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GRASS-FED BEEF CONSUMERS

Illinois Grass-fed Value Chain Case Study: Consumer Profile

Developed by Delta Institute and Pasture Project

“Eating less meat, but eating better meat”

Overview

The information in this case study was gathered through interviews with Chicago residents ages 25 to 40, living in different neighborhoods of Chicago (Uptown/Andersonville, West Loop, and Wicker Park) who had made food purchasing decisions for themselves for 6 to 23 years and bought grass-fed beef products for 6 to 9 years. Only some respondents could tell a difference in texture and taste between grass-fed and conventionally raised beef. They report that these differences are more noticeable in steaks than ground beef.

Motivation

The two most significant factors in influencing consumer choice to buy grass-fed, as identified by respondents, are ethical and financial considerations. These consumers care about mitigating the negative impacts of their food on the environment, however the distance of the grass-fed beef production site does not factor into purchasing decisions, largely because the information is not available, although local products are the preferred option.

Financial considerations lead to these consumers to purchase less beef overall, but they look for higher quality and typically more expensive products when they do buy it. Consumers tend to be slightly skeptical of market trends, suspicious of why certain products are promoted and wary of deceptive marketing. A credible

standardized labeling system that included source location would enable consumers to feel more confident in their purchasing decisions (like the Monterey Bay Aquarium guide for fish). The health benefits of grass-fed beef did not so much factor into the choices of the consumer group interviewed.

Financials

Total food expenditures for these consumers was not significantly affected by purchasing grass-fed. They noted a slight uptick in total costs – but choose to buy less meat and spend more on higher quality products, for a total of about \$100-200 per week per person on food, including groceries and dining out. Approximately 50-80% of that total is spent on groceries.

Growth

Consumers report having some knowledge about meat production; they have a sense of what practices are harmful but are less confident in what a well-managed production system looks like. It is difficult for them to commit to purchasing exclusively grass-fed products due to financial constraints and consistent access. Reducing the cost and ensuring the authenticity of grass-fed products could both be avenues to increasing their demand. Consumers are interested in seeing more local food co-ops, Local Foods and Dill Pickle for example, in locations where demand and need exist.