
Fresh City Impacts Project

Environmental, economic and social impacts of local food

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| Project Title: | Fresh City Impacts Project |
| Project Abbreviation: | 2013FreshCity |
| Start Date: | May 15th 2013 |
| End Date: | October 31st 2013 |
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Keywords: Local food impacts, food system analysis, greenhouse gas accounting, consumer survey

Theme and objective

The objective of this project is to identify and quantify the benefits of the enterprise Fresh City, which purchases and produces vegetables and fruits and distributes weekly food boxes to consumers. The project takes a systemic perspective to the food system and compares impacts between the Fresh City food chain and a conventional retail chain. In particular, producers were interviewed regarding their production and marketing practices, Fresh City's distribution hub was evaluated through staff interviews, the greenhouse gas balances of distribution were compared for the two food chains, and a customer survey characterized consumers and identified behavioural changes.

Results

The project identified benefits of Fresh City throughout the food chain. Fresh City supports production systems that rely on diversity both in cropping and marketing strategies. All suppliers of Fresh City were found to place great emphasis on environmental management practices. The Fresh City distribution system emits 3.8 times less greenhouse gases per food box than a comparable bundle bought at a conventional retailer, primarily because of their reliance on efficient distributors and short transportation distances. Consumers were found to shift towards a healthier diet with reduced meat intake, which has the additional benefit of reducing their environmental and greenhouse gas footprint. Cooking skills improved and customers increased their frequency of from-scratch cooking. Economically, Fresh City re-circulates consumer dollars more within the local economy than conventional retail systems: the Local Multiplier 3 was estimated at 2.4-2.8 for Fresh City, while the highest estimate for the conventional food chain is 1.7. This strengthens an alternative food chain, supports local input suppliers and promotes employment.