

Understanding motivations of consumers using organic, sustainable box schemes in England and France



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1. Objectives

- To compare the motivations of consumers in Central England and Southern France, who make local, sustainable food choices.
- To investigate the socio-demographic profile of fruit and vegetable box scheme users in England and France.

A box scheme is an example of a Local Food Initiative, which provides a direct link between local producers and the community. Boxes are ordered from the farm and seasonal produce is delivered to the customer's home.

2. Method

- The findings of semi-quantitative surveys are compared using data collected from telephone interviews in France and postal questionnaires in England.
- Questions were asked regarding socio-demographic profile of consumers, shopping habits, motivations for using a box scheme and perceived barriers to making sustainable food choices.
- Answers were regrouped to allow direct comparison between the results from the French and English study
- The English study was completed in Nottinghamshire, Central England (n=68 subjects)
- The French study was completed in Montpellier, Southern France (n=182 subjects)

Table 2-Motivations ranked in order of importance for the customers of the French and English box scheme

Motivation	English Ranking	French Ranking
Purchase of local produce	1	5
Ecological reasons	2	2
Natural, Organically produced food	3	3
Quality (taste, freshness, health)	4	1
Convenience	5	4
Budget	6	6

Table 3: How box schemes can fulfil sustainability criteria¹

Environmentally sustainable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If produce is organic, there are fewer pesticides and synthetic nitrogen fertilizers to damage the soil. There is an increase in the biodiversity of the land in a move away from intensive farming – replenishing nutrients in the soil. As food is delivered locally there is a reduction in the distance food is transported, therefore reducing food miles and greenhouse gases. There is a reduction in the packaging used on foods meaning there is less waste and greenhouse gases generated.
Economically Sustainable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As the produce is local and organic it is considered 'added value', therefore people will pay a premium for the food, and sold directly, more money will reach the farmers and producers. Local farmers can work together in co-operatives, so that they can compete with larger companies. Money that is spent on a vegetable box, remains in the local economy for longer and generates more money (Pretty, 2001).
Socially sustainable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing jobs in the area. Strengthening links between farmers and consumers. Public health – increasing fruit and vegetable consumption.

Table 1– Comparison of the socio-demographic profile of the box scheme users in England and France

	East Midlands, England	Montpellier, France		
Age group	%	%	χ^2	<i>p</i>
18-35 years	33.3	15.4	13.9	(<i>p</i> <0.001)
35-45 years	29.9	27.5		
Over 45 years	36.8	57.1		
Income				
Low	38.2	39.5	4.1	(<i>p</i> =0.129)
Medium	40.7	48.8		
High	21.0	11.6		
Profession				
Professional occupation	77.9	44.5	28.8	(<i>p</i> <0.001)
Non-professional occupation	15.1	24.1		
Never worked/retired	7.0	31.3		

3. Results

- The study population of box scheme users in both countries was dominated by rather affluent professionals. The UK users were however younger than the French population.
- Markets were a frequently used outlet for sourcing local produce in France whereas in England farm shops were more often used.
- In England the 82.8% of the study population still completed the majority of their shopping in supermarkets.
- In France supermarkets are used less often than in England and were more frequently used by professionals ($\chi^2=10.1$; *p*=0.006).
- The English reported access to local produce to be the most important motive to purchasing from the box scheme, and did not report any barriers that prevent their use of the box scheme more regularly.
- The French stated quality to be the most important motive to using the box scheme and price was the greatest barrier.

4. Conclusion

- The box schemes are being used by a niche market
- To benefit the environment sustainable food purchases must be more mainstream and not just used by affluent professionals.
- French customers primary motivation for using a box scheme is egoistical but in England is altruistic. This could be due to differences in culture regarding influences on food choice in general, and the French population require fewer guarantees about food production due to the prolonged connection with local good quality foods not seen after the rapid industrialisation of the UK.
- Consumers already using a box scheme perceive fewer barriers to making sustainable food choices.