

# Shop Smart, Shop Local

## Comparing the Cost and Origin of Food at Farmers Markets, Supermarkets and Independent Greengrocers in the Lismore Local Government Area

A research project conducted by Griffith University dietetics and nutrition students, Jasmin Moore & Sarah Why under the supervision of the Northern NSW Local Health District Health Promotion Unit and Red Cross Northern Rivers Food Security Officer.

### Executive Summary

#### Introduction and Aim:

The community of the Northern Rivers region prides itself on production of a large variety of fresh produce and values the local food supply. However, there has been no objective evidence to inform community members on which retail environments (i.e. farmers' markets (FM), supermarkets (SM), or greengrocers (GG)) sell the cheapest and most locally sourced produce. Thus, the aim of this project was to compare FM food prices and origin with that of SM and GG in the Lismore local government area (LGA). This project was undertaken by Griffith University dietetics and nutrition students, in partnership with the Northern NSW Local Health District and Red Cross.

#### Method:

A representative seasonal basket comprising of 20 food items was selected to compare price per kilogram and origin data from 6 FM, 5 SM and 3 GG in the Lismore LGA from early March-April 2018. The seasonal food basket was modelled from previous research based on the Victorian Food Basket, as well as popular food consumed by Australians identified in the National Health Survey (2016) and in accordance to the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating (National Health and Medical Research Centre, 2013). Data was collated in spreadsheets and analysed quantitatively, for comparisons and variations between each of the retail environments.

#### Results:

The representative seasonal basket was cheapest at SM (\$187) followed by FM (\$212.50) and GG (\$252). Nuts and vegetables were significantly cheaper (by \$9) at FM compared with SM, while tofu and honey were marginally cheaper (50c and \$2 respectively). Meat, eggs and dairy

products were more expensive at FM than SM (\$15, \$1.50 and \$27.50 respectively), with chicken breast and cheese contributing to most of the meat and dairy products' price differences (\$8 and \$21 respectively). A basket of organic fruit and vegetables was cheaper in FMs than SMs (\$50 and \$58 respectively). Almost 70% of the produce at FM was sourced within less than 50 km distance of Lismore CBD, and nearly 97% of the produce was sourced within 210km distance from Lismore CBD. Comparatively, approximately 75% of produce from SM and GG is obtained from places not specified within Australia.

### **Conclusion:**

These findings challenge the perception that cost of produce at FM is significantly more expensive than SM and highlights the large prevalence of local produce available at FM compared to both SM and GG. Shoppers who prioritise sustainable food systems and support local food supply should purchase the seasonal basket at FM. For those who are limited financially, yet still value local food and sustainability, purchasing most items from the seasonal basket (fruit, vegetables, bread, tofu, nuts and honey) will be the same price, or more affordable at FM whilst meat, eggs and dairy produce may be more affordable at SM. However, selective shopping of meat and dairy products at FM will minimise this price difference considerably. Future research could investigate the differences in price and origin between retail environments in other LGAs in NNSW.

## **Acknowledgements**

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