



Tropentag, September 17-19, 2013, Stuttgart-Hohenheim
“Agricultural development within the rural-urban continuum”

Driving Sustainable Consumption Determining Techniques that have Successfully Influenced Food Procurement Choices towards Sustainable Options

JULIANA DIXON

Agris Mundus, Food Chains and Development, Germany

Abstract

The current conventional agricultural supply chain is far from sustainable. It has dramatic externalities, of environmental, social and economic nature. Many EU countries support legislation designed to restrain these externalities but the US uses less regulation; allowing the consumer to ‘vote’ for the type of production they want through purchase choices. Consumers, while not agreeing with the practices and consequences of big agriculture, continue to support this system by purchasing the lowest priced item instead of the most sustainable one.

One solution is found in England: Incredible Edible Todmorden (IET). Operating on a triple platform of ‘Community, Education, and Business’, this group has accomplished significant results to localise their food chain and raise awareness of the impacts of our purchase choices.

This is a qualitative study using interviews with local consumers who have changed their spending and food consumption patterns because of the IET project. The interviews are designed to illuminate the key outreach and engagement factors that have created a turning point for consumers. Results will be evaluated for replication.

Target population characteristics:

1. IET leaders;
2. Restaurant buyers who are ‘middle men’. They have chosen to source locally but are not the final consumer;
3. Consumers who are now buying local food as a result of exposure to Incredible Edible who previously did not;
4. Those with no interest in local or sustainably grown food, or feel that it is a low priority.

If we are to promote sustainability, it must work for the people. Thus if regulation is not effective in the US and UK, perhaps consumers can be influenced to shift their purchase patterns to sustainable alternatives. This change, however, is difficult. Food choice is a complex system, shifted only through a series of turning points in the mind of the consumer. This study is designed to identify key influences used to affect these transitions.

When judged on the 1987 Brundtland Report it was found that Todmorden has indeed developed in a sustainable manner. Methodologies used to engage and influence consumers were widely varied, and context specific. The single overarching semantic theme was activists’ avoidance of branding terms such as ‘organic’ and ‘sustainable’. The overall engagement theme was providing learning through doing and community inclusion. When replication value was explored, all respondents unequivocally supported the Incredible edible methodology as appropriate and pertinent in a developed economy setting.

Keywords: Agriculture, consumer, development, sustainability, sustainable, urban agriculture