

Target Consumers for Bottled Tart Cherry Juice

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Introduction

Highlights

- Researchers at USU conducted a study to determine western U.S. consumers' willingness to pay for processed food items; this fact sheet addresses target consumers for tart cherry juice.
- Target consumers were more likely to participate in agricultural activities, such as shopping at farmers markets, visiting local farms, and eating at local-sourcing restaurants.
- Tart cherry juice consumers are younger, highly educated, and more likely to be employed fulltime and married, with children living in their households.
- Target consumers shop at both larger grocery and direct-to-consumer outlets.
- Aside from the product labeled local and organic, target consumers were willing to pay more for products with two labels than for those with only a single label.
- Findings suggest that marketing strategies emphasizing premium quality, health benefits, and transparent sourcing can effectively capture this market segment.

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 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 tart cherry juice (32-ounce bottle). The following fact sheet describes the target market (consumer group) for bottled tart cherry juice. Target consumers were identified as those who consume tart cherry juice at least several times weekly. A total of 188 survey respondents fell into this target consumer group.

Target Market Description

Demographics

Table 1 shows the demographic comparison between the full sample and those who consume more tart cherry juice. Tart cherry juice consumers are younger, highly educated, and more likely to be employed full-time and married, with children living in their households. Target consumers are also more likely to be male, be the primary grocery shopper for the household, and have a higher annual household income. In terms of ethnicity, the tart cherry juice consumers mirrored those of the full sample.

Table 1. Sample Demographics

Characteristic	Category	Target (%)	Full sample (%)
Age	18–34 years	33.51%	29.02%
	35–54 years	57.45%	37.60%
	55–64 years	4.26%	14.74%
	65 years and over	4.79%	18.64%
Gender	Man	56.38%	34.87%
	Woman	43.09%	64.51%
	Non-binary	0.53%	0.47%
Marital status	Single	27.66%	45.79%
	Married	70.21%	44.38%
Children in household	Yes	68.09%	37.29%

Education level	Less than high school	2.13%	3.98%
High school graduate/ GED	18.09%	31.20%	
Associate's degree/ some college	18.09%	28.39%	
Bachelor's degree	18.61%	18.33%	
Graduate degree or higher	43.09%	18.10%	
Annual income	Less than \$20,000	9.04%	12.25%
\$20,000—\$39,999	7.98%	19.50%	
\$40,000—\$59,999	10.10%	17.94%	
\$60,000—\$79,999	13.30%	18.25%	
\$80,000—\$99,999	11.70%	8.66%	
\$100,000—\$149,999	25%	14.51%	
\$150,000 and more	22.87%	8.89%	
Employment status	Full-time employed	76.60%	44.62%
Part-time employed/ Homemaker	11.7%	20.83%	
Unemployed/ Student/ Retired	11.7%	34.56%	
Shopping responsibility	Yes, I am the primary grocery shopper.	88.30%	75.90%

Yes, but I share the responsibility.	10.64%	22.00%
No, I do not shop for groceries.	1.06%	2.11%

Lifestyle and Food Behaviors

Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with statements about their food behaviors and lifestyle from 1 to 5 (*strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*). As shown in Table 2, all target consumers agreed or strongly agreed more than the full sample with all statements. Significantly more target consumers follow a vegetarian or vegan diet, eat out frequently, and are concerned about food safety. The greatest difference between the full sample and the target consumers was for the statement “I grow or raise my own food,” which 63% of the target consumers agreed/strongly agreed with compared to only 27% of the total sample.

Table 2. *Lifestyle and Food Behaviors (Percentage Agree/ Strongly Agree)*

Activity	Target (%)	Full Sample (%)
I follow a vegetarian or vegan diet.	50.00%	18.00%
I eat out frequently.	65.96%	39.24%
I have food allergies/ restrictions.	53.19%	26.91%
I eat fresh produce daily.	85.64%	75.59%
I avoid eating processed foods.	65.96%	40.17%
I avoid eating food products with additives.	69.15%	42.43%
Physical activity or exercise is an important part of my routine.	82.45%	62.56%

Activity	Target (%)	Full Sample (%)
I grow/raise my own food.	63.30%	27.38%
I buy food from local farmers when available.	85.64%	59.13%
I am concerned about food origin.	80.85%	55.15%
I am concerned about food safety.	84.57%	71.22%

When queried about their participation in food and agricultural activities, only 3% 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 3). While target consumers were more likely to participate in all activities, the most popular activities included shopping at farmers markets (66%), visiting local farms (50%), and eating at local-sourcing restaurants. Target consumers were much more likely to visit a local farm and participate in farm-based entertainment than the full sample.

Table 3. Annual Participation in Food and Agricultural Activities

Activity	Target (%)	Full Sample (%)
Shopped at a farmers market	65.96%	57.49%
Shopped at a farm store or stand	47.34%	30.81%
Subscribed to a local community-supported agriculture (CSA) or food subscription program	39.36%	10.37%
Visited a local farm	49.47%	24.73%
Traveled overnight to visit a farm	25.53%	7.41%

Activity	Target (%)	Full Sample (%)
Participated in farm-based entertainment	32.97%	10.53%
Ate at a local-sourcing restaurant	49.47%	35.49%
Visited a winery, brewery, or distillery	31.91%	25.20%
None of the above	3.19%	23.40%

Specialty Label Knowledge and Preferences

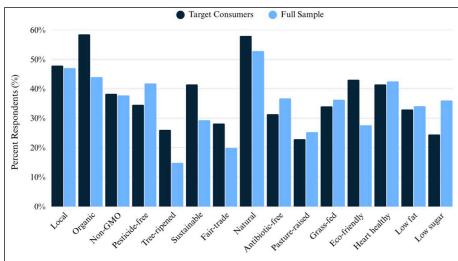


Survey respondents were asked to rate their familiarity (scale of 1 to 5, *not familiar* to *very familiar*) with various specialty labeling and production programs, including “certified organic,” “locally grown,” “grass-fed,” and “non-GMO.” Target consumers for tart cherry juice were more familiar than the full sample with all programs. They were most familiar with organic production and labeling standards, with 68% reporting that they were *very familiar* or *extremely familiar*. In comparison, in the full sample, only 26% were familiar with organic production and labeling standards.

At least two-thirds of the target consumers reported consuming food with each specialty label at least weekly. This suggests that target consumers are interested in specialty labels. Products labeled as locally grown or sourced were purchased most often, while grass-fed products were purchased the least often.

Although target consumers were more familiar with specialty labelling programs, they didn't find all specialty labels more important than the full sample when making purchasing decisions. As shown in Figure 1, target consumers were most likely to consider labels such as organic, natural, local, sustainable, and eco-friendly important when making a purchase. Interestingly, reduced sugar was one of the least important labels for target consumers, along with tree-ripened, fair-trade, and pasture-raised.

Figure 1. Specialty Labels Important in Food Purchase Decisions



Tart Cherry Juice Purchasing Behaviors

When asked where they most often purchase tart cherry juice, every location from large grocery outlets to direct-to-consumer venues was reported by at least 50% of the target consumers. The most common location was multipurpose stores, such as Wal-Mart or Target, closely followed by farmers markets, specialty stores, and community-supported agriculture (CSA) programs. These results suggest that target consumers shop at both larger grocery and direct-to-consumer outlets.



While the full sample reported spending an average of \$9.73 per purchase of tart cherry juice, target consumers

spent an average of \$24.50 per purchase, or \$14.77 more. Hence, target consumers either pay more for tart cherry juice or buy more on each purchase occasion.

Table 4 provides an overview of target consumer and full sample willingness to pay for specialty labeled tart cherry juice products. Target consumers were willing to pay the most for tart cherry juice labeled as "local" and "non-GMO," and the least for tart cherry juice without any specialty labels. Aside from the product labeled local and organic, 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 \$2.35 and as high as \$3.43. This difference suggests that target consumers value tart cherry juice more, and thus, are willing to pay price premiums.

Table 4. WTP for Tart Cherry Juice Products (32-ounce bottle)

Product	Target mean WTP (\$)	Full Sample mean WTP(\$)	Mean difference (\$)
Organic and non-GMO tart cherry juice	\$9.33	\$6.51	\$2.82
Local and non-GMO tart cherry juice	\$9.53	\$6.49	\$3.04
Local and organic tart cherry juice	\$8.88	\$6.53	\$2.35
Organic tart cherry juice	\$9.29	\$6.25	\$3.04
Non-GMO tart cherry juice	\$9.10	\$5.87	\$3.23
Local tart cherry juice	\$8.89	\$5.97	\$2.92
Non-labeled tart cherry juice	\$8.29	\$4.86	\$3.43

Conclusions

Study results show that target consumers of bottled tart cherry juice differ notably from the general population. They are younger, highly educated, and more likely to be employed full-time, married, and have children in the household. This group demonstrates greater engagement in food-related activities such as shopping at farmers markets, joining CSAs, and visiting local farms. They are also more health-conscious, consuming fresh produce daily, exercising regularly, and prioritizing food safety and origin in their purchasing decisions.

In addition, target consumers display strong awareness of and preference for specialty labels such as organic, local, natural, sustainable, and eco-friendly. They purchase products with these attributes frequently and show a higher willingness to pay—often several dollars more per bottle—for tart cherry juice with these labels. These findings suggest that marketing strategies emphasizing premium quality, health benefits, and transparent sourcing can effectively capture this market segment, which values both product integrity and lifestyle alignment.

Recommendations

- **Target younger, educated, higher-income households.** Marketing should focus on full-time employed adults, especially those with families, who show greater consumption of tart cherry juice.
- **Leverage direct-to-consumer and specialty outlets.** Farmers markets, CSAs, and specialty food stores are important purchase venues, alongside large grocery chains. Strategies should include a mix of both.
- **Appeal to health-conscious and active consumers.** Position tart cherry juice as part of a healthy lifestyle, emphasizing links to exercise recovery, daily produce consumption, and natural food preferences.
- **Highlight food safety and origin.** Communicate transparency about sourcing, farming practices, and processing to align with consumer concerns over safety and origin.
- **Connect with lifestyle and community activities.** Promote through partnerships with local farms, agritourism, farmers markets, and farm-to-table restaurants, as target consumers frequently participate in these activities.
- **Develop family-oriented marketing.** Since many target consumers have children, family-friendly health benefits and recipes could strengthen appeal.

- **Use education-driven messaging.** Provide detailed product information and health research to align with the target group's high education levels and food knowledge.
- **Price for premium positioning.** Consumers are willing to pay significantly more—often \$2.50–\$3.50 above average—for specialty labeled tart cherry juice. Pricing should reflect premium quality while reinforcing value.

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