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Consumers Motivations for Purchasing Melons

This article is based on the research paper: "Personal values, motivations and food safety concerns for melon consumers in Indiana US farmers markets" published by Dr. Torres and coauthors in the British Food Journal.

Understanding what truly motivates a customer to select a particular melon at a farmers market is invaluable information for any grower. It's not just about the surface-level appeal; deeper values and concerns, particularly regarding food safety, play a significant role in their purchasing decisions.

A recent collaborative study undertaken by researchers from Purdue University and the Federal University of Lavras (Brazil) delved into precisely these motivations among melon consumers at Indiana farmers markets. The study aims to identify the relationship between melons' attributes, the consequences of their consumption and the personal values that guided consumers' buying decision-making processes, alongside aspects related to food safety.



Photo Source: Stock Images Microsoft.

The primary aim was to identify the intricate relationships between the tangible attributes of melons, the perceived consequences of consuming them, and the fundamental personal values that guide consumers' buying processes, all while considering aspects related to food safety. This exploration offers more than just academic insight; it provides a practical roadmap for farmers to better connect with their clientele, refine their marketing strategies, and contribute to a more robust and sustainable local food economy.

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The findings from our interviews with Indiana farmers market shoppers revealed a consistent set of attributes when they are selecting melons.

- Among the most crucial attributes consumers look for, **flavor** stands out as paramount; the expectation of a great-tasting melon is a primary driver.
- Closely following flavor is **freshness**, with consumers seeking melons that not only appear freshly picked but genuinely are.
- The desired **sweetness and ripeness** are also key, as shoppers want melons that are at their peak, ready to be enjoyed without delay.
- The "**local**" attribute carries significant weight, as knowing the melon was grown nearby is a substantial draw for many.
- While not always the foremost factor, **price** remains an important consideration in the overall decision.
- Many consumers associate farmers market produce with being "**free from chemicals**," a perception that strongly influences their choice, even if not explicitly verified for every vendor.
- The **presence or lack of bruises** is critical, as the visual appearance of the melon significantly impacts the perception of its quality and desirability.

These preferred attributes are not sought in isolation; they are directly linked to the immediate benefits, or consequences, that consumers anticipate.

- The most powerful of these was the expectation that the melon will "**taste better**" and provide a "**good product guarantee**". This underpins the entire transaction for many.
- The desire to "**avoid unhealthy food**" is another significant motivator, reflecting a broader concern for health and well-being.
- Consumers also want to "**make my money worth**," seeking good value and ensuring their expenditure is justified by the quality and enjoyment received.
- The act of eating a good melon is also seen as an "**enjoyable experience and pleasure**," a simple treat that enhances their day.
- Shoppers aim to "**satisfy my expectations**," meaning they approach the purchase with a preconceived notion of what a good melon should offer in terms of taste, texture, and overall quality.



Photo Source: Stock Images Microsoft.

These attributes and their immediate consequences are, in turn, powerful pathways for consumers to achieve and reinforce their core personal values.

- The enjoyment and health benefits derived from a quality melon contribute directly to their sense of **happiness and quality of life**.
- When consumers choose melons from local farmers they trust, and make what they perceive to be good choices for their families, it fulfills their value of **responsibility and trust**.
- The inherent freshness and nutritional content of local melons are seen as integral to maintaining a **healthy life**.
- Successfully selecting a delicious melon and providing good food for their household can also instill a sense of **accomplishment**.
- For those conscious of their broader impact, supporting local agriculture, which is often perceived as using fewer chemicals, aligns with their value of **environmental responsibility**.
- And for some, the taste and experience of eating a good melon can evoke positive memories, tapping into the value of **nostalgia** and connection to family traditions.

Given these insights into consumer motivations, melon growers in the Midwest can adopt several practical strategies to enhance their sales and build stronger customer relationships. At the market stall and in any promotional materials, the emphasis should clearly be on **flavor and freshness**. Simple, direct communication, such as signs proclaiming "*Picked Fresh This Morning!*" or "*Sweet & Juicy - Ripe and Ready!*", can be highly effective. If local regulations permit, offering samples is an unparalleled way to sell flavor and quality directly. Furthermore, educating customers on how to select a perfectly ripe melon or when it will reach its peak can empower them and build confidence in their purchase.

The "**local**" attribute should be prominently displayed and communicated. Clear signage indicating "*Indiana Grown*" or "*Grown Locally by [Your Farm Name]*" is essential. Sharing a brief story about your farm and your identity as a local farmer helps to build that crucial sense of trust and personal connection that farmers market shoppers often seek.

To **demonstrate value for money**, focus on the superior quality that justifies your pricing. When customers experience exceptional taste and freshness, they are more likely to perceive good value. Offering advice on proper melon storage can also help customers prevent waste and get the most out of their purchase, further enhancing their satisfaction.

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