

Sustainable Solano: Marketing Plan



Eileen Nguyen

(Additional guidance provided by Hyunjung Lee and Kristin Kiesel)

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Executive Summary:

Sustainable Solano, a local non-profit in Solano County, is an organization promoting eco-friendly feeding communities, regenerative infrastructures, and environmental awareness. Its mission is to support sustainable food systems in small to mid-size farms. Furthermore, the organization strives to develop educational opportunities and other initiatives encouraging equitable access to locally-grown foods (Sustainable Solano, 2026)

With Sustainable Solano's projects in local food access and branding proposals supporting sustainable agriculture, there has been an increasing push towards marketing locally-grown produce. The primary objective of this collaboration with UC Davis is to devise marketing strategies to increase demand and accessibility for California agriculture and crops in Solano County, particularly in communities with limited awareness or access to local produce.

Introduction:

Solano County is a rural county located in Northern California, between the Bay Area and the Greater Sacramento region. It is agriculturally focused, with its top specialty crops in 2024 including tomatoes, almonds, and nursery products (Solano County Department of Agriculture, Weights and Measures, 2023). Like Solano County, various states and counties implement "local" marketing claims, particularly to attract purchasers' attention and position products towards environmentally-conscious, ethically aware consumer segments.

This marketing plan for Sustainable Solano aims to reinforce consumer interest in purchasing local foods, as well as draw new or existing segments towards purchases. The organization aims to support smaller farms and direct-to-consumer channels in revenue generation. We propose possible marketing strategies for Sustainable Solano to stimulate consumers' ability to identify locally produced foods and convey the community-centric values of buying local.

Data Collection:

Our field experiment examines whether local claims and organic labels lead to enhanced purchasing motivation or are competing for consumers' attention. Many consumers perceive organic products to be premium products, whereas they might perceive local products as more affordable versions of the same products available from different locations. We aim to analyze purchase response and belief updating when different sustainability messages are presented for locally grown produce.

The experiment and surveys were conducted jointly between UC Davis and Sustainable Solano at two sites: the Fairfield Civic Library on June 28, 2025, and Solano County Health and Social

Services on October 22, 2025. Participants filled out a pre-experiment survey regarding their knowledge of local claims, California agriculture, and food purchasing preferences. Afterward, they proceeded to the experiment table, where their quality perceptions and willingness to pay (WTP) were tested from the following labeling treatments:

1. No labeling treatment
2. Grown in Solano County + Sustainable Solano Logo
3. Grown in Solano County + USDA Organic seal
4. Grown in Solano County + Sustainable Solano Logo + USDA Organic seal

In our experiment, we tested four treatment statuses. One basket would display no labeling treatment in the treatment phase, while the other basket would display one of three labeling claims. These included a locally grown label, the USDA Organic seal, and both local and organic claims. During the initial control phase, participants were presented with two strawberry baskets, neither of which displayed a visible labeling treatment. Data were collected on their WTP and quality-perception ratings, as well as on the basket they preferred prior to treatment. Participants made a preliminary purchase decision before the treatment phase.

During treatment, one basket would contain one of the labeling treatments, while the treatment status on the other label was unchanged. Across participants, we examined potential interactions between the local (Sustainable Solano Logo) and organic claims, as well as whether demographic or socioeconomic factors indicated trends in responsiveness to these claims. Participants could change their purchasing decision or switch baskets upon reporting their preferences.

Following the experiment, participants completed a post-survey, thereby reinforcing potential differences between revealed and stated preferences. Participants were incentivized with \$30 in compensation for their participation; \$25 if they chose to purchase a basket of strawberries for \$5.

Descriptive Statistics:

Solano County is notable for the diversity of its residents' socioeconomic statuses. In particular, the county reported that over 60% of the population was non-white in 2024, with 28.5% Hispanics (California Department of Finance, 2024; County of Solano and Solano Economic Development Corporation, 2024). The median household income was reported at \$100,027, lower than that of comparable Bay Area counties but higher than the state median income of \$95,521 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023a, b).

Although there are limitations to our experiment due to the small sample size (108), we still identified notable evidence that marketing messages could reinforce purchasing behavior. In particular, despite the higher premiums associated with organic produce, lower-income consumers had the largest positive difference in WTP and quality perceptions when presented with one of the labeling treatments. Because all boxes were priced equally regardless of treatment, it's possible that low-income consumers gravitated towards the accessibility of buying local or organic products.

The retail environment also reinforces the avenues where consumers can shop for local produce. Participants from our experiment reported grocery chains and supercenters as their primary avenues for shopping for groceries, which is reflected in their convenience and high concentration in the county. Furthermore, many individuals reported stated preferences for purchasing USDA Organic (56%), Local (41%), and Naturally Grown (41%) foods. These statistics indicate the potential to position local produce through highlighting its sustainability and ethical benefits. Moreover, it signals that target audiences would value products that are not only environmentally friendly but also hold community value.

Regression Results:

The regressions used for our experiment incorporate changes in perceived quality and willingness to pay (WTP) for the strawberry baskets. Upon regressing the two variables on assignment to the USDA Organic only treatment and Grown in USDA Organic + Grown in Solano County treatment (with the Grown in Solano County only treatment as a reference category) and other demographic factors, we identified that perceived quality and WTP have a positive and statistically significant correlation with the labeling treatments. We ran regressions across three models:

Model 1: Treatment group indicators and reference point variable

Model 2: Includes demographic controls

Model 3: Includes controls from income groups

Our regression results indicate that incorporating the organic and local claims together leads to an increase in perceived quality and willingness to pay. Although the organic label led to a statistically significant effect on quality perceptions, adding the locally grown claim reduced statistical significance. This reinforces the fact that slightly more consumers reported stated preferences for organic produce, and the additional local claim may add limited value.

Regressions in Model 3 indicated smaller increases in perceived quality and WTP among middle to high-income consumers, as compared to low-income consumers. Moreover, demographic controls in Model 2 often led to statistically insignificant results, but income controls magnified

the significance of labeling. These results suggest that there is considerable potential to boost demand for local produce amongst segments who are lower income, particularly emergent consumers who may not already buy local produce.

Finally, we find that quality perceptions changed the most when introducing organic labeling, potentially due to its known certification. However, we saw significant positive differences when introducing both of the one-claim treatments (USDA Organic only, Grown in Solano County only). This suggests that, as much as consumers gravitate towards organic labeling, they also value the sense of community conveyed by the Sustainable Solano logo. This suggests that potential segments could be targeted through community-based promotions and other signals of how buying local contributes to the economic resilience and overall well-being of residents within the county.

Proposed Marketing Messages and Steps Towards Implementation:

SWOT Analysis:			
Strengths:	Weaknesses:	Opportunities:	Threats:
- Existing research proves associations between local foods, sustainability, and support for local farmers - Rural county: abundance of local agricultural production strengthens the feasibility of marketing 41% of participants from our survey stated preferences for locally grown foods, many considering local claims in buying produce, meat, etc.	- Local non-profit may not already be known to consumers, as compared to large organic brands like Driscoll's, etc. - Limited media outreach and publicity: ~2-3K followers on Facebook¹ and Instagram²	- Over 70 retail locations: potential for large-scale marketing and reach, especially at farmers' markets and other direct-to-consumer (DTC) channels - Sustainable Solano already has momentum from existing community outreach (e.g., community gardens, cooking classes, field trips)	- Impact of redundant sustainability messaging: combining organic and local may have diminishing value - Competition from other rural counties or larger retailers-consumers may stick to their usual buying patterns - Organic labeling premiums may reduce accessibility: 16.1% of Solano County's population is classified as low-income (U.S. Census Bureau)

¹ Sustainable Solano (@sustainablesolano) "Main Profile," Facebook, accessed May 21, 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/sustainablesolano/>

² Sustainable Solano (@sustainable_solano) "Main Profile," Instagram, accessed May 21, 2026, https://www.instagram.com/sustainable_solano/

SWOT Analysis:			
			(2023a, b)

Based on our analysis of Sustainable Solano’s marketing potential, we propose the following target segments, along with targeted strategies enhancing the appeal of local produce for various audiences:

Segment 1: Low-to-middle income, sustainability-focused, health-conscious middle-aged consumers (Gen X, ages 46-61)

Segment 2: Low-to-middle income college students and young professionals valuing sustainability and healthy eating (Gen Z, ages 18-29)

A potential outline of a STP (Segmenting, Targeting, Positioning) strategy is outlined below:

Segmenting: Sustainable Solano could consider incorporating demographic, income, and psychographic segmentation, potentially focusing on Gen X or Gen Z consumers desiring healthy, sustainable foods. Although local and organic produce often incurs a premium, our results showed a larger impact of labeling on low-income consumers, as compared to higher-income consumers. The median age of participants in our study was roughly 44, and our survey design focused on lower-income segments. This reveals considerable potential to increase local produce accessibility to emergent middle-aged consumers, especially through emphasizing its sustainability and ethical benefits. Including middle-income consumers could balance out the potential impact of higher premiums from the organic seal.

Gen Z students and young professionals with similar values could also be a potential target segment for Sustainable Solano. Given the county’s existing youth outreach and internship opportunities, students attending colleges in neighboring areas (e.g., Solano Community College, UC Davis) are likely to have existing exposure to California agriculture and local produce. Additionally, Cardozo (2024) cites that sustainability has been a growing concern for Gen Z, with many interested in choosing foods that protect the environment and conserve natural resources. Grocery stores have been responding to younger generations’ interest in organic produce, however, the local label is not as universally established. With their existing preferences, Gen Z has notable potential to further develop their preferences and choose foods aligning with their values.

Targeting: Based on evidence in support of Gen Z’s values, we recommend that Sustainable Solano target low-to middle-income young professionals and students (Gen Z, ages 18-29) living in the area, who prioritize eco-friendly practices, sustainability, and food safety. A 2025

survey indicated that 72% of Gen Z consumers reported a desire to buy more local produce; however, only 45% actually purchased more locally grown foods (Strailey, 2025). This suggests potential room to educate the younger generation about buying local and reinforce their preferences. Furthermore, young professionals and students strongly gravitate towards convenience, inclusion, and holistic nutrition. These attributes could raise opportunities to reinforce Sustainable Solano's mission to increase local produce demand, as well as create a sense of community and belonging.

Although evidence strongly supports potential results if focusing on Gen Z, targeting Gen X consumers with similar values could be another viable option. Although only 26% of Gen X consumers bought more local produce in 2025 compared to 2024, 64% of them reported being in favor of purchasing locally (Strailey, 2025). Furthermore, research indicates that 85% of GLP-1 patients indicated a strong preference towards local produce (Strailey, 2025). As many middle-aged consumers are interested in maintaining healthy lifestyles as they grow up, emphasizing the long-term benefits of local produce consumption could make this segment more receptive to potential purchases.

Positioning: Sustainable Solano could position locally grown produce as a fresh, sustainable option for consumers to support their community while maintaining a healthy lifestyle. They could leverage emotional and functional benefit positioning through highlighting various ways local produce can be implemented into everyday lifestyles.

Given the notable potential effects of incorporating the organic label, Sustainable Solano could reinforce its communication strategy by emphasizing organic production and including the USDA organic seal whenever possible. Highlighting community-oriented values coincides seamlessly with Gen Z's motivations for purchasing local, while reinforcing potential promotion strategies through social media outreach and partnerships with nearby colleges. Additionally, it could be helpful to incorporate a call to action, such as "Love Local, Buy Local" or "Love Local, Love Solano", in order to communicate the value of supporting Solano County agriculture. This can further be supported by grocery store outreach and booths as a first point of contact, utilizing social media to showcase fun ways to incorporate produce into daily lives, and partnering with nearby colleges.

If Sustainable Solano were to target health-conscious, middle-aged consumers, then positioning could learn more towards tangible, functional benefits. Grocery store sampling booths could serve as an effective first point of contact, where customers can obtain samples and cards with recipes, fun facts about the benefits of consuming local produce, and a link to Sustainable Solano's Facebook page, where volunteer cooking classes can be publicized. Sustainable Solano could also consider implementing a loyalty program, where customers can get a stamp on a rewards card for purchasing local produce at any participating grocery stores and work towards a

discount. The emphasis for this target segment should be positioning local produce as practical, accessible, and connected to community-building. These promotions could be done at local grocery chains, as they are more prominent compared to locally-owned stores and could attract more potential consumers. Similar calls-to-action as those proposed for Gen Z could be equally effective for middle-aged consumers, emphasizing how buying local can benefit Solano County communities and agriculture. Moreover, including additional cards can reinforce the functional benefits of local produce, including improvements to sustainability and personal health.

Budgeting:

We propose two potential annual budgets based on the segments that Sustainable Solano chooses to focus on. These are constructed under the assumption that Sustainable Solano already covers costs for volunteers, outreach coordinators, and other staff:

Budget 1: Middle-Aged (Gen X) Consumer Targeting	
<i>Total Requested Budget: \$22,500</i>	
Marketing Strategy/Promotion:	Approximate Cost for Budget:
Volunteer Cooking Classes	\$4,000
Educational Materials	\$1,500
Digital Ads and Content Creation (Facebook) <i>Goal: 100,000 impressions*</i>	\$3,000
Farmer's Market and Grocery Store Outreach	\$6,000
Print Media and Recipe Cards	\$2,000
Community Outreach Stipends	\$6,000

Budget 2: Students and Young Professionals (Gen Z) Consumer Targeting	
<i>Total Requested Budget: \$30,000</i>	
Marketing Strategy/Promotion:	Approximate Cost for Budget:
Social Media Advertising and Digital Content Creation (Instagram) <i>Goal: 100,000 impressions*</i>	\$7,000

Budget 2: Students and Young Professionals (Gen Z) Consumer Targeting	
<i>Total Requested Budget: \$30,000</i>	
College Outreach and Booths	\$4,000
Free Samples + Grocery Store Outreach	\$6,000
Pantry Giveaways	\$3,500
Digital Marketing Materials	\$1,500
Youth Engagement Stipends	\$8,000

*Estimated budget costs based on CPM: Facebook=\$9.18, Instagram=\$10.17, also accounting for editing, production, and additional content costs (Gupta Media, 2024)

Evaluation of Effectiveness:

Sustainable Solano can evaluate the effectiveness of their promotions through monitoring the number of impressions received on their social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram). Likes, comments, and views can be analyzed across all forms of media, ensuring that our media effectively engages audiences.

Additionally, Sustainable Solano can monitor participation in events and outreach, such as college pantry sampling booths and volunteer cooking classes. Retail sales pre-campaign and post-campaign, and QR codes can be recorded, and we can observe whether repeat purchases occur within our target segment(s). The repeat purchase rate and conversion rate can be analyzed over time (30-day windows each), and after piloting our promotions for roughly 6 months, we can evaluate whether demand for locally grown produce increases in Gen Z segments.

From this, we propose the following KPIs (Key Performance Indicators):

1. Achieve at least 100K impressions on Facebook or Instagram, depending on the social media platform used
2. Aim for a repeat purchase rate of at least 20% for locally grown produce in Solano County within 30 days (Rebuy (2024) suggests that a 20-40% repeat purchase rate is optimal)
3. Achieve a conversion rate (# of consumers who purchased produce / # of consumers who engaged with a promotion, such as our sampling booths with QR codes) of at least 3% (Lauing (2025) cites that a good conversion rate lies between 2% and 5%)

Concluding Remarks:

Our proposed marketing strategy aims to attract new and existing target segments to purchase locally grown produce in Solano County. We find that local and organic labels have the potential to increase local produce demand, and that consumers have strong and potentially complementary preferences for buying local and organic. Given Sustainable Solano's emphasis on community outreach to educate consumers about buying local, we identify various opportunities to attract various target segments, focusing on consumers who value healthy, sustainable lifestyles and can easily integrate produce into their daily lives.

As significant evidence suggests that Gen Z and Gen X demonstrate an increasing willingness to buy local and make food choices aligned with protecting the environment, we intend to expand Sustainable Solano's existing community engagement. By increasing awareness through digital and tangible media, advertising, and emphasizing local as a community signal, we can encourage long-term support for sustainable produce and strengthen the county's presence in agricultural production.

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