

ADOPTION OF SHORTER REGIONAL FOOD SUPPLY CHAINS DURING COVID-19

This Agriculture and Food Research Initiative is a multi-region, multi-institution research and outreach project that assesses the impact of COVID-19 on food and agricultural systems to develop strategies for coping with future crises. Lessons from COVID-19: Positioning Regional Food Supply Chains for Future Pandemics, Natural Disasters and Human-made Crises is one of 17 projects nationwide to receive funding through a new program area of the USDA's Agriculture and Food Research Initiative, targeting rapid response solutions to the pandemic through applied research, education and extension activities. This data was collected as a part of this project. This project is supported by the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative, grant no. 2020-68006-33037, from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

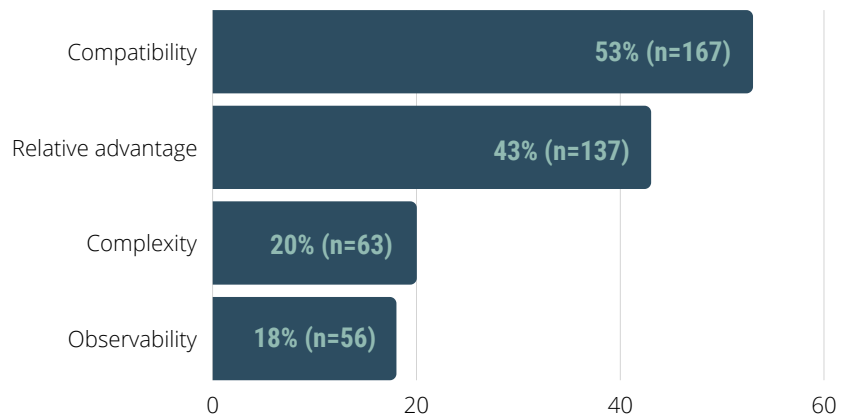
PERCEPTIONS OF PRODUCERS AND SUPPLIERS ON ADOPTING A SHORTER REGIONAL SUPPLY CHAIN DURING COVID-19

COVID-19 presented unique challenges to producers and the supply chain. As a part of this study, researchers examined how producers were able to adapt to shorter, regional supply chains during COVID-19. To assess this topic, an online survey methodology was implemented across study regions. Megaregions, as defined by the USDA, represent a cluster of cities that share similar environmental, economic, geographical, and cultural characteristics. This study focused on the megaregions of the Great Lakes, Florida, and California. Data were collected from February 1 to April 15, 2021.

The diffusion of innovations characterizes innovations with four characteristics, relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, and observability. **Relative advantage** is the degree that an innovation is perceived as better than the idea it supersedes. **Compatibility** is the degree to which an innovation is perceived to be consistent with current values, beliefs, or morals. **Complexity** is the degree to which an innovation is difficult to use or understand. **Observability** is the degree to which the results of using an innovation are visible to the possible adopter.

Findings indicated that 43 percent of respondents perceived a relative advantage to adopting a shorter supply chain over traditional supply chain during COVID-19. Nearly 54 percent of respondents indicated that shorter, regional supply chains aligned with their businesses and personal values. Twenty percent of respondents indicated that the transition to a shorter supply chain was complex. When respondents were asked about their ability to observe others transitioning to a shorter, regional supply chain, only 19 percent of respondents indicated being able to observe.

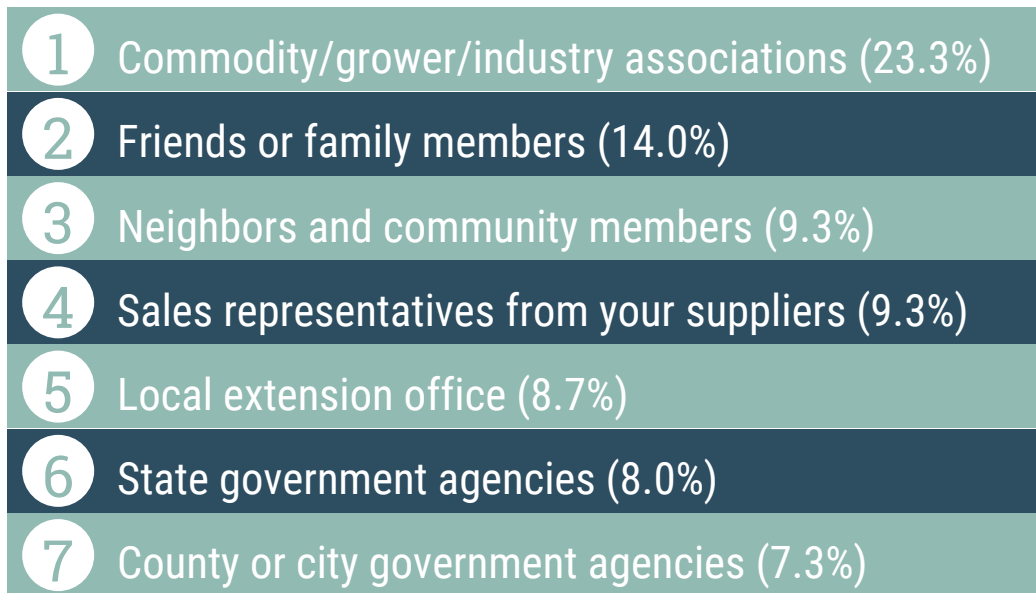
HOW DID PRODUCERS AND SUPPLIERS FEEL ABOUT ADOPTING A SHORTER REGIONAL SUPPLY CHAIN DURING COVID-19? (N=318)



Note: Graphic shows frequency and percentages of people who either somewhat agreed, agreed, or strongly agreed that shorter, regional supply chains were positively characterized by these characteristics of innovation.

When asked about top sources of information related to shorter, regional supply chains, respondents indicated that their top sources were commodity/grower/industry associations, friends or family members, and neighbors and community members.

WHAT WERE THE TOP INFORMATION SOURCES FOR SHORTER, REGIONAL SUPPLY CHAINS DURING COVID-19? (N=150)



THE POWER OF OPINION LEADERS

Opinion leaders play an important role in the diffusion of innovation and in the adoption process of products and services. Opinion leaders are those who are recognized to have authority within a respective speciality area. This recognition of authority allows opinion leaders to be more informed and have influence within their specialty area. Opinion leaders often exhibit high levels of innovation and help to spread information which can increase the overall adoption of information, products, or services.

Opinion leaders can be utilized to help predict and implement trends within their specialty area. In this case, opinion leaders could be utilized to increase the overall adoption of shorter regional supply chains. Opinion leaders can be identified through a variety of ways, including self-identification, staff selection, or the position they hold in their organization (Valente & Pumpuang, 2007).

For more information about this project, please visit:

<https://ruralengagement.org/lessons-from-covid-19/>