‘Buy Local’ Marketing Messages for Solano County

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Overview and Project Goals

🤝 **Partnership**

- Sustainable Solano & University of California, Davis

🌱 **Mission**

- Strengthen regional food systems
- Support agricultural producers & and vibrant communities

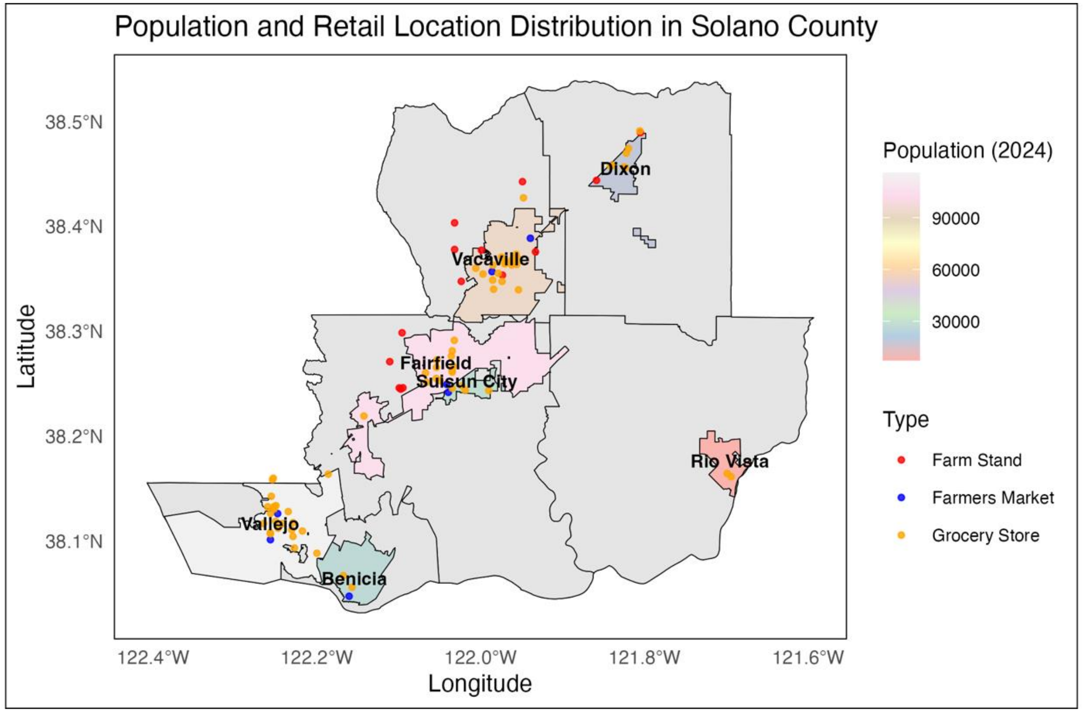
🧩 **This Project**

- Develop effective marketing strategies that increase demand for foods grown and produced locally (in Solano County) to:
  - Strengthen the revenue-generating potential for small and medium-size farmers and food businesses
  - Ensure access to high quality foods for diverse consumer groups

Overall Profile of Solano County Consumers & Retail Environment

👥 Population & Diversity (2024)

- ~446K residents, Growth slowed in recent years (stable since 2020)
- 61.5% working-age population (aged 18 to 64)
- ~65% BIPOC (highly diverse)



💰 Economic Variation

- Median income ~$100K (vs. Statewide ~$96K)
- ~50% high-income, ~10% below poverty line
- Education below CA average (29.1% vs. 37.5%)

🛒 Retail & Market Environment

- Mix of grocery chains, discount stores, local markets, farmers' markets

What Are We Trying to Understand?

How do we promote locally grown and produced foods in today's complex retail environment?

❓ Do multiple sustainability statements (e.g., organic + local) reinforce each other or crowd each other out?

❓ Do different groups of consumers (e.g., high- versus low-income consumers)respond differently to different messaging ?

➡ **Collect stated and revealed preference data**

💡 **Why does it matter**

- Consumers face income, time and cognitive constraints when making purchase decisions
  - ✓ Consumers are rationally inattentive; have potentially biased perceptions and beliefs that affect purchases
  - ✓ Well documented vote-buy gap

Data Collection Overview

📊 Survey data (Generic Survey and Focus Group Interview)

- Purchasing habits
- Perceptions of food labels
- Motivations

✓ Data collection

- Multiple locations (cooking class, food giveaway events, online)
- Diverse consumer groups

📝 Experimental data (including survey)

- Choice behavior
- Willingness to pay (WTP)
- Real purchase decisions

👉 Combines what consumers **say** (stated preferences) and what they **do** (revealed preferences)

Field Experiment in Solano County

📍 **Two sessions**

- June 28, 2025 at Fairfield Civic Center Library
- October 22, 2025 at Solano County Health & Social Services
- 👥 108 participants (68 and 40 across two sessions)

🍓 **Product: Strawberries (Homogenous)**

🧩 **Three parts:**

- Pre-survey (shopping habits & preferences)
- Choice experiment
- Post-survey (demographic information)

💰 **Incentivized decision**

- Participants received $30
- Could purchase strawberries at $5

Field Experiment in Solano County (Cont.)

1 Baseline (No Label)

Initial preference, quality rating, willingness to Pay (WTP), purchase intent

2 Label Treatment (Randomized)

One of the two products is labeled:

3 Re-evaluation

- Preference, quality rating, WTP; final purchase decision

(Group 1) Sustainable Solano + **Grown in Solano County**

(Group 2) USDA ORGANIC + **Grown in Solano County**

(Group 3) Sustainable Solano + USDA ORGANIC + **Grown in Solano County**

Who Participated in the Study?

👥 **Diverse sample of 108 participants**

- ~55% non-White, ~26% Hispanic
- ~57% female

🏠 **Households**

- Avg. size: ~2.7
- ~33% with children under 18 (Avg. number of children: 2.4)
- ~55% long-term residents in Solano County

💰 **Economic diversity**

- ~30% low-income (below $35,000)
- ~43% receive food assistance (SNAP, WIC, or food pantries)

🚗 **Access & Ag background**

- ~63% have car access
- ~27% with agricultural background

Results from Pre-Experiment Survey

Where Do Consumers Shop?

🛒 **Main shopping channels**

- Grocery chains (~75%)
- Supercenters (~64%)

💰 **Price-oriented options**

- Discount stores (~40%)

🌱 **Local food channels**

- Farmers markets (~32%)
- Farm stands / CSA (~20%)

Results from Pre-Experiment Survey (cont.)

<u>What Labels Do Consumers Pay Attention To?</u>

✓ **Products intentionally purchased with following labels and claims**

- Organic (~56%)
- Local (~41%)
- Natural/Naturally grown (~41%)
- Non-GMO (~33%)

👉 *Organic labels and local claims are widely recognized*

Results from Pre-Experiment Survey (cont.)

Who Do Consumers Trust (Information Source)?

✓ **Higher trust**

- Farmers / producers (~85%)
- Friends & Family (~84%)
- Local organizations (NGOs, NPOs) (~75%)
- Government certification (e.g., USDA) (~74%)

⚠ **Lower trust**

- Influencers / reviews (~53%)
- Processors / distributors (~51%)
- Retailers (~43%)

👉 *Credibility of the source matters for how labels and claims are perceived*

Results from Pre-Experiment Survey (cont.)

<u>What Do Consumers Say About Local Food?</u>

✓ **Labels and claims matter most for fresh products**

- Produce & dairy ranked higher (vs. meat & processed foods)

✓ **Motivations for purchasing local foods**

- Reasonably priced or a good value (~76%)
- Support local farmers (~65%)
- Availability (~59%)
- Freshness & transparency (~54%)

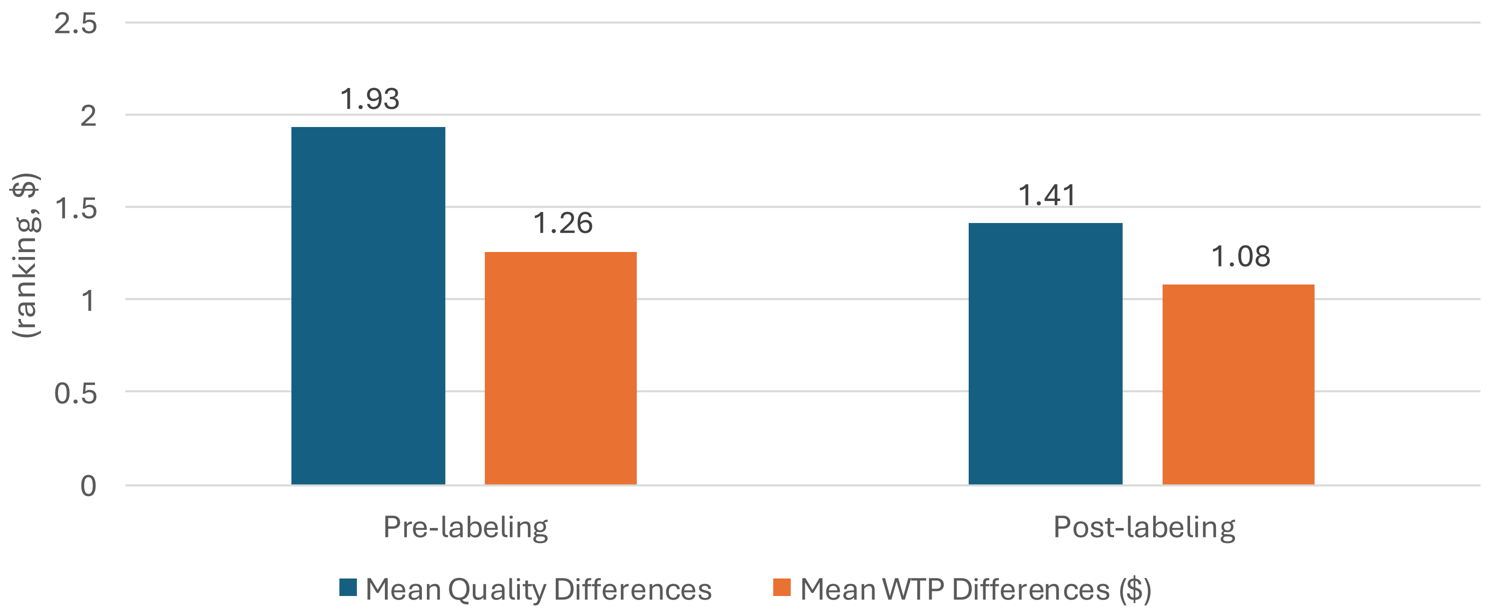
⚠ **Barriers to purchase local foods**

- High prices (~63%)
- Limited access (~52%)
- Not Convenient (~43%)

Experiment Findings: Initial Preferences Matter

✓ **Strong initial preferences**

- Initially preferred (without messaging) rated higher
  - Quality: +1.9 (vs. 1.4)
  - WTP: +$1.3 (vs. 1.1)



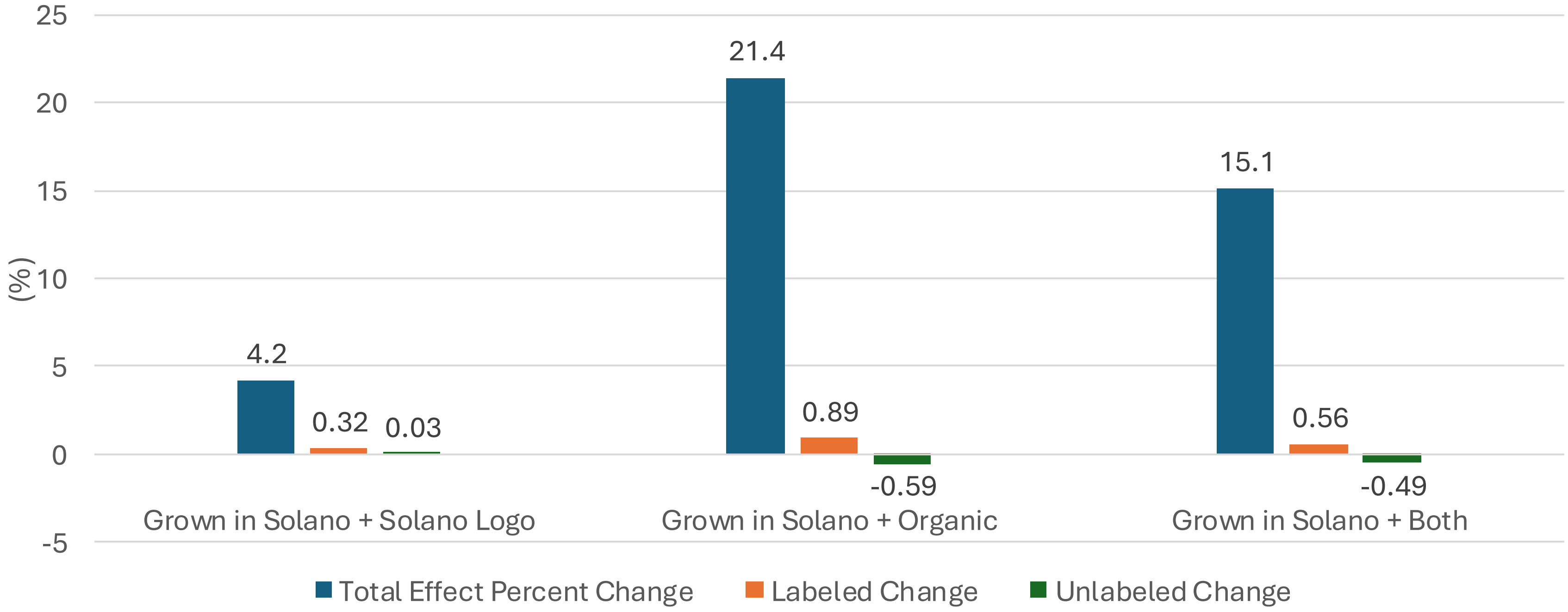
Experiment Findings: Messaging Increases Perceived Quality

✓Organic label → strongest effect (~+21%)

✓ Organic label + Sustainable Solano logo→ moderate effect (~+15%)

⚠ Sustainable Solano logo→ minimal effect (~+4%)

👉 Messages make unlabeled products less attractive

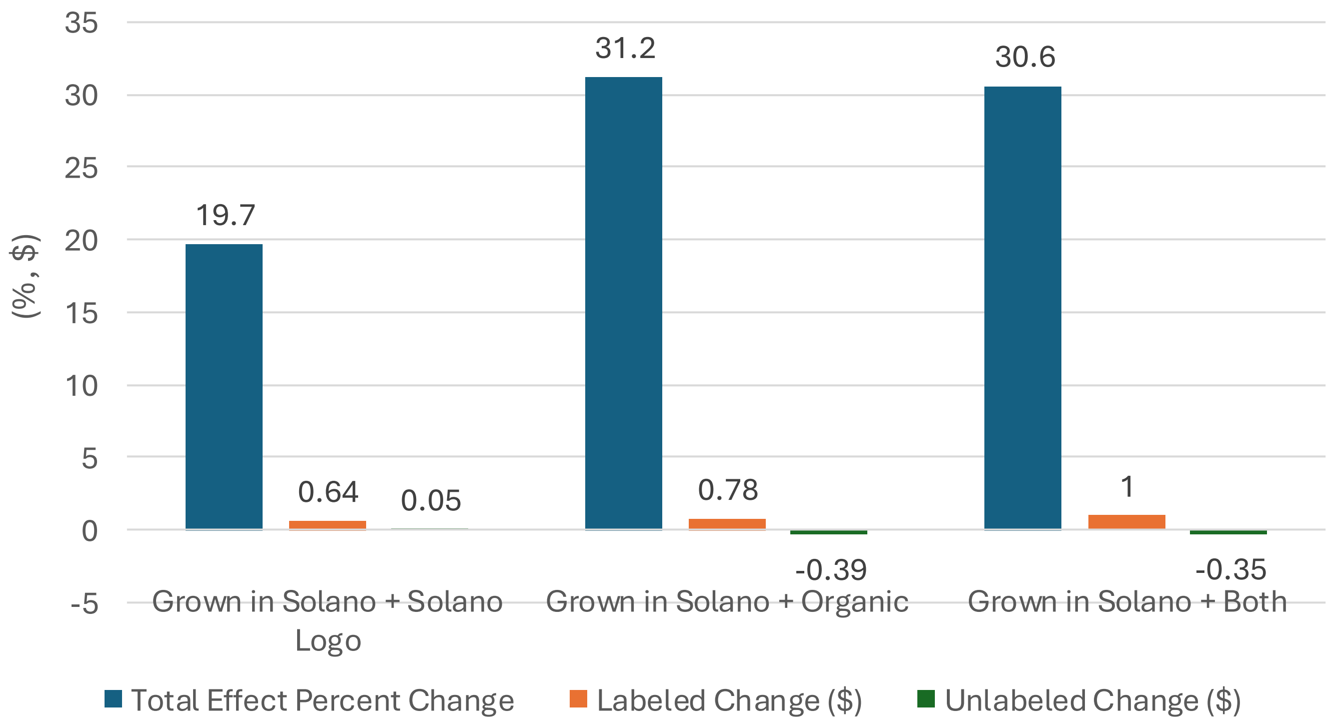


Experiment Findings (cont.): Willingness to Pay Increases

✓ USDA Organic Seal + Sustainable Solano Logo → largest effect

⚠ Sustainable Solano Logo → smaller effect

👉 WTP reflects both quality and consumer values (e.g., supporting local farmers)



Experiment Findings (cont.): Limited Impact on Actual Purchases

Do Responses Differ by Income?

✓ **High-income consumers (75k+)**

- Purchase rate increases (50% → 54%)

⚠ **Middle-income consumers (35k–74k)**

- Purchase rate decreases (29% → 19%)

➖ **Low-income consumers (<35k)**

- No change (33% → 33%)

- Additional analyses differentiated by income in progress

Experiment Findings (cont.): Limited Impact on Actual Purchases

⚠ **Most participants do not purchase**

- ~64% choose “no purchase”
- Purchase rate largely unchanged (36% → 35%)

⚠ **Limited switching behavior**

- Most participants do not switch
- Some move toward labeled products
- Many remain with “no purchase”

👉 **Strong inertia in decision-making**

Key Takeaways

✓ **Messages improved perceptions and valuations of local food**

- Higher quality and willingness to pay

🔍 **Not all messages work the same**

- Organic → strongest quality signal
- Local-only label shows limited impact by itself, some impact when combined with organic

❌ **Limited impact on actual purchases**

- Behavior is harder to change
- 👉 **Stated preferences (Perception) ≠ Revealed preferences (Purchase)**

👥 **Consumer responses vary**

- By income – low income less likely to purchase

Results from Post-Experiment Survey

Willingness to Support Local Food

✓ **High willingness to support**

- Prioritize Solano grown or regional produce (~65%)
- Regularly visit farmers’ markets and farm stands (~62%)

✓ **Moderate willingness to support**

- Advocate for local farmers and food businesses (~39%)
- Volunteer for local food initiatives (~29%)
- Commit 5% of family food budget to local produce (~27%)
- Subscribe to CSA programs (~26%)
- Ask restaurants to source locally (~24%)

✓ **Low willingness to support**

- Ask employer for local sourcing commitments (~15%)
- Donate (~13%)

Thank you!

We are looking forward to your questions and comments

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