

Consumer Produce Safety Perceptions: A Study of Pennsylvania

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INTRODUCTION

National concern regarding food safety has increased, recently highlighted by the Food Safety Modernization Act signed into law in early 2011. This new law mandates that fresh produce growers implement minimum on-farm practices based on known safety risks. As the new law is implemented, assessing consumer perceptions regarding produce safety is important. These perceptions can help other stakeholder groups in the food system, such as supermarkets and produce growers, make more informed decisions regarding their food safety policies and practices.



PURPOSES

- To determine the produce safety perceptions of Pennsylvania consumers.
- To identify important demographic factors that influence consumer perceptions of produce safety.
- To determine how consumer preferences for produce attributes, such as locally grown, organic, and inspected for food safety, affect their produce safety perceptions.
- To provide Penn State Extension with information to improve its educational programming on food safety.



METHODOLOGY

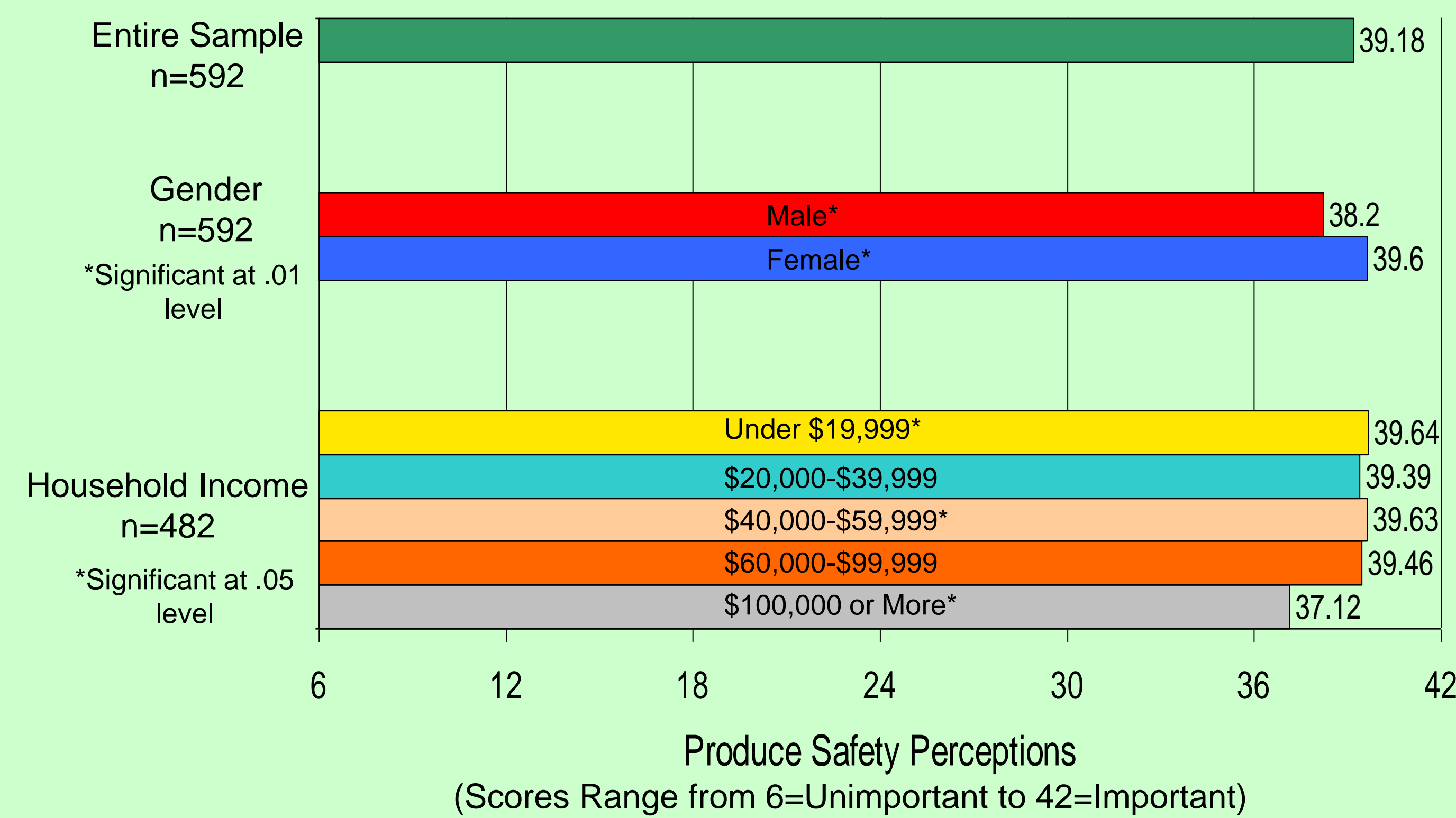
- Telephone interviews with 604 randomly sampled Pennsylvania consumers were conducted. Interviews included questions about consumers' produce safety perceptions and their preferences for local produce, organic produce, and produce that has been inspected for food safety.
- Cooperation rate for this study was 71.6%.
- Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. Effect sizes were also calculated to determine the standardized differences between groups.

RESULTS

All consumers perceived produce safety is important. Females and those whose gross income is \$99,999 or less believed produce safety is slightly more important than other income groups (Figure 1). Consumers with strong preferences for local produce, organic produce, and produce that has been inspected for food safety have slightly higher produce safety risk perceptions (Figure 2).



Figure 1. Mean Differences in Level of Importance Consumers Place on Produce Safety according to Gender and Income Level



DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

- Consumers with higher produce safety concerns are also slightly more likely to prefer local produce, organic produce, and produce that has been inspected for safety by the government.
- Supermarkets and produce growers can address public expectations by implementing more rigorous produce safety practices and policies.
- Penn State Extension can assist supermarkets and produce growers to change their food safety practices and policies to respond to these consumer perceptions.
- Penn State Extension must make consumer perceptions of produce safety available on its website to inform other important stakeholder groups in the food system.

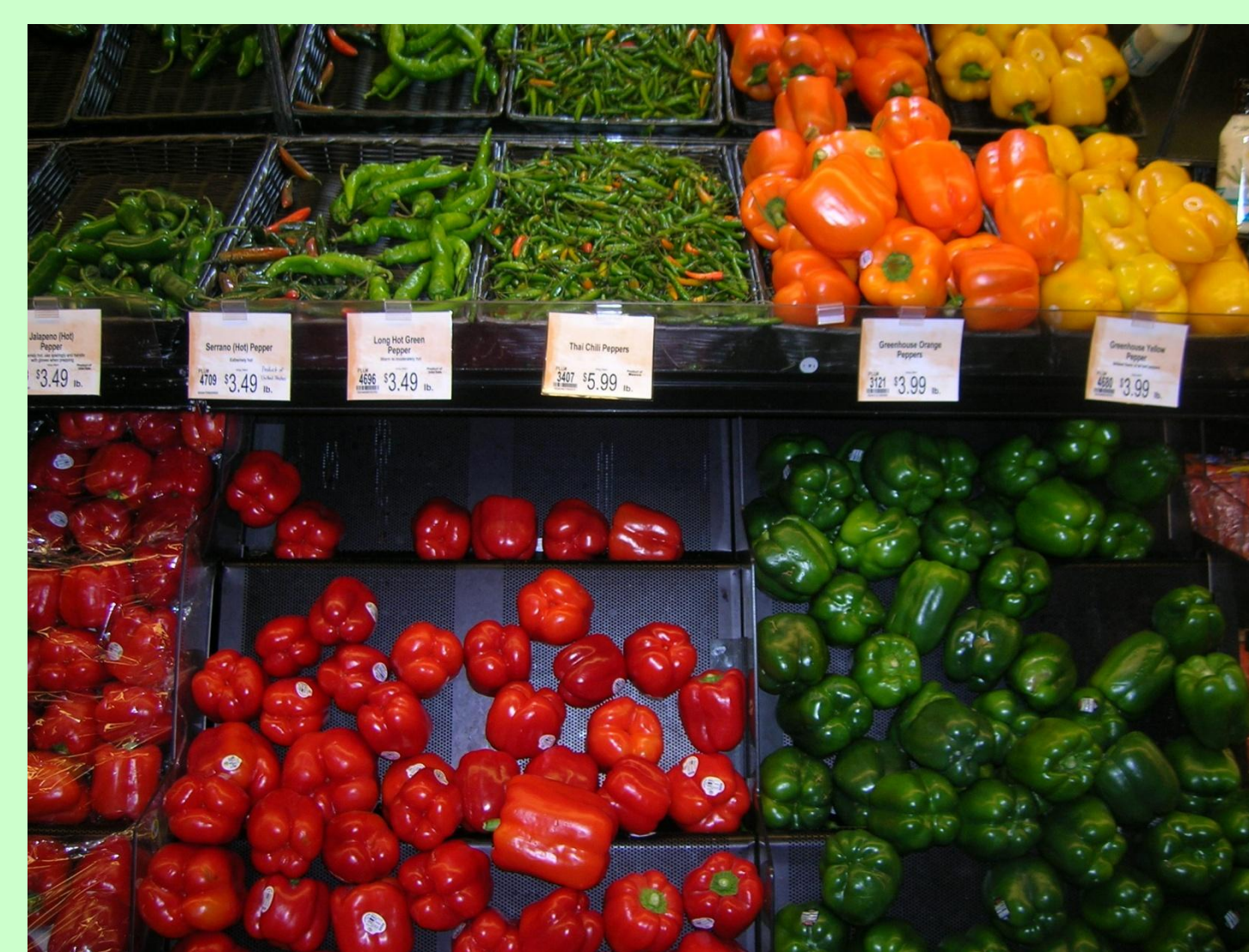


Figure 2. Mean Differences in Level of Importance Consumers Place on Produce Safety Based on Preferences for Local, Organic, and Government Inspection

