WIC or other forms of food assistance)?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Don't know

Do any children under the age of 18 live in your household?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

What is your zip code?

_____

Please feel free to provide any additional feedback or suggestions for a local food, health and wellness program in the box below.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Finally, please provide your email address below if you would like to receive updates about an upcoming local food, health and wellness Extension program and/or a potential CSA pick-up location at your workplace.

_____