

The Food Hub at the Burlington Intervale Center

Determining the Feasibility of a Burlington Food Hub
Among Chittenden County Restaurants

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As a student from the University of Vermont, I completed an internship with the Intervale Center in determining the feasibility of a Food Hub among Chittenden County restaurants through the implementation of a phone survey. The primary goal of this survey was to establish how responsive restaurants would be to an existing Food Hub in Chittenden County which would act as a consolidation location for local area farmers to store and distribute their produce via delivery system. The purpose of the Food Hub would be to encourage the exchange of local produce between farmers and restaurants, essentially strengthening the sustainability of agriculture in Chittenden County through the direct marketing outlet of farms to restaurants.

I began this process by researching various direct marketing outlets from farmers to consumers online requesting information from people who are involved in similar projects around the country. Through the information that I obtained from these similar projects, I was able to get a better feel for the inner workings of such places and the challenges of direct marketing from farmers to consumers. This also broadened my knowledge of CSA's along with the research findings of similar projects. After I researched various direct marketing outlets and similar projects, I created survey questions with the primary goal of determining how Chittenden County restaurants would respond to the implementation of a Food Hub. I also initially determined that a mail survey would be the best method of implementation however given my time frame I decided that a phone survey would probably be the most effective. After I developed the survey and decided how I would administer it, I developed a phone script and phone response sheet to use while talking to each individual restaurant food buyer. These tools

helped me keep my thoughts and their answers organized and sequential. Lastly I created a list of restaurants in Chittenden County, which turned out to be 63 restaurants that I had the intention of contacting to participate in my survey. My goal was to speak with 20 restaurant food buyers however I was only able to speak with 18. The information that I obtained from speaking with these restaurant food buyers determined the general response of Chittenden County restaurants to a Food Hub that would aim to consolidate local produce and products for distribution among local area restaurants.

Results:

Question #1

Do you currently use Vermont produce or products such as meat and dairy in your business? (Figure 1.1 in the appendix)

100% of food buyers reported using Vermont produce/products in their businesses.

Are you able to get the foods that you want from the sellers? (Figure 1.2))

88.9% of restaurant food buyers were able to obtain what they desired from their suppliers.

11.1% of restaurant food buyers were not able to obtain what they desired from their suppliers.

Are you satisfied by the food options available to you by the sellers? (Figure 1.3)

66.7% of food buyers were satisfied by the options available to them through the sellers.

22.2% were not satisfied by the options available to them by the sellers.

11.1% were both satisfied and unsatisfied

Question #2

A. How do you obtain your produce or Vermont products? (Figure 2.1)

66.6% of restaurants use suppliers to obtain their produce.

Of that 67% that use suppliers:

77.8% use Black River Produce as their primary supplier

22.2% use Squash Valley as their primary supplier

33.4% of restaurants obtain their produce by picking it up at the farm or shopping at farmers markets.

The preferred method of delivery among the majority of local restaurant food buyers was to obtain their produce/products through suppliers. This was more efficient for their business because they did not have time to go to each individual farm to pick up their produce. Contrastingly, smaller establishments enjoyed picking up their produce from each farmer and really valued that personal connection they had with them.

B. Are you satisfied with that method of obtaining your Vermont produce/products?
(Figure 2.2)

88.8% of food buyers are satisfied with obtaining their produce through suppliers like Black River Produce and Squash Valley.

11.2% of food buyers were not satisfied with obtaining their produce through these suppliers.

100% of food buyers were satisfied with obtaining their produce from the farms themselves or farmers markets.

Although a large percentage of food buyers reported being satisfied with obtaining their local food through these suppliers, they consistently reported costly service charges, strict time restrictions on placing their orders, and the mishandling of the produce they received. Often times the produce was packaged as though it were going across country to be delivered in California when it was just being taken down the road. The major concern with all of this packaging was the extra waste it caused. Smaller establishments who had the time to actually go to each farm and pick up their produce really enjoyed this method of obtaining their produce/products and were not necessarily interested in a consolidating food hub. Some however mentioned that they would consider trading their close relationship with the farmer for the simplicity of obtaining their food through a Food Hub.

C. How frequently do you place your orders? (Figure 2.3)

50% of restaurants order their produce everyday

38.9% of restaurants place their orders every other day or every two days per week.

11.1% of restaurants place their orders 1-2 times each week.

Restaurant food buyers are constantly ordering food. The food supplier, Squash Valley, delivers food orders twice each day to local area restaurants which the food buyers really enjoyed.

D. Would you be interested in online ordering? (Figure 2.4)

55.5% of restaurants were interested in online ordering.

44.5% of restaurants were not interested in online ordering.

This question was asked to gauge the interest in online ordering among restaurant food buyers. Many food buyers were interested in online ordering and commented on how that would make their day much easier. Others liked to speak with the farmers or the suppliers of the food directly and had no interest in online ordering.

Question #3

A. Do you deal directly with the farmers? (Figure 3.1)

77.7% of food buyers deal directly with the farmers whether they obtain their produce through suppliers or they go and pick up their produce from the farm. Either way there is communication between food buyers and suppliers.

22.3% of food buyers do not communicate directly with the farmers at all and only obtain their food through suppliers.

Food buyers reported that it is difficult to keep all farmers straight and sometimes the farmers do not supply the amount of produce the restaurant requested which strains their relationship. Other food buyers reported that they liked to choose which farm they want to support and like to get suggestions from the farmers on how to handle the produce. Farmers in return like getting feedback from the consumers.

B. Do you think it is necessary to deal with the farmer? (Figure 3.2)

55.5% of restaurant food buyers think it is necessary to deal with the farmers.

44.5% do not feel it is necessary to deal with the farmers.

The 44.5% of food buyers did not feel communication with the farmers was necessary and said that as long as the food they want is available through the suppliers and they can obtain it for a cheaper price from the suppliers then there is no reason to deal directly with farmers.

Question #4

Can you identify some benefits of using Vermont produce/products at your restaurant?

33.3% mentioned that people seek out local food and ask for it specifically

27.7% mentioned how local food contributes to a more sustainable economy

22.2% mentioned how fresh local food tastes

16.6% mentioned how local food is better for the environment

11.1% mentioned the good relationship between the farmer and the buyer

5.5% mentioned the increased quality of local food

5.5% mentioned how local food drives the cooking methods of their kitchen

5.5% mentioned how local food does not turn into waste but sells rapidly

The popularity of Vermont products among restaurant goers is a large benefit of using Vermont produce/products at their restaurants. People seek out local products and they are often the most popular dishes on the menu. Many food buyers were also aware

of the eco-footprint local food produces and how it contributes to a more sustainable economy. Also the better taste along with the relationship that is created between food buyers and farmers are among other benefits of using Vermont produce at local restaurants.

Question #5

Can you identify some challenges of using Vermont produce/products at your restaurant?

- 44.4% mentioned the restrictions that we have due to seasons
- 16.6% mentioned availability
- 11.1% mentioned supply meeting demand
- 11.1% mentioned efficiency
- 11.1% mentioned the different quality
- 5.5% mentioned price

Many restaurants mentioned the obvious restrictions that came with agriculture in Vermont as far as the seasonality of fresh produce. Availability of food was also mentioned which tells us that the restaurants want to purchase more Vermont produce but they cannot because it is not available through the sellers or farmers. Supply and demand of Vermont produce is also difficult due to the short supply during the winter months and the high demand for Vermont produce/products. Efficiency of obtaining Vermont produce is also challenging especially is restaurants have to seek out the farmer and go to get the food themselves. No central location exists where they can draw the produce/products they desire from. Also the different quality of Vermont produce/products was challenging when using it in recipes because often times it behaves differently or requires different cooking techniques as opposed to conventional California produce/products.

Question #6

Can you identify some reasons that prevent you from purchasing Vermont produce/products on a regular basis?

- 55.5% mentioned availability
- 55.5% mentioned price
- 44.4% mentioned seasonality
- 16.6% mentioned variety
- 16.6% mentioned consistency of supply
- 5.5% mentioned volume of what is available
- 5.5% mentioned quality

Interestingly, not many food buyers said that price was one of the most challenging obstacles of obtaining Vermont produce to use in their restaurants but then

when asked what prevents them from using Vermont produce/products, more than half of them reported that price was a major contributing factor. Availability and seasonality were also major factors due to uncontrollable circumstances of weather. Variety and consistency of supply were mentioned as well along with volume of the product and the quality.

Question #7

Would you be interested in an alternative brokering and delivery service that would distribute only locally grown produce? (Figure 4)

94.4% of restaurant food buyers said they would be interested in an alternative brokering service offered by the Intervale Center.

5.6% of restaurant food buyers said they would not be interested in an alternative brokering service offered by the Intervale Center.

An overwhelming number, 17 out of the 18 restaurants were interested in another consolidating food distribution center/delivery service offered by the Intervale Center: one that would distribute only locally grown food. Only 1 restaurant said they would not be interested in a such a place because they really enjoyed their connection with the farmers and did not want to lose that to a “middle man”.

Question #8

Are you a member of the Vermont Fresh Network?

55.5% of restaurants were members of the Vermont Fresh Network

44.5% of restaurants were not members of the Vermont Fresh Network

I felt that I received an even distribution of restaurants who were members of the Vermont Fresh Network and those who were not. I think this contributed to the neutrality of the survey and showed a lack of bias.

Question #9

Could I send you a copy of our mail survey which asks more in-depth questions regarding the implementation of a Food Hub?

88.8% of food buyers said they would be interested in filling out our mail survey.

11.2% of food buyers said they would not be interested in filling out our mail survey.

The overwhelming interest of local restaurant food buyers in the creation of the Food Hub is apparent with these percentages.

Question #10

Would you like to be added to our Food Hub mailing list to receive more information on the advancements of this project?

94.4% of restaurant food buyers said they would like to be kept updated on advancements made by the Food Hub project

5.6% of restaurant food buyers said they were not interested in being kept up to date by the advancements made by the Food Hub.

Again, the obvious interest in the Food Hub is apparent through these percentages.

Conclusion:

Overall there was a large interest in a consolidating Food Hub among Chittenden County Restaurants. Although restaurants reported being satisfied with their suppliers and the way they obtain the Vermont produce/products, by the end of the survey they realized they were not as satisfied as they had thought. Through the questions I asked, restaurant food buyers were given a chance to examine their relationships with the suppliers and the farmers. This rendered information concerning the satisfaction of local food buyers with suppliers and what they felt could be done better by a future supplier. Many smaller establishments commented on their strong relationship with the farmers and how they were not interested in using a supplier. After finishing the survey however, many of them were so interested in obtaining their produce/products from a Vermont sourced Food Hub that they were willing to trade that relationship they had with the farmer for the simplicity of getting their food from one location. The popularity of local food among local area restaurants and the ability of those restaurants to get all of their local food through the Food Hub was very appealing to restaurant buyers. Concerns of the Food Hub becoming a middle man and removing the relationship between restaurant food buyers and farmers was often a concern. The growth of the Food Hub was also a concern because food buyers feared it would become too big and lose its grassroots effort of supplying Vermont produce/products to Chittenden County restaurants. They did not want to see it become too large as many of the buyers claimed Black River Produce did. The overwhelming 94.4% of restaurant food buyers interested in a Vermont sourced Food Hub acting as a consolidation location for local area farmers to store and

distribute their produce via delivery system was incredible. The interest in a Food Hub is clearly apparent among the restaurants in Chittenden County.

Restaurants Interested in More Information Concerning Advancements made by the Food Hub

<p>Sweetwaters 120 Church Street Burlington 864-9800 Tonia Calley, General Manager tgilbert@reelhospitality.com</p>	<p>861-2999 Matt H, Chief Food Buyer matth@flatbreadhearth.com</p>	<p>The Green Room 86 St. Paul Street, Burlington 651-9669 Dave Pratt, Co-owner greenroomvt@verizon.net</p>
<p>Olde Yankee Restaurant Route 15 Jericho 899-1116 Amy Little, Owner oldeyankee@comcast.net</p>	<p>Rozzi's Lakeshore Tavern 1022 West Lakeshore Drive Colchester 863-2342 Jamie Rozzi, Owner</p>	<p>Trattoria Delia 152 St. Paul Street Burlington 864-5253 Tom Delia, Owner delia4815@aol.com</p>
<p>Alex's Restaurant -- Home of the Vermont Soup Company 1636 Williston Road South Burlington 862-5678 Alex Marko, Chef/Owner</p>	<p>Lincoln Inn Restaurant and Tavern 4 Park Street Essex Junction 878-3309 Jim Poulos, Executive Chef/Food Buyer jsophocles@aol.com</p>	<p>Skinny Pancake, The 60 Lake Street Burlington 540-0188 Benjamin Adler, Owner benjy@skinnypancake.com</p>
<p>Bistro Sauce 97 Falls Road Shelburne 985-2830 Bill, Chef/Owner bistrosauce@yahoo.com</p>	<p>The Inn at Shelburne Farms 1611 Harbor Road Shelburne 985-8498 Aaron Josinsky, Su Chef rgencarelli@ahelburnefarms.org</p>	<p>Stone Soup 211 College Street Burlington 862-7616 Avry, Conductor</p>
<p>Busy Chef 26 Susie Wilson Road Essex 878-0770 Cindy McKinfrie, Owner cindy@vtbusychef.com</p>	<p>Tiny Thai Restaurant 24 Main Street Winooski 655-4888 Pui Ciosek, Owner tinythai@gmavt.net</p>	<p>Rusty Scuffer 148 Church Street Burlington 864-9451 Jack Fontaine, Owner</p>
<p>American Flatbread -- Burlington Hearth 115 St. Paul Street Burlington</p>	<p>Dutch Mill Family Restaurant 4309 Shelburne Road Shelburne 985-3568 James Bissonette, Owner info@dutchmillvt.com</p>	<p>Vermont Pub & Brewery 144 College Street Burlington 865-0500 Mike Trepanier, Kitchen Manager vpb@pshift.com</p>

Appendix

Figure 1.2:

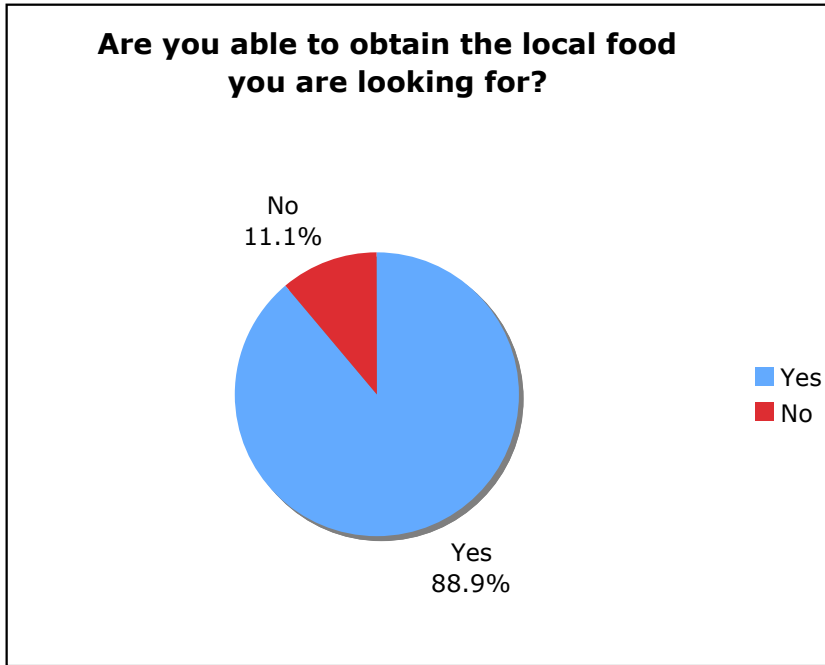


Figure 1.3:

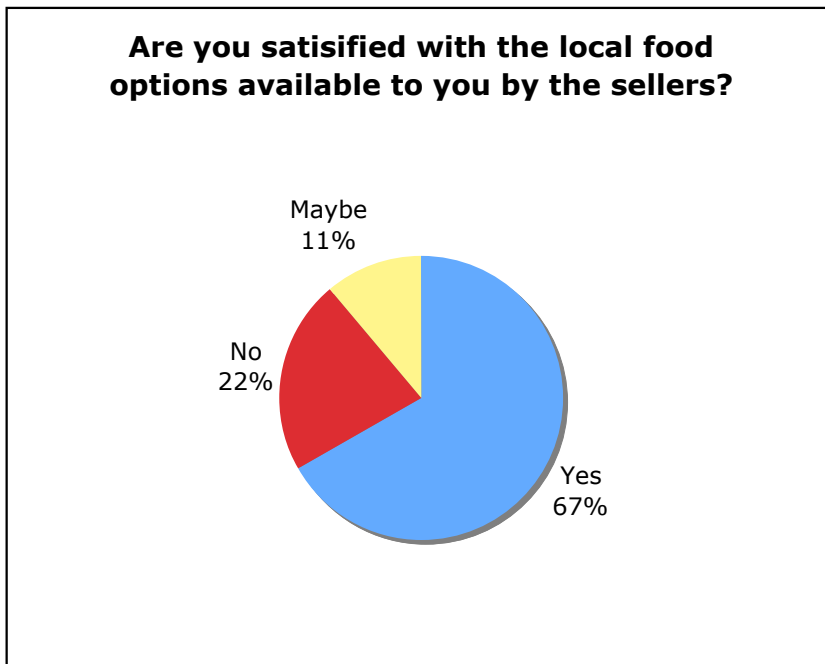


Figure 2.1:

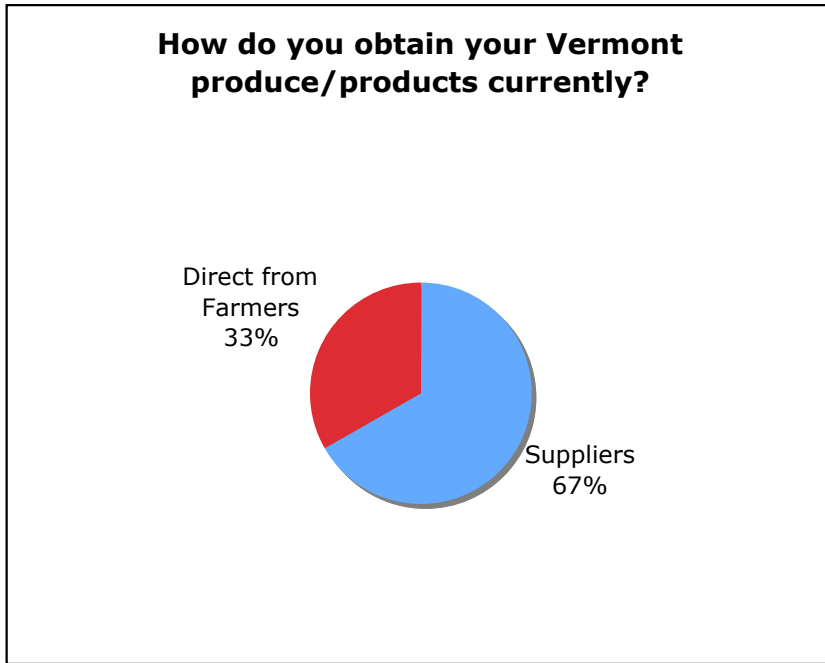


Figure 2.2:

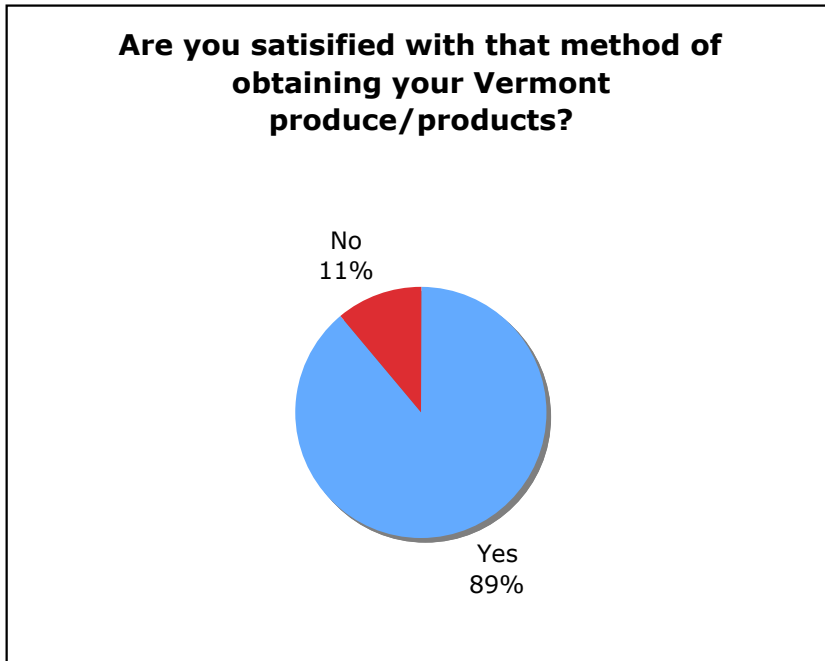


Figure 2.3:

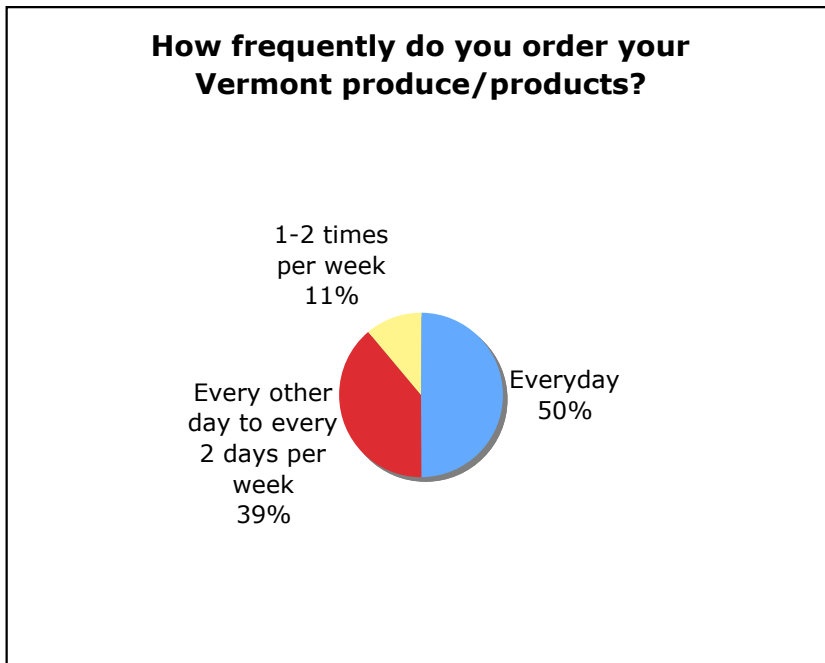


Figure 3.1:

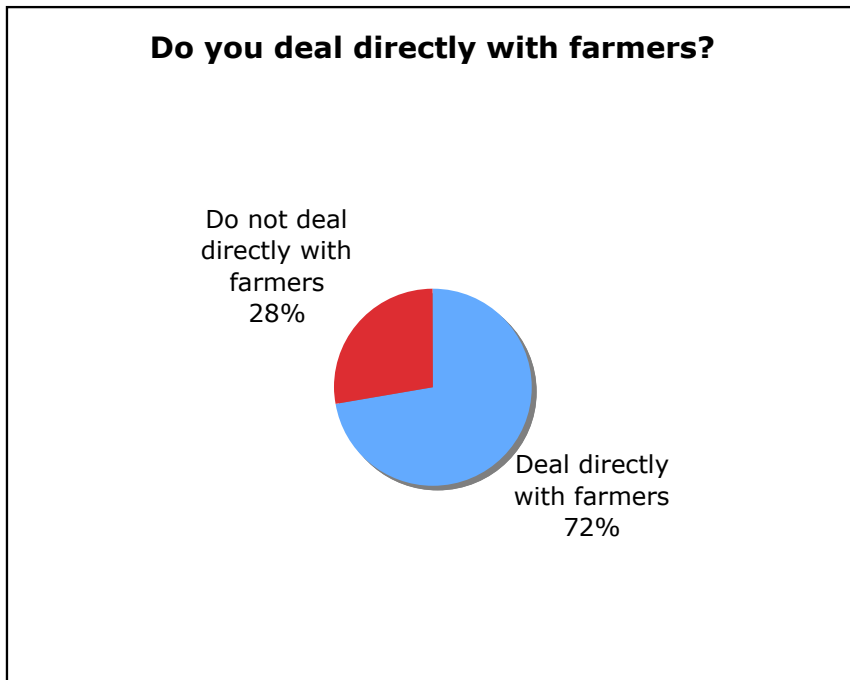


Figure 3.2:

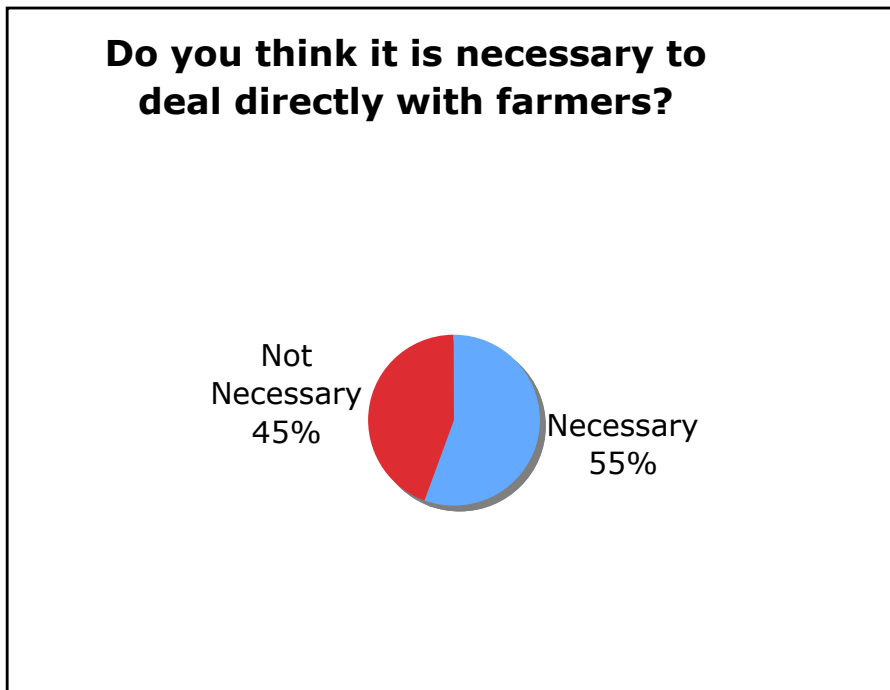
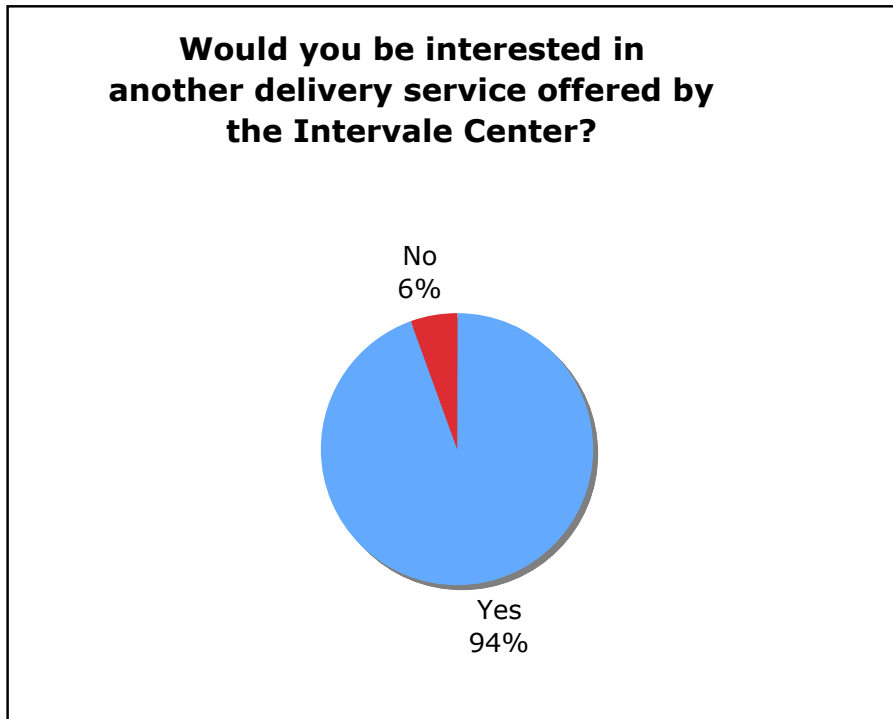


Figure 4:



List of Participating Restaurants:

Sweetwaters
120 Church Street
Burlington
864-9800
Tonia Calley, General
Manager
tgilbert@reelhospitality.com

Olde Yankee Restaurant
Route 15
Jericho
899-1116
Amy Little, Owner
oldeyankee@comcast.net

**Alex's Restaurant -- Home
of the Vermont Soup
Company**
1636 Williston Road
South Burlington
862-5678
Alex Marko, Chef/Owner

Bistro Sauce
97 Falls Road
Shelburne
985-2830
Bill, Chef/Owner
bistrosauce@yahoo.com

Magnolia Bistro
1 Lawson Lane, Suite 10
Burlington
846-7446
Shannon Riley, Owner

Busy Chef
26 Susie Wilson Road
Essex
878-0770
Cindy McKinfrie, Owner
cindy@vtbusychef.com

**American Flatbread --
Burlington Hearth**
115 St. Paul Street
Burlington
861-2999
Matt H, Chief Food Buyer
matth@flatbreadhearth.com

Rozzi's Lakeshore Tavern
1022 West Lakeshore Drive
Colchester
863-2342
Jamie Rozzi, Owner

**Lincoln Inn Restaurant
and Tavern**
4 Park Street
Essex Junction
878-3309
Jim Poulos, Executive
Chef/Food Buyer
jsophocles@aol.com

**The Inn at Shelburne
Farms**
1611 Harbor Road
Shelburne
985-8498
Aaron Josinsky, Su Chef
rgencarelli@ahelburnefarms.org

Tiny Thai Restaurant
24 Main Street
Winooski
655-4888

Pui Ciosek, Owner
tinythai@gmavt.net

**Dutch Mill Family
Restaurant**
4309 Shelburne Road
Shelburne

985-3568
James Bissonette, Owner
info@dutchmillvt.com

The Green Room
86 St. Paul Street,
Burlington
651-9669
Dave Pratt, Co-owner
greenroomvt@verizon.net

Trattoria Delia
152 St. Paul Street
Burlington
864-5253
Tom Delia, Owner
delia4815@aol.com

Skinny Pancake, The
60 Lake Street Burlington
540-0188
Benjamin Adler, Owner
benjy@skinnypancake.com

Stone Soup
211 College Street
Burlington
862-7616
Avry, Conductor

Rusty Scuffer
148 Church Street
Burlington
864-9451
Jack Fontaine, Owner

Vermont Pub & Brewery
144 College Street
Burlington
865-0500
Mike Trepanier, Kitchen
Manager
vpb@pshift.com

Phone Survey Script:

Telephone Script for the Restaurant Survey

Hello, my name is Lauren Abda I am a UVM student contacting you on behalf of the Intervale Center in Burlington. Is the chief food buyer available today?

No? Is there another time that I can call when he/she will be available?

Hello, my name is Lauren Abda I am a UVM student contacting you on behalf of the Intervale Center in Burlington. We are surveying Chittenden County restaurants to determine how they would respond to the implementation of a Burlington Food Hub. This Hub would act as a consolidation location for local area farmers to store and distribute their produce via a delivery system. We are looking to get feedback from local restaurant food buyers who are interested in buying more Vermont produced food and to learn what they feel is needed to make this happen.

This survey will only take about 10 minutes of your time and your participation would be greatly appreciated. May I continue with the survey?

(Answer: YES)

May I please have your name and your position at the restaurant?

1. My first question is, do you currently use Vermont produce or products such as meat and dairy in your business?

(Ans: YES) If so could you tell me what you use?

Are you able to get what you want?

If no then what is missing?

2. How do you obtain your food currently? (Database, online ordering, phone)
Are you satisfied with that method of ordering?
How frequently do you place orders?
Is it different for different items?
Would you be interested in online ordering?

3. Do you ever deal directly with farmers?
Do you think it is necessary to deal with the farmer?

If yes:

Why do you deal with them?

How many?

How are those relationships?

If no:

Why don't you deal with them?

Does someone else? Who?

4. What are some of the benefits of using Vermont produce at your restaurant?

5. What are some of the challenges of using Vermont produce at your restaurant?
6. Can you identify reasons that prevent you from purchasing Vermont produce on a regular basis such as availability, quality, seasonality, variety, price, taste, convenience.
7. Would you be interested in an alternative brokering and delivery service that would distribute only locally grown produce?
8. Are you currently a member of the Vermont Fresh Network?
9. Could I send you a copy of our mail survey which asks more in-depth questions regarding the implementation of a Food Hub?
10. Would you like to be added to our Food Hub mailing list to receive more information on the advancements of this project?

Thank you for your time and information, if you have any more questions or you would like to get involved in the Food Hub Project, you can contact Sona Desai at 660-0440 Ext. 112 or visit our interactive website through the Agricultural Development Services link at www.intervale.org.

Thank you again and have a nice day!

(Answer: NO)

Would there be a better time to call back?

Thank you for your time and if you have any more questions or you would like to get involved in the Food Hub Project, you can contact Sona Desai at 660-0440 Ext. 112 or visit our website through the Agricultural Development Services link at www.intervale.org.

Thank you have a nice day!

Telephone Survey Question Response Sheet:

Name of Restaurant: _____

Name and Position of person interviewed: _____

Telephone number: _____

Email: _____

1. Carrots Beef
Tomatoes Milk
Broccoli Eggs
Onions Poultry
Garlic Maple Syrup
Apples Sweet potatoes
Beets Squash
Potatoes Cabbage
Honey
Berries _____
Oats/Grains _____
Dairy Products _____
Greens _____
Other _____

Are you able to get what you want? Y N

Ans: No – What is missing? _____

Are you satisfied with the local food options available to you by the sellers?

Y N _____

2. How produce/products are obtained:

Database Supplier _____

Online ordering Telephone

Other _____

Satisfied: Y N

Frequency: Everyday
Every ___ days
Once a week
Every other week
Once each month

Different for different items?

Interested in online ordering? Y N

3. Do you deal directly with farmers? Y N How many? _____
Necessary to do so? Y N

(Yes)

Why _____

How is the relationship? _____

(No)

Does someone else deal with them? Y N _____

4. Benefits

5. Challenges

6. What prevents purchasing on a regular basis?

Availability	Variety	Other
Quantity	Price	
Quality	Taste	
Seasonality	Convenience	

7. Interested in another delivery service? Y N

8. Member of the Vermont Fresh Network? Y N

9. Send copy of the mail survey? Y N

10. Add to mailing list? Y N

Additional Comments: _____
