

Target Consumers for Bottled Mild Salsa

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Introduction

Highlights

- Researchers at USU studied western U.S. consumers' willingness to pay for processed food items; this fact sheet addresses target consumers for mild salsa.
- Target consumers were more likely to visit local farms, shop at farm stands or stores, or subscribe to a community-supported agriculture (CSA) program.
- Mild salsa consumers are middle-aged, highly educated, and have a high household income.
- Target consumers more often grow/raise their own food, follow a vegetarian or vegan diet, buy food from local farmers when available, and eat out frequently.
- Target consumers were willing to pay more for all salsa products, especially organic salsa and salsa with two specialty labels.

A study was conducted by Utah State University (USU) in the fall of 2024 to determine western U.S. consumer preferences and willingness to pay (WTP) for regionally sourced processed food products. Study data were collected using an online survey of consumers via the Qualtrics response system. A total of 1,282 responses were collected from all U.S. western states and territories. Respondents were recruited to assure that sample averages for age, education level, and annual household income were representative of the region's demographics.

The survey included questions on respondent demographics, food-related lifestyle and behaviors, consumption habits and expenditures, preferences for specialty labeled foods and food characteristics. Researchers examined consumer preferences, purchasing

habits, and pricing for three processed food products, one of which was bottled mild salsa (16-ounce bottle). The following fact sheet describes the target market (consumer group) for bottled mild salsa. Target consumers were identified as those who consume salsa at least several times weekly. A total of 345 survey respondents fell into this target consumer group.

Target Market Description

Demographics

Table 1 shows the demographic comparison between the full sample and those that consume more bottled mild salsa. Salsa consumers are middle-aged (35–54 years), highly educated, have a higher annual household income, and are more likely to be employed full-time and married. While target consumers are also more likely to be male than the full sample, a larger percentage of the group is female. Target consumers are less likely to have children living in their household, but more likely to be the primary grocery shopper. In terms of ethnicity, the salsa consumers are less likely to be two or more races, or “other” than the full sample.

Table 1. Sample Demographics

Characteristic	Category	Target (%)	Sample (%)
Age	18–34 years	28.99%	29.02%
	35–54 years	48.99%	37.60%
	55–64 years	11.30%	14.74%
	65 years and over	10.72%	18.64%
Gender	Man	47.83%	34.87%
	Women	51.30%	64.51%
	Non-binary	0.86%	0.47%
Marital status	Single	38.84%	45.79%
	Married	55.94%	44.38%
Children in household	Yes	5.22%	37.29%
Education level	Less than high school	2.90%	3.98%

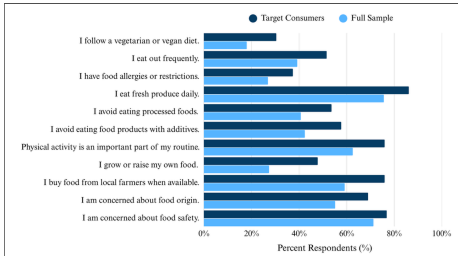
Characteristic	Category	Target (%)	Sample (%)
High school graduate/ GED	24.06%	31.20%	
Associate's degree/ some college	22.90%	28.39%	
Bachelor's degree	18.84%	18.33%	
Graduate degree or higher	31.30%	18.10%	
Annual income	Less than \$20,000	10.12%	12.25%
	\$20,000–\$39,999	13.05%	
	\$40,000–\$59,999	16.24%	
	\$60,000–\$79,999	13.92%	
	\$80,000–\$99,999	10.44%	
	\$100,000–\$149,999	20.29%	
	\$150,000 and more	16.52%	
Employment status	Full-time employed	61.16%	44.62%
	Part-time employed/ Homemaker	15.94%	20.83%
	Unemployed/ Student/ Retired	22.9%	34.56%
Ethnicity	Black or African American	7.54%	8.27%
	American Indian or	2.03%	1.79%

Characteristic	Category	Target (%)	Sample (%)
Alaskan Native			
Asian	5.22%	5.54%	
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander	1.16%	1.09%	
White	68.99%	67.39%	
Hispanic or Latino	11.88%	11.31%	
Other	1.16%	7.80%	
	Two or more races	1.45%	3.12%
Shopping responsibility	Yes, I am the primary grocery shopper.	84.93%	75.90%
	Yes, but I share this responsibility with another.	13.91%	22.00%
	No, I do not purchase groceries.	1.16%	2.11%

Lifestyle and Food Behaviors

Participants were asked to rank their agreement with statements describing their food behaviors and lifestyle on a scale of 1 to 5 (*strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*). As shown in Figure 1, all target consumers agreed or strongly agreed more than the full sample with all statements. Target consumers agreed most with the statements “I eat fresh produce daily” and “Physical activity or exercise is an important part of my routine.” Significantly more target consumers grow/raise their own food, follow a vegetarian or vegan diet, buy food from local farmers when available, eat out frequently, and have food allergies than the full sample. While food safety was a strong concern for target consumers, their ranking of this statement was closest to that of the full sample.

Figure 1. Lifestyle and Food Behaviors



When queried about their participation in food and agricultural activities, only 11% of the target consumers didn't participate, while nearly a quarter of the full sample had not participated in any of the activities in the last year (see Table 2). The target consumers were more likely to participate in all the activities, and the most popular included shopping at farmers markets and eating at local-sourcing restaurants. Mild salsa consumers were more likely to visit local farms, shop at farm stands or stores, or subscribe to a community-supported agriculture (CSA) program than the full sample.

Table 2. Annual Participation in Food and Agricultural Activities

Activity	Target (%)	Full Sample (%)
Shopped at a farmers market	65.51%	57.49%
Shopped at a farm store or stand	44.35%	30.81%
Subscribed to a local CSA or food subscription program	22.61%	10.37%
Visited a local farm	39.13%	24.73%
Traveled overnight to visit a farm	14.20%	7.41%

Activity	Target (%)	Full Sample (%)
Participated in farm-based entertainment	20.29%	10.53%
Ate at a local-sourcing restaurant	50.14%	35.49%
Visited a winery, brewery, or distillery	31.01%	25.20%
None of the above	11.88%	23.40%

Specialty Label Knowledge and Preferences

Survey respondents were asked to rate their familiarity (scale of 1 to 5, *not familiar* to *very familiar*) with various specialty labeling and production programs including "certified organic," "locally grown," "grass-fed," and "non-GMO." Target consumers for mild salsa were more familiar than the full sample with all programs. They were most familiar with grass-fed followed by locally grown production and labeling standards. Both the full sample and target consumers were least familiar with non-GMO standards.

At least half (54%) of the target consumers reported consuming foods with each specialty label at least weekly. Locally grown or sourced products were consumed most frequently, with 61% of the target consumers consuming them at least once a week. Target consumers also frequently consumed organic products (59% consumed at least weekly). Non-GMO products were consumed least frequently by target consumers.

Although target consumers were more familiar with specialty labeling programs, they didn't find all specialty labels more important than the full sample when making purchasing decisions. As shown in Figure 2, target consumers considered labels such as natural, organic, local, heart healthy, and grass-fed important when making a purchase. Pasture-raised, fair trade, and tree-ripened were not as important to target consumers. Pesticide-free, antibiotic-free, low fat, and low sugar were more important to the full sample than target consumers.

Mild Salsa Purchasing Behaviors

When survey participants were asked where they most often purchase bottled salsa, at least half of the target consumers reported every location from large grocery

outlets to direct-to-consumer venues. The most popular locations were multipurpose stores, such as Wal-Mart and Target, and grocery stores, which were reported by 65% of target consumers. Farmers markets (61%), local farm stands/stores, and CSA programs were also very popular. Target consumers were less likely to shop at a discount store, warehouse club, or specialty store. These results show that target consumers are very likely to shop at direct-to-consumer markets in addition to traditional grocery outlets.

While the full sample of respondents reported spending an average of \$11.32 per bottled mild salsa purchase, target consumers spent an average of \$17.97 per purchase, or \$6.65 more. Hence, target consumers either pay more for salsa or buy more on each purchase occasion.

Figure 2. *Specialty Labels Important in Food Purchase Decisions*

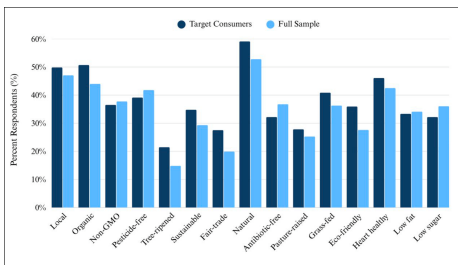


Table 3 provides an overview of target consumer and full sample WTP for specialty labeled mild salsa products. Target consumers were willing to pay the most for salsa labeled as local and organic and the least for salsa without any specialty labels. Target consumers were willing to pay more for products with two labels than for those with only a single label. The pricing difference between what target consumers and the full sample were willing to pay per bottle was at least \$0.64 and as high as \$0.81. This difference suggests that target consumers value mild salsa more, and thus, are willing to pay price premiums.

Table 3. *WTP for Mild Salsa Products (16-ounce bottle)*

Product	Target mean WTP (\$)	Full sample mean WTP(%)	Mean difference (\$)
Organic and non-GMO salsa	\$4.58	\$3.93	\$0.65
Local and non-GMO salsa	\$4.55	\$3.91	\$0.64

Product	Target mean WTP (\$)	Full sample mean WTP(%)	Mean difference (\$)
Local and organic salsa	\$4.69	\$4.04	\$0.65
Organic salsa	\$4.52	\$3.75	\$0.77
Non-GMO salsa	\$4.18	\$3.46	\$0.72
Local salsa	\$4.47	\$3.73	\$0.74
Non-labeled salsa	\$3.59	\$2.78	\$0.81

Conclusions

Study results highlight that target salsa consumers represent a distinct and valuable market segment. They are more likely to be middle-aged, highly educated, higher-income, and full-time employed individuals who engage actively in food-related activities and prioritize health-conscious and sustainable lifestyles. These consumers demonstrate strong interest in locally sourced and organic products, with significant familiarity and trust in specialty food labels. Their higher spending per purchase, along with WTP premiums for local and organic salsa, underscores both their purchasing power and the value they place on quality and authenticity.

Overall, the results suggest that targeted marketing strategies focusing on authenticity, local sourcing, and health-conscious attributes will resonate strongly with this consumer group. By leveraging their interest in farmers markets, CSA programs, and local restaurants, salsa producers and marketers can strengthen consumer loyalty and justify premium pricing. This segment's purchasing behavior signals clear opportunities for producers utilizing direct-to-consumer sales channels to capture market share while promoting sustainable and local foods.

Recommendations

- Emphasize “locally grown” and “organic” claims on product packaging, signage, and marketing, as these are the most valued specialty labels.
- Consider combining two complementary labels (e.g., local + organic, organic + non-GMO) to capture higher prices.

- Provide clear information on sourcing, food safety, and sustainable practices, aligning with target consumers' strong interest in food quality and trust in labels.
- Expand presence at farmers markets, farm stands, CSA programs, and local food events, as target consumers frequently shop at these channels.
- Collaborate with restaurants and food service businesses that highlight local ingredients, as target consumers are frequent patrons of such establishments.
- Price salsa products at a premium that reflects target consumer higher WTP.
- Explore product variations that may appeal to vegetarian/vegan consumers or those with food allergies, as these traits are more common among frequent salsa buyers.

Authors

Makaylie Langford, Research Assistant, Department of Applied Economics; Kynda Curtis, Professor and USU Extension Specialist, Department of Applied Economics; Karin Allen, Associate Professor and USU Extension Specialist, Department of Nutrition, Dietetics, and Food Sciences; Ruby Ward, Professor and USU Extension Specialist, Department of Applied Economics

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