

The real meal deal: assessing student preferences for “real food” at Fort Lewis College

Carl Schnitker and Kathy Hilimire, Environmental Studies, Fort Lewis College

BACKGROUND

- Fort Lewis College committed to purchasing 20% real food by 2020 as part of a national campaign called the Real Food Challenge (RFC) (figure 1).

REAL FOOD STANDARDS 2.0

Real Food **NOURISHES**



Figure 1. The RFC is an initiative on college campuses that aims to shift food procurement towards real food; defined as ecologically sound, humane, fair, or local. Criteria for these terms are defined in the Real Food Standards report (RFC n.d.).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the most important factors for students in deciding what to eat?
- Would students be willing to pay more for real food? If so, how much?
- What characteristics predict whether a student is willing to pay more for real food?

METHODS

- Survey administered in dining hall to 309 respondents.
- Institutional Review Board approval received 12/21/2017.
- Data analysis completed with SPSS: ANOVA and binary logistic regression.

RESULTS: STUDENT FOOD PREFERENCES

- All four RFC categories were important to respondents when deciding what to eat; average scores were from 3.05 to 3.51 out of 5, where 2.5 was neutral (figure 2).
- Of the RFC categories, there was no statistically significant difference between animal welfare, farmworkers’ working conditions, and environmentally-friendly food production. All three of these categories were more important to respondents than local sourcing of food, although local was still important.
- Taste was significantly more important to respondents than all other categories when deciding what to eat. Taste, health, and price were statistically more important than all RFC categories.

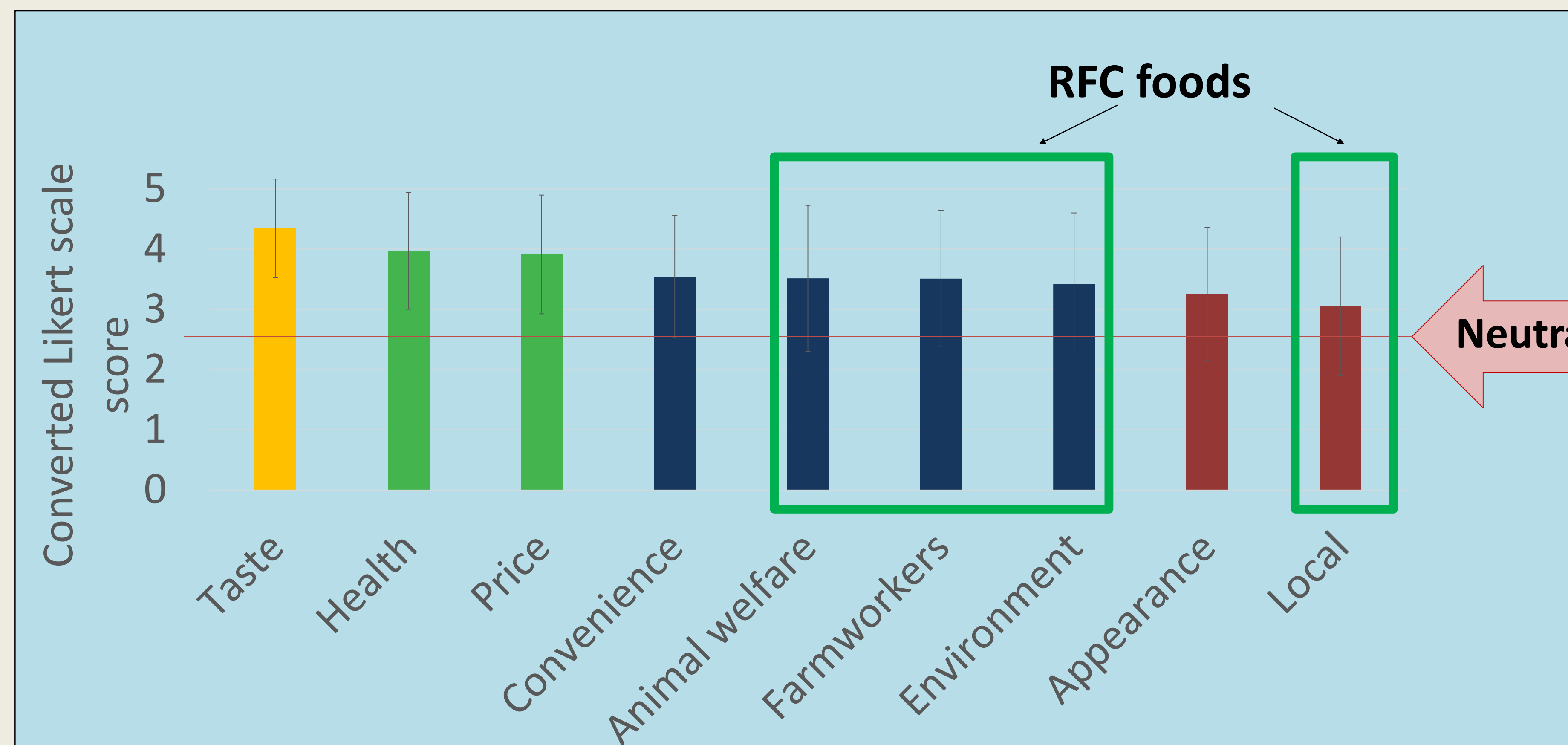


Figure 2. Average Likert scores (+/- 1 standard deviation) for nine food preference factors (N=309).

RESULTS: WILLINGNESS-TO-PAY FOR REAL FOOD

- 2/3 of respondents reported that they would be willing to pay more for real food (figure 3).
- Using binary logistic regression, we found that statistically significant *positive* parameters for predicting whether a respondent would pay more for real food were taste, values, and in-state. The only *negative* parameter was convenience (figure 4).



Figure 3. Respondent willingness-to-pay for real food amounts (N=309).

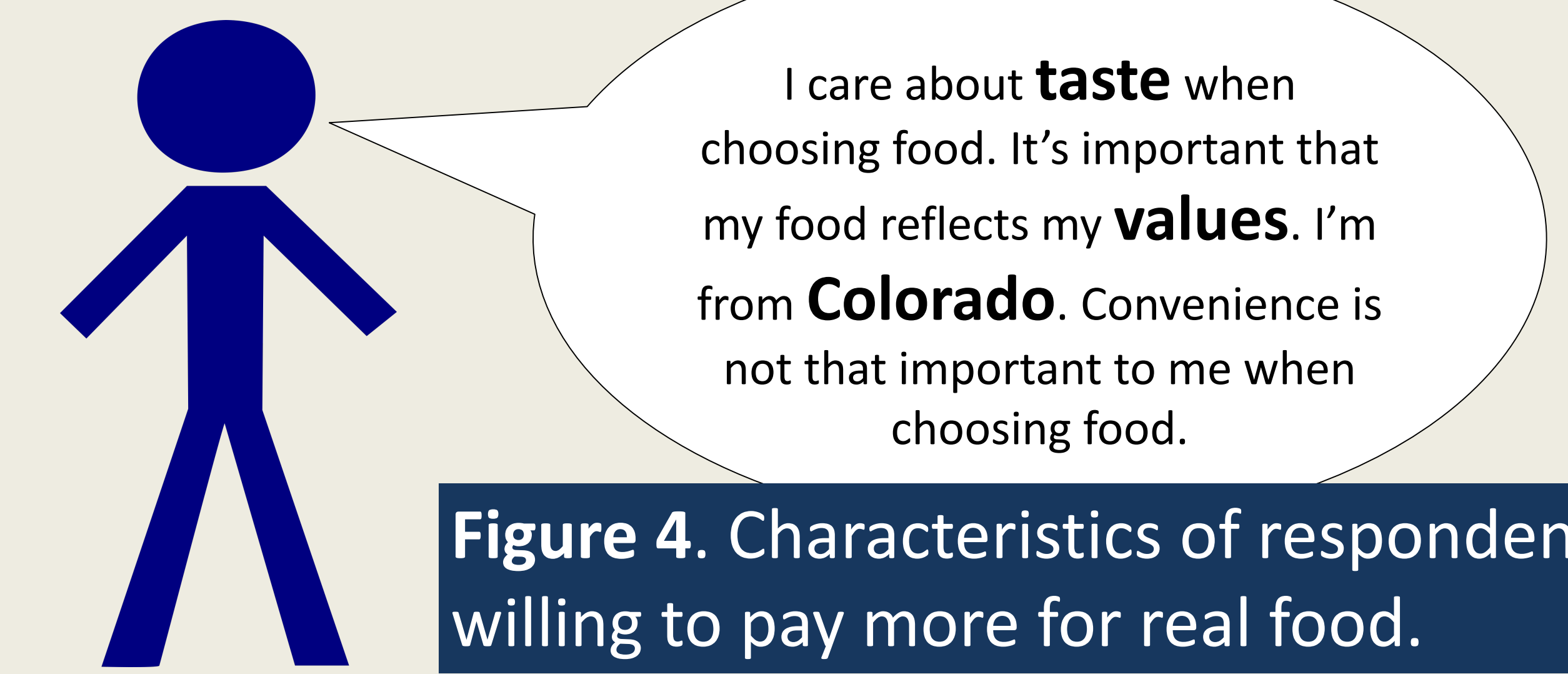


Figure 4. Characteristics of respondents willing to pay more for real food.

CONCLUSIONS

- Respondents valued all four RFC categories, although not as much as taste, health, & price.
- RFC marketing materials should focus on taste and health benefits.
- Responses about price were conflicting; therefore Campus Dining should add real food items that don’t cause a cost increase.

REFERENCES

- Porter, J, Conner, D, Kolodinsky, J, Trubek, A. 2017. Get real: an analysis of student preference for real food. *Agriculture and Human Values* 34: 921–932.
- RFC n.d. Real Food Standards 2.1 (accessed 3/27/19; <https://www.realfoodchallenge.org/resources/real-food-resources/real-food-standards-20/>)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS Thank you to Maggie Magierski for contributing to this research. A huge thank you to students in the spring semester of ENVS 320 for collecting data. Thank you to the Undergraduate Research in the Humanities support from the Mellon Foundation for funding this research.