

Report: Support your locals

1. Introduction

'Support Your Locals' is an initiative that supports local food producers during the Covid-19 crisis. As a consequence of the drastic measures in restricting freedom of movement and the enforced closure of restaurants and food services, many local food producers struggled to sell their (mostly fresh) products. To support them, the development of local supply chains was accelerated. Under the slogan 'Support Your Locals' – a nationwide initiative – a network of Flevoland food producers developed a platform offering a delivery service of boxes containing various local food products to local consumers.

This initiative provides a concrete opportunity to obtain more insights into the reach of local food in the city of Almere, which strongly encourages the replacement of global food models with alternative food networks. This project tries to answer the following research questions:

- 1) How are the buyers of the 'support your locals' initiative, and what motivates their purchase?
- 2) Who are the nonbuyers? And how do they experience access to food?

2. Method

This project consists of two main research activities. Firstly, we held a survey to perform a comparative analysis between two samples of 'Support Your Locals' buyers: Amsterdam and Flevoland. The following socio-demographic information of the respondents (buyers of the box) was collected: Gender, age, migration background, education, household income, access to the initiative, motivation, and repeated purchase intention. Second, we followed up with an in-depth investigation among the people who did not participate in the 'Support Your Locals' initiative to understand the reasons for lack of engagement and to explore their experiences in accessing food. Data was collected using a participatory approach: photovoice. We asked participants to take a photograph representing the most important foods and food-related objects in their daily food routine. Photographs were later used to initiate a conversation during semi-structured interviews.

3. Results: Part one

Who are the buyers? Comparison between Amsterdam and Flevoland

80% of buyers from Flevoland and Amsterdam were female (Table 1). Although in both samples, the majority of buyers are 50-plus, Amsterdam had a higher percentage of younger people <36 years old (20% vs 7%). The overwhelming majority of the buyers had a Dutch background in both samples (85%). The education background was high in both samples. However, Flevoland buyers seemed to have a higher education level (75% vs. 60%). Average household income was similar among the groups (61.795€ vs 66.451€)

Table1: Comparison of survey respondents' demographic characteristics

| Characteristics | Flevoland buyers | Amsterdam buyers |
|-----------------|------------------|------------------|
| | % (n=306) | % (n=65) |
| Gender | | |
| Female | 80% | 80% |
| Male | 20% | 20% |
| Age | | |
| <36 | 7% | 20% |
| 36-55 | 45% | 43% |
| >55 | 48% | 37% |

| Education | | |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|
| High (HBO, WO) | 75% | 60% |
| Middle (MBO) | 25% | 40% |
| Migration background¹ | | |
| Dutch background | 85% | 85% |
| Migration background | 15% | 15% |
| Average household income | | |
| | 61.795 ² | 66.451 ³ |
| <small>¹ Migration background of the buyers is determined according to the definition of CBS. It is considered a Dutch background if both parents were born in the Netherlands, whereas migration background if at least one parent was born abroad.</small> | | |
| <small>² Based on 46% of the total sample</small> | | |
| <small>³ Based on 97% of the total sample</small> | | |

Overall, demographic characteristics from both samples demonstrate that 'Support Your Locals' is a niche initiative, reaching mostly Dutch adult females, highly educated, and with higher household income levels. The little differences likely relate to the different inclusion numbers (n=306 VS n=65).

Access to the initiative

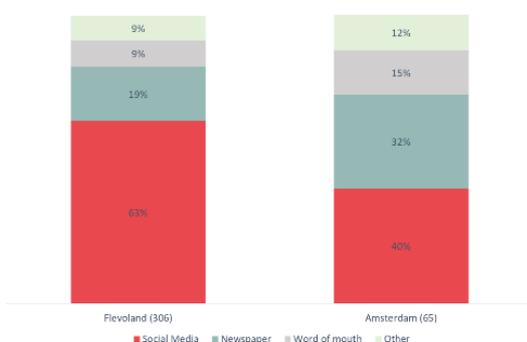


Fig 1. Access to the initiative: comparison Flevoland VS Amsterdam

As shown in Fig 1, social media seem to be more effective in promoting the initiative among Flevoland buyers (63% vs. 40%), whereas newspapers attracted more buyers from Amsterdam than Flevoland (32% vs 19%). The fact that in Amsterdam newspapers are more effective seems not to reflect the younger age of its sample. However, we did not investigate the types of social media. For example, Flevoland might have set specific municipality pages that helped promote the initiative. Therefore, further research is needed.

We will now present the remaining results focusing on Flevoland only. The high response from the Flevoland buyer's population provided a representative sample (n=306).

Comparison of survey respondents' demographic characteristics with the population of Almere.

Data provided by the 'Support Your Locals' initiative from Flevoland revealed that 68% of the total buyers of the Flevour box (Food box from Flevoland) are citizens from Almere. Although our survey among 306 buyers did not record the respondents' residence, we may assume (given the sample size) that most of our respondents live in Almere. Therefore, we compared the buyers' profile and, more specifically, the buyers' migration background, education, and income, with the Almere citizen profile (Table2).

| Table 2. Flevourbox buyers compared to the citizen of Almere | | |
|--|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| | Buyers Profile | Almere citizen profile |
| Migration background | 15% | 43% ⁴ |
| Higher education level | 75% | 29% ⁵ |
| Average household Income | 61.792€ | 25.200 € ⁶ |
| <small>4,6: https://www.clo.nl/indicatoren/nl2100-opleidingsniveau-bevolking (cijfers 2019)</small> | | |
| <small>5: Allecijfers.nl (2019)</small> | | |

We can clearly see that the Flevour box buyers' profile does not reflect Almere's population. The exclusivity of this initiative led us to the question of what motivated the buyers to purchase the flevour box, and whether they would repeat the purchase.

Motivation: The desire to **support local food producers** and the **curiosity** towards the initiative are the most important factors motivating the purchase (Fig 2).

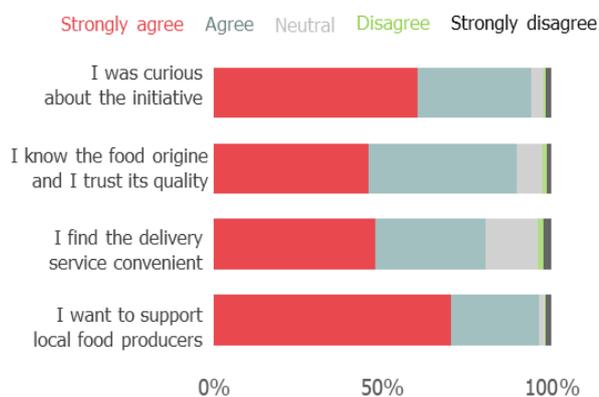


Fig 2. Motivation when purchasing the Flevour box

Repeated purchase: 56% of the buyers will not repeat the purchase. Reasons relate to a lack of food **variety**, the preference for **traditional in-store shopping**, and the **unfamiliarity** with specific food products (Fig 3).

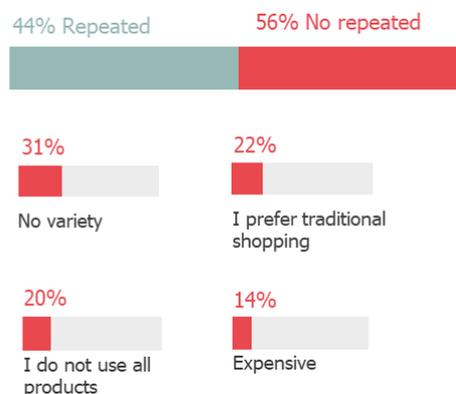


Fig 3. Repeated purchase

To summarize, this representative survey revealed a homogeneous buyer profile: Dutch adult females, highly educated, and with higher household income levels. Among this sample, the main drivers of purchase are the desire to support local food producers and the curiosity to discover new initiatives. Although nearly half of the buyers are willing to make a repeated purchase, the current consumer base could be strengthened by making changes in the food content (e.g., more variety).

These findings provide insights into this food initiative's limited reach, revealing an unbalanced engagement of citizens across the socio-economic and cultural factors. To follow up, we complemented the survey by conducting interviews among non-buyers (people who didn't purchase the Flevour box) to understand why they didn't purchase the box and to obtain broader understandings on their food provision practices and their experiences with food access.

Results: Part 2

Due to covid-19 pandemic, we have been able to conduct only four interviews.

To initiate the conversation, participants were encourage to describe the photograph sent previously to the researcher (Photographs can be provided on request).

Only one out of four participants knew about the initiative. He was a middle-aged Dutch male living in Weesp. The researcher recruited this participant during the Dutch Food Week (DFW), where the above survey's results were exposed and used to engage with the DFW audience. The participant was well informed and willing to purchase the Flevour box. However, as the initiative does not deliver to Weesp, he was unable to acquire the box. The remaining three participants, who had never heard about the 'Support Your Locals' initiative, were:

- Two middle-aged women with a Surinamese background living in Almere Stad.
- One middle-aged man with an Iraqi background living in Almere Stad.

To investigate their willingness to participate in this or similar food initiatives, the researcher provided a brief description of the 'Support Your Locals' initiative. The participants were skeptical about the initiative. However, their skepticism was directed towards any form of online food delivery service.

Three main reasons were identified:

Convenience

Online food delivery does not seem a convenient option for our participants. During the interviews, participants mentioned that they see no reason to buy food online. They live close to the supermarkets. Therefore, when food is missing at home, they can easily access to local stores without making any plans or schedule it in advance.

'I am not into it (referring to online food shopping). I live very close to a supermarket. If I were far, I would have considered, but I do not need it' (Male 38, Iranian migration background)

'DEEN is not far from me, Albert Heijn is not far from me, if I need the meat I go in the city center, so why I would deliver?' (Female, 51, Surinamese migration background)

Lack of trust.

As expressed in the following quote, the inability to see and touch the actual products creates a lack of trust in the online food delivery service.

'No, thank you. I want to see it (the food) by myself. My God. Why (would I buy online)? Sometimes they let you see that is so beautiful (the food shown in the online shop). And if you have that at home it's not the same! Many people say that, so I don't try it' (Female 52, Surinamese background)

This feeling of distrust is connected not only to the quality or freshness of food products but also to specific religious beliefs. For example, being a Seventh-day Adventist, a participant needed to follow a vegan diet. Therefore, she wanted to see the food ingredients herself to be sure they would fit within her cultural beliefs.

'I want to see what I eat.....They can tell you it's vegan but it's not. You know, it's very important to see what I eat, I have to know what I will put in my in my dinner' (Female 45, Surinamese migration background)

Costs of food

Shopping for food at traditional stores would give participants the possibility to select the cheapest options.

"if today I want to make cabbage and I see that the string beans are cheaper, then I make the string beans today, so yeah, I'm looking well to the prices I will wait maybe next week for that (cabbage) and if its cheaper I will buy." (Female 52, Surinamese background)

The cost of the delivery service was also identified as a barrier to purchasing food online.

'That is (online food delivery from supermarket) very expensive you know....I know for AH to do your grocery you expect to pay 5 euro and then they will get right to you. 5 euros !' (Female 45, Surinamese migration background)

Conclusion

Although Almere is a city with a wide variety in demographic configurations, this project's results demonstrated that access to the 'support your locals' initiative remained limited to a specific population niche: first-generation Dutch women in the older age range and with high SES. There seems room for broadening the consumer base by making changes in the food content (e.g., more variety). However, our interviews suggested that online platforms might not be the best way to guarantee local food access among the different groups in the city. The participants interviewed prefer traditional in-store shopping as it might fit more within their socio-economic and cultural profile. It needs to be noted that only four interviews were conducted. Therefore, further research is required.

In conclusion, the Flevour box initiative represents a concrete way to encourage local food production and consumption in the city of Almere. However, when striving to broaden access to local supply chains among

different population groups, various strategies, which combine online and traditional channels (markets, supermarkets), should be considered.