



The Tasmania Project

Share your experience during COVID-19.

Photo: WendyWei from Pexels.

Tasmanians seeking more circular and sustainable food systems.

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The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated many emerging trends like online shopping, working from home, and distance education. The Tasmania Project Food Survey asked 1,170 Tasmanians about the food that they consume. Data suggests people are wasting less food and are sourcing more locally, to reduce 'food miles'.

These findings imply greater awareness of the need to transition to a more circular and sustainable food system, one where food is produced and consumed locally with minimal waste and with attention to soil health.

Key findings

- Nine out of every ten participants agreed they were wasting less food during the COVID-19 Pandemic.
- Eight out of every ten participants agreed it was important to buy food grown locally to reduce food miles.
- Three out of every ten participants agreed it was important to buy food that was organically or biodynamically certified.
- Almost half (48%) of younger Tasmanian participants (18-24 years) agreed it was important to buy organically or biodynamically certified produce.

Sustainable Food Systems are ones that are...

*"more **decentralized** and invite the **democratic participation** of community residents in their food systems; they encourage more **direct and authentic connections** between all parties in the food system, particularly between farmers and those who enjoy the fruits of their labour—consumers or eaters; they attempt to **recognise, respect and more adequately compensate the laborers** we often take for granted—farmworkers, food services workers, and laborers in food processing facilities for example; and they tend to be **place-based**, drawing on the unique attributes of a particular bio-region and its population to define and support themselves" (Feenstra 2002, p. 100).*



The Circular Food Economy. Source: <https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/explore/food-cities-the-circular-economy>

Perceptions of food waste

Tackling food waste is important economically, socially, and environmentally and reducing waste is a key objective of the circular economy. As the [Fight Food Waste CRC](#) notes, avoiding food loss and waste would save Australians \$20 billion a year, improve local and food security and mitigate climate change by reducing methane emissions from food diverted to landfill.

The Tasmania Project Food Survey participants were asked about the COVID-19 pandemic and to respond to the statement 'More food is wasted in my household'. Four-fifths (89%) of respondents disagreed with this statement, with little variation across gender (89% female, 88% male), political affiliation (89% Liberal, 87% ALP, 92% Greens) or employment status (89% employed, 84% unemployed).

Perceptions of local food

When done well, reducing the physical distance food travels can be an effective sustainability strategy because it trades-off declines in economic efficiency against gains in worker and community equity and environmental resilience.

The trade-off is captured in ideas like 'local food' and 'food miles'. Many surveys on 'local food' highlight two features: a large majority of consumers prefer their food to be sourced locally; however, what 'local' means has a variety of connotations.

Some consider 'local' to be an administrative region like a council region or a state; others have a specific distance in mind—50km, perhaps; still others believe it to involve some kind of direct purchaser-farmer transaction at the farm gate or a farmers' market.

We asked Tasmanians whether 'it is important to reduce the distance your food travels (i.e. food miles).' Overall, four-fifths of participants agreed it was important to reduce the distance food travelled and there were some interesting demographic differences.

For example, while 81% of females agreed it was important, only 72% of males did. Education was also a factor with 85% of university educated participants stating it was important compared to 61% of those whose highest level of education was high school.

Political identity was also important. While a sizeable majority (65%) of those affiliated with the Liberal Party thought it important to reduce the distance food travels, almost all those affiliated with the Greens did (91%), with ALP voters in between (79%).

Perceptions of organic and biodynamic certified food

Our third question focused on organic and biodynamic production methods. While there are differences between the two systems, both aim to build healthy soils without the use of artificial chemicals— that is, modern pesticides and herbicides designed to ensure success of monoculture production systems.

We asked Tasmanians to rate the importance of buying 'produce that is certified organic or biodynamic' with over one-third (35%) agreeing this was 'important' compared to 23% who did not.

There were some interesting group differences. For example, women considered it more important (38%) than men (28%); and Green voters considered it more important (48%) than liberal voters (20%), with ALP voters again in the middle (33%).

Another interesting finding was that almost half of our respondents, 46% of those aged 18-24 years, considered it important compared to 32% of those aged 25-44 years.

Where next?

Taken in conjunction with the other reports from The Tasmania Project on Tasmanian perceptions about food security (#15), food access and supply (#17), Tasmanian grown food (#18), growing food (#20) and buying local food from farmers' markets (#24), it is clear Tasmanians are developing a deep appreciation of food's inseparable economic, social and environmental dimensions.

Given the urgent and widely accepted need to transition to a more circular, just and sustainable economy, government should explore setting up appropriately constituted local food councils in each region. These could support local food hubs to enhance food security and promote local and sustainable food procurement for better dietary, health, and environmental outcomes.

Also, given that food production and consumption spans across the natural, health and social sciences and the humanities, there is an urgent need for a more transdisciplinary and integrated approach to teaching and researching Tasmania's food system.

References

Feenstra, Gail. 2002. 'Creating space for sustainable food systems: Lessons from the field.' *Agriculture and Human Values*, 19 (2), pp.99-106.