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Local Flavors: A Look at Farm to Table in Samoa

Emily Gove

SIT Graduate Institute - Study Abroad

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SIT Samoa,
Spring 2016

Local Flavors

A LOOK AT FARM TO TABLE IN SAMOA

EMILY GOVE
ADVISOR: VARGAS
AD: JACKIE FA'ASISILA

ABSTRACT

With increased access to foreign markets, Samoa has become more dependent on food imports. Most of these products are packaged and preserved, and often lack nutritional benefits. Women in Business, a local organization, has developed a Farm to Table program to encourage buying local. The effectiveness of the program has not yet been determined, and this project seeks to gauge restaurant owners' satisfaction with local food, as well as the challenges they face when buying local. Surveys were distributed to 53 restaurants in Apia, Samoa, at the consent of the restaurant managers, and eight surveys were conducted with various players in the local food system. Results were compared and analyzed, both quantitatively and qualitatively. The results of analyses show that restaurants source a good deal of food locally, often because of low price, freshness, and authenticity. Challenges of consistency and quality remain an issue for locally-sourced food.

-147 words

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I also owe gratitude to the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, and the Samoan Beverage Company. Both were quick to respond to my questions, and enthusiastic about sharing their perspectives with me.

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INTRODUCTION

Eating is an agricultural act.

-Wendell Berry

In the past decade, Samoa's tourism industry has grown substantially, becoming a significant contributor to the country's GDP (estimated at 20% of it) and altering the lifestyles of permanent residents on the island. While about 75% of the local population lives in rural areas, all are affected by these changes, as they have changed economic priorities of the country, and in doing so altered export needs. Food is a major area in which this change may be seen: with more outsiders, foreign products must be imported to meet demands, and the agricultural sustainability of the nation is compromised as a result. Most small-scale farms focus on personal sustainability and grow crops local to the island, a surplus of which can be sold at markets, but a small and growing number of more commercial farmers focus on products like eggplant, cucumber, and lettuce, which are demanded by the hospitality industry (FAO 2012). There has been a growing demand from the hospitality sector to incorporate local products into its cuisine, and government-supported organizations and committees have formed in order to promote linkages between local, sustainable agriculture and the hospitality sector.

Clients at restaurants range from local Samoans to expats and tourists. In terms of the latter, 40% of visitors to the island are Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFRs), 38% are travel/leisure tourists, and the remaining 22% are related to the fishing and sports industries (FAO 2012). Tourism is not the main barrier to consistently-produced local foods, but the industry is growing. Current barriers to local production are sustainability-related, as environmental changes have damaged the fishing industry, and it can be difficult to grow certain crops in warmer seasons.

Recent initiatives for tourism at farms, factories, and fishing areas have proved popular, and more development/analysis in the area would prove beneficial.

The traditional Samoan diet is quite healthy, including staples like breadfruit and taro, complimented with coconut products, fish, and pork (Oliver, 2013). However, foreign imports now permeate the food sources of the nation, providing an alternative to local products that lasts longer, and requires less work to prepare. These sources are not necessarily nutritious, nor do they stimulate the local economy (Hughes, 2005). A push for local has taken shape in response: restaurants emphasize local products, celebrity chef Robert Oliver has published a book on the vibrancy of local cuisine, and the UNDP and Oxfam have partnered to support a Farm to Table Program (FTTP) at Women in Business, a local nonprofit.

As Samoa moves forward in nutrition, local empowerment, and independence from foreign sources, businesses are likely to focus more on local food sources. Tourism will also play a large role in culinary shifts at restaurants that cater largely to foreigners, demanding that restaurants cater to new tastes and also respond to demands for “tropical” products (a general stereotype that may differ from traditional Samoan cuisine). Further, local products in tourist venues will provide a boost for the economy, as Samoa lacks the scale to compete in global markets for many agricultural products (Robbins 2003, 6).

METHODOLOGY

I used surveys and the talanoa method to compile my primary data, aiming to cover a wide range of perspectives. I distributed my surveys by hand throughout Apia, going as far west as Sails restaurant and as far east as Legends Café. Overall, I was able to survey 53 restaurants, of various size, ownership, cuisine, and price range. Surveys each had seven questions, and restaurant managers could leave questions blank if they chose to do so. My contact information was written at the bottom, and I made sure to explain, in person, what the aims of the research project were. To acknowledge the project and their part in it, managers were asked to sign the bottom of the survey, where a statement of consent gave their permission for me to use their data in the survey analysis process.

The talanoa method was essential during the eight interviews conducted. I had initially compiled a number of interview questions, which I had intended to use in order to structure the interviews. This, however, turned out to be unnecessary, as interviewees came from a range of professions and walks of life. Further, “food” was a trigger word that not only gained interest, but also sparked a great deal of enthusiasm. Once I had summarized my project and my hopes for my research (adding that I was eager to hear their perspective on the current state of food in Samoa) interviewees needed little further prompting, other than a few clarifying questions. Thus, my interviews were loose, semi-structured, talanoa-based conversations. I gave priority to what interviewees wanted to tell me, letting the interview take its own path, rather than the one I would have laid out for it.

The study was conducted from the end of March to the end of April, 2016. Research was based mostly in the city of Apia, where the headquarters of Women in Business Development Initiative (WIBDI) is located, as well as the restaurants surveyed, the Samoan Beverage Company (SBC) Headquarters, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF). Data from surveys was

collected and compiled quantitatively, and interviews was analyzed qualitatively. Participants in the surveys were primarily restaurant owners and managers, while interviewees ranged from members of WIBDI, to advertising managers of Taula Brewing Company, to government workers, to restaurant owners and local food activists.

Verbal consent for interviews was given, and survey results do not publish or mention the names of any restaurants or individuals. No personally harmful information was involved in either interviews or surveys, but nonetheless, results were kept on a password-protected computer. Food is not a particularly sensitive subject, but all participants were given the option of skipping questions or backing out at any time. Ethics and respect were highly important in the project, and all perspectives were welcomed, valued, and protected to the best of my ability.

SURVEY DATA

A total of 53 surveys were returned, from restaurants in and around the city of Apia. Most restaurants were started between 2010 and 2016, nearly triple the amount of any other decade. This may show quick changeover between owners, or short lifespans of the majority of restaurants (see appendix B).

Restaurant owners were also asked why they started their restaurants, and a free-response question. Many did not answer this question, however, among those that did, trends emerged among responses: the top reason for starting the restaurant was that the type of food offered satisfied a need in the community, or fit into a niche that a certain demographic was looking for. This response had nearly double the respondents of each of the next four reasons, to support the family, to pursue a dream/passion, to start a business, and to make money/profit (see appendix C). Other responses were only brought up by one to three respondents, ranging from having a calling from God to feeling a desire to serve the community.

Restaurants were asked to describe their clientele, and given the options of four boxes: expat/local *palagi* (white foreigner), tourist, Samoan, and Samoan visiting from abroad. They were encouraged to “check those that apply,” in order to accurately portray their clientele (see appendix D). However, overall tallies left little difference between demographics, only varying in number by a few percentage points (a difference of five check marks). Local *palagi* and Samoan got the highest number of check marks, suggesting that the local market is stronger than the tourist market, although with such small variation, it is impossible to generalize.

Nearly 80% of restaurants got their food from a combination of local and imported sources, while nearly 20% have only local sources (See appendix E). With a fifth of the restaurants surveyed already breaking away from import dependence, the future for the local food system looks

optimistic, and interviews supported these findings (more in *Themes and Analysis*). When asked whether they grew any of their food supply, 40% of restaurants answered “yes,” and 60% answered “no” (see appendix F). This, too, was higher than anticipated.

Top foods bought at the local market were vegetable, niu, cucumber, and fruit, all of which were mentioned seven or more times. Responses were analyzed by tallying the frequency of each word that was mentioned.¹ Taro, *fa'i* (banana), tomato, pumpkin, and eggplant were mentioned a total of five times. When products were grouped into categories (vegetable, fruit, etc), analysis revealed that nearly two thirds of foods mentioned were vegetable products (see appendix H). Interviews confirmed that restaurants prioritize buying vegetables locally. The same was true for foods purchased directly from the farmer/producer: nearly half of the foods mentioned were vegetables (see appendix H). The items mentioned the most were tomato, lettuce, *fa'i*, and taro.

The items mentioned most from wholesale sources were chicken, meat, and milk, followed by rice, sausage, and eggs (see appendix I). When results were grouped, meat, poultry/eggs, seafood, and dairy held the biggest share of items purchased. In other words, animal products were purchased most at this level, with vegetables and fruits accounting for under 20% of purchases.

Not many restaurants had food items listed for the garden portion of Question 6 (List the foods from...). Those that did listed mainly vegetables and herbs/spices. Specifically, tomatoes and parsley were the produce most frequently grown. The majority of garden produce as herbs and vegetables was supported in interviews and participant observation at Women in Business, where organic baskets were composed mostly of vegetables, herbs, and fruits. Staff explained that herbs

¹ the words “vegetable” and “fruit,” were also counted as items, since some restaurants only wrote those words as their answer. Others used them to emphasize the amount of vegetables/fruits purchased, putting them at the beginning of a list.

were often not available at the market because of wilting/spoiling, so restaurants or chefs will grow the produce, themselves (Magbity 2016).

When asked how the use of local products impacted business, respondents gave a range of answers. Price (“local food is cheaper”) was the most cited response, given by nearly half of the restaurants. 23 restaurants referenced price, and 10 referenced freshness, explaining that local produce was usually fresher. The next most popular response involved availability. Ironically, the number of respondents who wrote that local produce was the most available was equal to that of those who said that local food was inconsistent in its supply. The range of opinions reflects the range of responses for previous questions, as well as why there is still a stable import market for certain products. Those who referenced inconsistency usually mentioned the same products (lettuce, tomatoes), which can be difficult to grow in Samoa’s climate. Interviewees suggested that the reasons for inconsistency were tied to cultural views of time, money, and profit: once farmers collected money for a harvested crop, they would not plant again until the money ran out. The results of questions 6 and 7 on the survey will be the primary focus of the next section, as they supplement interview and secondary source information to yield interesting trends.

THEMES- BENEFITS OF GOING LOCAL

Nutrition: local food is healthier

Many survey respondents reported that local food had better nutritional value than imported food. Nutritional value can link with customer satisfaction, as many customers choose restaurants based on quality and nutritional value of food. This is especially true where tourism is concerned; not only is island food often stereotyped and advertised as exotic fruits and greens, but the advertised bikini shots that pull tourists in also imply a diet low in calories (Fields 2002, 38). Island vacations tend to be advertised with pictures of locals carrying fresh fish or produce, and tour packages and resorts may craft themselves as restorative or relaxing through their cuisine. In other words, tourists go for the benefit of the body and “soul,” and “soul food” is exactly what restaurants and hotels are willing to give them.

In the US, the term *soul food* refers to historically African American cuisine, which is often deep-fried and calorie-dense. However, gastronomists have begun to use the term to refer to “food which feeds the soul.” Contrast this with *body food*, which only fills the stomach (this is where the fried, calorie-dense dishes would now fall): soul food is prepared slowly, and is exotic and different (Hjalager 2002, 21). This exotic cuisine, for tourists, is associated with buzz words like fair trade, organic, natural, and locally-grown. None of these buzz words may necessarily be true, but restaurants catering this sort of food to tourists have found that the more buzz words they use, the better tourists will appreciate the product. Ironically, the dishes that appeal to tourists often do not appeal to locals, nor do they reflect “authentic” dishes, though they are often labelled as such (Taulealo 2016). *Palusami*² is perhaps the most quintessentially Samoan dish, and perhaps the healthiest locally-consumed product offered at restaurants. Many offer staples like palusami or

² A traditional dish made of coconut cream, wrapped in breadfruit and taro leaves and cooked on an *umu* (stone oven)

taro, but in different forms: Scalini's as a sauce in a lamb roulade, other restaurants provide it as an option as a side dip or appetizer (Lam 2016).

Locally-grown is not synonymous with locally-eaten, as processed, high-calorie, imported foods have taken over local stores (Yu and Mahimpur 2016). Paradoxically, "Samoa" food offered by restaurants includes fresh fruits, vegetables, and leafy greens that often grow neglected in local gardens and forests. Though attractive to tourists seeking healthy "tropical" flavors, many products are spurned by locals. Leafy greens seem to be the products most eschewed (and least chewed) by locals. A number of greens grow on roadsides and as school hedges, and have high nutritional value (Magbity 2016). They can be prepared in a number of ways in order to enhance a diet, but the only major use is of breadfruit and taro leaves in palusami. Many restaurants advertising themselves as healthy options have taken full advantage of these products, but they are seldom available in the local market, as they wilt quickly and have few other buyers. Proper education on nutrition is currently not effective enough to dramatically alter eating habits, and so greens continue to grow without consumers willing to eat them (Schuster 2016).

Fortunately, recent research may make leafy greens more popular, and make knowledge about their health benefits more accessible. The Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) recently conducted a study on ten varieties of leafy greens commonly found in Pacific Island nations, and composed fact sheets that provide information on how crops can be grown, cultivated, and cooked, also detailing the nutritional contents of each variety. The study found that all of the greens researched were inexpensive to purchase and/or grow in home gardens, however, they were seldom eaten, and were stigmatized as "low status foods" (Goebel, Taylor, and Lyons 2013a). The social stigma is unfortunate, as many of the plants have properties that lower eaters' risk of health problems that have been plaguing countries like Samoa, ranging from

energy levels, to diabetes/obesity, to eye health, to immunity. High-powered foods include aibika (laupele), ete/ofega, drumstick (moringa), and amaranth, all of which contain high levels of beneficial nutrients like carotenoids, zinc, magnesium, and manganese (Goebel et al 2013c, d, h, k). Other greens may have lower levels of nutrients, but are still comparably higher than cabbage and sweet potato leaves, which are the most commonly-consumed greens. Further, greens can be prepared in a range of ways: many can be eaten raw or blended into drinks, while others can be made into soups (vitamins will boil out of the leaves and infuse the water), and others can be made into jam (Goebel et al 2013b, c, e, f, g, i, j).

These grains could veritably be called super-plants, as their nutrients would dramatically cut down on health problems in Samoa if they were consumed regularly. Stigma against them remains substantial, but restaurants have begun to promote healthy salads and smoothies. Restaurants that listed some of their greens as ingredients also wrote that their clientele ranged from *palagi* tourists to resident Samoans, and that they worked to craft healthy menus for their customers. Greens and herbs were most commonly grown in gardens or bought locally (see appendices G, H, J), but lack of consumer demand at the market often led to inconsistent availability. Given this situation, WIBDI provides a necessary source of hard-to-find foods, both for restaurants in the FTTP and for locals enrolled in the organic basket program. It is establishing a network among farmers and restaurants, increasing demand for products that are easy to grow but not worth a market trip, and actually creating a more profitable network for both restaurants and growers in the program, cutting down on time spent selling/buying for both. Restaurant owners who expressed dissatisfaction with the market and with WIBDI found alternatives to the program, establishing their own systems and networks by growing their own greens or working directly with a local farmer (Taulealo 2016, Lam 2016).

Vankay Yu and Mahindra Mahimpur were outliers in their feedback, acknowledging that the SBC's "local" product, Taxi, was not at all nutritious, but that it was a necessary means to an end. "At the end of the day, it's a balance between being commercial and putting food on the table," they acknowledged (Mahimpur and Yu 2016). Since there is no market in Samoa for a healthy soda product, Taxi at least puts money into the Samoan economy, unlike the equivalent imported soda product. In a precarious international market, they prioritize sustenance first, with optimism that nutrition will eventually follow.

Price: local produce is cheaper

Around 40% of surveys reported that going local proved economical for restaurants, cutting down on costs like GST, fluctuating markets, and transport costs (see appendix K). Where in countries like the US, local food is often associated with privilege and elite access, restaurant owners reported on the whole that the best step for cutting costs is to buy local. When asked about the impact that buying local had on their restaurant, nearly half of restaurants surveyed cited price (see appendix K). Interviews echoed this; one manager noted when taking his survey that local lettuce cost \$2, in comparison to imported lettuce, which is valued at \$15.

In this case, price does not correspond with quality. Samoan goods, on the whole, are still seen as better quality than imported goods, since they have been harvested more recently, and have often lived without contact with foreign fertilizers, pesticides, growth hormones, etc. When foreign-grown food was brought up in interviews, many interviewees expressed wariness toward certain products. Yu and Mahimpur (2016) discussed the potential effects of hormone injections to consumers, using the example of an orange. Yes, the orange looks perfect, they acknowledge. But at least a third of it is composed of chemicals. *Would you eat it?* The same applies to chickens

and cows, which interviewees have affirmed taste better than imports, specifically because of their different growing process.

One important element of the food system that went largely unacknowledged in interviews and surveys, and which is perhaps the most salient reason for low local prices, is local wages and earnings. Both pale in comparison to those of import countries like New Zealand and the Australia, where Samoans can travel for seasonal work and *still* earn more harvesting than they would at home. Locally, Samoans can earn more farming on their property than they could working minimum wage jobs, but it is still not substantial, especially when compared with foreign competitors. (Connell 2005). On the whole, Samoan families would be more profitable if they were to have some family members abroad and remitting some of their salaries, while they also kept a small subsistence plot at home.

Authenticity: reinforcing Samoan identity

Because Samoa is a tropical island nation, it is subject to stereotypes and associations, which have impacted its tourism industry, advertising campaigns, and gastronomy. Fields explains that tourism involves two components for travelers: push factors that make tourists want to travel and pull factors that affect where they go (Fields 2002, 36). Samoa's climate, location, and geography are major pull factors, and these have manifested in a cuisine that is stereotyped as exotic and centered on fresh tropical produce. Such a stereotype has worked well with restaurants and organizations trying to "go local," but clash with current Samoan eating habits. However, restaurant owners reference past foodways when they discuss changing perceptions. "Farm to table is a healthier choice," states Lam, "but it's always been our choice" (Lam 2016). Taulealo's garden further echoes what restaurateurs call the Samoan connection with land, supplying a range of foods for her restaurant, as Lam's home garden does for his. Making concessions on few foreign foods

(“chickpeas are a bit of a winner with vegans,” and a must-have for her menu, she admits), Taulealo, like Lam and many other chefs, has worked to create food that “speaks to the fact that it comes from Samoa” (Taulealo 2016).

Some specialty products may be imported to supplement local menus, but others have manifested themselves in local menus. Products imported most were meat, processed, meat, and dry goods, but vegetables also had a surprisingly strong presence in items bought by restaurants from wholesale venues, about 20% of the foods mentioned in the wholesale portion of the survey were vegetables (see appendix I). Among the vegetables, potatoes and lettuce stood out. Potatoes became a must for restaurants selling popular fast food plates like fish and chips, but chefs with a Samoan flair in mind have spurned the product. Taulealo’s fish and chips offers breadfruit or taro chips, and local marinades for dipping. Other restaurants continue in the breadfruit. Taro, and yam vein to substitute in other potato products: Scalini’s often features a breadfruit gnocchi, Nella’s is working on promoting breadfruit fries, and The Coffee Bean complements eggs with a breadfruit hash.

Perhaps the main personality to whom restaurateurs should credit the possibility of this local food transition on menus is Robert Oliver, a chef originally from New Zealand, who published *Mea'ai Samoa* in 2013, in hopes of spreading awareness of the superior taste and health benefits of local food. He begins his book, a part history, part cookbook, part picture narrative, by detailing the changes that have been made to Samoan cuisine over the past few centuries. He labels the influx of foreign imports as “a food invasion,” during which Samoans became dependent on unhealthy foreign foods, until tourist menus were “largely devoid of Samoan content” (Oliver 2013, 14). Working closely with WIB and local restaurants, Oliver describes local crops, then moves into featured dishes and recipes from locals, ranging from restaurants to “desperate

housewives” to villagers. From curries to coconut buns, from Koko Samoa brownies to stuffed “sea bugs,” Oliver balances local histories and characters with vibrant photos, immersing the reader in Samoan food culture.

One featured cook in Oliver’s book is Kilisi “Chris” Solemuno, a cultural tour officer for the Samoan Tourism Authority. In the Samoan Cultural Village in Apia, Solemuno leads tours and cultural shows for tourists, “to give them a sense of who we are, what we are, and how we are” (Solemuno 2016). Emphasizing that there is no other way to make an *umu*³ that “the village way,” Solemuno brings the *umu* to tourists who may not otherwise have access to the experience. The Cultural Village includes demonstrations on cooking taro, making *palusami*, making coconut cream, and climbing coconut trees to harvest coconuts and palm fronds for baskets. Hotels do not give tourists or visiting Samoans the true cultural experience, he says, including breakfast buffets but seldom a *toona’i* or even a menu featuring local staples. This seems to be changing, but hotels offering tourists “comfort foods” from their home countries, rather than local dishes, will need to transition to better support the local economy.

Restaurants have embraced promoting local food as authentically Samoan, and manufacturers are attempting to do the same thing. The SBC markets its products by emphasizing their Samoan-ness...even if their contents are largely imported. Yu and Mahimpur justified the import by explaining the motives behind it: Samoans have developed a taste for beer and soda, the first in German style and the second after American sodas. It is impossible to grow the chemical sweeteners in soda, or the hops in beer, in Samoa. *But* those elements only make up around five percent of the final drink product, and since the water is local, the imports are not too detrimental.

³ Cooking pit made of rocks

What the SBC seeks to promote in terms of the localness of its product is the labor that goes into it, the local communities who benefit from profits, and local consumers who take pride in purchasing a Samoan product over a foreign product of similar quality—they include their rival company, Vailima, in this latter category, since it is owned by the Coca Cola Beverage Company (Yu and Mahimpur 2016). Buying local may not mean buying healthy in the SBC's case, they admit, but it *is* healthy in terms of the well-being and financial stability of locals. Using the example of local chicken, which is produced in larger-scale quantities by Ah Liki Wholesale (linked with the SBC), Mahimpur explained that it can be deadly for a country as small as Samoa to rely on a large power like the US, since it is easy for the bigger country to switch to a better foreign market without a second thought. "If America decides not to sell chicken, half the population starves," he warns (Yu and Mahimpur 2016). Developing a local system will not only stabilize Samoa financially, but will also ground it more, enabling it to have more control over its cultural identity.

The SBC's soda, beer, and commercial chicken may not be the ideal local-based food system, but it *is* making Samoa less import-dependent, and is a good first step toward localizing the food system. WIB has begun to work on value-added products, as well, which Magbity says is the best way to stabilize products produced in the country (2016). Currently, WIB has found its main markets abroad, with soaps, oils, and dried bananas being sold in specialty stores in New Zealand. Value-added products can take advantage of the foods available in Samoa, without becoming beholden to spoilage during transport, or with fluctuations in supply and demand. Foods like bananas, papayas, and coconuts will continue to hold their reputation, but will have a longer shelf life that will prove advantageous to the country.

Me and Magbity both emphasize the usefulness of a new warehouse that WIB will be building in the near future (Me 2016, Magbity 2016). With grants to purchase machines like juicers and dehydrators, WIB can better harness their resources, and does not need to worry about lack of storage space for overflow. Lack of local demand for these products continues to be a problem, but demand in other countries will at least establish an initial market, and could enable Samoa to establish a gastronomical following abroad, which may in turn build tourism. Richards explains that a nation can promote itself abroad through its “typical” foods, creating a feedback loop in which tourists associate an “exotic” food (say, coconut or chocolate) with a nation (2002, 5). The association makes them want to buy a food product because it is from the country, and builds a tourism network for the country because it has the foods associated with it. “We can show off our cultural capital⁴ relating to the destination by ‘eating authentic’ food in the destination,” Richards explains. “The traveler can escape from the mass tourist hordes by finding that ‘hidden’ local restaurant where only the ‘locals’ go” (Richards 2002, 10). Even though exported food products will not be feeding Samoans directly, they will be promoting Samoan as a destination.

THEMES- NEGATIVES OF GOING LOCAL

Accountability: WIB breaks down Farm to Table relationship

Some restaurants have shown dissatisfaction with the FTTP, claiming that it has severed the relationship between the restaurant and the farm—in effect, making the name ironic, since the process is in reality farm to WIB to table. Farmers communicate their supplies to WIB, then restaurants are sent a list of these supplies, and send WIB their selection from the products available each week. They no longer have a relationship with the farmers, and WIB takes the blame

⁴ *Cultural capital* is a sociology term relating certain items and actions to one’s social status. In this case, cultural capital is built through travel, and exotic, authentic foods. Gastronomists have also developed the term *culinary capital*, a subset of cultural capital that concerns chiefly food.

when something goes wrong on either side. Further, all of the time that is saved at the farm or table end of the spectrum is used by WIB staff to organize the endeavor, making it unclear if any time is saved overall, if that was the goal of the project. WIB's attraction for restaurants is that it is cheap and cuts down on time spent at the market, but if funding from the UNDP ceased and volunteer work fell short, the venture would be much more difficult to execute.

Restaurant owners held no animosity toward WIB, and commended its efforts to create an alternative food system to wholesale and imports. However, many found that their own relationships with local farms proved more fruitful when their participation in the FTTP. Many businesses cited dissatisfaction with the consistency of local food, some mentioning WIB, and others referring to the Samoan market in general. Even WIB members acknowledged that the system had its problems. "You go to a village and see those limes, and no one even knows to lick the juice out of them," Magbity explained. And when villagers do not know associate products with food, it is unlikely that they will go through the trouble of picking them.

Lam has worked in Samoa's food system for many years, more recently as a consultant for hotels seeking to set up farm-to-table programs for their restaurants. The main problem with the local food system is work ethic and consistency, what he has come to call "the island shuffle." "You go one step forward, then two steps back...then ten steps sideways," he jokes. Unless a direct business relationship is established, farmers will grow a product without planning for the future; they will plant a single crop, harvest that crop, relax with the profit, and when they run out of money, they will think about planting a new one. With the systems he has developed, farmers recognize that their clients need a consistent supply (for which they may pay a bit more), and that in order to maintain the relationship, the farmers must deliver that supply. Because farmers with

WIB are not policed effectively, demand is constant but supply is inconsistent. Farmers are guaranteed profit, but tables are not guaranteed the products they request.

Other inconsistencies contribute to problems in the system, and farmers are not the only players who do not hold up their end of the bargain. The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF) has developed the Samoan Agricultural Crop Enhancement Project (SACEP), which should provide farmers organic certification, needed tools and equipment, and training/technical support. For farmers wishing to start a project, SACEP will fund half of the endeavor, provided the farmers each pay \$100 to have access to seeds and membership bonuses (Leaana 2016). The problem is, the MAF happily collects membership fees, but then conveniently forgets to provide seeds, tools, or services (Me 2016). This has been a major roadblock to the organic movement in Samoa, as well as to any new projects that may require the materials that the government claims to have. But, like other branches of the food system, greater accountability and communication may be able to resolve this problem.

Quality: Foreign products more consistent

Quality control and constant supply are also a problem for the organization. Restaurant owners cite their need to look at and touch produce that they intend on cooking with (Taulealo). WIB's products have caused buyer dissatisfaction, both in terms of amount and quality of products. While buyers get what they order, size may not be quite right, or, though WIB volunteers act as quality control, some blemishes may reflect poorly on dishes. The commodification of products in WIB's network has necessarily cut down on quality and aesthetic appeal; fruits and vegetables become numbers that are moved from one party to another, and restaurants have little control over what their end products will look like.

Volunteers have certain standards for the foods they send to consumers and restaurants, and some items *do* get rejected. This, however, brings up another issue: that of food waste. In larger food chains, waste on certain levels will never be noticed by consumers. Karl Marx named this *the metabolic rift*. The phenomenon occurs when food is wasted at the farm or in transit, but the waste (food, chemical, or energy/fuel) contaminates a place that is socially, economically, and geographically distant from the consumer: rural versus urban, poor versus wealthy, global North versus global South, etc. The result of the rift is “a squandering of the vitality of the soil, which is carried by trade far beyond the bounds of a single country” (Marx 1894). Thus, the consumer enjoys a product while another area/group of people is affected by its negative consequences. This can be seen on a small scale in Samoa, where Farm to Table runs the risk of serving the table more than the farm. Hundreds of fruits are left beneath trees, “ugly” vegetables thrown out at the end of a basket-filling day at WIBDI.

Restaurants that are more reliant on their own food may find ways to use products that have blemishes or odd-looking features: making minces, stir fries, tempuras, or smoothies. Food waste in this situation would be cut down because it is directly next to where the food will be consumed, thus waste is noticed and dealt with. Less fruits may be left in fields or orchards, since chefs are wasting the produce that they have cultivated. It may not be possible for a proprietor to be both chef and farmer (Taulealo 2016, Lam 2016), but it is possible for chefs to become more accountable for the products they waste.

An increase in value-added products (VAPs) would also cut down dramatically on waste, and WIBDI’s new warehouse will be a major contributor to increasing stability, maintaining quality, and finding a channel for products that do not necessarily meet quality standards (Me 2016). Samoans are resourceful, according to interviewees, and will work with what they have.

VAPs will increase supplies and available resources to the point where the local economy may be able to stabilize itself on local products, breaking its dependence on certain imports, attracting tourists, and perhaps building national identity and pride.

CONCLUSION

Survey responses and interviews showed that there are many benefits to going local in Samoa. The wide range of voices involved in this project concurred on the health benefits on local food, though they acknowledged that “healthy” had nuances depending on the type of food and the system in which it was produced. Price also met a largely favorable response from surveys and interviews, as buying local food not only cut down on price, but also stimulated the economy. Finally, authenticity played a significant role in the choice of going local, whether it was in the form of a feedback loop for tourists, in which Samoan or tropical stereotypes reinforced and were reinforced by cuisine, or in building national identity and pride.

There were, however, negative aspects of the current system. While nutrition, price, and authenticity were major motivators to restaurants and consumers for buying local produce, inconsistency in quality and availability often made relying on local produce difficult. WIB’s efforts to build a local Farm to Table network are commendable, but perhaps counter-intuitive, adding in an additional link in the local chain that can lower farmer accountability and create additional work for volunteers. If greater accountability is established within the system, WIB may find itself able to expand its efforts, and create a system that, for local restaurants or consumers involved in the organic basket program, is highly effective.

Food studies and gastronomy are fields that are often overlooked in academia, therefore, there is a great deal of research left to be done. Apart from Oliver’s book, this is one of the few studies looking critically at the local food system, and all links in the local food system could benefit from further research, particularly that focusing on efforts to create large-scale farming operations and consumer trends. Breadth of food research should be expanded, looking farther at food systems geographically, socially, and economically.

Depth is also important for future research. Case studies of specific products or types of restaurants would be highly beneficial. For example, a look into fish and how it is used, bought, and sold could reveal interesting information about trade networks and business trends. The same can be said for certain fruits and vegetables, ranging from a focus on new specialty products to studies of products like laupele, taro, breadfruit, and papaya. One of the largest up-and-coming food items is “corporate” chicken and eggs. A look into large-scale chicken and egg production could evaluate what is and is not working for that scale of an endeavor, and pave the way for more successful local alternatives for currently imported goods.

Finally, a creative approach to problems and perspectives in local gastronomy would be a vibrant addition to studies in the field. A creative study might collect recipes and opinions in an Oliver-esque style, compiling recipes for local products, the stories behind them, and health benefits of the foods. Using film as a medium for this sort of project could be even more advantageous, filming farms, gardens, and kitchens documentary-style, and adding in personal narratives of local people featured in the project.

Food is an important and rewarding subject of study, especially in a country like Samoa, where so much can grow, yet so little of the things that can grow are eaten. Samoa is entering into a transition in its food system, and perhaps a shift back to healthier local products, rather than high-processed imports.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACIAR: Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research

Body food: in gastronomy terms, “food that fills the body.” Usually low in nutrients, this food fills rather than nourishes the consumer. Fast food would be a quintessential body food

Culinary capital: a term developed by gastronomists to refer to *cultural capital* accrued through experiences with different foods and foodways. Culinary capital can be accrued when an actor has an experience with food that is “authentic” to another culture

Cultural capital: a sociology term relating certain items and actions to one’s social status. The term constructs an imaginary point system in which certain actions and items accrue an actor more “points” on the social scale. For example, knowledge of a certain music artist (non-mainstream, but with a good reputation) or of an authentic regional cuisine imparts that an individual has a knowledge and experience with something that others do not.

Fa’i: banana

Food insecurity: limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe food, and/or limited ability to acquire these foods without relying on food pantries or soup kitchens.⁵

FTTP: Farm to Table Program (an initiative organized by Women in Business, with funding from Oxfam and the UNDP)

Niu: coconut

Palagi: white foreigner

Palusami: a traditional Samoan dish, made of coconut cream cooked in taro and breadfruit leaves, on an *umu*

SACEP: Samoa Agricultural Crop Enhancement Project, a government initiative funded by the World Bank

SBC: Samoan Beverage Company, producer of Taxi sodas and Taula beer (Vaitele Fou)

Soul food: food that “feeds the soul,” usually eaten at a slower pace, with the intent of relaxation, socialization, enjoyment, and nourishment.

Toona’i: the Samoan Sunday meal. Most of the food for this feast is cooked on the *umu*,

Umu: a cooking pit made of hot rocks

UNDP: United Nations Development Program

⁵ Hesterman 2011, 30

VAP: Value-added product; a food product that has been cooked, dried, or otherwise altered in order to be better preserved and/or have a longer shelf life

WIBDI/WIB: Women in Business Development Initiative/Women in Business

APPENDICES

A. *Restaurant Survey*

Food Sources: a Survey

Name of Restaurant: _____

1. When did your restaurant begin? Why?

2. What kind of food do you serve?

3. Who eats at your restaurant? (*check those that apply*)
 - expatriates/local palagi
 - tourists
 - Samoans visiting from abroad
 - Samoans

4. Where do you get most of your food supply?
 - imports
 - local
 - combination of imports/local

5. Do you grow any of your food supply? (circle)

| | |
|-----|----|
| Yes | No |
|-----|----|

6. List foods from the following sources:
 - Local market:

 - Farmer/producer:

 - Wholesale:

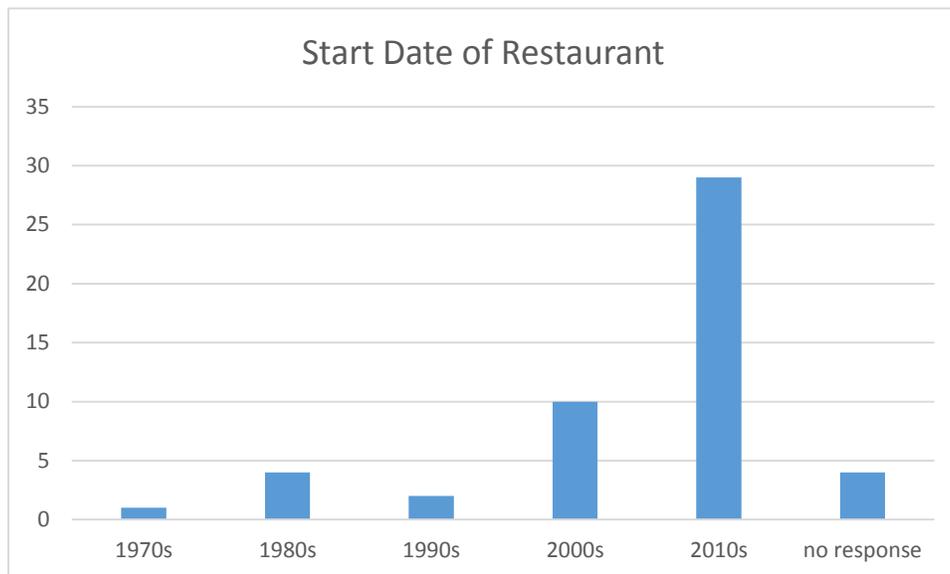
 - Own garden:

7. How does the use of local products impact your business?

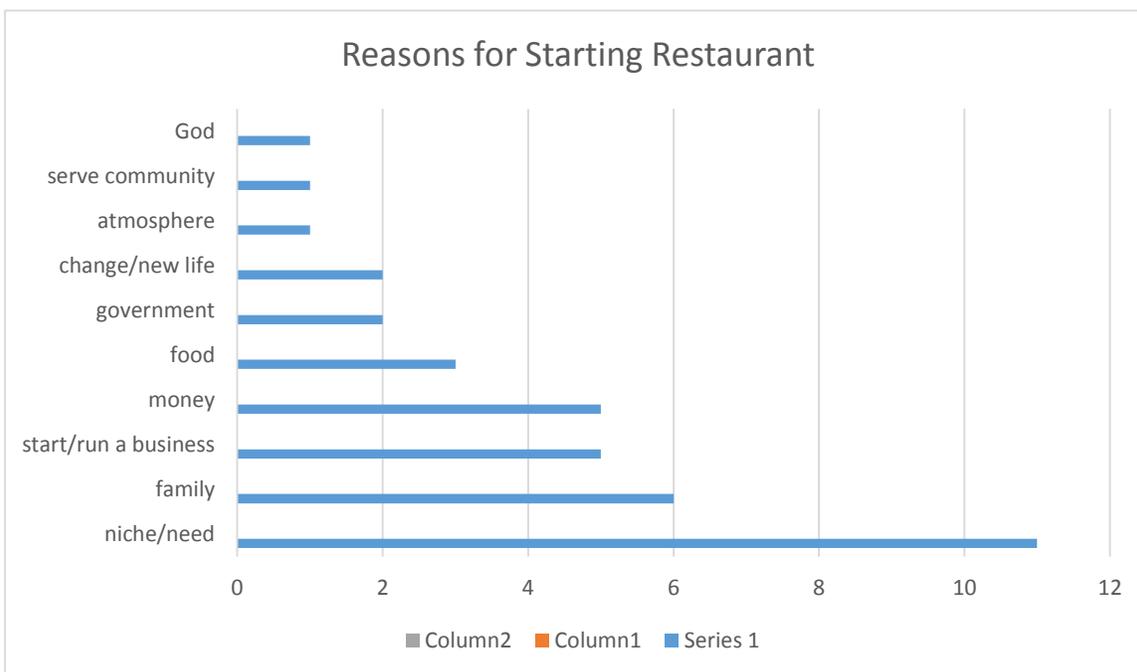
By signing this survey, I give permission for my responses to be used for research purposes.

Thank you!

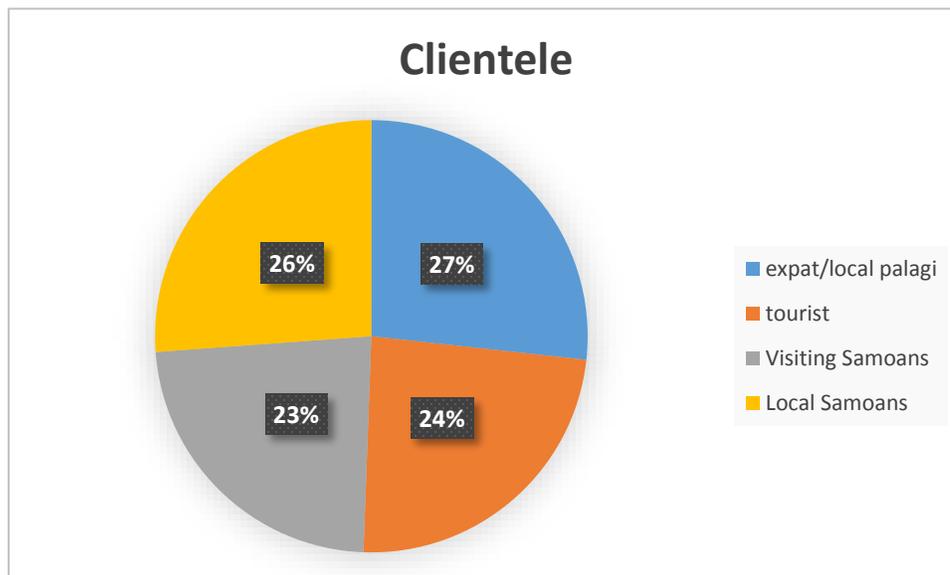
B. Survey Results: When did your restaurant begin?



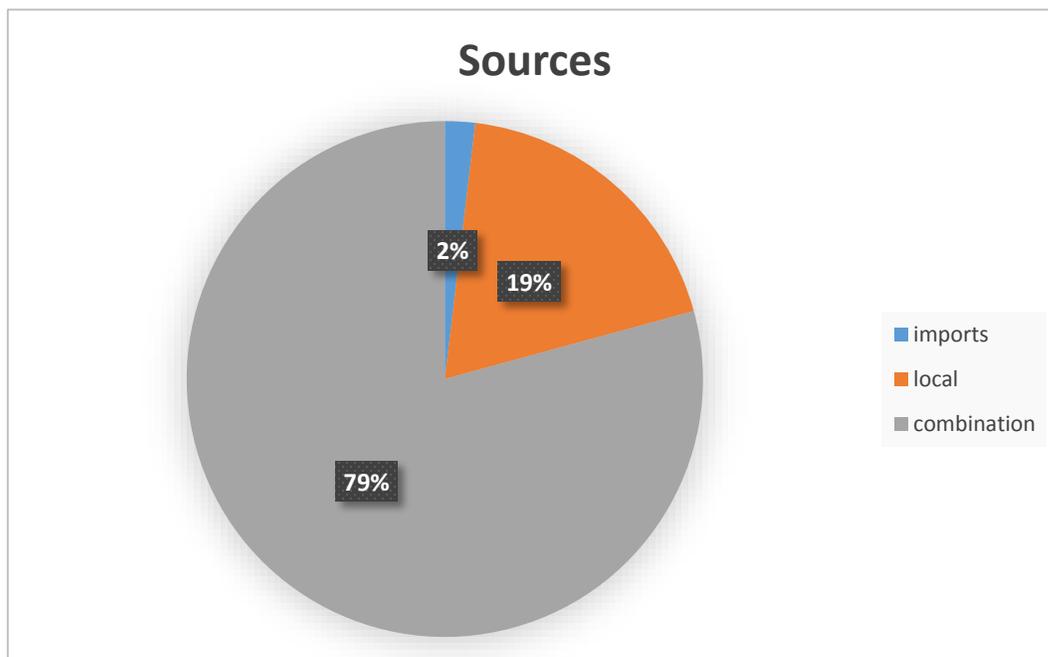
C. Survey Results: Reasons for starting restaurant



D. Survey Results: Who eats at your restaurant?



E. Survey Results: Where do you get most of your food supply?

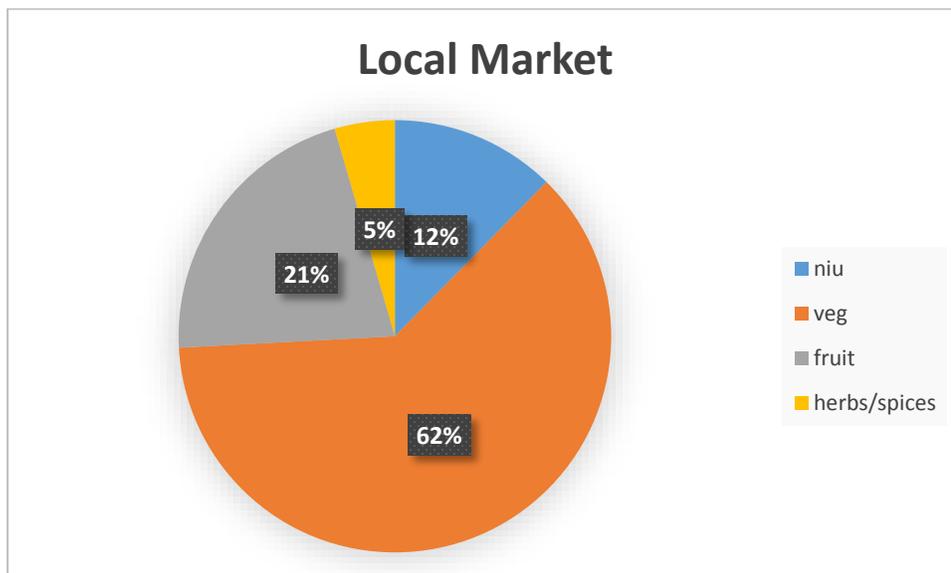


F. Survey Results: Do you grow any of your food supply?



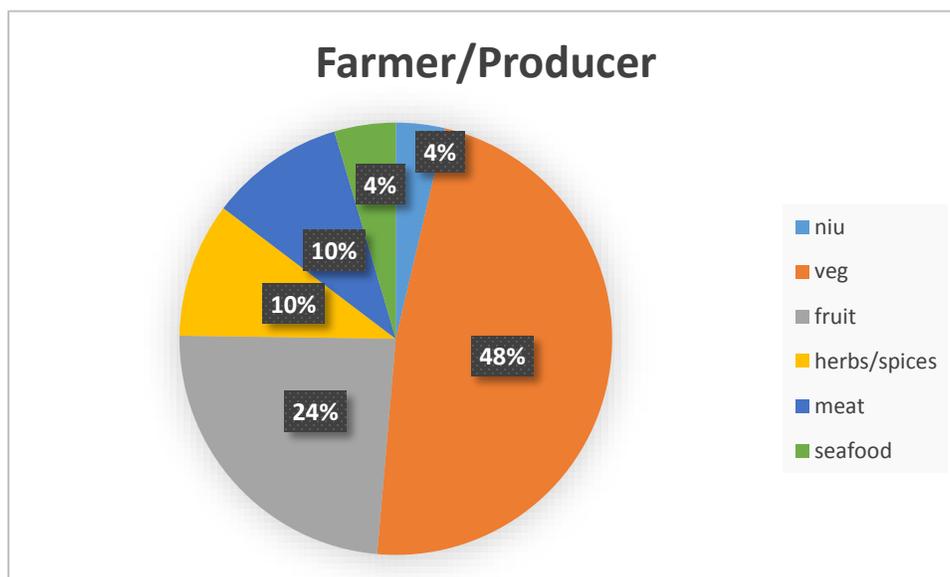
G. Survey Results: Foods from the local market

| | | | |
|----------|----|--------------|---|
| veg | 13 | herbs | 2 |
| niu | 11 | cabbage | 2 |
| cucumber | 7 | spices | 1 |
| fruit | 7 | pea | 1 |
| taro | 5 | green bean | 1 |
| fa'i | 5 | chin cabb | 1 |
| tom | 5 | watercress | 1 |
| pumpkin | 5 | ginger | 1 |
| eggplant | 5 | sasalapa | 1 |
| lettuce | 4 | lemon | 1 |
| fish | 3 | lime | 1 |
| onion | 3 | mango | 1 |
| avocado | 2 | passionfruit | 1 |
| esi | 2 | | |



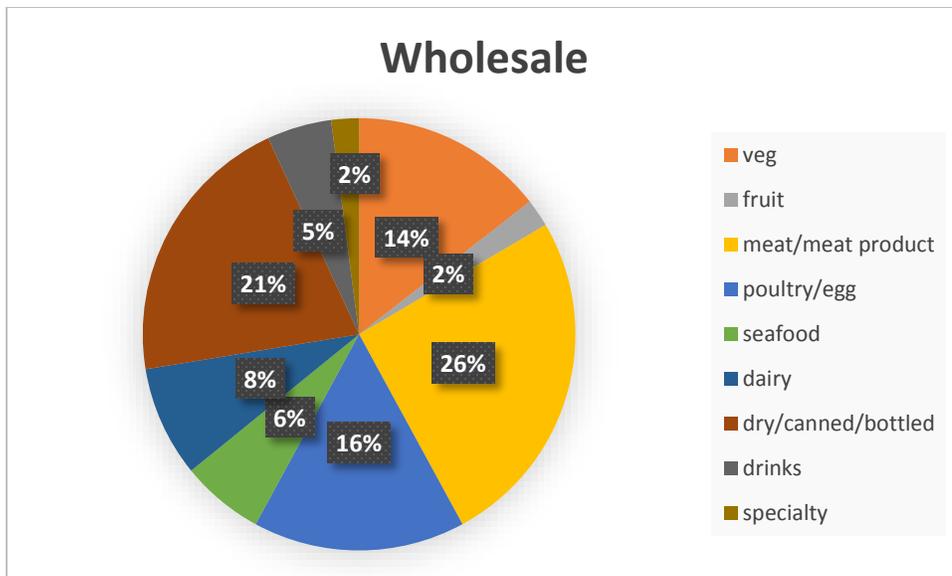
H. Survey Results: Foods direct from farmer/producer

| | | | |
|------------|----|--------------|---|
| veg | 14 | mint | 2 |
| tom | 9 | lime | 2 |
| lettuce | 9 | herbs | 2 |
| fa'i | 8 | parsley | 2 |
| taro | 6 | basil | 2 |
| fruit | 5 | spinach | 2 |
| meat | 5 | laupele | 1 |
| esi | 5 | green bean | 1 |
| niu | 4 | green pepper | 1 |
| fish | 4 | mesclun | 1 |
| watercress | 3 | ginger | 1 |
| mince | 3 | chili | 1 |
| starfruit | 3 | coriander | 1 |
| eggplant | 3 | seafood | 1 |
| lemon | 3 | carrot | 1 |
| beef | 3 | round cabb | 1 |



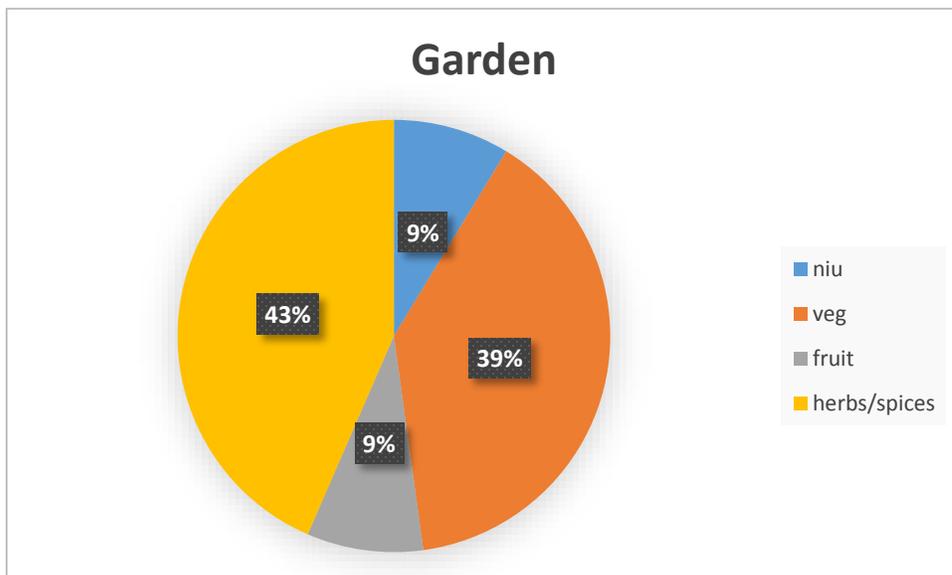
I. Survey Results: Foods purchased from wholesale stores

| | | | | | | | |
|-----------|----|------------|---|--------------|---|------------|---|
| chicken | 18 | steak | 3 | noodles | 2 | butter | 1 |
| meat | 15 | lettuce | 3 | cheese | 2 | ketchup | 1 |
| milk | 7 | cabbage | 2 | coke | 1 | fish | 1 |
| rice | 5 | drinks | 2 | sprite | 1 | salt | 1 |
| sausage | 5 | flour | 2 | pork | 1 | syrup | 1 |
| eggs | 5 | onion | 2 | apple | 1 | berries | 1 |
| potato | 4 | ice cream | 2 | strawberries | 1 | b. beans | 1 |
| bacon | 4 | coffee | 2 | snacks | 1 | soda | 1 |
| sauce | 4 | carrot | 2 | flounder | 1 | eye fillet | 1 |
| fries | 4 | ham | 2 | pepperoni | 1 | wrap | 1 |
| mayo | 4 | can goods | 2 | tuna | 1 | shortening | 1 |
| dry goods | 3 | strip loin | 2 | chickpeas | 1 | tom sauce | 1 |
| veg | 3 | seafood | 2 | soy milk | 1 | green peas | 1 |
| momoe | 3 | prawns | 2 | whipping | 1 | crab meat | 1 |
| | | | | | | salmon | 1 |



J. Survey Results: Foods grown in restaurant garden

| | | | |
|-----------|---|------------|---|
| herbs | 6 | niu | 2 |
| veg | 4 | eggplant | 1 |
| tom | 4 | laupele | 1 |
| parsley | 3 | spices | 1 |
| sp onions | 2 | sage | 1 |
| rosemary | 2 | chin cabb | 1 |
| basil | 2 | pea | 1 |
| pumpkin | 2 | cuke | 1 |
| lemon | 2 | lemongrass | 1 |
| mint | 2 | capsicum | 1 |



K. Survey Results: How does the use of local products impact your business?

| | | | |
|-----------------------|----|--------------------------|---|
| cheaper | 23 | good presentation | 1 |
| freshness | 10 | easy to cook | 1 |
| unstable supply | 9 | important | 1 |
| convenient | 9 | hard to find | 1 |
| useful/helpful | 6 | quality | 1 |
| customer satisfaction | 4 | stimulate local business | 1 |
| healthy | 3 | spoil easily | 1 |
| nice | 2 | authentic | 1 |
| taste | 2 | no GST | 1 |
| organic | 2 | stable | 1 |
| pricier | 2 | simple | 1 |