

TASTE OF PLACE

The Taste of Place framework allows producers to identify specific, unique characteristics of their products and authenticate those characteristics by making connections to the place the product was grown or produced, the natural environment, production practices, and culture. This concept focuses on product quality, uniqueness, and collective action by producers.

In partnership with the Vermont Agency of Agriculture and grounded in work by Amy Trubek and others, here is a sampling of current Taste of Place research at UVM:

MARKET RESEARCH

Based on findings from two preliminary market studies, there appears to be a demand for a place-based designation system for Vermont food products both in Vermont and in metro areas in the northeastern United States.

In the Philadelphia, Boston, and New York metro areas, the minimum levels of interest among primary household food shoppers in a place-based designation system are 2.8, 2.1, and 4.0 percent, respectively. These metro areas were selected for the study because they

were identified as having the three highest levels of visitation to the state of Vermont, according to the Vermont Department of Tourism (2010).

Overall, the study suggests that any place-based designation system for Vermont food products should originate from a genuine, sincere effort to inform interested consumers (in Vermont and the northeastern United States) of the beneficial attributes of specific Vermont-based food products.

Method: Self-administered, cross-sectional survey using a stratified, random sample.

Highlights

- o Consumers clearly expressed that the Vermont food products best suited for this type of place-based labeling system are cheese and maple syrup, followed by apples, apple cider, maple candy, and milk;
- o Consumers would like to see a labeling system run by an independent, third-party certification committee and a group of farmers and producers. Consumers do not want to see this system being run by a state government agency;
- o Consumers are willing to pay an average premium of up to 52% in Vermont and 59.6% in the metro areas for food products that have two or more of the characteristics that are important to them as a consumer. In Vermont, attributes that indicate that

a food product was grown on a family farm and that farmer and farm workers get a fair wage commanded the highest premium, followed by the identification of a product as being “made in Vermont.” In the metro areas, the attributes that garnered the highest premiums were: made using environmentally friendly methods, fair wages for farmers and farm workers, and the place-based concept of a food having unique flavors that reflect the region where it was made. In the metro areas, the “made in Vermont” attribute on its own resulted in the second lowest premium; and

- o There is no indication among consumers that a place-based designation system would negatively impact the Vermont brand, as long as the connection to Vermont remains noted.

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PRODUCER WORKING SESSIONS

A fall 2010 series of working sessions brought together producers, researchers, policy makers, and experts from Vermont and abroad to discuss opportunities for place-based foods in Vermont.

The sessions included focused maple, cheese, apple, wine and meat producer discussions about individual products and how a designation system could benefit each producer group.

What started as a dialogue around place-based foods and the establishment of a regulatory system for geographic designations evolved into a broader discussion about Vermont

agricultural sector needs grounded in a focus on standards, quality and know-how.

The discussions centered on consistent quality, the importance of quality raw products, and the distinction between quality in terms of flavor and in terms of safety. Self-regulation also emerged as a common theme.

Producer input from the two working sessions, combined with feedback from producer associations, independent research, and suggestions from experts in the field resulted in a set of producer-driven action items for protecting and promoting place-based foods in Vermont:

Research action items

- Economic analyses for place-based foods
- Define quality for different products
- Examine the potential for high quality raw product
- Investigate cross-border collaboration
- Enlist more support from UVM

Tools and infrastructure action items

- Create a producer-driven designation system
- Coordinate support for producer associations
- Facilitate the creation of self-assessment tools
- Provide state assistance with inspections to certify best management practices
- Increase technical assistance for producers

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MAPLE SENSORY EVALUATION

As part of the Taste of Place project, a team of researchers from the UVM Nutrition and Food Science department, sugarmakers and sensory panelists collaborated over several years to develop a tool or “map” to define and describe the unique sensory qualities of Vermont maple. Using maple syrup from throughout the state, a group of experts developed a descriptor list upon which the tool is based. The team is in the review phase with producers and consumers to refine and improve the tool, with hopes of implementing it through the Vermont Agency of Agriculture upon its completion. The project was jointly developed by the Nutrition and Food Sciences Department at University of Vermont and the Vermont Agency of Agriculture Food and Markets.

Amy Trubek and Allison Hamlin • Nutrition and Food Sciences

the maple syrup map	
mouthfeel	thin, syrupy, thick smooth, slightly mineral
taste	maple intensity, balance of red two, sweetness
odors	praline, bourbon, spiced meat, mineral notes, dark chocolate, soy sauce, leathery
body	grassy, oats, mushroom, hay
flavor	honey, floral/blend, raisins, orange, peach, raw nuts, mango, prunes, grapefruit, apricot
odor and flavor (aromatic)	vanilla, cinnamon, mixed spice, nutmeg, light brown sugar, molasses, toffee, dark brown sugar, dark corn syrup
mouthfeel	fresh butter, condensed milk, melted butter, burnt roach
mouthfeel	baked apple, brinche, caramelized sugar, golden sugar, roasted coffee, toasted nuts, roasted marshmallow, creme brulee, burnt sugar
maple	maple

