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Agriculture Program

A Customer Survey of U-Pick Berry Farms in Monroe County and its vicinity

Knowing what customers are looking for helps farmers grow their business.

Summer is here and with it comes berry picking season. Last year we were in the middle of the pandemic marked with precautions to stop the spread, such as restrictions on meeting people from other households, travel bans and closure of non-essential businesses and stores. Concerns about the spread of the virus caused many to turn to local sources of food. People who were worried about germs on their produce looked for more direct ways to buy fresh produce. Others who were tired of being cooped up in their homes for months were seeking recreation. This led many to their local U-Pick farms.

The resulting surge of customers brought a revenue increase for farmers, in some cases up to 75%. It also provided a good opportunity to do a customer survey that would examine the factors that influence customer satisfaction, customer demographics, duration of their stay and the amount of money spent.

This survey was a part of the 'Needs Assessment at Berry U-Pick Farms in Monroe County' funded by the Genesee Valley Regional Market Authority. The questionnaire was developed by researchers Ya-Ling Chen, Ph.D. and Nick Pitas, Ph.D., Department of Recreation, Therapeutic Recreation & Tourism at SUNY Brockport. Its goal was to create a series of best-practices for farmers and provide recommendations on how U-Picks can better serve their customers.

Over 220 customer responses were collected at four blueberry and raspberry U-Picks in Monroe County and its vicinity. While it would be false to assume that the results apply to all farms, the study provided valuable insight. An "Importance-Performance Analysis" was used. This is a simple method of evaluating and improving service quality using survey data. It allows service providers to identify things that customers find important, but which are not delivered at a sufficient level of quality.

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From the data, the researchers learned that U-Pick visitors are mostly female, Caucasian, and residents of Monroe County. Their average age was 50, and nearly 50% had a graduate or professional degree. This indicated that some of the racial or ethnic minority groups, younger adults, and individuals with lower socioeconomic status were not included and did not equitably benefit from visiting the U-Pick farms in the region.

In evaluating services or farm characteristics that influence visitor satisfaction, survey respondents placed the highest value on the quality of the fruit, taste of the fruit, helpfulness of staff and ease of checkout.

The results also suggested that farmers should focus on improving perceptions of availability of desired berry varieties through competitive pricing and more effective communications using their website, social media, answering machine recording, and signage about what is available/not available to "avoid disappointment when customers arrive."

Click for the [full report](#). More details about the project and its goals can be found [here](#).

Following the findings, the CCE of Monroe County Agriculture Department plans on working with U-Pick farmers to help them improve their marketing strategies and attract customers in the post-pandemic era. We will also help them connect with minority groups that could be a significant market potential for U-Pick farms.

Contact Jarmila Haseler, Agriculture Educator, CCE of Monroe County for more details about the project and its outcomes.



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