



Utah Food Business Center Updates: Research, Resources, and Funding

*Kynda Curtis, Professor, Applied Economics, USU
Extension*

*Karin Allen, Associate Professor, Nutrition, Dietetics,
and Food Sciences, USU Extension*

Extension
UtahStateUniversity.



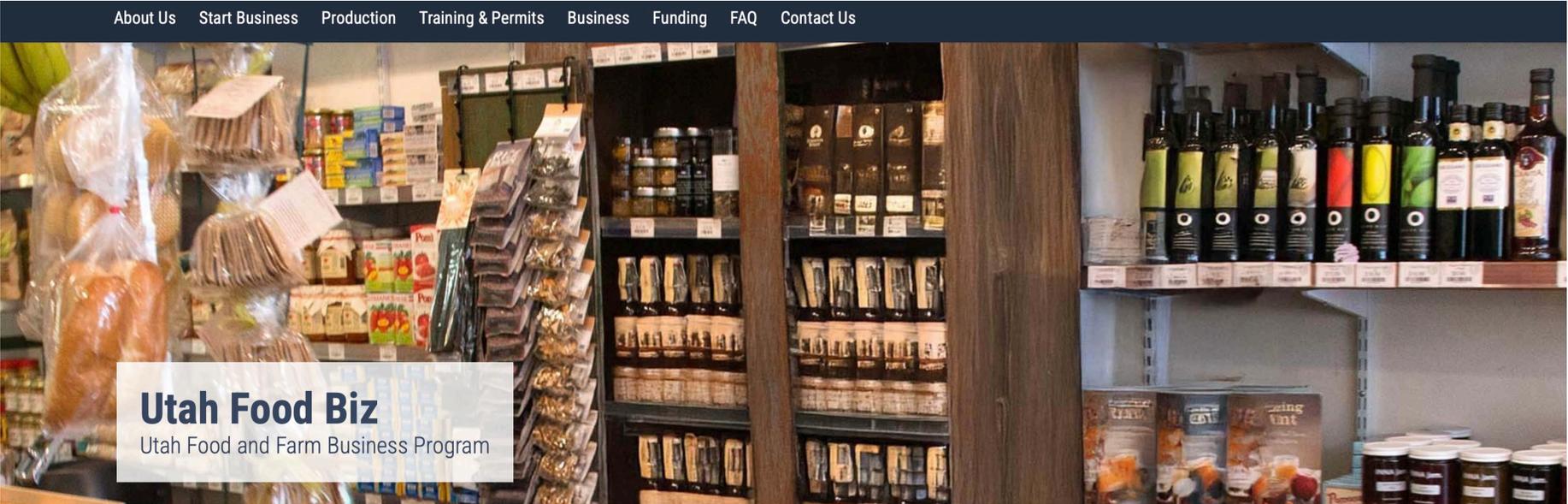
[EXTENSION.USU.EDU](https://extension.usu.edu)

Utah Food & Farm Business Program

- USDA funding for Regional Food Business Centers ended Sept 2025
 - Impacts SWRFBC and Utah Food & Farm Business Program staff
- Utah Food & Farm Business Program still running
 - USU Extension Utah Food Biz website will continue to provide resources
 - Process evaluations, regulatory assistance, other food specific services still available
- Business Builder Awards - Utah
 - 12 businesses with \$550K total awarded
 - Processing, cold storage, washing stations, etc.



Utah Food Biz Website



What We Offer



[Start a Food Business](#)



[Production Resources](#)



[Training & Permits](#)



[Business Resources](#)



[Grants & Funding](#)



[FAQ](#)

[EXTENSION.USU.EDU](https://extension.usu.edu)



Consumer Preferences and Willingness to Pay for Specialty Labeled Processed Foods

Kynda Curtis, Professor

Tatiana Drugova, Research Associate

Karin Allen, Associate Professor

Extension
UtahStateUniversity.



EXTENSION.USU.EDU

Background

- Southwest Regional Food Business Center – Established 2023 (CA, UT, NV, & AZ)
 - Market research component
- Examine consumer local value-added food preferences
 - Smaller scale/cottage foods to medium sized processing
- Products chosen due to popularity with local producers/food makers and availability of inputs in the US West
 - Tart cherries are a leading crop in Utah for example



EXTENSION.USU.EDU

Extension
UtahStateUniversity.



Study Objectives



- Examine consumer preferences and willingness to pay (WTP) for local specialty-labeled value-added foods
- Examine differences in WTP for...
 - Single vs. dual-labeled products
 - Labels across products
 - Labels by consumer knowledge of specialty labelling programs



Data Collection

- Survey conducted online via Qualtrics consumer response
 - Summer 2024, in 13 Western US states and 3 territories
 - N = 1150 respondents
- Respondents were screened based on...
 - State of residence
 - Age
 - Education
 - 2023 household income
- Asked if wanted labeling program definitions/description prior to choice experiment
 - Yes = 45%, No = 55%
- Choice experiment for 3 products – estimate pricing/value
 - Beef jerky (8 oz package)
 - Tart cherry juice (32 oz bottle)
 - Mild salsa (16 oz bottle)



Information Provided

Organic: Organic certified food products must be produced without the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), ionizing radiation, sewage sludge, and most synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. Organic products may or may not be produced locally, but they must be certified by a USDA-accredited certifying agent. Meats certified as organic must be processed from animals raised on certified organic land.

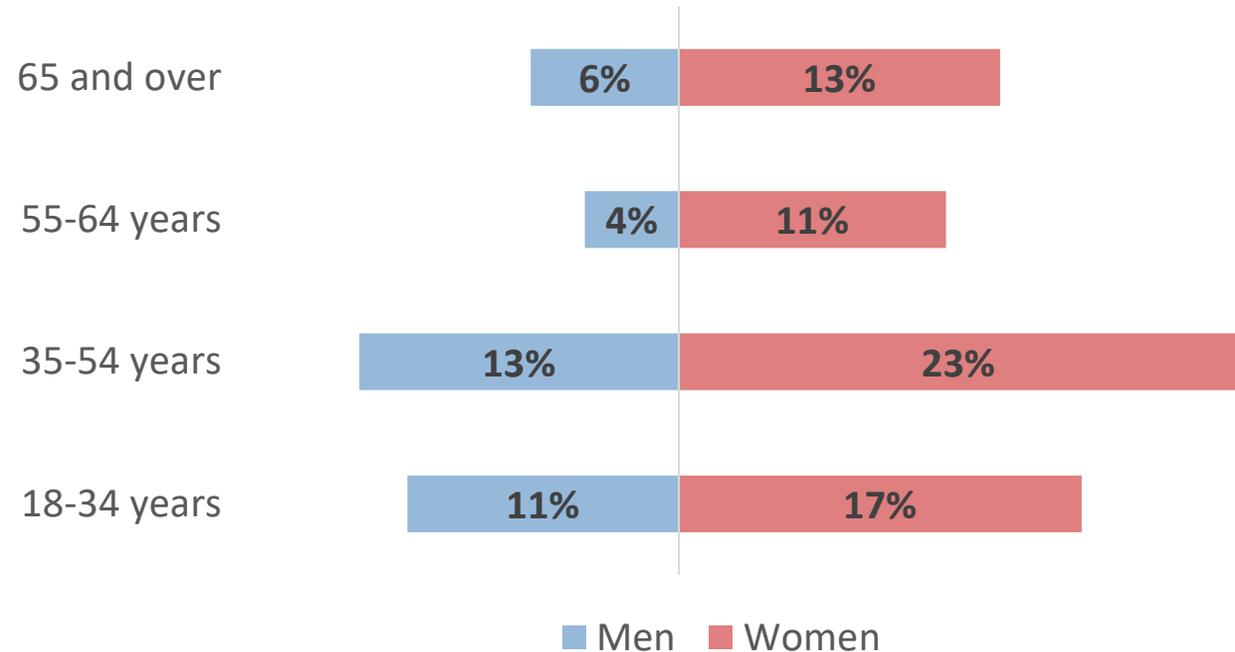
Non-GMO: Non-GMO (or GMO-free) certified products have been verified to have been grown and processed without genetic modification. GMO stands for genetically modified organism. Genetically modified organisms (GMOs) refer to crops developed through genetic engineering. Genetic engineering is a method of plant breeding. It allows plant breeders to transfer traits from the DNA of one plant to another. They can also use it to make changes to a plant's existing traits.

Locally-grown/sourced: Locally grown/sourced food has been transported less than 400 miles, or from within the state in which it was produced.

Grass-fed: The animal's diet shall be derived solely from forage consisting of grass (annual and perennial), forbs (e.g., legumes, Brassica), browse, or cereal grain crops in the vegetative (pre-grain) state. Animals cannot be fed grain or grain byproducts and must have continuous access to pasture during the growing season.

Gender & Age Groups

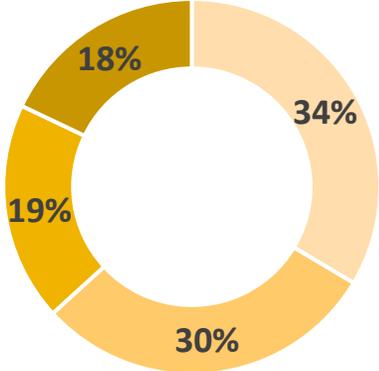
- There were almost 2x more female (65%) than male (35%) respondents
- Most respondents were in 35-54 age group, which is consistent with the general population



Selected Socio-Demographics

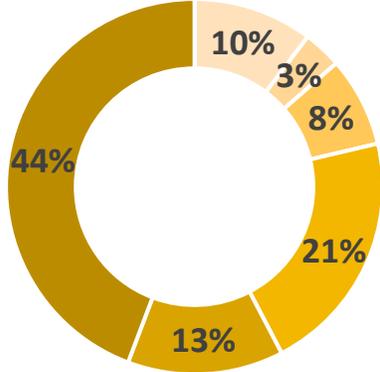
Highest education

- High school or less
- Associate's or some college
- Bachelor's degree
- Graduate degree or higher



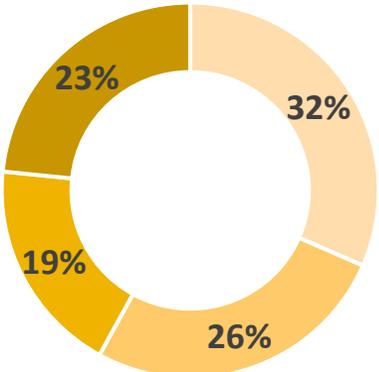
Employment status

- Unemployed
- Student
- Homemaker
- Retired
- Part-time employed
- Full-time employed



2023 household income

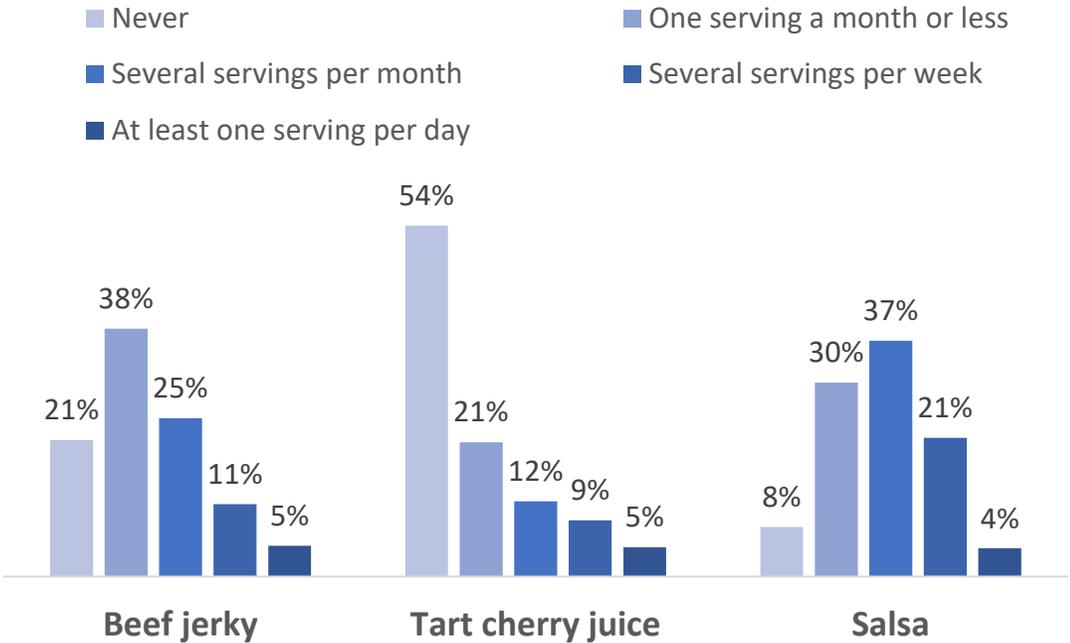
- Less than \$40K
- \$40K - \$69K
- \$70K - \$99K
- \$100K and more



• The sample was diverse in terms of socio-demographic variables

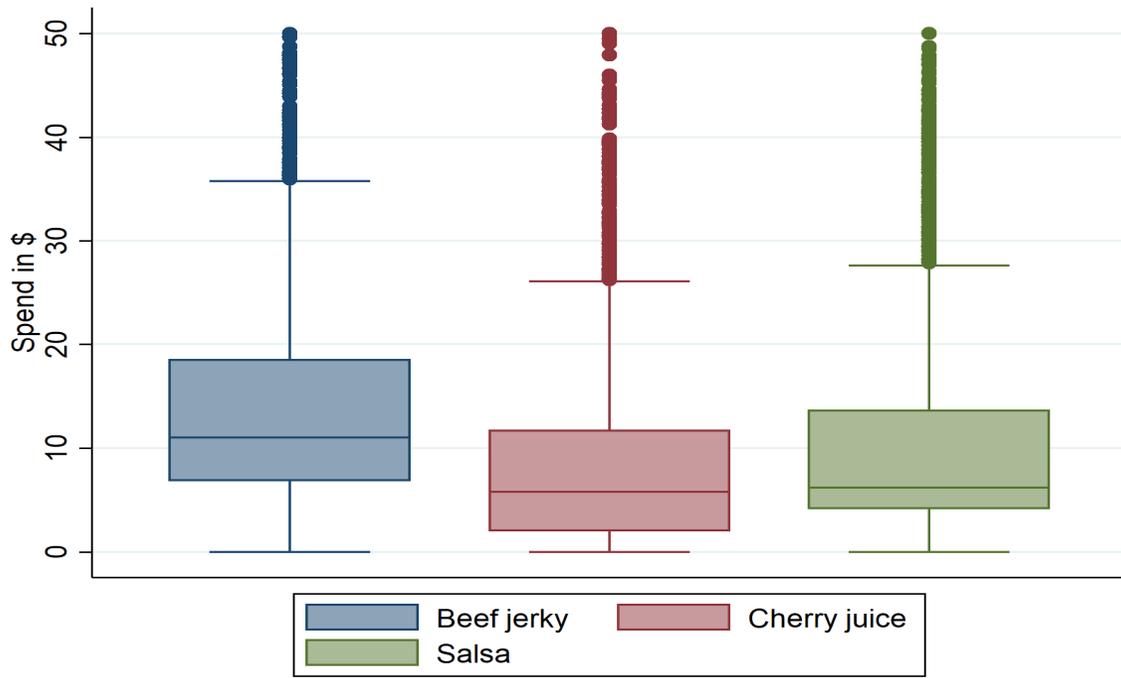
Product Consumption & Spending Habits

Frequency of Consumption



- Among the three products, respondents consume salsa most frequently and cherry juice least frequently

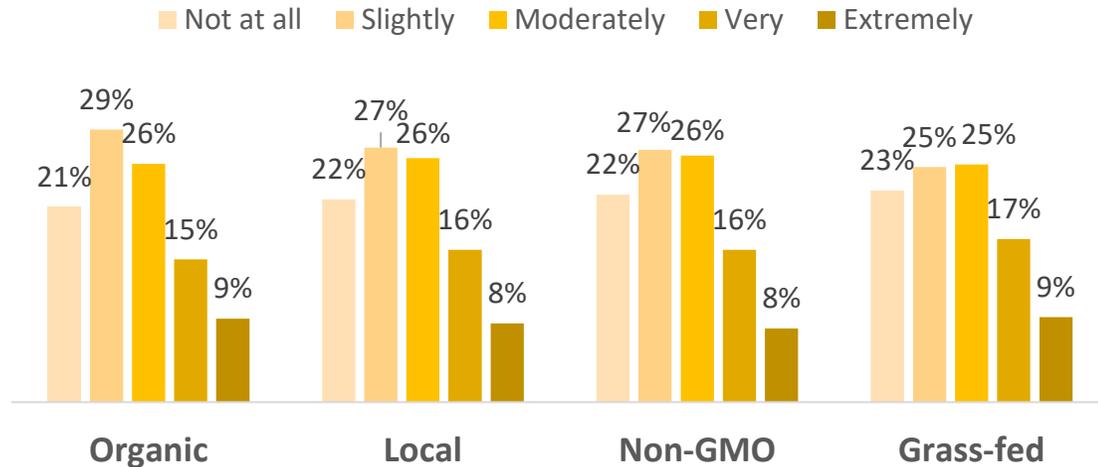
Spending per Purchase



- Per purchase, respondents spend more on beef jerky (avg. **\$14**), and they spend similar amounts on cherry juice (avg. **\$10**) and mild salsa (avg. **\$11**)

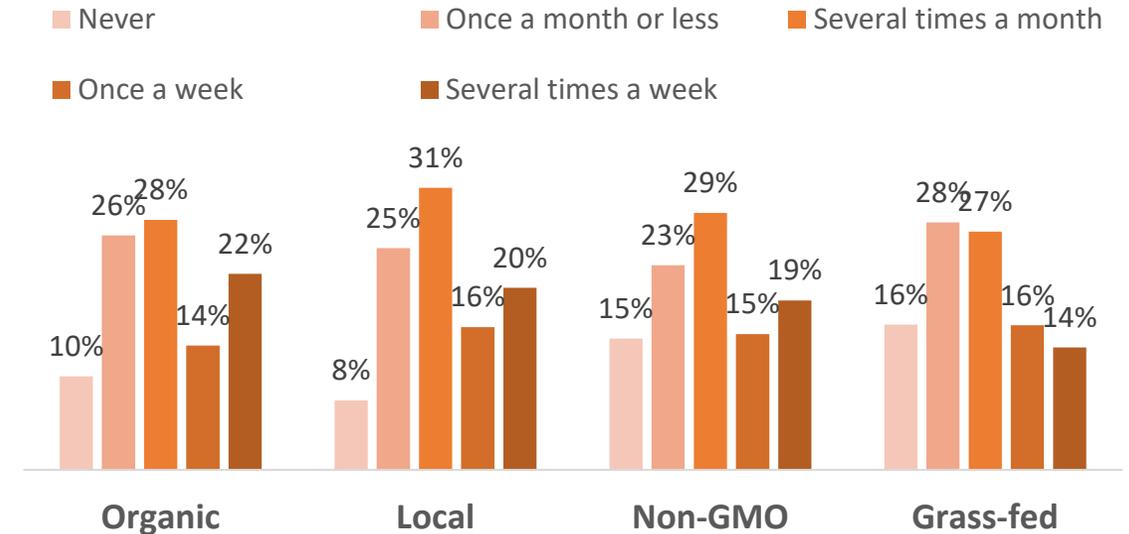
Label Familiarity & Consumption Habits

Familiarity with Labels



- The level of familiarity is low and similar across the labels
- **Half** of respondents are **not at all or slightly familiar** with each label
- **~25%** of respondents are **very or extremely familiar** with each label

Frequency of Consumption



- **~1/3** of respondents consume products with each label **at least once a week or more frequently**
- Grass-fed products are consumed least frequently

Choice Experiment

- Respondents complete 24 choice tasks
- Each respondent was randomly assigned to 2 of the 3 products
- Choices differ by...
 - Label – Certified organic or not, Local (sourced, grown, made) or not, non-GMO (grass-fed for beef jerky) or not
 - Price – 4 prices levels
 - One at 50% discount
 - One at current price
 - One at 50% premium
 - One at 100% premium
- Each choice offers two products and a none option
- Purpose is to elicit the actual value the consumer derives from purchasing the product and thus their WTP – pricing for each labeled product



Choice Experiment Setup

Attribute	Beef jerky 8 oz package 	Tart cherry juice 32 oz bottle 	Mild salsa 16 oz bottle 
Production 1	Organic or not	Organic or not	Organic or not
Production 2	Grass-fed or not	Non-GMO or not	Non-GMO or not
Source	Local or not	Local or not	Local or not
Price	\$9.99; \$13.99; \$17.99; \$21.99	\$3.99; \$6.99; \$9.99; 12.99	\$1.49; \$3.99; \$6.49; \$8.99

Choice Task Example - Beef Jerky

This choice involves an 8 oz package of beef jerky. Which of the following options would you choose based upon the listed price in dollars and the labels indicated?



\$21.99 (8 oz)
Organic
Grass-Fed



\$9.99 (8 oz)
Grass-Fed
Local

None

I would choose...



Results: Mean Willingness to Pay (WTP) – Premiums

Labels	Beef jerky	Tart cherry juice	Mild salsa
Organic	\$4.07***a1	\$3.65***d1	\$3.12***h2
Grass-fed	\$4.47***a	---	---
Non-GMO	---	\$2.67***e3	\$2.63***i3
Local	\$4.23***a4	\$2.77***e5	\$2.35***i6
Organic & Grass-fed	\$8.73***b	---	---
Organic & Non-GMO	---	\$6.55***f7	\$5.61***j8
Organic & Local	\$6.81***c9	\$5.48***g10	\$4.76***k11
Grass-fed & Local	\$8.86***b	---	---
Non-GMO & Local	---	\$5.85***g12	\$5.08***k13

Notes: *** = significant at 1%

Same letter indicates that the estimates are not statistically different (within product comparison)

Same number indicates that the estimates are not statistically different (across product comparison, same labels only)

- Combining labels results in higher WTP than WTP for one label
- **Beef jerky**
 - Individual labels are similarly valued (differences not statistically significant)
 - Combination of organic & local is less valued than other two label combinations
 - Yet, local and organic & local are more valued on beef jerky than the other two products
- **Cherry juice and salsa**
 - Organic label (alone) is most valued
 - Combination of organic & non-GMO is most valued
 - Labels alone and in combination are more valued on cherry juice than salsa (except non-GMO)

Results: WTP by Information Group – Premiums

	Beef jerky		Tart cherry juice		Mild salsa	
	No*	Yes**	No	Yes	No	Yes
Organic	\$3.44	\$6.96	\$3.07	\$5.39	\$2.83	\$4.06
Grass-fed	\$4.18	\$6.82	---	---	---	---
Non-GMO	---	---	\$2.19	\$4.40	\$2.46	\$3.56
Local	\$3.71	\$5.43	\$2.45	\$3.51	\$2.32	\$2.66
Organic & Grass-fed	\$8.73	\$11.57	---	---	---	---
Organic & Non-GMO	---	---	\$6.52	\$7.94	\$5.75	\$6.39
Organic & Local	\$6.28	\$9.98	\$5.01	\$7.34	\$4.59	\$5.78
Grass-fed & Local	\$8.40	\$10.80	---	---	---	---
Non-GMO & Local	---	---	\$5.37	\$7.13	\$5.00	\$5.74

- Group that requested label information has a higher WTP for each label and combination across all products (except local on salsa)
- Unclear if WTP values are higher due to the information or the groups are fundamentally different
 - To be explored further

* No = respondent did not want more information about labels before the choice experiment

** Yes = respondent wanted more information about labels before the choice experiment

All WTP estimates significant at 1% level. Estimates **in bold** are not statistically different.



Summary

- Consumers are willing to pay more for products with labels
 - Relative preference for individual labels varies by product
 - Beef jerky: Individual labels similarly valued
 - Cherry juice and salsa: Organic is most valued
- Producers/food makers will benefit from using multiple labels on the examined products (WTP for a dual-labeled product higher than a single-labeled product), although some combinations are more valued than others
 - Beef jerky: organic & local combination is least valued
 - Cherry juice and salsa: organic & non-GMO most valued
 - Except organic & local labels combination, WTP is either additive (independent labels), or there is a segment willing to pay more than the sum of WTP for each label alone
- WTP for labels on salsa tend to be lowest among examined products
- Respondents who wanted more information about labels exhibited higher WTP



USU Valued-Added Foods Production, Business Management, & Marketing Resources

- Value-Added Food Production and Marketing – Factsheets, presentations, and other materials
 - <https://extension.usu.edu/apec/value-added-food-production-and-marketing>
- Utah Food Biz
 - <https://extension.usu.edu/foodbiz/>
- Southwest Regional Food Business Center
 - <https://swfoodbiz.org>



Value-Added Food Production & Marketing Website – Fact Sheets

Value-Added Food Production and Marketing

Extension Fact Sheets



January 13, 2026

Agricultural Producer and Food Maker Food Processing Operation Needs Assessment Overview

Utah State University's 2024 needs assessment explores the educational, funding, and infrastructure needs of Utah farmers, ranchers, and food makers involved in value-added food production. Results highlight respondent demographics, products, markets, lab...



January 8, 2026

Assessing Utah's Agricultural Producer and Small Processor Interest in Value-Added Food Production

This fact sheet presents findings from a study on value-added food production among Utah farmers, ranchers, and food processors. Highlighting operational characteristics, production timelines, markets, sales goals, and key resources needed to support loca...



December 18, 2025

Target Consumers for Beef Jerky

This study identifies the target market for packaged beef jerky in the western U.S., highlighting consumer demographics, purchasing habits, and willingness to pay premiums for organic, grass-fed, and locally sourced products.

- Utah's Value-Added Food Processing Options
- U.S. West Consumer Processed Food Preferences and Consumption Habits
- U.S. West Consumer Preferences for Specialty Labeled Processed Foods
- Target Consumers for Bottled Tart Cherry Juice
- Target Consumers for Bottled Mild Salsa
- Target Consumers for Packaged Beef Jerky
- Agricultural Producer and Food Maker Food Processing Needs Assessment Overview
- Assessing Utah's Agricultural Producer and Small Processor Interest in Value-Added Food Production

EXTENSION.USU.EDU

Extension
UtahStateUniversity.





Thank you!

Questions?

Extension
UtahStateUniversity.



EXTENSION.USU.EDU