

Consumers' and producers' perceptions of local food in the north of the Netherlands

*Exploring the local food system by consumers' and producers' proximity
dimensions of local food*

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Abstract

There is a growing attention of media and consumers to local food. However, there is neither an exact definition nor meaning of what local food exactly entails; consequently, there are no regulations which limit the use of this term. Local food is frequently defined by a close geographical distance between producers and consumers. This master thesis explored the local food phenomenon in the north of the Netherlands from the perceptions of and behavior by producers and consumers. This was done by focusing on the three different domains of proximity: geographical proximity, relational proximity and values of proximity (e.g. quality, small-scale).

Within this master thesis, local food is seen from the concept of social embeddedness; all economic actions are embedded into a social world. Therefore, local food is not solely about an economic transaction between consumer and producer, the social interaction is equally important.

The local food producers within the north of the Netherlands are mainly small-scale businesses. While all producers involved with local food recognized the financial gain of this, they also produced local food because of personal motivations. For the producers local food was mainly about trust and the close relation with the consumer. While the consumers did acknowledge a closer relation between producer and consumer by buying local food, the consumers did not attach much value to a close relation with the producer. The consumers did think that local food entailed a high quality.

Within academic literature, local food is often related to the 'quality turn', where increased consumer awareness of food quality due to food related diseases results in a growing demand of alternative forms of food outside the conventional market. Although many consumers acknowledged the positive characteristics of local food, most of them did not purchased this on a regular basis. The main reason was due to the insufficient supply of local food within supermarkets. There seems to be a mismatch between supply of the producers and demand. Due to the small-scale of the local food producers, they do usually not sell their products within the bigger supermarkets. Therefore the distribution aspect, how to get the products from consumer to producer, is a recurring problem, acknowledged by consumers and producers.

Keywords: local food, motivations, perceptions, domains of proximity, social embeddedness.

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1. Introduction

"Increasing the role of local food systems is an answer to a clear expectation among EU citizens. It is also particularly important for farmers and for the diversity of EU agriculture. Via direct sales and closer contacts with consumers, EU farmers can add value to their products, boost their sales, and better understand the expectations of EU citizens with regard to food and food production methods. That's why we want to encourage farmers to develop local food systems and to discuss the best ways to increase the visibility of their products" (European Commission, 2013).

Local food received much attention by academics, journalists, consumers, politicians, and food retailers (Mount, 2012). As is indicated by the quote above, local food is frequently seen as having positive impacts for both consumers as producers/farmers. Although there is a so called 'buzz' about local food, there is no agreed definition on what local food actually means, neither is there a regulation or certification system which identifies local food. Various understandings of the local are used in academic literature and these resulted in a diverse landscape of meaning of the 'local' (Eriksen, 2013). The most common definition of local food referred to geographical distances, expressed in a range of kilometers (Feldmann and Hamm, 2015). However, local food is more than just a close geographical distance between consumer and producer. Other definitions of local food products are related to the production (e.g. organic) and distribution methods (Hand & Martinez, 2010).

To see local food solely as food from a certain geographical area is too narrow, because local food entails more than a close geographical proximity between consumer and producer. Therefore, instead of viewing the local as being defined by strict boundaries, this thesis uses a proximity approach and explores the local food system in the north of the Netherlands in domains of geographical proximity, relational proximity and values of proximity. In addition to the geographical distance (such as food miles), this approach examines local food in terms of relations (e.g. consumer-producer relations) and the attached characteristics of local food (e.g. high quality and organic). The concept of the proximity approach is further explained in the theoretical framework (Chapter 2). It is important to examine what two of the most important actors (consumers and producers) in the local food system identify as local and how they experience and value the local food system and related proximities in their area. Learning about the motivations of participants of the food system is important to examine how these participants view the local food system and describe their own participation.

Nevertheless, the focus on local and alternative food is not without critique. Awareness should be raised of the 'local food trap', whereby the local is uncritically acknowledged as good (Ilbery and Maye, 2010). The local trap occurs when local food is immediately seen as something positive, solely because it takes place in a certain geographical area. Holloway et al. (2007) for example warn for the risk of romanticizing the alternative and local food supply systems, whereby the alternatives are not as critically discussed as the conventional food supply systems. This local food trap can occur when local is confused with other

values, such as quality. Within this thesis, the concept of local food will be unraveled to examine to what extent consumers and producers attach meaning to local food and maybe romanticize this image.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to research the quality and rural development impact of local food and, consequently, only the perceptions of consumers and producers will be explored. Therefore, this master thesis will not necessarily value the local food system as something good, but instead tries to explain the current situation and perceptions of individual actors.

In addition to the particular definition of the local, there is also the problem that although local food receives much attention within the literature and regulations, the actual appearance of local food is still small. This makes the purpose of this thesis twofold: what do the consumers and producers associate with local food and what are the motivations and restrictions in participating in the local food market/system?

In the northern part of the Netherlands, attention on local food and short food supply chains has increased in the last years. There are farmers markets in urban and rural areas, grouped and individual farmer shops, and some regional quality labels. Moreover, the city of Groningen was declared 'capital of the taste' ('hoofdstad van de smaak') in 2011. However, while the ideas about farmers markets and labelling local food are often seen as having a positive impact on the surrounding area (Brown & Miller, 2008) there is much to be researched about the perceptions individual producers and consumers have of the local food system and what their behavior is regarding the consumption or production of local food. The following subchapters will describe the relevance of this master thesis in more detail.

1.1. Societal relevance

Even though local food is available within the north of the Netherlands, it is still a relatively small phenomenon. Learning about the view that producers and consumers have of local food is relevant to see where the chances and difficulties are for the local food system and whether the two groups have the same associations with regard to the term local. Definitions of the local can help to explain what consumers and producers demands are for the food system and to what extent demand and supply match with each other.

1.2. Scientific relevance

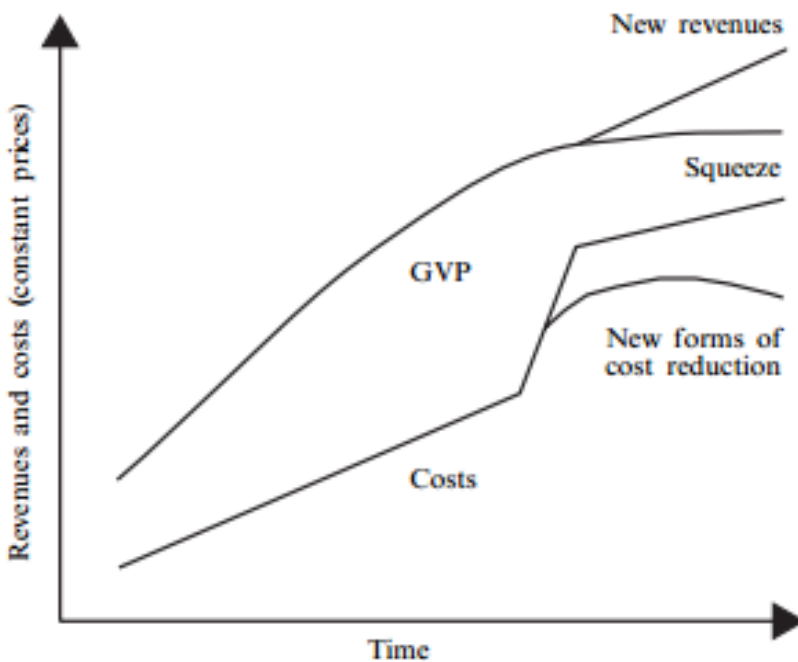
There is much research about local food networks in Europe, where collaborations between producers and consumers (such as farmers markets or regional specialty schemes) in different European countries are examined to explain the rural development impact (Fonte, 2008; Renting et al., 2003; Brown & Miller, 2008). As far as the author is aware, there is few (if any) research written which describes the local food system in terms of proximity from the view of consumers and producers. According to Eriksen (2013), local food is defined by researchers in three domains of proximity: geographical, relational, and values of proximity. However, there is a lack of knowledge on how the two main actors of the local food sector experience this proximity. Moreover, this research does not focus solely on producers who are member of a cooperation, but also looks at independent producers and their construction of 'local' food. The Netherlands is chosen because the Dutch agro-food economy is strongly industrialized and export oriented (OECD, 2008). Academic and policy research on alternative or local food tends to concentrate

on areas that did not developed industrial farming methods (O'Neill, 2014). Selfa and Quazi (2005) state that researchers need to keep refining both their investigations as well as their methodologies in order to reveal the nuances in meaning and purpose in the construction of local food systems.

1.3. Explanation of local food systems

The current food sector is shaped by continuing globalization, with increased levels of industrialization and standardization in the consumption and production of food. Especially in the USA and Western Europe, the food sector is characterized by an intensive and specialized agricultural system which is largely export-based and consists of large supply chains. However, at the same time, there is an increasing demand for natural and locally embedded foods (Murdoch et al., 2000). After the foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) in the UK and other Northern European countries, the food supply networks became increasingly criticized. It could be argued that an alternative food geography emerged due to various problems connected to the industrialization of food chains (Murdoch et al., 2000). As countermovement against the long supply chains and intensification in the agricultural sector, some groups strive for short food supply chains (SFSCs). Sometimes this means that the amount of intermediate parties decreases, while at other times it is about decreasing the geographical distance between production and consumption (Kneafsey et al. 2013).

Renting et al. (2003) explain the emergence of a new food system from a producers' perspective by underlining the existence of a price squeeze in the modernization approach to agriculture. This modernization approach is based upon the economic reasoning that farm income will be sustained by increasing the total production volume as well as improving the technical efficiency of production (Van der Ploeg et al., 2000). Renting et al. (2003) claim that this model was successful until the 20th century; afterwards the production volume for conventional producers could not be expanded anymore due to the saturation of the market and rising resistance against dumping of products on global markets. However, in addition to the inability to increase production value, the production costs did increase. Renting et al. explain this by the 'technological treadmill', which obliged farms to keep investing in new technologies to lower their production costs. Moreover, producers were obliged to new investments which originated from various new regulations, such as animal-welfare standards and environmental regulations. This can be defined as the 'regulatory treadmill'. These two simultaneous trends, stabilization of total product volume and increase of production costs, are creating a price squeeze, as can be seen in figure 1. With this price squeeze, the economic margins are decreasing (van der Ploeg et al., 2000). This price squeeze leads to new strategies outside the conventional market. New strategies can be diversifying agriculture into new activities (tourism, landscape management), or by for example increasing the added value on farm products, such as with home selling (Renting et al., 2003). Within this explanation, producing and/or selling or local food can be seen as a strategies adopted by producers to handle to price squeeze on the conventional market.



Note: GVP—gross value of production.

Figure 1: Price squeeze within agricultural development. Source: Renting et al. (2003)

1.4. Objective and research questions

The aim of this research is to increase the understanding of local food networks and the perceptions of two of the most important participants: consumers and producers. To assess the future progression of local food systems in the north of the Netherlands, it is important to know why and how producers sell their food on the local market (Martinez, et al. 2010). This master thesis will look at the associations and motivations consumers and producers have and to what extent the proximity dimensions play a role within this. Because of the lack of data on this topic, especially in the Netherlands and more specifically the north of the Netherlands, this research is mainly exploratory.

The main question of the thesis is: What are the consumers' and producers' main perceptions of local food within the north of the Netherlands and to what extent do proximity dimensions play a role within this?

1. To what extent do producers associate local food in terms of geographical, relational and values of proximity?
2. To what extent do consumers associate local food in terms of geographical, relational and values of proximity?
3. To what extent do the motivations to produce local food relate to the domains of proximity?
4. To what extent do the motivations to purchase local food relate to the domains of proximity?
5. What are the main barriers for producers to produce local food?
6. What are the main barriers for consumers to purchase local food?

To answer these research questions, the remainder of this thesis consists of six chapters: theoretical framework, methodology, results (producers and consumers), and conclusion. The results are divided into two parts: the results from the producers and the results from the consumers.

1.5. Institutional and research background

This subchapter will give provide insight into the background of local food in the Netherlands and provide a short description of the most important institutional background at different scales.

The Netherlands has a dense population rate and is highly urbanized; 85 percent of the population lives in urban areas. Due to the high urbanization rate of the Netherlands, rural areas are often closely situated to cities. Although there are no predominantly rural regions on a provincial level, the provinces situated in the north of the Netherlands are defined as intermediate provinces; areas which have a relative high degree of rurality and are not primarily urban. The agricultural sector within the Netherlands is highly export oriented; 75% of the agricultural products are exported (OECD, 2008).

However, although a relatively small share, there are also agricultural products sold locally. One way of selling local food is through direct selling, for example through farm shops. The percentage of firms with farm shops increased in nearly every Dutch province between 1999 and 2013 (see figure 2). The province of Limburg is the only province where the share of firms selling agricultural products at home decreased. The three Northern provinces (Drenthe, Friesland and Groningen) and Overijssel have the lowest share of farm shops. In the province of Groningen, the percentage increased from 2,29% (99 firms) in 1999 to 3,86% (124 firms) in 2013.

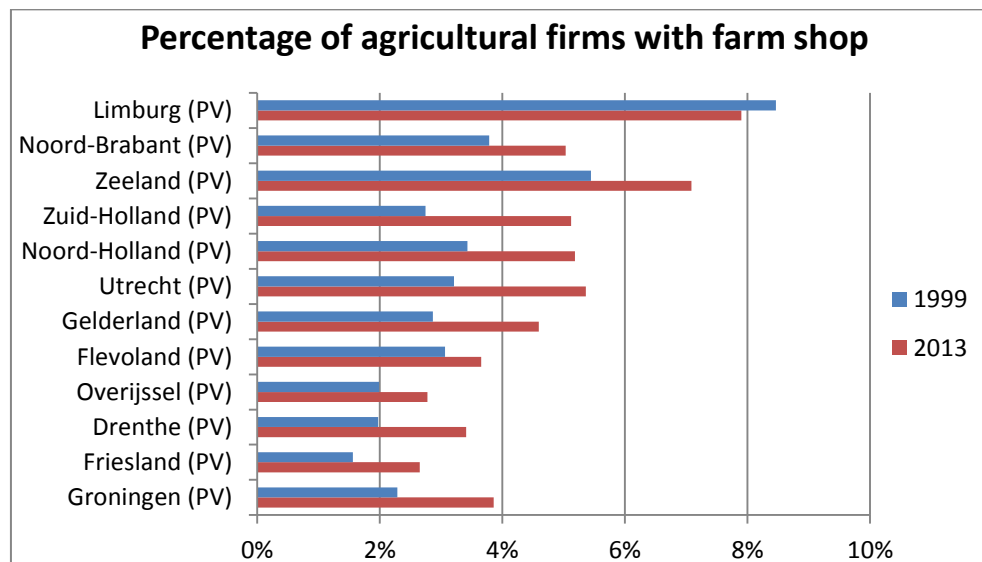


Figure 2: Percentage of agricultural firms with farm shops (1999-2013). Source: Statline (2015).

The locality of a product can be presented with the use of labels or certifications. With regards to the institutional background it is important to be aware that on a European level, there are European regulations associated to local food. Protected Designations of Origins (PDO) for foods is one of the most important regulations on a European level (for example the well-known brands such as Parma Ham and Roquefort Cheese). These will be discussed in more detail in chapter 2.6.

On the national level in the Netherlands, a national food strategy is lacking. The Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) states that the food networks are getting longer, more complex, and less transparent than in the past. Therefore, the WRR underlines the importance of a Dutch food strategy and advises a shift from agricultural policy to food policy (WRR, 2014). However, there are no national official labels which describe what local is.

Even though the Netherlands only have eight food products with a PDO/PGI certification, products with regional specialty labels ('streekproducten') do exist in the Netherlands. The difference with PDOs and PGIs and these specialty labels is that they are not controlled at the European level. The Dutch locality or regional specialty products get their certification when they comply with conditions set by regional organizations. This makes comparison to other countries or even national comparison challenging. Moreover, there are many local products in the Netherlands without labels.

Within the provinces of Groningen and Drenthe (in the north of the Netherlands), the regional food vision of Groningen-Assen is discussed. Its goal is to use food chains as an important mechanism to (re)connect city and countryside. The region Groningen-Assen claims that when the distance between food producer and consumer decreases, the consumer feels more connected with the product.

2. Theoretical framework

The local food phenomenon will be described using important concepts in the local food literature by the different domains of proximities. Local food systems are often seen as part of alternative food networks (AFNs) and short food supply chains (SFSCs) (Renting et al., 2003; Sonnino & Marsden, 2006). However, the concepts of AFNs, SFSCs, and local food systems (LFS) look similar and are often used interchangeable in some literature. “There is an increasing tendency to readily conflate terms such as ‘local’, ‘speciality’, ‘quality’, ‘alternative’ and ‘sustainable’, all part of some oppositional camp to agro-industrial production” (Ilbery and Maye, 2005, p.342). Confusing the term ‘local’ with ‘sustainable’ gives the risk of the before mentioned local food trap. It is therefore important to be clear what these concepts entail. However, there is not a singular accepted definition of these concepts. For example, the current literature gives various, and sometimes even conflicting, definitions of local food networks (Cox et al., 2008). This thesis will use the following definitions of the most common concepts in the local food literature (see table 1). The concepts will be discussed in more depth in the remaining part of this chapter.

Concepts	Meaning
Alternative food networks	Broad term which is used to describe the food system outside the conventional system. “AFNs are relatively new and rapidly expanding feature of the UK food economy, typified by the growth in sales of fair trade, organic, local, regional, and specialty foods” (Ilbery & Maye, 2010, p. 173). However, it is argued that the distinction between the conventional and alternative system is blurred (Kizos and Vakoufaris, 2011). Local food can be seen as being part of AFNs.
Short food supply chains	According to Renting, et al. (2003), short food supply chains are more specific than the term AFNs. It covers the actors who are “directly involved in the production, processing, distribution, and consumption of new food products” (p.394).
Local Food Systems	Here local can refer to the geographical area, to the degree of trust or to decentralized models of governance (FAAN, 2010). “The central idea of such systems is a commitment to social co-operation, local economic development, and close geographical and social relations between producers and consumers” (FAAN 2010, p.10).
Localization	“The process of embedding the economic and social interactions of a food system within a distinct, bounded place.”(Baker 2011, p. 9)
Localism	Localism is a counter-reaction to the “disempowering and homogenizing effects of globalization”

Table 1. Main concepts used within this master thesis

Often local food systems are viewed as being the opposite of the conventional and globalized food system. According to Morgan et al. (2006), it is useful to distinguish between two different agri-food systems: the conventional system, which is characterized by productivist agriculture where large firms produce, process and retail the food on a national and global scale, and the alternative system, which “tends to be associated with a more ecological approach to agriculture, with smaller companies

producing and retailing food for localized markets.” (Morgan et al. 2006, p. 2). However, Ilbery and Maye (2005) warn for the confusion of terms as ‘local’ with ‘speciality’, ‘quality’, ‘sustainable’ and ‘alternative’, as all being the opposites of the conventional food system. The difference between the local or alternative food system and the conventional food system is actually not always clear. “[...], not only are conventional supermarkets increasingly interested in selling local food, but they are already the largest retailers of organic food—two categories of food that are indelibly associated with the received image of the alternative sector (Morgan and Murdoch, 2000).” This implies that there is no strict boundary between the local and the conventional food system.

2.1. The concept of place in food systems

Although there are actors who would like to see the world as globalized, the importance of place in people’s lives is still large (Pascual-de-Sans, 2004). This is also the case with the food system. Climate, culture and tradition are all important in what is produced in a certain area. However, as Hinrichs & Lyson (2007) argue, the concept of place is complex and not just about geographical distance. “If we think of space in simple terms of distance and configuration, the notion of place incorporates more: the specificity of location, particular material forms, associated meanings, and values” (Hinrichs & Lyson 2007, p. 11). From a critical human geography viewpoint, concepts such as ‘place’ and ‘local’ are not ontologically given; they should be seen as social constructions (Harris, 2010). Moreover, while underlining the value of ‘local’ in local food systems, Harris (2010) argues that it is essential to realize that conventional food systems also function in places, “albeit often with shallower roots. Industrial agricultural production, corporate-owned food processing plants and supermarket distribution centers are all physically located in places and contribute to the meaning and experiences of those places through the social relations that sustain them” (p.366). Not only are places important in the food system, Feagan (2007) argues that food can assist in the valorization of place. This way, place is constructed through the local food system.

2.1.1. The importance of proximity within local food

Food can make a reference to different scales, for example, food can refer to the country, the province, a region, or a local place. Born and Purcell (2006) use the current scale theory in political and economic geography to stress the social construction of scale. “Local-scale food systems are equally likely to be just or unjust, sustainable or unsustainable, secure or insecure” (Born and Purcell, 2006, p. 195). Therefore, a scale is not something fixed and can be described in different ways. This means that when referring to the ‘local’ in ‘local food’, the local area is not fixed in advance and there is nothing inherent about it. This is why, in this thesis, the perceptions of consumers and producers of the local are researched, to better explore the social construction of local food.

There are many interpretations of the term local: “local food means different things to different people in different contexts” (Eriksen 2013, p.49). According to Martinez et al. (2010) “In addition to geographic proximity of producer and consumer, however, local food can also be defined in terms of social and supply chain characteristics” (p.3). This means that the local is not just about the geographical distance between the different actors in the food chain, but also about the relations between them. For example, Ostrom (2006) found in her case study that people in the US defined local food also in relational or qualitative terms. Fonte (2008) argues that local food can be seen according to two main perspectives:

the reconnecting perspective and the origin of food perspective. The reconnecting perspective aims at rebuilding the link among producers and consumers, whereas the origin of food perspective “repositions local food production in relation to values associated with territory, tradition and pre-industrial production practices” (p.202). Eriksen (2013) tried to reveal the complexity of the local food concept, by defining local food in three proximity domains. The first domain is geographical proximity, which is based upon the geographical distance between consumer and producer (such as food miles). The second domain is relational proximity, which refers to the relations between actors in the local food chain. The third domain is values of proximity, which describes the different positive values that are frequently associated with local food. These three domains of proximity are further described in table 2. The benefit of using these three domains of proximity is that it helps to examine the local food system beyond just the geographical proximity and recognizes the reconnection potential as well as the attached values to local food. This implies that (local) food entails more than just the transaction of food from producer to consumer, but that the social construction of local food and interaction between the actors is of great importance.

Domains of proximity	The domains of proximity refers to:
Geographical proximity	The explicit spatial/geographical locality, (e.g. area, community, place or geographical boundary) distance and/or radius (e.g. food miles), within which food is produced, retailed, consumed and/or distributed.
Relational proximity	The direct relations between local actors (e.g. such as producers, distributors, retailers and consumers) reconnected through alternative production and distribution practices such as farmers markets, farm shops, cooperatives, box schemes, food networks, etc.
Values of proximity	The different values (e.g. place of origin, traceability, authentic, freshness, quality, etc.) that different actors attribute to local food.

Table 2. local food as proximity. Source: Eriksen (2013)

2.2. Local as geographical proximity

Geographical proximity can take two forms: a distance measure and a (geographic or political) boundary measure. The first form uses a radius often between 50 and 400 miles to define the local. Whereas the second form uses a geographic or political boundary and often includes a region or provinces (Trivette, 2015). The geographical proximity depends on the characteristics of the region or country. Especially population densities are important in defining the distance of local, because local in a densely populated area means something else than local in a sparsely populated region (Martinez et al., 2010). For example, in the US the term local often refers to the state where it is produced. The U.S. Congress state in the 2008 Food, Conservation, and Energy Act (2008 Farm Act; cited in Martinez et al., 2010) that the total distance a product can be transported and still be considered a “locally or regionally produced agricultural food product is less than 400 miles from its origin, or within the State in which it is produced.” However, for the Netherlands it is unlikely that food transported 400 miles of its origin would be considered as local. This can be seen as ‘flexible localism’, where the meaning of local is fluid and depends on the ability to source supplies from a certain distance (Ilbery and Maye, 2005). Flexible localism and other kinds of localism are further described in chapter 2.5.

2.3. Relational proximity

The domain of relational proximity relates to the direct relations between local actors. This proximity domain will be further examined with the concepts of 'social embeddedness' and 'short food supply chains'.

2.3.1. Social embeddedness

Eriksen (2013) mentioned embeddedness as a possible value of proximity of local food. The relation between producers and consumers can be seen in the context of social embeddedness. 'Social embeddedness' is an often applied theoretical concept used to highlight the social component of economic action (Sonnino and Marsden, 2006). Social embeddedness implies "that economic behaviour is embedded in, and mediated by, a complex and extensive web of social relations. Social interaction may take the form of acknowledgement, attention, respect, friendship, or sociability, all of which can be subsumed within the concept of 'regard'" (Ilbery and Maye 2005, p.827). The notion of embeddedness is especially useful in understanding direct marketing initiatives such as farmers markets and farm shops. Ilbery and Maye (2005) argue that economic relations (e.g. prices) and social relations (e.g. trust and local links) are seen to be vital elements in the success of local food.

Within this concept, food transactions are seen as being re-embedded in place and community (Feagan, 2007). Socio-cultural concepts are seen as important within the local food system. "Trust, 'relation of regard', social interaction, and more comprehensive information are said to create the conditions for this relational food transaction environment" (Feagan 2007, p.28). Henrickson and Heffernan (2002) argue that local food processes can facilitate in reordering space and time by offering education on local customs and seasonality. "Food in a local system is rooted in a space that enables and constrains production and consumption through its own unique characteristics." (p. 363).

However, the appearance of social embeddedness in the local food system does not mean that this concept does not occur outside the conventional agricultural system. According to Hinrichs (2000), embeddedness should not be viewed "simply as a friendly antithesis to the market" (p. 296), but all transactions can have a degree of embeddedness. Nevertheless, social interaction can be vital to the success or failure for local food firms (Ilbery and Maye, 2005; Kirwan, 2006).

Besides social embeddedness, there is also the concept of territorial embeddedness, this concept is based upon "linking product to place, along the lines of more established European local food cultures, such as those of France and Italy" (Ilbery and Maye 2005, p.827). This master thesis uses the embeddedness concept to examine local food beyond the economic values.

2.3.2. Short food supply chains

Within the local food phenomenon, short food supply chains (SFSCs) are often used to describe the relation between producers and consumers. Food supply chains are important for the food to reach the consumer. SFSCs can be related to the domain of relational proximity, because they are based upon the interactions between consumers and producers and to a much lesser extent dependent on the geographical proximity. According to Renting et al. (2003), SFSCs can be divided into three different categories (see also figure 3):

1. Face-to-face SFSCs. SFSCs with direct interaction, such as farmers markets, roadside sales, and farm shops. This direct interaction does not have to happen within a certain geographical proximity, because they can also happen through mail orders. It is about the direction of interaction instead of the geographical distance.
2. Proximate SFSCs. This category is based on relations of proximity and goes beyond direct interaction. The proximate SFSCs is mostly based on spatial proximity, however, cultural proximity is also possible. It often involves cooperation between producers, where for example farm shops exchange products or a regional quality trademark is created to combine different products. Examples of this category are: farm show groups, consumer cooperatives and community supported agriculture. It often includes the intermediary actors who are active in the agro-food chain.
3. Extended SFSCs. In this category, products are sold outside the production region. These products can be sold on the national market, or even on the global market. According to Renting et al. (2003) the global networks can still be a short food supply chain, because “it is not the distance over which a product is transported that is critical, but the fact that it is embedded with value-laden information when it reaches the consumer, for example, printed on packaging or communicated at the point of retail” (p.400). Examples of products from extended SFSCs are Champagne wine and fair trade products.

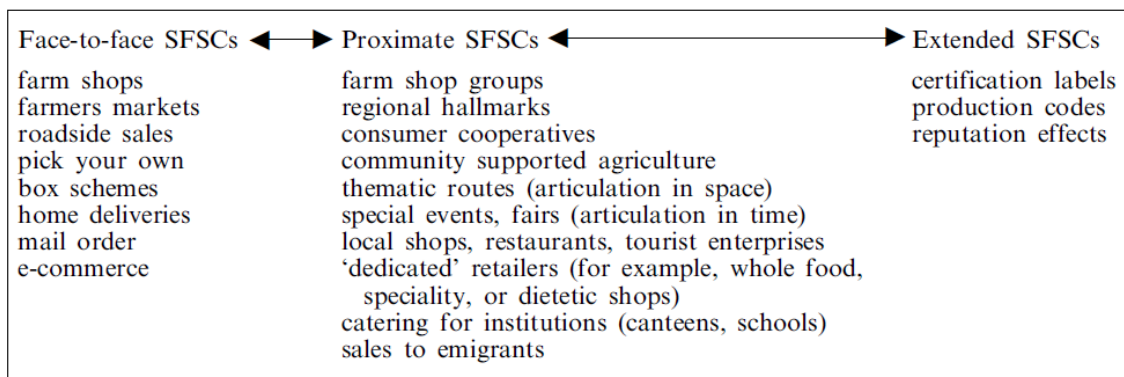


Figure 3. The three categories of short food supply chains (SFSCs): extending SFSCs in time and space. Source: Renting et al. (2003)

One way to sell local food is through direct selling methods. These direct selling methods are part of the face-to-face SFSCs mentioned above. These SFSCs offer direct interaction between producer and consumer and can, among others, take place on farmers markets or in farm shops. Farmers markets are often mentioned in the literature as alternative places outside the conventional market, where the physical and social distances between consumers and producers are decreased (Åsebø et al., 2007). Although farmers’ markets are often seen as places which cannot replace the supermarket visit for most people, it is argued that they can be used in cooperation with the supermarket to offer consumers fresh food that comes from their own surroundings (La Trobe, 2001). In their research about farmers markets in Norway, Åsebø et al. (2007) found that producers and consumers were more concerned about how food is produced than the location where it was produced. However, the Norwegian producers were

overall more interested in both production method and production location compared to the consumers, who were less concerned about the production location. Moreover, they argue that farmers saw the communication to the consumers as more important than that the customers experienced this. However, there is also critique against the farmers' market. They tend to aim at the middle-class consumer, which excludes less affluent citizens and increase social injustice (Hinrichs, 2000; Sonnino, 2013).

2.4. Values of proximity: quality turn

Often other concepts besides the physical products itself are associated with local food. This is part of the domain values of proximities, where for example quality is connected to local food and is seen by some authors as a response to the 'quality turn' (Feagan 2007; Goodman, 2003). The idea that local food is perceived as possessing a higher quality than conventional food is closely connected to the concepts of SFSCs and embeddedness (Ilbery & Maye, 2008). This quality turn is related to the reorganization of the EU agricultural programs and policies, which responded to the changing values associated with consumer doubts about the health and safety consequences of the intensive agriculture in Europe (Feagan, 2007). According to Goodman (2003), the quality turn is closely related to the re-spatializing of food, directed away from the industrial world. Just as it is with the concept of local in local food, the term quality is also not strictly defined. Quality is a socially constructed concept and "is characterized by continuous change, as people in different spatial and temporal settings perceive it differently" (Kizos & Vakouvaris 2010, p. 220). This means that the perception of what is seen as qualitative high products is not widely agreed upon. Even between European countries, quality definitions differ. Parrott et al. (2002) argue that there is a difference between food quality in south Europe and west Europe, where in the northern European countries, food quality is related to food safety and animal welfare, while in the southern European countries, food quality is more related to the geographical environment. Murdoch et al. (2000) argue that the turn to quality is founded on the food safety concerns and leads to an alternative geography of food production, because the quality production areas are often concentrated in areas that did not experience the industrial agriculture.

However, there is also critique in connecting the local with quality. As Winter (2003) states, to equate quality with local food production ignores the development of the defensive localism in the food consumption. The following subchapter will further describe food localism and the critical notions about it.

2.5. Localism and its critique

According to Harris (2010), alternative food activists are embedding food systems in local places to contrast it to the globalized conventional food system, which is seen as more homogenized than the diversity of local places. "Localism becomes a counter-hegemony to [the] globalization thesis, a call to action under the claim that the counter to global power is local power. In other words, if global is domination then in the local we must find freedom" (DuPuis & Goodman 2005, p. 361). Also Allen (2004) argues that localism is a counter-reaction to the "disempowering and homogenizing effects of globalization" (p.169).

However, some scholars such as Hinrichs (2003), question the use of the binary oppositions of local and global, where local is seen as ‘good’ and global is perceived as ‘bad’. The most commonly mentioned associations with the local and the global are summarized by Hinrichs (2003), as can be seen in figure 4. The reality is more complicated than this dichotomy; this may overvalue proximity and conceal the unclear social and environmental consequences. This can therefore be related to the before mentioned local food trap. Some scholars argue that this binary thinking between the local and the global can lead to a ‘defensive localism’ (Hinrichs, 2003; DuPuis and Goodman, 2005; Winter, 2003), which according to Hinrichs (2003) underlines the construction, relational positioning and the protection of the local. Defensive localism takes place when the turn to local is seen as more important than the turn to quality (Winter, 2003; Ilbery and Maye, 2005). In terms of proximity, this defensive localism is more related to the geographical proximity between consumer and producer than the values of proximity, such as a good product quality. Within defensive localism, local agricultural economies are seen as being threatened by the conventional (global) agri-businesses and politics; a reconnection between local consumers and producers is preferred to protect these local agricultural economies. The problem with defensive localism is that all activities which take place on a local scale are seen as more right and this can lead to depoliticizing localization strategies (Harris, 2010).

GLOBAL	LOCAL
Market economy	Moral economy
An economics of price	An economic sociology of quality
TNCs dominating	Independent artisan producers prevailing
Corporate profits	Community well-being
Intensification	Extensification
Large-scale production	Small-scale production
Industrial models	“Natural” models
Monoculture	Bio-diversity
Resource consumption and degradation	Resource protection and regeneration
Relations across distance	Relations of proximity
Commodities across space	Communities in place
Big structures	Voluntary actors
Technocratic rules	Democratic participation
Homogenization of foods	Regional palates

Figure 4. Attributes associated to the local and global. Source: Hinrichs (2003).

Contrary to defensive localism, Hinrichs (2003) encourages a ‘diversity-responsive localism’, where the local and the global are seen as interdependent concepts and where the concept of the local is not something static. This is largely similar to the view of Born and Purcell (2006), where they argue that the local should be understood as a means to reach an end instead of the end itself; this can be seen as ‘flexible localism’. This reflects the complex and hybrid nature of the local food system, where there is not a strict boundary between local/alternative and global/conventional. In itself, local does not mean anything. All food is local to some place, which does not have to mean it is better or worse than food

further away. Bellows and Hamm (2001) have a comparable opinion when they state, “a food system cannot operate in an independent local vacuum, but is integrated within global systems. It incorporates both ‘more alternative’ and ‘more conventional’ members and processes” (p. 281).

However, the critique of these scholars about ‘the local’ does not mean that the local should be unimportant in the food system. For instance, DuPuis and Goodman (2005, p. 364), argue for a more reflexive and just localism: “The purpose of our critique is not to deny the local as a powerful political force against the forces of globalization. Our real goal is to understand how to make localism into an effective social movement of resistance to globalism rather than a way for local elites to create protective territories for themselves. This requires letting go of a local that fetishizes emplacement as intrinsically more just. We have to move away from the idea that food systems become just by virtue of making them local and toward a conversation about how to make local food systems more just.”

2.6. Food labelling and (values of) proximity

While it is not necessary for local food to have labels or certifications, food labels could also be seen in relation to the proximity of food. Adding labels of origin to a product is one of the ways to link food to a certain place or region; this can be seen as food relocalization. Food labelling can influence the values of proximity; it can for example increase the traceability of the product (Ilbery and Kneafsey (2000). Moreover, labels can create cooperatives or networks, where the relational proximity is increased. Labels of origin are adding a geographical association to food. These labels can be seen as “the marketing and cultural branding of food through its association with place” (Feagan 2007, p.26). They are frequently used to re-embed the product with information about the production place and method. EU certifications such as Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographical Indication (PGIs) are often being researched (e.g. Kizos and Vakouvaris, 2011). The distribution of PDO and PGI labels across Europe vary greatly. Within the Netherlands, only ten producers have a PDO/PGI label (European Commission, 2015). However, labels of origin can also occur as regional specialty labels outside the EU certifications. According to Ilbery and Kneafsey (2000), regional specialty labels can increase the traceability of the product, which is important in giving the “consumer needs for assurance in terms of the health and safety aspects of SFPs and the tendency to place greater value on products which they can associate with a region, pays, terroir or method of production”(p.220). The geography in regional specialty foods is important in their status and success by valorizing the local area (Feagan, 2007).

Products with a PDO and PGI certification, as well as many regional specialty labels, can be sold on local and global markets. PDI and PDO labelling schemes are “examples where a sociospatial character is inscribed through a geography based on its place of production but not necessarily in terms of the geography of its consumer market” (Feagan 2007, p.34). According to Feagan, here the local is connected to the ‘extra-local’ and this makes the establishment of the boundaries more complicated. Maye and Ilbery (2007) argue that it is important to make a distinction between ‘local’ and ‘locality’ food. The former is used for products produced and consumed in a certain area, whereas the latter is used for food that is locally produced, but consumed further away, such as PDOs and PGIs. Watts et al. (2005) differentiate between strong and weak food networks; they see local food as a ‘stronger’ alternative to the conventional food system and locality food as a ‘weaker’ alternative to the conventional food system. Watts et al. (2005) categorize the locality foods/labelling schemes, as

'weaker' alternative/local food systems, because these products are often distributed through conventional supply chains. 'Stronger' systems are the products which are produced and consumed within the area, such as farm shops. Therefore, within this study, the focus is mainly on stronger alternative food systems, where producers are selling part of their produce directly to the consumer. However, some of the products which are directly sold to the consumer also contain regional specialty labels.

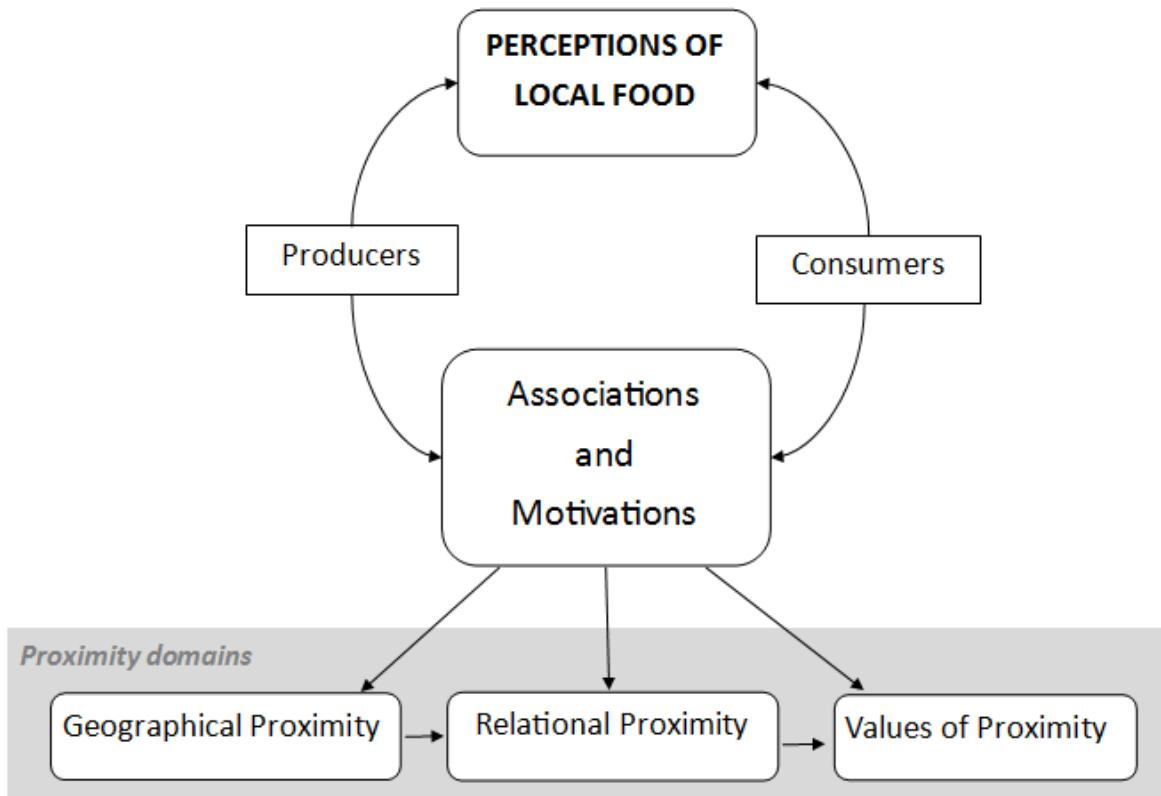


Figure 5: Conceptual model

This conceptual model (figure 5) shows that the perceptions of both consumers and producers are researched through their associations with and motivations of local food. The limitations and barriers (sub-questions 5 and 6) are not explicitly mentioned in the conceptual model since they are perceived as part of the motivation to (not) produce or consume local food. This research will explore to which of the three proximity domains their motivations and associations are connected as is visualized in the conceptual model. The three domains are also linked with each other in this model as the two arrows indicate. First, a close geographical proximity means that the physical distance between consumer and producer is small, e.g. a small amount of food miles. It could be expected that a close geographical proximity can also result in an increased relational proximity where there is more interaction between consumer and producer. Second, the literature suggests that local food is often related to a closer relationship between consumer and producer for example through the direct contact between those

actors on farmers markets or in farm shops. With a closer relational proximity, the interaction can result in a better understanding of the consumers with the producers and increase the values of proximity attached to local food. For example, face-to-face communication between producer and consumer, can lead to a higher perception of quality consumers have of local food.

3. Methodology

Within social sciences, Hennink et al. (2011) argue, that the two most often used paradigms are positivism and interpretivism. Because of the focus on perceptions and experiences, this research is guided by the interpretive paradigm. This paradigm identifies the reality as social constructs and is based upon the broader contexts of people's lives. Moreover, the interpretive paradigm sees the perceptions of people as subjective; this implies that there are various perspectives of reality instead of one reality as is the case with the positivist paradigm (Hennink et al., 2011).

Because of the lack of data on consumers' and producers' perceptions, associations and motivations on local food, especially in the Netherlands and more specifically the north of the Netherlands, this research is mainly exploratory. Moreover, a lack of previous research and theories that frame this topic, make it hard to formulate clear expectations. According to Babbie (2013) these are reasons to perform an explorative study. Moreover, Babbie (2013) explains that exploratory studies are often cross-sectional. This entails "a study based on observations representing a single point in time" (p.105). Due to pragmatic reasons, both the consumers' and producers' perceptions were explored in a 'snapshot' manner providing insight in associations and motivations in a certain point of time.

This thesis used a quantitative and qualitative method of data collection. This is not a mixed-method approach in the sense that quantitative and qualitative data were gathered on the same stakeholder group (O'Leary, 2010). However, qualitative data were used to gather producers' perceptions and quantitative data were used to gather consumers' perceptions, as will be explained below. This will help answer the research question because insight can be gathered into the both consumers' and producers' perceptions on local food, which, in the result section, will be framed using the proximity dimensions as explained in the conceptual model.

For the producers a qualitative research approach was used. According to Hennink et al. (2011), "qualitative research is an approach that allows you to examine people's experiences in detail, by using a specific set of research methods such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observation, content analysis, visual methods and life histories or biographies" (p. 8-9). This approach was chosen, because it allowed the researcher to identify issues from the perspective of the study participants and gave a better understanding of the interpretation the participants have of their behavior or object (Hennink et al., 2011); in this research it allowed the study participants to explain their perceptions of and experience with 'local food'.

While there are only a limited numbers of local food producers within the north of the Netherlands, there is a large and diverse group of consumers. Therefore, a quantitative approach was used to explore the general stance/perception of the consumers. A quantitative approach allows the researcher to find results which to a certain extent can be generalized (O'Leary, 2010) and thereby produce insight into a wide variety of associations and motivations for consumers to purchase local food and their perceptions of this phenomenon.

This chapter is divided in three parts: Subchapter 3.1 explains the interview data collection and analysis for producers; subchapter 3.2 explains the collection and analysis of consumer data using questionnaire surveys while subchapter 3.3 explains ethical issues and positionality.

3.1. Interviews (N=10)

To retrieve the perceptions of the producers, ten semi-structured interviews were conducted. Semi-structured interviews were chosen, because they are conversational and informal (Longhurst, 2010). Moreover, compared with questionnaire surveys, with the use of interviews more information could be retrieved from the producer. This way, the producer was not restricted to a particular set of possible answers, but could tell their personal experiences and follow-up questions could be asked. The producers were approached on farmers markets and through their websites. Afterwards, with the use of the snowball technique, new participants were retrieved through another producer. However, a limitation of asking participants to use their social network is that the new participants come from the same social context (Hennink et al., 2010). Therefore, to ensure enough variation between the producers, also producers who were unknown to the other participants were approached. All interviews took place at the participants' homes, because all participants lived on the same location where their farm/business was.

3.1.1. Participants

The ten producers who were interviewed were all located within a range of 50 kilometers of the city of Groningen. The ten producers were producing and selling a heterogeneous set of products. These included both processed as non-processed products, ranging from meat (beef, goat, sheep), fruit (including juices, chutneys and jams), various vegetables, cheese, and eggs. Not only various products were produced, also the production method differed; some of the producers used organic methods, others did not have the organic label, but were part of certain nature protection schemes, and some used no quality labels or certification schemes at all. Two of the producers used regional specialty labels. However, all producers were selling at least part of their products directly to the consumer. An overview of the producers' interviews can be seen in table 3.

Participant (male/female)	Province business	Kind of products	Date interview	Location of interview	Length of interview
P1 (F)	Groningen	Fruit and regional specialty labeled products	25-06-2015	Participants' home	1hr03
P2 (M)	Drenthe	Beef	03-07-2015	Participants' home	0hr56
P3 (F)	Groningen	Beef and milk*	07-07-2015	Participants' home	1hr28
P4 (M)	Groningen	Cheese	08-07-2015	Participants' home	1hr20
P5 (F)	Groningen	Goat meat	13-07-2015	Participants' home	0hr45
P6 (M)	Groningen	Goat and cow cheese	14-07-2015	Participants' home	0hr50
P7 (M)	Groningen	Eggs and chicken meat*	14-07-2015	Participants' home	1hr39
P8 (M)	Drenthe	Lambs	01-08-2015	Participants' home	0hr47
P9 (M)	Drenthe	Vegetables and regional specialty products	02-08-2015	Participants' home	1hr05
P10 (M)	Groningen	Fruit and vegetables	04-08-2015	Participants' home	0hr39

Table 3: Overview of the interviews with the local food producers. * Products which are not locally sold

3.1.2. Interview structure

The interview guide can be found in Appendix A. The duration of the interviews was approximately one hour. The first question of the semi-structured interviews was, as with the questionnaires, also an association question about local food ('what are the first three associations coming up when thinking about local food?'). This was done because "researchers often start with a question that participants are likely to feel comfortable answering" (Longhurst 2010, p.107).

The following topics were discussed:

1. Associations with local food
2. Background questions about the company
3. Market places of the products
4. Attitudes towards local food (Motivations and restrictions of producing/selling local food)
5. Customers
6. Impact of producing/selling local food

3.1.3. Data processing and analysis

All in-depth interviews were recorded with consent of the participants. After each interview, the recording was immediately transcribed. According to Hennink et al. (2011), transcribing interviews directly after they are performed has the advantage that important and/or unexpected issues could be explored to a further extent in succeeding interviews. Furthermore, information from the interview could result in recruitment of other participants, as was the case with this study. After completing and transcribing the in-depth interviews, the transcripts were coded with the use of Atlas.ti. According to Cope (2010, p.441), "coding helps the researcher to identify categories and patterns". Coding the transcripts in Atlas.ti was useful to organize the data and to retrieve an overview of the participants' motivations, associations and behavior. Moreover, coding made it possible to connect the data to the different proximity domains. This will help to answer subquestions 1, 3, and 5.

3.1.4. Reflection data quality interviews

This part will reflect on the quality of the data collected from the in-depth interviews. As mentioned before, the interview questions can be found in appendix A.

Due to the fact that interviews were held at participants' homes, because they all had farm shops, the interviews were sometimes interrupted by customers or family members. This reduced the quality of the recordings, and distracted the participant. This might, in some instances, have influenced the participants' response.

Coding every paragraph of the transcription gave the assurance that no given information was ignored. Due to the many concepts discussed by the participants, much data could be retrieved from the in-depth interviews. Due to the flexible character of the semi-structured interview guide, the researcher asked follow-up questions when needed. However, these follow-up questions did sometimes lead to topics irrelevant for this research. Moreover, during the analysis of the interview data, sometimes further elaboration of certain concepts would have been useful, but no follow-up questions were asked, while

this could have given more insight in for example the reasons behind producers' perception of local food production.

Due to only ten in-depth interviews it was difficult to generalize results or to explore differences between producers in different sectors (e.g. meat, vegetables, cheese). However, the ten interviews did provide a diverse and in-depth picture of producers' perceptions because they were very approachable and did not appear to hold back information due to sensitivity of certain topics or questions. Contrary, all interviewees were enthusiastic and many also gave samples of local products, which indicated that they were comfortable during the interview. The only topic that might have been sensitive was a question about income; however, in the design of the interview guide this was taken into account by asking the percentage of income that was retrieved from local food, rather than absolute numbers. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that the positionality of the researcher always influences the outcome of the interviews. This will be further explained in chapter 3.3. about ethical issues.

3.2. Surveys (N=114)

To examine the perceptions of consumers of local food, students' from the University of Groningen were asked to fill out a questionnaire. This research focusses on one population group (students); due to pragmatic reasons it was not possible to research the whole consumer population. Moreover, the city of Groningen consists of a large proportion of students and therefore it is interesting to see what the perception is of this group of consumers of local food. This group is highly educated and university students are likely to become part of the middle or higher class income groups; as indicated in the literature, middle and high income groups are more likely to be local food consumers (Hinrichs, 2000; Sonnino, 2013). Therefore, examining students might also give an insight into the local food perceptions of future consumers.

During the construction of the questionnaire, there was first a round of pilot-testing to find any flaws in the survey. Due to this pretesting, some of the questions were reformulated to avoid any confusion among the respondents. According to McLafferty (2010), pretesting is crucial to guarantee a successful questionnaire survey. The final version of the survey which the students filled out can be found in Appendix B.

To measure the attitudes of students of local food, respondents were asked to provide a rating on an ordinal scale for a set of statements about local food. The ordinal scale applied during this research is the Likert scale, which consists of a scale of various responses, where the outliers are two opposing positions. With the Likert scale questions there were always five responses possible. An odd number of responses ensured that there is a neutral option for the respondents to choose. This way, the respondents were not forced to choose a particular position when they did not have a strong opinion about it (McLafferty, 2010).

The students were asked questions about their association with the term 'local food', their definition of local, attitudes to local and organic food, purchasing behavior and awareness of local food markets.

1. Associations with local food
2. Definition of local

3. Attitudes towards (local) food
4. Purchasing behavior
5. Awareness of market places and labels

The first question of the questionnaire survey was an associational question. The respondents were asked to write down the first three associations coming up when thinking about local food. This question obliged the respondents to think about local food, without being influenced by the answer possibilities and remaining questions. This question was used to see whether the respondents associated local food with the proximity domains.

Because there is not a legal and widely acknowledge geographical boundary of the term ‘local food’, the respondents were asked to give their definition of what they still see as the local area in geographical terms. However, to be able to compare the surveys and perform statistical analyses, the rest of the survey continued with an explanation of ‘local food’ as food produced (and sold) in the northern provinces of the Netherlands (Drenthe, Groningen and Friesland).

3.2.1. Respondents

The surveys were handed out at various university locations in Groningen (e.g. the University of Groningen Library, University Library Zernike, and the library of Behavioral and Social Sciences). This was to ensure that a heterogeneous set of students from various faculties filled out the questionnaire. In table 4, the distribution of students and their faculties is shown. Moreover the choice to hand out the surveys, might result in a higher response rate, due to face-to-face interaction between researcher and participant, compared to for example an internet survey where the participants are not in direct contact with the researcher.

Faculty	Frequency	Percent
Spatial sciences	11	10,0
Economics and business	29	26,4
Law	12	10,9
Arts	20	18,2
Mathematics and Natural Sciences	11	10,0
Behavioral and Social Sciences	18	16,4
Medical Science	8	7,3
Total	109	99,1
Missing	1	,9
Total	110	100,0

Table 4 distribution of faculties of student respondent

3.2.2. Data processing and analysis

The paper questionnaire surveys were all transferred to SPSS in order to retrieve the descriptive statistics. The questionnaire contained one open question: ‘What are the first three things that come to your mind when you think about local food?’. The given answers of this question were categorized in order to make them comparable with each other. The analysis of the survey data was mainly descriptive.

The data was categorized into tables and figures, which created an overview of the consumers' perceptions.

Because of the explorative nature of this research, descriptive statistics were used to analyze the survey results because this approach provides an overview of the most important perceptions of the consumers with regards to local food. This will help answer subquestions 2, 4, and 6. Moreover, to answer question 2 'to what extent do consumers associate local food in terms of geographical, relational and values of proximity?', there was an open question included where the participants could give their first associations with the term local food and this gave opportunities to compare the associations with the answers given by the producers. There were no statistical regression made, because it was not about statistical significances; it was about to explore the view of a particular consumer group about local food and to explore the reasons behind their behavior.

3.2.3. Reflection data quality surveys

This part will reflect on the quality of the data collected by the surveys. The survey questions can be found in appendix B.

Even though the survey questions were pretested on a small amount of students and improved accordingly, the structure of the actual survey made some students skip questions. This was especially the case with question 6b 'what is the most important reason to purchase local food?'. Due to the placement of this question on top of the paper, 14 out of 85 students skipped this question and continued with question 7. Therefore, the amount of participants filling out the survey who at least seldom bought local food was not equal to the amount of students giving their most important motivation to purchase this. Therefore, it would have been better for the quality of the data that the surveys were filled out online; in that case the respondents were obliged to answer every question.

Furthermore, the length of the survey was rather long and in hindsight, some questions could be removed from the survey. For example questions about the kind of local products the students bought. Moreover, because of the early time of the data collection with the surveys in comparison to the whole research process, the survey questions were not yet in line with the notion of the three domains of proximity from Eriksen (2013). Therefore, there were no question asked whether geographical proximity is needed for food to be considered local food.

Moreover, due to the open nature of the first question 'What are the first three things what come to your mind when you think about local food?', the answers of the participants had to be merged, which resulted in a loss of detail of the given answers. However, merging the answers did make it possible to compare the answers with each other, which otherwise would not be possible.

3.3. Ethical issues

Within all research, the ethical issues have to be taken into consideration in order to prevent the participants and respondents from being harmed. The boundary of something being ethical is about the researcher's judgement of right and wrong. In other words, it links to the researcher's integrity during the research process (Hennink et al., 2011). Even though the concept of local food does in first instance

not seem a sensitive topic, here the ethical issues are mainly related to the way of data collection and the positionality of the researcher.

Two main ethical issues are that participation of the participants is voluntary and that confidentiality of the data should be guaranteed (Babbie, 2013). Also the information shared by participants but unrelated to the research has to be handled confidential (Hennink et al., 2011). This was important for both the in-depth interviews and for the surveys. Before the in-depth interviews took place, all participants received an informed consent form. Within this consent form the objective of the interview was explained, confidentiality was guaranteed and it was made clear that they could stop the interview at any time. Even though this could create some distance between the researcher and the interviewee, it is important to make the rights of the participants clear and to give them the opportunity to obtain information about the interview and research. Moreover, the assurance that participants' data was handled confidential and that their data was being anonymized, made the participants more willing to talk open about their business without being afraid for possible consequences. Furthermore, this helped to make the participants feel like they were taken seriously. The consent form can be found in appendix C. The surveys also started with an explanation about the research and about the survey. Moreover, as was the case with the interviews, it was made clear that there were no right or wrong answers, but that the opinion of the participant was of main importance. For the surveys, anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed. Moreover, the participants could quit at any moment.

As well already shortly mentioned before, the positionality of the researcher always has to be taken into account, because it can influence the research results. As Hennink et al. (2011) among others argue, positionality relates to the power relations between interviewer and interviewee/participant. They state that: "during the interviews, you become aware of the power relations between you and the interviewee, and how it may influence what the interviewee shares about their life and experiences." (p. 123). The positionality of the researcher – being a woman, young, student, academic – can influence the participants answers during the interview since most of them were for example non-academics and of an older age. However, the researcher's interest in local food that was shared before the interview created a comfortable atmosphere during the interviews in which no power relations seemed equal. Due to the rural background of the researcher, the participants seemed to be willing to openly talk about their experiences in the agricultural sector. All participants of the in-depth interviews were friendly and willing to answer all questions in large detail. Some difference was noticed between interviews with participants who were younger and female and older men. The former seemed to talk more easily in which the interview became more conversational compared to the latter that seemed to wait for the questions before they responded.

The positionality of the researcher was also important for the surveys. Because the survey participants were also all students of the University of Groningen, they seemed to be more willing to fill out the surveys. The fact that almost all approached students were willing to participate could have been related to the researcher's positionality: also student and therefore an 'insider'. This could have created goodwill to participate among other students.

4. Results - producers

This chapter will describe the results of the interviews with the producers. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the views of the producers about the local food phenomenon in the north of the Netherlands. An overview of the producers and their important characteristics regarding to their (short) supply chains and labels is seen below. All interviewed producers owned their company together with their partner.

Participant (M/F)	Kind of products	Quality label	Face-to-face SFSCs	Proximate SFSCs	Selling from colleagues?	Only local?
P1 (F)	Fruit and regional specialty products	Regional specialty label	Shop at home. Farmers markets.	Small nearby shops. Colleagues with farm shops.	Yes	No
P2 (M)	Beef	-	Shop at home.	Nearby shop.	Yes	Yes
P3 (F)	Beef and milk	Organic. The Dutch Rare Breed Survival Trust.	Shop at home.		No	No
P4 (M)	Cheese	Organic	Shop at home. Farmers market.	Delicatessen.	No	No
P5 (F)	Goat meat	-	Farmers market.	Delicatessen.	No	No
P6 (M)	Cheese and beef	Organic	Shop at home. Farmers markets.	Restaurants. Nearby supermarkets.	Yes	No
P7 (M)	Eggs and chicken meat	Organic. Regional specialty label	Shop at home. Farmers markets.	Hotels. Restaurants. Nearby supermarkets.	Yes	No
P8 (M)	Lamb meat	-	Shop at home.	Butchers.	No	No
P9 (M)	Vegetables and regional specialty products	Organic	Shop at home. Farmers markets.		No	No
P10 (M)	Fruit and vegetables	-	Shop at home.		Yes	No

Table 5: overview of the characteristics of the interviewed producers

4.1. Producer and local products

Almost all interviewed producers were trying to, at least partly, differentiate their products from the conventional market. All local meat producers used special or rare breeds, which were raised on the farm. One of the producers was member of the label 'The Dutch Rare Breed Survival Trust' ('Zeldzame Huisdierrassen'). This label aims to stimulate the commercial use of rare and authentic Dutch breeds. The uniqueness of the breed and its quality can be used to create niche markets (The Dutch Rare Breed Survival Trust, 2015). By using different breeds of animals, the producers could offer another kind of product which is not available on regular markets. This way, they could focus more on quality and focus

less on price competition. This was especially important due to the small-scale size of the firms. The importance of differentiation is exemplified by the following quote:

“Furthermore, we also have a part with meat chicks, however, I cannot differentiate with this. I purposely do not sell the chicks myself, because I am not able to differentiate.” (P8)

P8, is a producer of lamb meat, but also breeds meat chickens for the conventional market. He did not see himself as able to sell the chicken meat to the consumer, because they are just regular chickens which were also available in the supermarket. This means that differentiation is important for the choice of products and shows a hybrid world of conventional markets and local markets. The same was the case with the raw milk cheese producers. These cheese producers did not differentiate by using special breeds, but by production method. Here, the cheeses were made with unpasteurized milk. With fruit and vegetables, it can be seen as more difficult to differentiate these products. However, one producer sold rare or uncommon vegetables. Another method is to process the fruit and vegetables into juices, conserves or other processed products. Moreover, as important is the experience the producers are offering the customers. To distinguish from colleagues, they sell more than just the product. This can be done by letting the customers pick the fruit and vegetables themselves or offering other activities. The following quote illustrates this:

“People who buy local food are doing that from a certain emotion. They are coming here at the farm and have a certain experience. We do not just sell locally produced food, but we are selling a bit of emotion, the whole experience around it. You have to make sure that your yard looks good and you have to offer some animals they can pet. That is the piece of experience we can give to them.” (P7)

The above quote illustrates that buying local food through direct food supply chains is not solely about the product itself, but the whole experience around it is perhaps equally important. P7 used the emotion and experience consumers are valuing to attract customers.

4.2. Producers’ associations with local food

The following section will describe the associations producers have with local food and what they think local in local food entails. The different associations could be categorized into three different proximity domains as found by Eriksen (2013). Table 6 shows the associations of local food given by the producers. The first domain of proximity, what Eriksen called the geographical proximity, is most often mentioned as the first association with local food from the producers’ perspective. Recurring was the association ‘food from the region’, where the producers were often vague about what the region exactly entailed. Moreover, the geographical proximity domain was frequently combined by values of proximity. When producers referred to values of proximity, these values (such as fresh, honest and unique) were always positive values attached to the local food concept. Some producers mentioned relational proximity associations with local food; these were related to the shorter food supply chain and the direct contact between producer and consumer.

Geographical proximity (N=14)	Relational proximity (N=4)	Values of proximity (N=10)
Food produced in the region (N=5)	Short supply chain (N=2)	Environmental friendlier
Limited food miles (N=2)	Direct from producer to consumer	Emotion
Food produced in the Netherlands (N=2)	Producer and consumer get acquainted	High quality
Food from own surroundings (N=2)		Unique, not available in the supermarket
Food belonging to Groningen		Fresh
Local scale		Produced in an animal welfare friendly and healthy way
Food from own soil		Honest
		Honest and sustainable produced
		Does not have to be organic, but you often think about it
		Small-scale

Table 6: Producers' associations of local food in terms of proximity dimensions

Moreover, different geographical proximity domains were also mentioned. P10, a fruit and vegetables producer mentioned three different spatial localities: the surroundings of the farm, the province of Groningen, and the Netherlands.

“With local food, I think about food which is produced in the surroundings of the farm. There is food which is typical for Groningen, although perhaps you can also see the Netherlands as local. I think if it is from the Netherlands that is already a strong point and products which belong to the area.” (P10)

This quote shows the difficult nature of the term local; even when producers define local food solely in terms of geographical proximity, there is no fixed area what is defined as local.

4.3. Geographical proximity of local food

The interviewees brought up many different definitions of the local area. There was no agreed definition of what the local area should be. Whereas one producer mentioned the province of Groningen as local, others did not give a bordered definition. Some producers were not entirely sure what local meant, this was explained by P9:

P9: Yes that is a good one. People who are coming here, that is of course local. However, you can doubt if somebody is 30 kilometers from here celebrating its holiday, if it is still local. I do not know that. If I go to the farmers market in Groningen, that is a 40 kilometer drive. There (on the farmers market), we use a range of 50 kilometers. I think that is fair. It is difficult to say what is local. A region is a region.

In the above quote it is visible that there even for one individual, there is no fixed definition of the local. P9 differentiated in who the consumer is: a resident or a tourist. Often their definition was linked to the area where most of the customers came from while visiting the farm shop. Moreover, one of the producers also mentioned part of Germany as being local:

P3: "90% of my customers come from 15 km around me. [...] If I should define local, it is also the corner of northern Germany nearby Groningen. Local is not just within the Netherlands; it does not stop at the border."

In first instance, P3 related the local to the place of the consumer and referred to a geographical distance in defining the local area. However, instead of using a fixed distance of the local, she later extended the definition by defining that the local crosses administrative boundaries.

In addition to the variations in definitions, not everybody agreed with the term local.

P4: "Local regional. For me local is too limited. I prefer the term regional. Then you can say: draw a circle of 100km or 500km around your company. That is for somebody from the city different than for somebody who is busy with food production."

P4, favored to term regional over local, because he thought local was too limited. Moreover, he distinguished between urban residents and rural food producers.

None of the producers' perceptions of the local could be clearly linked to the defensive localism, as was criticized by Hinrichs (2003). Although the farmers market of Groningen uses a strict boundary of 50 kilometers when defining the local, this definition was generally not adopted by the producers. Some of the producers used a more flexible definition of the local. For example, one producer sold in their farm shop products from the local area, which originally entailed the province of Groningen, unless it would not be available within this region. This can be related to the concept of flexible localism described by Ilbery and Maye (2005), where the definition of local depends on the context and the availability of supplies.

4.3.1. Importance of geographical proximity

While the producers associated local food with a closer geographical proximity, not everybody saw this as an important motivation to produce local food. For one producer, decreasing the geographical distance with the consumer was important to limit the amount of food miles. This is an environmental motivation behind selling local food. Three producers mentioned their motivation to produce local food was related to using what is available in the area. So instead of importing food, they thought it was important to produce and sell the food within the region. However, while in general the producers saw it positively that the geographical distance between producer and consumer was decreased, they did not sell their entire production volume within the local area.

4.4. Relational proximity

4.4.1. Producer-consumer contact

The clearest example of relational proximity is the contact between consumer and producer. All producers valued the relation with the consumers positively. The contact with the consumer was often mentioned by the producers as a reason to produce for the local market. As one producer puts it, who mainly sold vegetables:

“... I like the contact between the producer and consumer. It is nice to tell things, how things go, where they are from, how it is taken care of. I would like to convey that information.”
(P9)

This implies that local food is not just about selling the product, but also about delivering information about the product and production process to the consumer. The contact with the consumer is valued by the producer. Although there is close personal contact between producer and consumer, this does not mean that they are enough familiar with each other that they know their names. This can be seen in the following quote:

“I know my customers personally, but I have no idea what their names are. You are greeting each other, but never introduce yourself. Sometimes customers have nicknames and with others I know exactly what they want. Personal contact with local products is really important. You can tell where the products came from. Especially young people think this is important. This is also why it is important that you are selling the products yourself on the Ommelander market. It does not work with a stranger” (P1).

Personal contact is seen as important by the producer to convey information about the origin of the product. This is in line with the concept of social embeddedness, where economic transactions are situated within social interactions (Sonnino and Marsden, 2006).

The producers did not only enjoy the contact with the consumer, but this made them also feel more responsible for the quality of the products they delivered. This is illustrated with the following quote:

“I think selling local is really important. Regarding to the meat, I think it is a good motivation to stand 100% behind your product. You are feeling responsible due to the contact with the customer.” (P3)

4.4.2. Producer-producer contact

In addition to the contact with the consumer, the producers also had contact with each other and other suppliers. This took place through formal/registered collaborations (farm shop groups, farmers markets) or informal collaborations (exchange of products in farm shops or exchanging information).

Interviewer: How important is it to have good contact with other producers?

“That is really important; you have to maintain a good relationship with your suppliers. I call them suppliers, but they are just colleagues who you work with to deliver a good product for

the market. The relationship has to be incredibly well. You have to keep trusting each other and tell each other what works with the consumer, what they appreciate and what they do not appreciate.” (P2)

The above quote implies that trust and communication with the suppliers/colleagues is extremely important in marketing the product.

“I think I have a good relationship with my colleagues. There is an organic meat farmer near the city, whom I know for years. When I started, I told him: I am also going to sell meat. We are not selling the same kind of meat, but we are relatively closely located. So I told them, but they reacted really well.” (P4)

Some producers thought it was necessary to know the colleagues before selling their products in the farm shop. This was also the case with P7, the egg producer:

“We want to know all producers where we sell the products from. Or at least, we want to know the story behind the company. That is also really important for the consumer, they are asking us: ‘where does this come from? Who produces it?’ Often we have information flyers in the shop, or we are referring them to the website” (P7)

For this producer it was important to get to know the colleagues, to know that the story behind the company was good and to communicate this to the consumer.

Moreover, relational proximity could also be increased by the formal collaborations, such as the ‘Foundation Regional Specialty Product Groningen’ (‘Stichting Streekproduct Groningen’). This foundation is a partnership between a few initiatives that were founded 10-15 years ago. The foundation exists since three years, especially to take care of the marketing aspect and distribution of local products.

“It is nice that all producers are distributing their products everywhere, but we are all driving behind each other when delivering the products. So it is a good idea to combine that. The only disadvantage is that you lose part of your margin, because the one distributing your products also has to earn an income, but you are saving on travel costs and time. For us, that was a reason to hire a distributor.” (P7).

However, some of the producers refused to sell products from colleagues because they would be unsure if the quality was good enough. This is illustrated by the next quote from an organic meat producer:

“I rather not want other people to sell my products from the same reasons as I do not want to sell products from other producers. I know exactly how the process went and what the quality is of our own products. Besides that, my margin is the highest with my own products. [...] I strongly believe in the direct contact between the producer and the consumer and that does not happen anymore in that case. Because it is not the producer anymore who helps the customer, but someone who works for the producer. Of course, many people can sell products, so that does not really make sense. And if I want to become bigger, then I have to

work with other people, because you cannot do everything by yourself. But I do not aim for become so big.” (P3)

4.5. Values of proximity

As also mentioned in the theoretical framework of the master thesis, the values of proximity are closely related to the quality turn. When referring to the quality of their product, the interviewed producers often mentioned their products as being the opposite of the supermarket products.

“We think that consumers deserve to eat a good piece of meat. Sometimes you hear the most bizarre stories; then they are going to the supermarket for a cheap piece of meat (‘kiloknaller’) and it turns out to be impossible to cook it well. Or they buy a steak, but the sole of my shoes are better to cut. If you manage to let those people purchase your meat, then I see that as an accomplishment.” (P2)

This implies that their product quality is much better than the ones available in the supermarket. Most interviewed producers dissociated themselves from ‘supermarket food’. This is also where the small-scale aspect comes into account.

Some of the producers were not willing to sell their products within supermarkets. One of the reasons not to sell products in the supermarket was that within the supermarket it was not clear anymore where the product came from. One producer explicitly wanted to sell his meat small-scale and from other farms. He only desired people selling it who appreciated his product and could tell where it came from. Some of the producers saw themselves as opposites of producers selling to the supermarket, so in this regard one could speak of ‘alternatives’ to the conventional market. Besides the power position of the supermarket, also consumers’ negative associations of ‘food from the supermarket’ could deliver customers, by the preference of the consumer for other products than the ones in the supermarket. This is illustrated by the next quote:

“Horsemeat scandals sometimes provide me a new customer. They contribute a little bit. However, I believe that equally important is that people say: I do not like the meat from the supermarket.” (P3)

This can again be seen as an example of a kind of dichotomy of product qualities as viewed by the producer: products from the supermarket and their products/products from small-scale producers. When talking about quality of the products, it was often mentioned what it was not: a supermarket product.

“I think my customers like the taste of farmers cheese and also chose consciously for small-scale, environmental friendly and organic.” (P6)

4.5.1. Place of origin

Some of the producers referred to the place of origin of the product while selling the product. The producers who referred to the place of origin of the product, often referred to different scales: the name of the village or hamlet, the region, or the province of Groningen. If they referred to the locality of the

product, this was done to increase the traceability of the product for the consumer. One of the producers put the name of the region on his cheeses to get the cheeses out of the anonymity. Two producers (cheese and potatoes) did not refer to a specific geographical locality, but made a reference to the soil: the clay.

Nevertheless, not all producers were positive about referring to the place of origin. For example, P4 (producer of raw milk cheese) mentions the place of production in the logo, but does not think it plays a crucial role.

“The place of production is mentioned in the logo. Personally, I do not think this is of great importance. There is also a cheese producer in Tsjuchum and they call themselves Tsjuchummer cheese, but do you really buy this in Appingedam? I do not know where you are from, but imagine that they have Tjuchummer cheese on the market, do you want to buy this? The direct place does not mean that much. You can better make the consumer more familiar with your product by telling a good story and giving a good folder to new customers. This way they can realize: hey this is a company which makes me feel good in the way it produces. That tells much more than when the farm would be in Pekela, in Appingedam or Tsjuchum. It does not really matter.” (P4)

This implies that the place of origin does not have an added value for all local food producers. The geographical proximity was for this producer not crucial, but it was more important to communicate the story behind the product.

Another producer used different boxes for his eggs, depending on whether they were sold within or outside the province of Groningen. For example, when his products were being sold in the local supermarket, they used the boxes with the label that said it came from Groningen. However, if the eggs were sent to the province of Friesland, the standard boxes were used. From the producer’s answers, it seems that it is not the exact place that is most important, but that it should be clear for the consumer where it is produced. This increases the traceability. For this particular producer, the reference to the place of production became less important when the product was sold further away.

4.6. Farmers market and proximity

Not only differentiation of the product was common, also market places outside the conventional market were searched. All interviewees sold part of their produce in the surrounding area and directly to the consumer: the face-to-face SFSCs, as identified by Renting et al. (2003). Direct selling happened through standing on a farmers market or a shop at home. Other distribution channels were restaurants, delicatessen and (small) supermarkets/groceries. Also, some farm shops exchanged products with each other; this can be classified as proximate SFSCs (Renting et al. 2003). According to the proximity domains of Eriksen, the farmers market relates to the relational proximity domain of local food, because the farmers market can be seen as a place of direct interaction between consumer and producer. Within the province of Groningen, there are four farmers markets. One is located within the city of Groningen: the Ommelander Markt, while the other three markets are in villages of the province (Leens, Leek, and Middelstum). The four farmers markets were organized once a month, all on a different Saturday of the

month. The Groninger farmers markets are offering a range of fresh and processed products. Some of the products contain a regional specialty label or are organically produced. However, having a regional specialty or organic label is not obliged. The Ommelander Markt in the city of Groningen requires that the food is produced within a range of 50 kilometers of the city of Groningen. This means that producers from the north of Drenthe can also sell their products here. Five of the interviewed producers were selling their products on farmers markets. One producer mentioned as main motivation to sell on the farmers market:

“To have the sales better under control. Because if you are entirely dependent on trading, you are also vulnerable. If your cheese is not bought, for one way or another, you are staying behind with stocks. You do not want this to happen.”

This shows the importance of farmers market for increasing their sales and evading overproduction.

Another often mentioned reason to be on the farmers market is advertisement. This happens through the personal interaction taking place on the farmers market.

“What we are doing, if we are standing on the farmers markets, is advertisement. This way you get to meet people. [...] The profit is also important, but you have to show your face. You have to leave the farm and go into the city.” (P4).

This advertisement aspect is a good example of the importance of the farmers market in (re)connecting consumer and producer and therefore increasing the relational proximity.

While the farmers markets gain much attention in the academic literature, Watts et al. (2005) mention them as stronger alternative food systems, most of the interviewed producers were sceptic about the value of these markets. Especially time was seen as a restricting factor for the producers to sell on these farmers market. A repeated argument for the producers against selling on the farmers market was that they always took place on a Saturday, while this was also an important day to work at the farm or be available in the shop. While for some producers, the personal interaction with the consumer is a reason to stand on the farmers market, for others this is a restriction to be on the farmers market, because therefore they cannot hire another employee. The lack of time is illustrated by P7:

“It is a shortage of time. The farmers markets are always on a Saturday or Sunday, but our shop is also open those days. This means I have to hire people and that will cost me money. During the summer days, I am constantly being called if I am willing to stand on a market. It costs a lot of time and energy. You have to purchase extra, hire an extra employee. Actually, you cannot have the employee standing on the market, because you have to do it yourself. Afterwards you have to take everything home again and pay for the stall. If you calculate how much income you have left, that is just too low. You will earn 40-50 euros. It is just not worth it.” (P7)

The need for relational proximity for selling local food on a farmers market can therefore also be seen as a restriction for the producers.

Most producers felt that it was vital that they had to be the ones selling the products directly to the consumer, for instance on the farmers market, in order to provide the information about the product that consumers were believed to be looking for.

Related to the time-consuming characteristic of the market, is the lack of profit. This was related to the high costs of standing on the market and not enough customers buying their products, as could be also seen in the quote above. However, one producer stated that it also depends on the kind of product. This is in line with the research of Stratford farmers markets from Holloway and Kneafsey (2000), who found that farmers' markets favor some products over others.

“For me, the Ommelander market does not give enough profit. However, if I have fresh products such as cherries or gooseberries, these specific products, then it functions well and I will earn my stallage back easily. However, the more preservable products are more difficult to sell.”(P1)

4.7. Relation with conventional market

While the interviewed producers used differentiation to sell their products locally, they were often still involved with the conventional markets or longer supply chains. Frequently, some of the stock was sold to wholesalers who distributed the products around the Netherlands. A frequent mentioned reason to sell also to wholesalers was that they produced too much to sell everything by themselves. Morris and Buller (2003) explain this connection by pointing out that the local food sector is never a closed system and that producers do not solely produce for the local area. However, for some of the producers, the traceability of the product was decreased by getting involved in the longer supply chains. The following quote illustrates this:

“Some of the cheese goes to the wholesaler, who distributes it to different selling points, supermarkets and groceries. I do not know exactly where it will go. We deliver to the wholesaler, but then we do not know exactly where the distribution takes places. Sometimes I know it, but other times I do not.” (P6)

The firms of the producers were always influenced by what happened on conventional markets. Even though producers often sold locally to be able to determine their own prices, the prices of the products were still dependent on the global and market prices. This can again be explained by Morris and Buller(2003) notion that the local food sector is never a closed system.

The concept of power was reoccurring during the interviews, especially the power in regard to the bigger supermarkets. For P8, the power position of the supermarket was one of the reasons to shorten the food supply chain and start selling the products himself.

“The supermarket dictates the producer, I am not fond of that. The supermarket has the power, it dictates what there has to be. In my opinion, it has a power position which is not fair. So I am glad that I have a small supply chain for my own which gives me enough profit.”
(P8)

4.8. Regional specialty labels

The place of production can also be made clear by the use of regional specialty labels. As was mentioned in the theoretical framework, labels can influence the values of proximity; for example the traceability of the product (Ilbery and Maye, 2000) or the perceived quality. Within the province of Groningen there are the regional specialty labels Gegarandeerd Groningen and Oet Grunn, which are both part of Stichting Streekproducten Groningen. Only the label Gegarandeerd Groningen is an official regional specialty product according to national standards. The province of Drenthe has the regional specialty label DrentsGoed. The producers were asked whether they were member of a regional specialty label and what the reasons were for participating in the programs.

Reasons to participate:

- We expected to sell more products. (P1, member)
- Advertisement, for the consumer the label could be important. (P5, no member)
- To offer more clarity to the consumer. (P7, member)

Reasons to not participate:

- I do not produce the right products. (p2, no member)
- I want to stay independent and it does not work with our vegetables. (10, no member)
- I never thought about it. They never contacted me. I also think I am too small for it and I can already sell my products well enough. (P3, no member)
- It has no added value. (P4, no member)
- The costs to participate are too high. (P5, no member)

The initial reasons to participate do not always appear to be the reality. For example: P1 is a producer with fruit and regional specialty products and for ten years she has been producing products for the regional specialty label Gegarandeerd Groningen. However, she is really skeptic as well about the importance of the label and believes that the contact between consumer and producer is more important. Although she recognizes that maybe outside the province of Groningen it could add some value. This is illustrated by the following quote:

“Ten years ago, when we started producing for the regional specialty label Gegarandeerd Groningen, we assumed that the consumer would see this as an added value. However, while selling on the farmers markets we noticed that the consumer does not care about the regional specialty label. They do not trust the food more because of the label. The added value is that you produce the food yourself. If you can explain as a producer how the product is produced and where, that is most important. Especially because of the hype around fresh and healthy food. That is more important than the label. The consumer sometimes believes it

is more important that it is organically produced, than if there is a regional specialty label on it.” (P1, fruit orchard and regional specialty food)

Another producer who is a member of the regional specialty label (Oet Grunn'n) and also sells regional specialty products from colleagues is also doubtful about the importance of the quality labels. Although, the importance of this label is seen as more important by the producers when selling the products outside the province.

Interviewer: Does the regional specialty label matter?

P7: “No nothing. We would really like it, but no one looks at it. Maybe it is because of the proliferation of quality labels. It is a different story when people take the products to somewhere else in the country. Then people will look at the quality label. Outside the province of Groningen, the quality label is important. Or tourists want a product with a sticker on it. However, purely for the local consumer, the label is not important. What the consumer think is important, is that it is produced locally or in the area. [...] on the other side, everybody can say that it is locally produced, but who will guarantee this? A label can guarantee it. However, you can fool a consumer once, but they will not come back anymore. If a consumer is critical and will look on the internet, it has to be true. You always have to be honest.”

Tourists are perceived as possibly being interested in the regional quality label. However, because of the rural locations of most farm shops, the interviewed producers did not receive enough tourists to solely sell these products to them from their shop.

Also clearly negative views about the label were mentioned. P4 is a raw milk cheese producer and he does not produce under the regional specialty label. He has a negative perception of the label as well of the organization behind it. Being independent was an important reason for him to be able to sell local food and he expects that becoming a member of the regional specialty label will decrease his independency. Moreover, he criticizes the costs for the label. The costs to become member of the regional specialty label was mentioned by more producers.

“We always sold everything under our own name. If I am really honest, I really cannot stand that kind of people, who are sitting for 125 euros subsidized in your home and they are telling you how you have to produce. I do not have something with that. The reality is when they think of a new project, and when there is not enough money anymore, the whole project stops again. I saw this happening so many times. That is the same as with Waddengoud and Gegarandeerd Groningen. They all want our cheese and we have to put stickers on the products. Then we have to pay them a certain percentage and they come driving by in a Volvo of 50.000 euros. And then I think: nice, but what do I get out of this?” (P4, cheese producer).

A possible explanation for the doubts of the producers about joining the regional specialty label, is that they often started selling their products directly to the consumer in order to stay independent. They are

afraid that joining the regional specialty label will limit this independency. This was also a reason to not join other collective local initiatives, such as farm shop groups. Moreover, because the interviewed producers were almost all operating in a small-scale way with a lot of personal interaction with the consumers, the necessity for a quality label decreased; they could already tell the background of the products directly to the consumer.

4.9. Motivations to produce local food

A recurring motive for producers to sell products directly to the consumer was to increase and secure their income. With shortening the food chain, less margin was spend on other stakeholders. Producing local food was not always done on ideological reasons, but often as a response to the intensive agriculture which obliged producers to up-scale their companies and increase the production. Selling directly to the consumer was recurrently seen by the producers as a strategy to stay a small-scale farm and receive a higher margin. However, not only selling directly to the consumer was important to stay in business, also becoming organic or processing the products themselves were used as methods to stay small-scale. For example, P4 used the farm shop and the conversion to being organic both as ways to stay small-scale. This producer preferred owning a small-scale farm, because of the greater diversity in activities it offered.

“My brother and I wanted a small firm and make it intensive. Intensive in the sense that you can retrieve two incomes out of it in a small-scale way of producing. Being large-scale was just not attractive for me, because I do not like to do the same thing for a long time. In my opinion, large-scale production is not a solution for the scarcity in the agriculture. I choose for diversity; that you choose to make cheese one day, and being busy with nature preservation the other day. [...] At the moment we have 70 cows, for our standards that is quite a lot. That is pretty tough, because we are that small. Most farmers around us own easily above the 100 cows. However, because we have the shop, we can get a higher margin.” (P4)

Financial motivations to produce and sell local food were important for all producers, however, satisfaction and recognition were also recurring concepts. One producer recognizes that he probably could earn more income with selling to a wholesaler, but he liked the recognition he receives for selling the products in the local area.

“It is just a piece of satisfaction, what you are doing. Financially it is also attractive, however if I see how much labor I put into it and if I should pay this labor, it would maybe be better to produce more and get somebody who picks it all up. Selling products cost a lot of time, but it gives some satisfaction. It also gives a positive contribution. Maybe if I would keep more sheep and just focus on the production, it would be financially more interesting, however, it does not give any satisfaction.” (P8).

For P3, producing and selling local food goes beyond the wellbeing of the own business. She also believed it is important for a country to stay independent from other countries and to secure the own

food provision. So in her view, local food is important for the food security within a country. In first instance, it seems that this comment can be related to the defensive localism concept, where local is related to the protection of an area. However, because this producer also described Germany as being local and that local was not restricted by boundaries, it is therefore less closely connected to defensive localism, but more towards a flexible localism.

Moreover, there is a tendency among producers to advertise their own products as being tastier than the ones in the supermarket. The producers differentiate their own product quality with that of the larger companies and claim to offer a better quality. This is demonstrated by P1:

"I sell the products myself, because I produce them myself. I want to show the customers what I produce and how good that taste. Selling the products directly to the consumer is one of the most important things. That actually it is really fun and also to let the consumer taste that the flavor is much nicer than the food in the supermarket. And why is that nicer? In the supermarket there are colleagues with huge companies and they gather the fruit different than we do. We pick the fruit because of its color; they pick it because they have to. Whether the fruit has sufficient taste or color is not really important for them. We also have to pick it, that is not something to forget, but we can take just some more time to let it hang longer."
(P1)

In general, the producers appreciated the contact with the consumer and this was often an underlying reason behind producing and selling local food. This relation between producer and consumer is part of the relational proximity of Eriksen (2013). This close relational proximity also can also lead to recognition for the producer for his product, as was important for some of the producers.

The table below shows the motivations of the producers to sell/produce local food. Even though there was an expected impact on the local community by most producers, this was not the main reason for selling local food. This diversified collection of producers' motivations is most likely to be the result of the diversified types of products and businesses. The motivations 'recognition' and 'satisfaction' are displayed as light blue, because they were perceived by the producers as being a result from the interaction between consumer and producer.

Participant	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10
Quality							x			
Financial			x	x			x		x	x
Independency	x					x				x
Diversity				x						
Consumer-producer interaction	x		x	x		x		x	x	
Recognition				x		x		x		
Food miles	x									
Satisfaction		x						x		
Use what is in area		x	x		x					
Practical reasons			x							

Table 7: participants perceptions about motivations to produce local food. Green: geographical proximity. Blue: relational proximity. Orange: values of proximity.

4.10. Restrictions to produce local food

While all the interviewed respondents did produce local food, they also recognized that they faced some limitations for doing this. This part will describe the restrictions the producers experienced in producing local food in the north of the Netherlands. The restrictions in producing local food in the north of the Netherlands were related to the following categories:

- Time: Producing locally is time-consuming and often the producers had other jobs next to the producing and selling of local food.
- Weather: The production and demand were dependent on the weather.
- Distribution: How to get the products from the producer to the consumer.
- Location: Location of the farm is not near the location of consumer
- Product: Certain products are more difficult to sell locally.
- PR: How to market the products.
- Legislation: Restrictions related to legislation

Most limitations were related to the fact that producing local food was not the full-time job of the respondents; they also had a conventional farm next to it or another job completely outside the agricultural sector. For example, the lack of time was a recurring element for the producers, because producing and selling local food were seen as time-consuming activities.

5. Results consumers

As mentioned in chapter 4, there were 110 students surveyed to examine their perceptions of and behavior towards local food. The following subchapters will describe the survey results

5.1. Consumers purchasing behavior

The consumers were asked how often they bought local food. 20% of the students never bought local food, 32% bought if seldom, 26% sometimes and 7% frequently (see figure 6). The remaining part of students was not sure if they ever bought local food. This can be explained by the complex nature of local food. It is not always clear what local means or where the product is coming from.

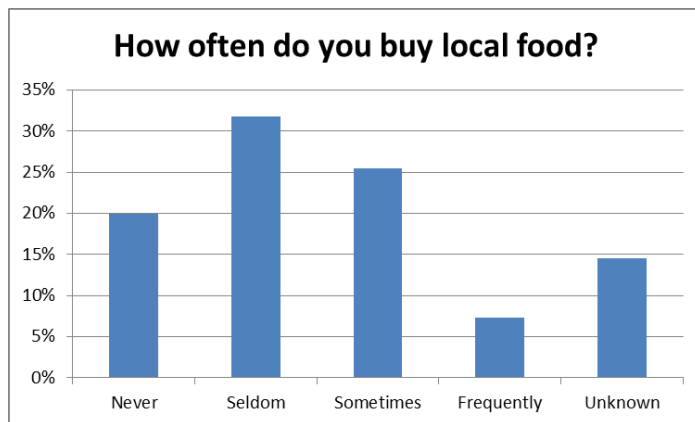


Figure 6: Consumers' purchasing behavior of local food. N=110

The motivations by the students to purchase local food as visible in table 9. The most mentioned motivation to buy local food was the taste and freshness. However, also the support of the local economy and the support of local farmers were mentioned as motivations to buy local food, although these were not perceived as the most important motivations.

Motivations to buy local food	Times mentioned N=71	Times mentioned %	Most important motivation N=58	Most important motivation %
It is authentic	24	9,5%	6	10,3%
It is cheap	12	4,8%	4	6,9%
It is tasty	41	16,3%	21	36,2%
It is fresh	31	12,3%	5	8,6%
It is pure	14	5,6%	3	5,2%
It is healthy	19	7,5%	4	6,9%
It is organic	9	3,6%	1	1,7%
To support the local economy	27	10,7%	2	3,4%
The quality is high	20	7,9%	4	6,9%
To support local farmers	27	10,7%	3	5,2%
To limit the amount of food miles	21	8,3%	5	8,6%
To have personal contact with the farmer	4	1,6%	0	0%
Other	3	1,2%	0	0%
Total	252	100%	58	100%

Table 8: Consumers' motivations and most important motivation to purchase local food.

Because only 7% of the students thought they purchased local food frequently, it is also interesting why they did not purchase this more often. Next to the positive values attached to local food, many consumers also associated local food with negative values which formed a limitation to buying local food. As can be seen in table 10 below, most students perceived local food as either too expensive or not/insufficiently available in the supermarket. Almost 15 percent of the students did not care where the food was produced.

Most important reason to not buy local food	Percentage
It is too expensive	26,4%
It is not/insufficiently available in the supermarket	30,0%
I think being local offers no added value to the product	2,7%
I don't like the taste	4,5%
I do not know where to buy local food	9,1%
It is inconvenient to check the origin of products	7,3%
I don't care where my food is produced	13,6%
Nothing, I already buy local food	0,9%
Other	4,5%
Total	100%

Table 9: consumers' main reasons to not purchase local food. N=110

5.2. Consumers and local food associations

The consumers had associations with local food which could partly be related to the domains of proximity. These are shown in figure 7 below; here the numbers visible in the pie diagram indicate the number of times these associations were mentioned by the consumer. In contrast to the producers, the consumers associated mostly values of proximity with local food. Examples of mentioned values of proximity were: sustainable, tasty and organic. A striking result was that only two times the domain of relational proximity was associated to local food by the consumers. This implies that in general, this consumption group did not associate local food with a closer relation to the producer. Moreover, the most common given answer by the consumers was a certain food product (e.g. potatoes, Groninger sausage, or apples) which they related to the term local food. This implies that the consumers thought more about specific products instead of the aspect of proximity. Furthermore, whereas the producers only associated positive values to local food, some consumers had negative associations (e.g.: expensive, not tasty and boring).

Consumers associations with local food

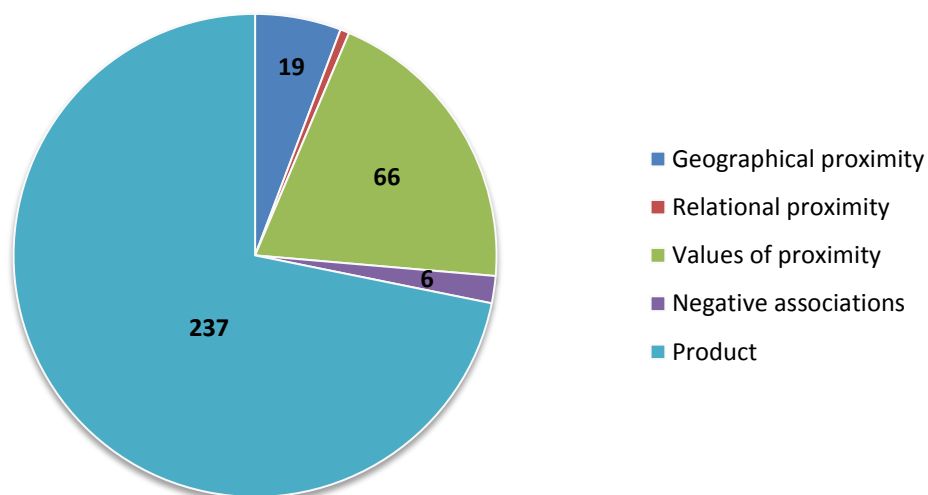


Figure 7: The categorized associations of local food mentioned by consumers (N=110). Maximum of three associations per respondent.

5.3. Geographical proximity

The easiest way to measure the geographical proximity is through food miles; the amount of kilometers the food is transported from the place of production to the place of consumption (Martinez et al., 2010). The majority (80%) of the respondents agreed with the notion that local food decreases the amount of food miles. Which implies that geographical proximity is often being contributed to the consumption of local food. Also related to the domain of geographical proximity, students were asked what they thought was the local area in local food. As was stated by Trivette (2015), geographical proximity can either be a distance measure or a (geographical or political) boundary measure and depends on the characteristics of the region and country. Figure 8 shows the geographical distance food can be transported to still be considered local by the consumers. 50% of the surveyed students saw local food as food that is produced

within the province of Groningen; this group chose for administrative boundaries to define the local area. The second largest group selected the northern provinces of the Netherlands as being local. Whereas, the farmers market in Groningen uses a range of 50 kilometer to define the local area, almost none of the consumers chose this answer. As Martinez et al. (2010) argue, the population densities of a region are important in defining the distance of the local. This could mean that what is local for consumers within the north of the Netherlands, could be entirely different from the local in more densely populated areas, such as the Randstad.

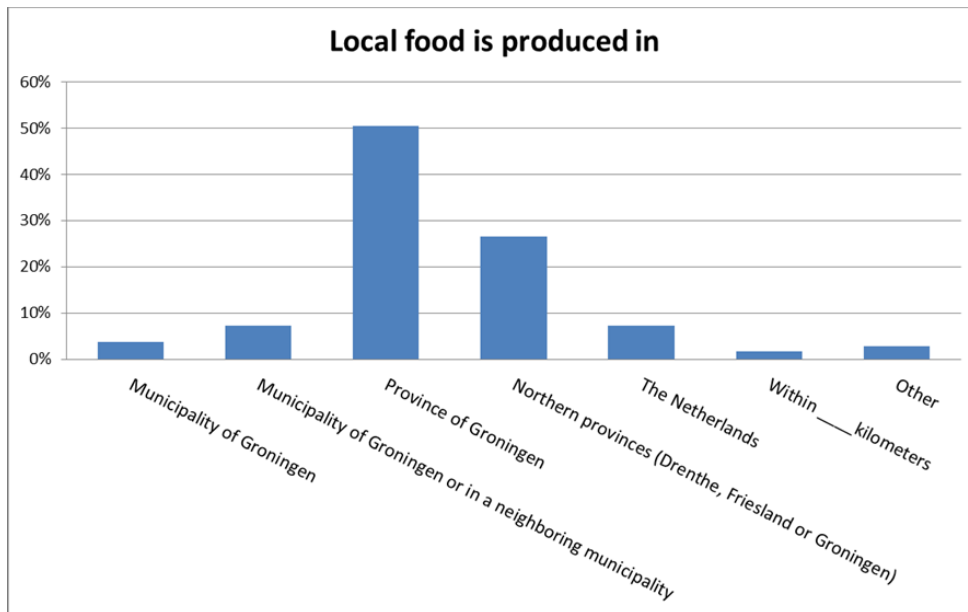


Figure 8: Consumers' perception of the local area in local food

Table 11 shows various statements about the importance of geographical proximity of (local) food. The majority of the consumers (56,3%) slightly agreed or agreed to the statement that it is important to know the geographical origin of a product. However, a closer geographical proximity does not automatically mean for the consumers that they trust the food more related to conventional products. For example, 25% of the consumers slightly agree to the statement that they trust food more when it is produced within the Netherlands, whereas also 25% slightly disagree with this statement. So while the consumers recognized the importance of knowing the geographical origin of a product, their food did not necessarily had to be produced within the Netherlands. Moreover, most respondents preferred organic food over local food, which is in contrast with Winter's (2003) warning about defensive localism, where the turn to local became more important than the turn to quality.

Statement	disagree	Slightly disagree	Neutral	Slightly agree	Agree
It is important to know the geographical origin of a product	9,1%	13,6%	20,9%	42,7%	13,6%
I don't care if my food is local, as long as it is cheap	14,5%	30,9%	26,4%	21,8%	5,5%
I trust food produced in the Netherlands more than food from outside the Netherlands	17,3%	25,5%	20,9%	25,5%	10,9%
Clearly labeling local food is important	4,5%	4,5%	9,1%	47,3%	34,5%
Food scandals (such as the horsemeat scandal) make me more aware of the place of origin of my food	6,4%	21,8%	16,4%	40,9%	14,5%
I prefer organic food over local food	12,7%	18,2%	23,6%	30,9%	14,5%
Local food decreases the amount of food miles	5,5%	4,5%	7,3%	31,8%	50%

Table 10: consumers' opinions about geographical proximity and the relation to local food. N=110

5.4. Relational proximity

Most consumers' acknowledged the potential of local food connect the consumer with the farmer (see table 12). However, it was in general not their first association with the term 'local food'. As mentioned before, primarily only two of the respondents associated local food with a closer relational proximity between consumer and producer. This means that in first instance, consumers were not likely to associate local food with a closer relation between consumer and producer. This was in contrast to the producers' associations, where the relation with the consumer was often mentioned. This lesser importance of relational proximity is also visible within the consumers' motivations to purchase local food. Only three times, consumers mentioned the contact with the producers as a reason to buy local food. Moreover, none of the consumers mentioned this as the most important motivation (see table 9). Therefore, although the majority of the consumers did agree with the statement that local food connects the consumer with the farmer, this was not a motivation to actually purchase local food.

Local food connects the consumer with the farmer N=110	Percentage
Disagree	6,4%
Slightly disagree	6,4%
Neutral	11,8%
Slightly agree	43,6%
Agree	31,8%
Total	100%

Table 11: Consumers perception of the connection of local food with the producer

5.5. Values of proximity

Many consumers attached values of proximity to the local food products. In figure 9, statements of possible values of proximity are shown. The most agreed upon value of local food recognized by the consumers is 'fresh'. Which implied that consumers see local food often as fresh food. Overall, the consumers agreed with the positive values attached to local food. One possible explanation for this is

that it is an indication of the ‘local food trap’ where the local is seen as something positive, solely because it takes place in a certain area (Ilbery and Maye, 2010). However, based on the results of this study this cannot be confirmed, because it is unclear what the exact reasons are for consumers in attaching these positive values to local food.

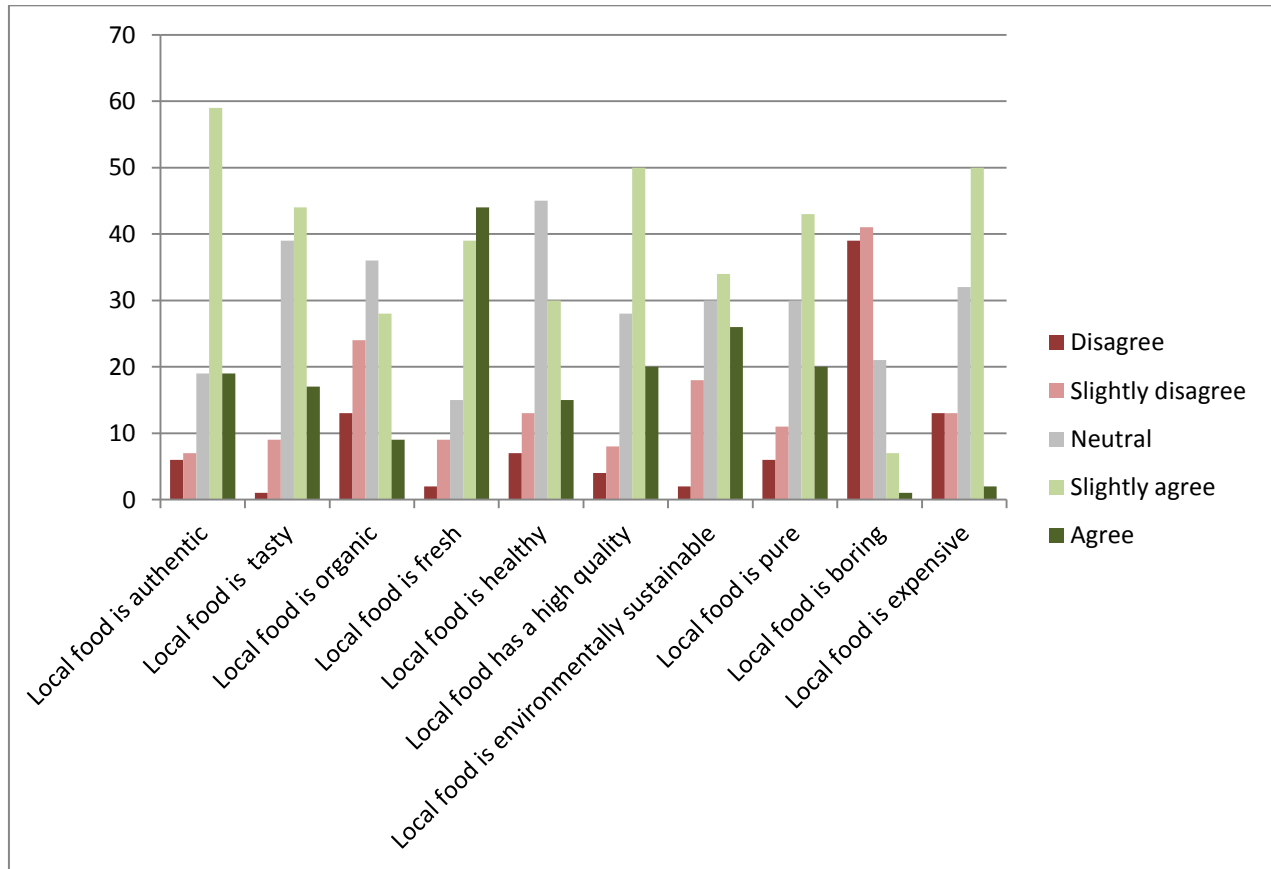


Figure 9: Consumers opinion about local food statements. N=110

5.6. Knowledge about regional specialty labels and farmers markets

Figure 10 shows the purchasing behavior of consumers of products from farmers markets or containing regional specialty labels. A remarkable result is that most surveyed consumers never heard of the farmers markets within the province of Groningen, especially the farmers markets outside the city of Groningen were unknown. Only 20% of the respondents ever bought something from the Ommelander market, whereas the percentages for the other farmers markets were much lower. Moreover, also the regional specialty labels (Guaranteed Groningen, Waddengoud and Oet Grunn) were for most respondents unknown. 80% of the respondents never heard of the Guaranteed Groningen label. A difficulty with the Oet Grunn label, is the similar name for whiskey from Groningen: ‘Whisky Oet Grunn’ and beer ‘Grunn’. These two products are not part of the regional specialty label. Therefore, it could be possible that some of the consumers who said they purchased products from this label, in fact were confused with the beer or whiskey.

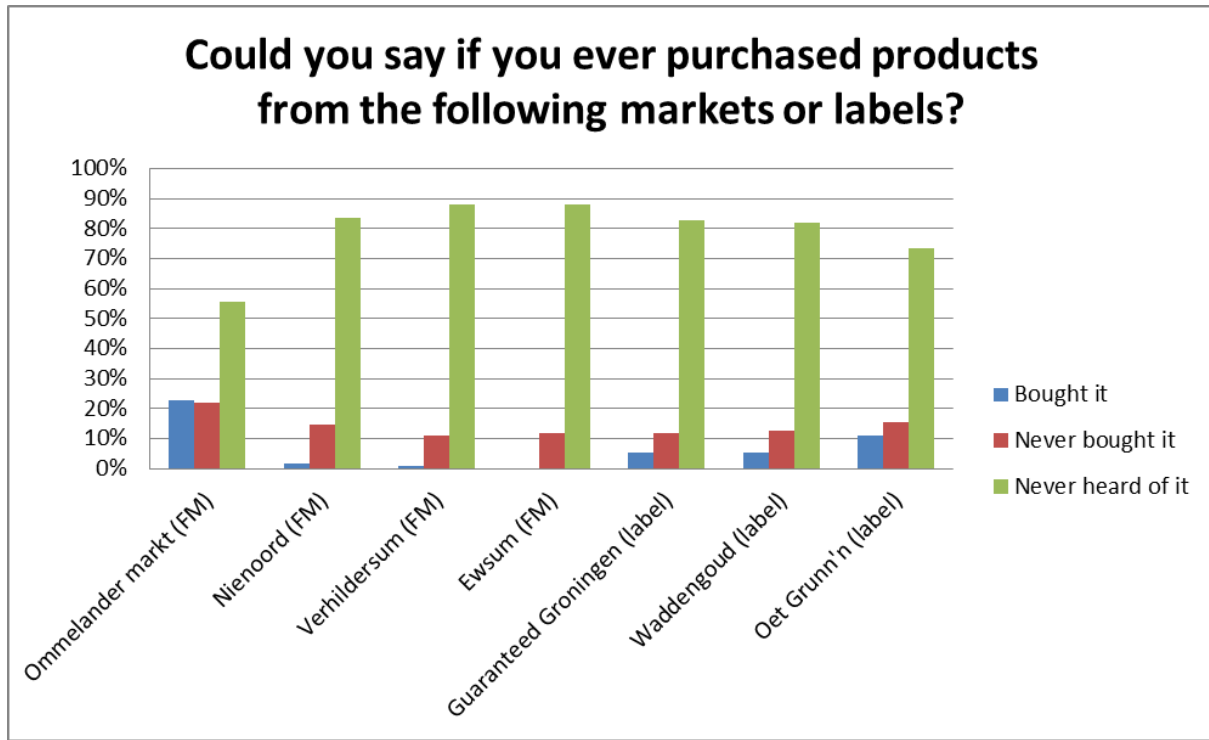


Figure 10: Consumers' purchasing behavior of FM's products and labels. N=110.

6. Conclusion

This chapter will discuss the conclusions starting with answering the research questions, followed by a reflection and recommendation for further research. The aim of this master thesis was to explore the local food system in the north of the Netherlands by examining consumers' and producers' perceptions and experiences of local food and relating this to the different proximity domains. From the theoretical framework, it already became clear that local food in itself is already a difficult concept. Due to the social construction of local food, the meaning of it is context dependent and differs between and within countries. As was stated by Eriksen (2013) local food can be seen in three different domains of proximity: geographical proximity, relational proximity, and values of proximity.

The main question of this research was: what are the consumers' and producers' main perceptions of local food within the north of the Netherlands and to what extent do proximity dimensions play a role within this? Overall, consumers and producers had mostly positive perceptions of local food. Local food was often related to positive values such as a high quality, environmental sustainability and healthy. These positive values can be related to the third domain of proximity (values of proximity). Although geographical proximity and relational proximity were also contributed to local food products, for the students these were rather unimportant in the motivation to purchase this. Most important was the quality of the food, especially freshness (value of proximity). The cost and availability of local food within supermarkets were seen as limitations to buy local food. The interviewed producers related a closer relation with consumers (relational proximity) to local food and for most producers this was also an important motivation to produce local food. This seems to imply that producers favor relational proximity more than consumers. As was mentioned before, Ilbery and Maye (2005) argue that economic relations (e.g. prices) and social relations (e.g. trust and local links) are seen to be vital elements in the success of local food. This is in line with the findings of this research from the producers' interviews, where social relations were highly valued, but at the same time the potential to gain a higher economic margin with local food was widely acknowledged.

Within chapter 2, the main concepts of local food within the academic literature were explained. However, the results from this thesis do seem to provide some insights that differ from the literature. For example, the concept of the 'quality turn' (Feagan 2007; Goodman, 2003) and the influences of relational proximity seems to imply that consumers are aware of local food and will value closer proximity to the producer. However, this seemed not to be straightforwardly the case with the surveyed consumers. There were less associations of local food with the proximity dimensions than the literature implies; especially the relational proximity was least associated with local food by students. This can be partly explained by the vague concept of local food; many consumers did not know whether they purchased local food. Moreover, the knowledge of the consumers about where to buy local food was limited. Most respondents were unfamiliar with farmers' markets within the province of Groningen or the regional specialty labels of the north of the Netherlands. Even though consumers acknowledged that local food could increase the contact with the producer, this was not present in the motivations of the consumer to purchase it.

In contrast, the producers associated local food more frequently with the proximity dimensions. Especially the relational proximity between consumer and producer was often mentioned as both an association with local food as a motivation to produce local food. This seems to imply that producers value the relation with the consumer more than the other way around. However, this could also be related to the choice of participants for the survey; if for example consumers would have been surveyed in the at the farmers market this outcome might differ.

The contact between the producers was mostly informal, although they sometimes worked together by selling each other products within the farm shops. The most often mentioned motivation by producers to be involved in the production of local food was the higher margin which could be achieved compared to the production of conventional food. However, even though the financial incentives were recognized by the producers, most other motivations to produce local food related to an increase in independency; being independent from bigger market parties and create an alternative to the powerful supermarkets. Related to the values of proximity, the producers perceived their own products as obtaining a higher quality than the conventional products from the supermarket.

Producers experienced the time-consuming factor of local food as an important limitation to increase their share in the local food sector. Due to the social characteristic of local food, producers were expected, by the consumers and by themselves, to be the one selling the local products. Especially on farmers market the producers' experienced the need for relational proximity; most producers were convinced they had to be the one selling the products to be able to tell more about the product to the consumer. With this relational proximity, the producers could influence the values of proximity experienced by consumers, as was expected within the conceptual model. However, from the data collected for this research, it cannot be concluded that this is the case for consumers, because the sample that actually had a close relational proximity with local food producers attached higher values to local food, due to the ample size of the consumers for which this was actually the case. This would provide an interesting starting point for further research.

There seems to be a mismatch between supply of the producers and demand. Due to the small-scale of the local food producers, they do commonly not sell their products within the bigger supermarkets. However, the main limitation for consumers to buy local food was the insufficient availability within the supermarket. Therefore the distribution aspect, how to get the products from consumer to producer, is a recurring problem, acknowledged by consumers and producers, and is a point where improvements can be made in practice. At the moment, the local food suppliers within the north of the Netherlands are mainly small-scale and therefore the economic and social impacts on the surrounding area are likely to be limited. The potential of increasing local food within the north of the Netherlands lies in increasing consumers' awareness of local food and giving producers more chances to sell their products within the local area. Especially the broader distribution of the products could help to increase the supply of locally produced food.

As explained by Babbie (2013), "the chief shortcoming of exploratory studies is that they seldom provide satisfactory answers to research questions, though they can hint at the answers and can suggest which research methods could provide definitive ones" (p.91). Therefore, this chapter suggests options for

further research. Moreover, the limits to this study and the generalizability and transferability of results are important to consider, especially when using this research as a basis for possible future studies.

This research demonstrates that the awareness of students from the University of Groningen about farmers markets, local food and (local) food certifications was limited. Therefore, for future research, it would be recommended to examine other population groups than students to see to what extent students' perceptions of and experiences with local food are comparable with those of other demographic groups. A possible explanation for students to be less familiar with these concepts is that they live a relative short time in Groningen, as a large proportion of students moved to the city of Groningen for their studies and therefore are less informed about the city. However, it is also possible that this group cares less about the origin of their food and instead favors convenience and price.

Within research about organic food, it is argued that the organic food sector is being 'conventionalized' by supermarkets and other major suppliers. Are there already signs of this process also happening with local food? Will the local food production and distribution 'taken over' by the larger players? These questions can be relevant to explore the future of the local food market and this could increase understanding about the role of the conventional market and their food strategies. This is especially relevant in light of the findings in this research that producers on the one hand disassociate themselves from the conventional food sector and value relational proximity, while on the other hand a broader distribution of local food could enhance the supply of locally produced food and thereby reach more consumers, as indicated above. However, placing local food and conventional food as direct opposites from each other does not acknowledge the flexible nature of the concept as observed during the interviews in this research. For example, the notion that local food is embedded within social relations, does not mean that conventional food is disembedded from social relations. Moreover, it became clear that the interviewed local food producers were frequently also involved within the conventional food sector. This illustrates the complexity of the food network and these dynamics between the local and conventional food sector provide interesting insights for further research.

Moreover, another emerging question from this research is to what extent the situation in the north of the Netherlands is different from the more urbanized provinces in the Netherlands. This also impacts the transferability of this research; because of the socially constructed of local food, where the local is among others defined by the population density of the area (Martinez et al., 2010), the rural characteristics of the north of the Netherlands could therefore decrease the transferability to more urbanized areas, or even less densely populated areas abroad. However, the findings are more likely to be transferable to other parts of the Netherlands or rural parts of northern Europe. As was mentioned by Parrot et al. (2002), what is seen as food quality and therefore can be expected to be important for consumers and producers, differs between southern and northern Europe. According to this, the perceptions of Dutch consumers and producers of local food are likely to differ from countries such as Italy, where the geographical environment is of main importance in defining food quality.

Moreover, as indicated earlier, the findings resulting from the surveys are difficult to generalize for the whole consumer population because it focused only on one specific consumer group: students. Furthermore, due to the exploratory and cross-sectional nature of this research, the results are

generalizable only to a certain extent, because the perceptions were observed at a specific point in time. However, it might be interesting to examine how the concept of local food has developed over time as well, using a longitudinal approach.

In general, there are many parts of this research process which could be improved. The overall research process took longer than initially planned due to a lack of focus and changes in the research objective in the period before data collection took place. Moreover, the structure of the research process could be enhanced, for example the surveys were made and collected in a too early phase of the research process. Therefore, the barriers for the students to purchase local food were not related to the domains of proximity, while it could, for example, be possible that students found the direct interaction with the producer a reason to avoid buying local food.

Especially the broad character of the research and the focus on two groups (consumers and producers) made it difficult to give an in-depth exploration of the local food phenomenon. Too many local food concepts (market places, labels, alternative food network, kind of product, kind of supply chain, and direct selling) are important in the explanation of the local food system. It would have improved the research if instead of a broader and more descriptive approach, it would go in-depth on either the consumers or producers and find the focus in an earlier stage of the research process.

Moreover, a limitation of this research is that the two researched groups (consumers and producers) were not examined using the same data collection methods (surveys and in-depth interviews). Therefore, comparing these two groups is challenging. The interview data is more detailed than the data retrieved from the surveys. For further research, a more thorough statistical analysis of broader sample of consumer data could provide more detailed insight into the aspects that are most important for consumer perspectives. But on the other side, in-depth interviews or focus groups with consumers could be useful to retrieve a greater insight into the consumers' perceptions and this will make it possible to better link and compare it with the producers' perceptions.

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Appendix A: Interview guide food producers/farmers

(For English version see below)

Heel erg bedankt dat ik u mag interviewen. Ik doe dit interview voor mijn master scriptie voor de onderzoeksmaster Regional Studies bij de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. In dit interview zou ik mij graag willen focussen op uw ervaring met lokaal voedsel, motivaties om te produceren of juist belemmeringen die productie van lokaal voedsel vermoeilijken. Het doel van mijn onderzoek is om de percepties van producenten en consumenten van lokaal voedsel te identificeren en te vergelijken.

Ik ben benieuwd naar uw kijk op dit. Dat betekent dat ik benieuwd ben naar het verhaal dat u heeft te vertellen, en zijn er geen 'juiste' of 'onjuiste' antwoorden op de vragen die ik zal stellen.

Is het goed als ik dit interview opneem, zodat ik dit later makkelijker uit kan schrijven en gebruiken voor mijn analyse? Uw gegevens blijven echterwel anoniem. Wanneer ik in mijn scriptie verwijs naar uw interview, dan zal dit altijd vertrouwelijk gebeuren en zal uw anonimiteit gewaarborgd worden

Associatie vraag:

- Welke drie associaties komen als eerste in u op wanneer u denkt aan lokaal voedsel? Dit mag alles zijn.

Achtergrond vragen:

- Wat voor soort bedrijf heeft u?
 - o Wat voor producten produceert u?
- Hoeveel werknemers heeft uw bedrijf?
 - o Familieleden?
- Hoe lang werkt u hier al?
- Waarom bent u begonnen met dit bedrijf?
 - o Wat voor werk deed u hiervoor?
- Heeft u nog ander werk naast dit bedrijf?

Markt

- Waar worden u producten verkocht? (bijv. Supermarkten, streekmarkten, gewone markten, restaurants).
 - o Waarom hier?
- Heeft u plannen om in de nabije toekomst op andere plekken uw producten verkopen?
 - o Waar zou u het liefst uw producten verkopen?

Definitie lokaal voedsel

- Wat ziet u als uw lokaal afzetgebied? (lokale markt)

- Kunt u een schatting geven welk percentage van uw producten worden verkocht binnen de lokale markt?
- Hoe belangrijk is het voor u dat uw producten worden verkocht in de lokale omgeving/op lokale afzetmarkt?
- Verkoopt u ook rechtstreeks aan de consument?
 - o Op welke manier?
 - o Verkoopt u ook producten van collega's?
 - o Kunt u een schatting geven hoeveel procent van uw inkomen is verkregen door rechtstreekse verkopen aan de consument?

Certificering

- Bent u lid van een certificering, keurmerk programma? (biologisch, streekproducten keurmerk)
 - o Ja: Welke en waarom?
 - o Maakt u gebruik van dit keurmerk om uw product te verkopen?
 - Nee: Waarom niet?
 - o Ja: heeft u contact met andere deelnemers van dit keurmerk?
 - Hoe waardeert u dit?

Marketing

- Refereert u aan de plaats van productie bij de verkoop van uw producten?
 - o Waarom/waarom niet?
- Welke manieren maakt u reclame voor uw producten? (advertenties, mond-op-mond reclame)

Klanten

- Wat is uw doelgroep?
- Waar komen uw klanten vandaan?
- Heeft u veel persoonlijk contact met uw klanten?
- Weet u waarom uw klanten graag uw producten kopen?
- Merkt u dat consumenten steeds meer interesse krijgen in lokaal voedsel?

Motivaties om lokaal voedsel te verkopen

- Wat zijn de belangrijkste redenen voor u om lokaal voedsel te verkopen?
- Wat zijn de grootste obstakels bij het verkopen/producen van lokaal voedsel?
- Bent u van plan om uw bedrijf uit te breiden in de toekomst?
- Wat moet er gebeuren om meer voedsel te verkopen op de lokale markt?

Impact op omgeving

- Werkt u samen met andere voedselproducenten?
- Denkt u dat het verkopen van lokaal voedsel positieve invloeden heeft op de lokale economie? (bijv blijft er zo meer geld in de omgeving, meer werkgelegenheid)

- Denkt u dat uw bedrijf positieve invloeden heeft op de lokale gemeenschap?
- Houdt u met uw bedrijf rekening met de natuur?
 - o Waarom?
 - o Neemt u deel aan natuurbeschermingsprogramma's, zoals agrarisch natuurbeheer?

Rol als consument

- We hebben het tot nu toe alleen gehad over uw rol als producent, maar bent u als consument ook bewust van de oorsprong van uw voedsel? Koopt u zelf lokaal voedsel?

Laatste vragen

- Kent u nog andere producenten die zich bezig houden met het produceren van lokaal voedsel, die ik ook kan benaderen voor een interview?
- Zijn er nog zaken die niet besproken zijn in dit interview, maar die u graag nog wilt benoemen?

English translation interviews producers:

Association question:

- What are the first three things that come to your mind when you think about local food?

Background questions:

- What kind of business do you have?
 - o What kind of products do you produce?
- How many employees does your business have?
- How long are you working in this business?
- Is your enterprise your total income?
 - o *If no*: what other work do you do?

Market

- Where do you sell your products? (e.g. supermarkets, farmer markets, regular markets, restaurants)
 - o Why at these places?

Defining local food

- What would you consider to be your local market?
- Can you estimate the percentage of your products which are sold within the northern provinces of the Netherlands?
- To what extent is it important for you that your products are sold in the local area?
- Do you sell directly to the consumer?
 - o *If yes*: In what way?
 - o Can you estimate what percentage of your income is generated by selling directly to the consumer?

Certification

- Are you member of any certification or labelling schemes? (e.g. organic label or regional specialty label).
 - o *If yes*:
 - Which ones & why?
 - Do you use the label in marketing your product?
 - o *If no*: why not?
- If yes: how do you value the contact with the other participants of the scheme?

Marketing

- Do you refer to the place of production when selling the products?
- Is your product more expensive than similar products in the supermarket?
- In what way are you marketing your products? (/what defines your product?)

Customers

- What kind of customers are buying your local food products?
- Where are your customers coming from?
- Do you know why your customers are purchasing your products?
- Do you notice if consumers increasingly prefer to eat local food?

Motivations for selling local food

- What are your main reasons for selling local food?
- What are the main difficulties or obstacles for selling local food?
- Do you have plans to expand in the near future?
- What should happen in order for you to sell more of what you grow (/or produce) in local markets (northern part of the Netherlands)?

Impact on area

- To what extent do you think selling local food influences the local community?
- To what extent do you think selling local food influences the local economy?
- How important is taking into account the local environment in your business?
- Are you with your business involved in any (agricultural) nature preservation programs?

Final questions

- Do you know other food producers or farmers in the northern provinces of the Netherlands who are involved with local food and who I could interview?
- Is there anything we have not discussed that you would like to mention?

Appendix B: Survey design



university of
 groningen

faculty of spatial sciences

Thank you for participating. The questionnaire will only **take 4-5 minutes**. This research is conducted for my master thesis for the Research Master: Regional Studies at the faculty of spatial sciences. I will guarantee **anonymity** to all people filling in this questionnaire. The aim of this questionnaire is to discover students' perceptions of local food. There is no official definition of local food, so there are no wrong answers possible. It is really about your perception.

With kind regards,

Sanne Kasten (s.t.kasten@student.rug.nl)

Please answer all the questions

1. What are the first three things that come to your mind when you think about local food?

1: _____

2: _____

3: _____

2. Which of the following definitions of 'local food' do you think is best? Please select one answer.

- A. Food produced in the municipality of Groningen
- B. Food produced in the municipality of Groningen or in a neighboring municipality
- C. Food produced in the province of Groningen
- D. Food produced in the northern provinces of the Netherlands (Drenthe, Friesland or Groningen)
- E. Food produced in the Netherlands
- F. Food produced within ____kilometers (please fill in the amount of kilometers)
- G. Other, please specify:



For the remaining part of this survey we use the definition of local food that it is produced in the northern part of the Netherlands (Drenthe, Groningen or Friesland).

3. Please mark one box that most suits your opinion on the statements below

- | |
|-----------------------|
| 1 = Disagree |
| 2 = Slightly Disagree |
| 3 = Neutral |
| 4 = Slightly Agree |
| 5 = Agree |

Statements	1	2	3	4	5
Local food is authentic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local food is expensive	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local food is tasty	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local food is fresh	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local food is healthy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local food has a high quality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local food is environmentally sustainable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local food is pure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local food is boring	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local food is organic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local food is good for the local economy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local food decreases the amount of food miles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local food connects the consumer with the farmer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. How often do you buy local food?

- | |
|---|
| A. Never (continue with question 8) |
| B. Seldom |
| C. Sometimes |
| D. Frequently |
| E. I do not know if I buy local food (continue with question 8) |



5. When you buy local food, what kind of products do you buy and how often do you buy these?

Local food	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Frequently
Fruit	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vegetables	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Potatoes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Meat	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bread	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Eggs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Milk	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cheese	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other dairy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Beer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Honey	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mustard	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fruit juices	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jam/marmelade/jelly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cookies/cake	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (specify below) _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (specify below) _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. What are your main motivations for purchasing local food? Multiple answers possible

- A. It is authentic
- B. It is cheap
- C. It is tasty
- D. It is fresh
- E. It is pure
- F. It is healthy
- G. It is organic
- H. To support the local economy
- I. The quality is high
- J. To support local farmers
- K. To limit the amount of food miles
- L. To have personal contact with the farmer
- M. Other, please specify:



6b. Which answer of question 6 is the most important motivation to buy local food? (chose 1 answer) _____

7. Where do you purchase local food? Multiple answers possible.

- A. Supermarket
- B. Directly from the farmer
- C. From a farmers market
- D. Through a farmer shop
- E. From a regular market
- F. Through a box delivery scheme
- G. Through internet
- H. Other, please specify:

8. What are the main reasons for NOT buying local food? Multiple answers possible

- A. It is too expensive
- B. It is not/insufficiently available in the supermarket
- C. I think being local offers no added value to the product
- D. I don't like the taste
- E. The quality is not good enough
- F. There is not enough variation in the product range
- G. I do not know where to buy local food
- H. It is inconvenient to check the origin of products
- I. I don't care where my food is produced
- J. Nothing, I already buy local food
- K. Other, please specify:

8b. Which answer of question 8 is the most important reason to not buy local food? (chose 1 answer) _____



9. Please mark one box that most suits your opinion on the statements below

- | |
|-----------------------|
| 1 = Disagree |
| 2 = Slightly Disagree |
| 3 = Neutral |
| 4 = Slightly Agree |
| 5 = Agree |

Statements	1	2	3	4	5
It is important to know the geographical origin of a product	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I prefer organic food over local food	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clearly labeling local food is important	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Food scandals (such as the horsemeat scandal) make me more aware of the place of origin of my food	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I don't care if my food is local, as long as it is cheap	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I trust food produced in the Netherlands more than food from outside the Netherlands	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I prefer organic food over 'normal' food	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I think it is important that food has a quality label	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know where I can buy local food	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If food produced locally was (more) clearly labeled in stores/supermarkets, I would be willing to pay a higher price for it	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If local food would be cheaper, I would probably buy it more often	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If there would be more local food available in the supermarket, I would probably buy it more often	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If there would be more farmers markets near my house, I would probably buy local food more often	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am planning to buy more local food in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



10. Could you say if you ever purchased the following products? Please circle the answer you would like to choose.

Products at the Ommelander market	Yes / No / Never heard of it
Products at the farmers market Nienoord, Leek	Yes / No / Never heard of it
Products at the farmers market Verhildersum, Leens	Yes / No / Never heard of it
Products at the farmers market Ewsum, Middelstum	Yes / No / Never heard of it
Regional specialty products: Gegarandeerd Groningen	Yes / No / Never heard of it
Regional specialty products: Waddengoud	Yes / No / Never heard of it
Regional specialty products: Oet Grunn'n	Yes / No / Never heard of it

Please, mark one box that fit most to your situation

Gender

- Male
- Female

Current education level

- Undergraduate (Bachelor)
- Graduate (Master)
- PhD

At which faculty are you studying?

What is your place of resident?

What is your nationality?

Thank you for filling out this questionnaire!

Appendix C: Consent form interviews

Toestemmingsverklaringformulier

Toestemmingsformulier

Deze masterscriptie wordt van uit de Faculteit Ruimtelijke Wetenschappen van de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen uitgevoerd. De begeleiders van deze scriptie zijn prof. Philip McCann en dr. Louise Meijering. Als u later nog vragen hebt kunt u mailen naar sannekasten@gmail.com.

Waar gaat het onderzoek over?

Het doel van dit onderzoek is om te onderzoeken hoe consumenten en producenten tegen lokaal voedsel aankijken. Er wordt gekeken naar wat producenten en consumenten zien als lokaal voedsel, welke kenmerken aan lokaal voedsel worden gegeven en wat de belangrijkste redenen zijn om lokaal voedsel te produceren/consumeren. Omdat er geen officiële definitie van lokaal voedsel bestaat gaat het er vooral om wat u vindt. Er zijn tijdens dit interview geen 'goede' of 'foute' antwoorden mogelijk.

Wat betekent dit voor u?

Het interview zal ongeveer een uur duren. Om later te analyseren zal dit interview worden opgenomen, uw gegevens blijven echter wel anoniem. Wanneer er in de verslaglegging naar een stuk van uw interview wordt gerefereerd, dan zal dit altijd vertrouwelijk gebeuren en zal uw anonimiteit gewaarborgd worden.

Geeft u toestemming?

Ik ben naar tevredenheid over het onderzoek geïnformeerd. Ik heb de schriftelijke informatie over het onderzoek goed gelezen. Ik ben in de gelegenheid gesteld om vragen over het onderzoek te stellen. Mijn vragen zijn naar tevredenheid beantwoord. Ik heb goed over deelname aan het onderzoek kunnen nadenken. Ik heb het recht mijn toestemming op ieder moment weer in te trekken zonder dat ik daarvoor een reden hoeft te geven. Ik heb het recht om altijd verdere vragen over het onderzoek of het interview te stellen. Ik stem ermee in dat het interview wordt opgenomen en dat geanonimiseerde voorbeelden uit het interview gebruikt worden in de verslaglegging.

Ik stem toe met deelname aan het onderzoek.

Datum:

Naam:

Handtekening: