

2013 UBC - City of Vancouver Greenest City Scholars Program

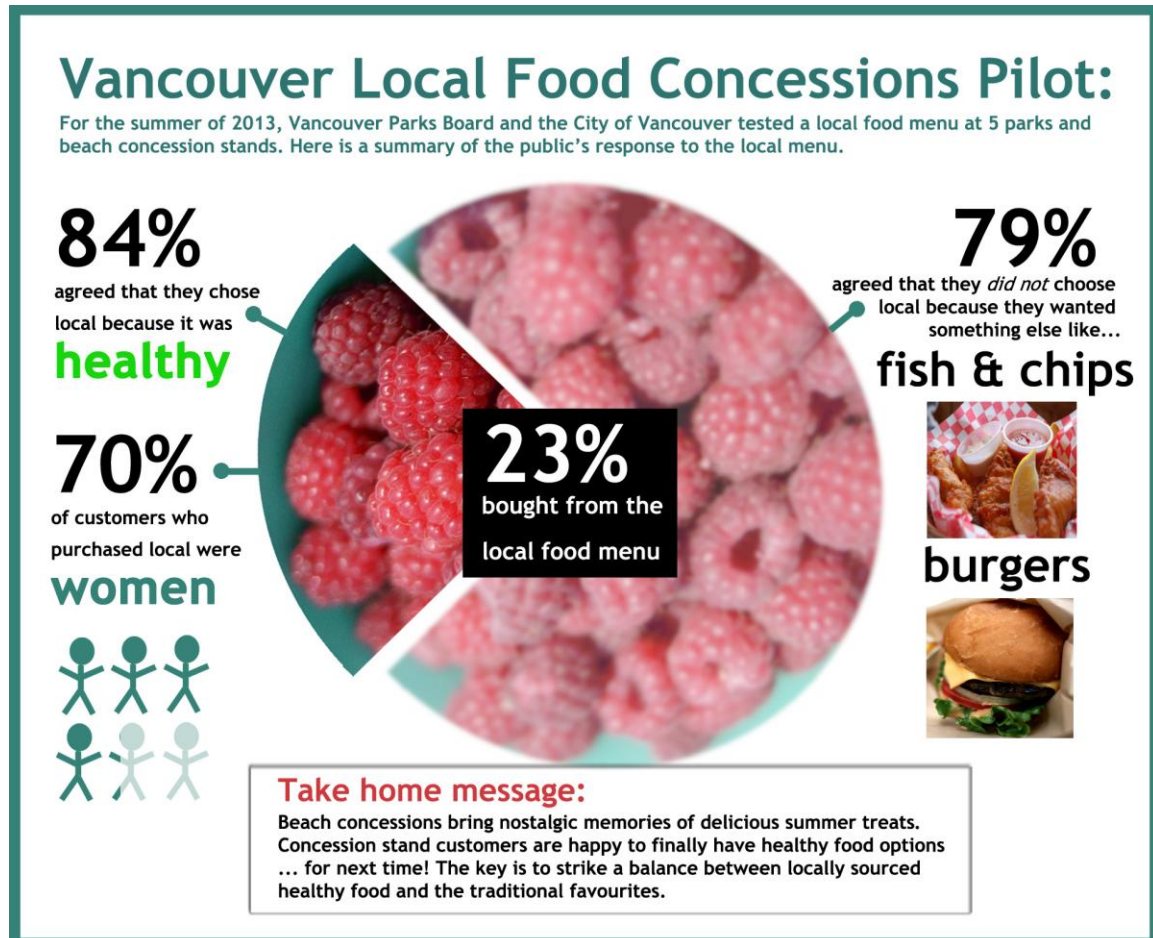
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Project Name: How can we use City-run concession stands to advance local, sustainable, and healthy food objectives?

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Executive summary



In response to a number of City of Vancouver and Park Board plans, such as the Greenest City Action Plan, the Vancouver Food Strategy, and the Park Board Local Food Action Plan, the City's Sustainability Group and Park Board piloted a local food menu at park and beach concessions. This report aimed to:

1. Evaluate best practices for local, sustainable, and/or healthy food procurement in other North American municipalities.
2. Review current research regarding consumer preference for local or sustainable food to inform the marketing material of the local food pilot and the questions, in the public response survey, regarding factors motivating local food purchase.
3. Survey public response to the Park Board concession local food pilot.

Best practices scan

Municipal staff at five large urban centres in North America were interviewed regarding initiatives to increase local, sustainable, or healthy food at parks or city facilities. Key informants were all involved in the planning and/or implementation of these initiatives. Most municipalities contracted out their food concessions to independent operators, whereas two cities operated all food concessions in Parks and Recreation Departments.

All concessions included language in Requests for Proposals (RFP), for either concession operators or food suppliers, which favoured applicants that source local, sustainable, and/or healthy food. Two of the municipalities only included nutrition standards and three prioritized nutrition standards as well as local and/or sustainable food in procurement decisions.

Main lessons learned from the best practices scan include:

- Control over menu puts Parks in the driver's seat for decisions regarding local food content at facilities.
- Continue to include language regarding local and sustainable food in RFPs for food suppliers. Also consider including criteria for healthy food. As demand from customers for these products increases, suppliers will shift in this direction.
- Partner with a restaurateur or chef with success in local, sustainable, healthy food procurement, to provide advice on developing RFPs, develop menus, or help source prepared local, sustainable, healthy food, considering the limited space in concessions.
- Know your audience and cater local, sustainable, or healthy to customer demands. The public response survey sheds some light on this question.

Consumer preference research

A scan of the current research regarding consumer preference suggests that the following factors characterize local, sustainable food choice:

- Taste and quality (including quality of appearance, freshness)
- Convenience
- 'Natural-ness'
- 'Local-ness'
- Health benefits
- Environmental benefits

Research on this topic is still an emerging field, as evidence is limited; therefore, more research is needed to consider the importance of social and economic sustainability benefits associated with local food consumption.

Public response survey

The public response survey evaluated trends in local food purchase, such as what customers purchased, reasons why they did or did not purchase local, as well as other factors related to food purchase decisions. The survey was completed by 331 customers at 3 concession locations: Lumberman's Arch, Second Beach, and Spanish Banks East.

Among customers participating in the survey, there was a roughly even distribution of key demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, and income.

However, the majority of the sample was from either Metro or the City of Vancouver (64%) and primarily spoke English at home (84%).

At least one item from the local food menu was purchased by 23% of the sample. Of these participants, 74% agreed that they chose from the local menu because the item was a healthy option. Women comprised 70% of the local food purchasers.

The majority of people that did not purchase from the local food menu agreed that they made this decision because they simply wanted to order something else. The other items purchased were overwhelmingly fast food style products, with fish and chips being a popular favourite.

It is also interesting to note that although the majority of the sample did not purchase from the local menu, these customers reported that they liked the local menu options available. Many of these customers mentioned that they were happy to see healthy options available at the concession and that they might choose these products next time. In terms of the local menu pricing, although the sample was roughly normally distributed on this question, there was a slight tendency towards agreeing that the products were too expensive. At the same time, many agreed that they would be willing to pay \$1 (33%), \$2 (25%), or \$3 (15%) more for local food at the concession, and 74% said they eat local food at least once a week or more. These findings indicate that although the sample did not primarily purchase from the local food menu, they were generally in support of local food and liked the options available.

Recommendations

Beach concessions bring nostalgic memories of foods like fish and chips. Many customers visited the concessions craving and expecting a fast food style item. Local food procurement can be expanded to these traditional products, like pacific cod or BC potatoes. Also, local items already on the menu (such as the Wild BC Salmon burger) can be accounted for in the inventory of local food purchased by the Park Board and included in future local food promotions.

The key is to strike a balance between traditional concession menus and some healthier options. Customers were delighted to have healthy food alternatives available and indicated that they would be willing to purchase these in the future. Therefore, some healthy options should continue to be offered.

Due to the physical space constraints for food preparation and storage in the current concessions, the local food items piloted this summer were snacks, and some customers expressed that they did not order these because they wanted a substantial meal. Suggestions included grilled local chicken or fish for the salad, a quinoa salad, or an option of side salad with the burgers, in place of fries. Other meal options could be considered if some of the existing constraints at concessions were lifted, through improving and expanding kitchen facilities.

Many customers mentioned that they did not notice the local food posters (26%), and suggested placing the poster next to the main menu board, as this is where their eyes are directed when deciding what to order.

Overall, the pilot test and best practices scan successfully provided many learning lessons in terms of logistics of procuring local products in facilities with limited space, the public's appetite for these kinds of products, and recommendations for moving forward with local, sustainable, and healthy food at Park Board facilities.