



The Tasmania Project

Share your experience during COVID-19.

Photo: Wendy Weifrom Pexels.

Local and fresh food and community interactions more important during the pandemic.

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The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the vulnerability of our food systems and the potential consequences that a lack of access to fresh, quality, and organic food has on people's health and wellbeing.

Results from The Tasmania Project are combined with a recent survey on farmers' markets to reflect on the increased importance Tasmanians' attribute to local and fresh food, wellbeing, and sense of community to inform recovery post COVID-19 pandemic.

Farmers' markets became a focus of debate as restrictions were initially imposed in Tasmania. By combining results of a recent study on farmers' markets ([Yanotti & Ripoll González, 2020](#)) with survey results from The Tasmania Project, we can explore community perception of the social, cultural, economic, and environmental benefits of farmers' markets.

Beyond being a selling point for local food and highlighting the cultural and social value and aesthetics of food, farmers' markets can also help build community connections through periods of crisis.

Key findings

- Most respondents to The Tasmania Project Food survey said that Tasmanian produce was extremely important or very important, and more than half said it was more important because of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Almost half reported consuming more Tasmanian grown food during the pandemic. 98% reported having bought Tasmanian produce in the last 30 days.
- One in five believed that local produce was only available in expensive restaurants and specialty shops.
- A quarter reported experiencing a decline in the access to enough food for an active, healthy life since March 2020.
- Only 16% had bought local produce at a farmers' market and 17% had eaten food from a farm gate in the last 30 days.
- Several respondents aspired to regional community, sustainable agriculture, local food security and environmental practices.
- In The Tasmania Project's second general survey, 25% admitted they did not always follow the physical distancing rules, up from 13% in the first general survey, mainly to connect with family and friends, and do things they enjoyed before the pandemic.



Photo: Harvest Launceston by Maria Yanotti.

Comparative results

The Tasmania Project Food survey found that a quarter of respondents reported experiencing a decline in access to enough food for an active, healthy life since March 2020; particularly low-income households, young people, single parents, and those with a disability. Moreover, 46% of respondents believed food was more expensive because of the pandemic.

Farmers' markets support sustainable production of food by educating consumers on seasonal, optimal nutrition, regenerative agricultural practices, healthy diets, and waste management, and by encouraging human connection through food. From an economic perspective, farmers' markets support small to medium local producers and increase food diversity (Yanotti & Ripoll González, 2020).

Data from The Tasmania Project reveals that 89% of respondents think that Tasmanian produce is extremely or very important, and over half think that it is more important due to the current pandemic. Almost all agreed that it is important to know where your food is produced (92%), how it is produced (91%), and who produces it (87%). 43% of respondents reported consuming more Tasmanian grown food during the pandemic. Most of them buy Tasmanian produce from major (65%) and independent (74%) supermarkets. 98% reported having bought Tasmanian produce in the last 30 days. The survey found that 1 in 5 Tasmanians believe that local produce is only available in expensive restaurants and specialty shops. Only 25% of respondents reported buying food directly from a producer and 16% from a farmers' market. 17% of respondents reported eating food from a farm gate in the last 30 days.

In addition, the recent [report](#) on farmers' markets argues that food is a driver of community building and has an undeniable cultural significance. Farmers' markets bring communities together. The report finds that most participants attend farmers' markets as a social (or even touristic) weekend activity and not a mere shopping outing. Participants primarily bought food and drinks to be consumed at the market. Participants' main motivations included: access to fresh and local produce, experience local food, and socialise. The social distancing regulations imposed by governments due to the COVID-19 health crisis are restricting social interactions within the community, highlighting the importance of community interaction and support.

The first general survey of The Tasmania Project (TTP1), open from 20 April – 10 May 2020 when full COVID-19 restrictions were in place in Tasmania, found that although 82% of Tasmanians stayed home and only went out for essential purposes, 11% reported to have broken the rules on social distancing to connect with family and friends, and 5% to do things they enjoyed before the pandemic. Most of them mentioned that some restrictions should be lifted to allow socialising (outdoors) with the community.



Photo: Harvest Launceston, by Chris Crerar, courtesy of Harvest Launceston.

TTP1 found that farmers' markets were visited most often by females (75%), and individuals aged between 46-50 years, living in urban areas (76%), with a bachelors' degree or higher (55%) and with an annual income higher than \$80,000 (48%). The recent [report](#) finds that the typical survey respondent at a farmers' market is a female between 25-34 years of age, with a university degree and a relatively high household income.

Interestingly, The Tasmania Project's second general survey (TTP2) that closed on 20 June found respondents had generally been satisfied over the last week with their homes (89% satisfied or very satisfied), life opportunities (76%), financial situation (72%), how safe they feel (89%), their health (75%), the area where they live (81%), their amount of free time (70%) and their life, all things considered (84%), however only 64% reported being satisfied with feeling part of their local community.

Where next?

Local farmers and producers are an important sector that can help reactivate the local economy during COVID-19 as long as Tasmanians are willing and able to purchase local food. Farmers' markets are important enablers to access local and fresh produce and more importantly are sustainable community builders. However, many Tasmanians do not interact in these markets or find them unaffordable. The social, economic, and wellbeing benefits of farmers' markets need to be inclusive and extend to the entire community. Arguably, those members of the community with lower education and poorer health (often associated with lower income levels) would benefit the most. With the appropriate government policies and support, farmers' markets could assist in the provision of fresh and highly nutritional food and food education to lower socio-economic sections of urban and regional societies.