

Report on design research with urban local food customers

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Introduction

The "FlavourCrusader" concept was introduced by Sharon Lee (under the project title "What's for dinner") at the Australian Social Innovation eXchange Social Innovation Camp, held in March 2010. The project seeks to leverage social technologies, such as mobile phone applications and Twitter, to promote in-season, fresh, locally-grown (and to a lesser extent organic) produce, with a long-term vision of:

- connecting urban food-lovers ("foodies") with the origins of their food
- increasing consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables, with improved health outcomes
- strengthening local economies threatened by globalised food supply chains and the supermarket duopoly in Australia

Gaining an understanding of motivations, barriers, needs and context of use for customers, producers, and local market operators (e.g. farmers' markets) is considered by the project team to be an important contributor to project success. With this in mind, a design research project was undertaken to provide some insight into each of customer-oriented participant groups, with a view to informing the project team as they further develop the FlavourCrusader concept.

This report is an informal reflection on this design research project and provides an overview of some of the key themes that were identified within this small sample group.

Methodology

In person, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with four participants across three interviews in locations related to food (e.g. local farmers' market, restaurants, food storage warehouse etc.). One additional participant was interviewed via phone.

As the research was seeking people actively engaged in social media, participants were recruited via social media channels, with the author doing a "call-out" for participants via

the Twitter¹ social network. Two participants were from the researcher's personal network — e.g. known to the researcher before the call-out. The screen for participants was quite broad, outlining two main conditions:

- people that shop at farmers markets and buy locally, or those that would like to but aren't able to do it as regularly as they'd like
- participant familiar with using social media (e.g. Facebook², Twitter, blogs etc.)

Participants

Identifier*	Age	Gender	Occupation group	Type
A	27	Female	Writer	Customer
B	48	Male	Online services	Customer
C	33	Female	Online services	Customer
D	34	Female	Social policy	Customer
E	35	Male	Pastry chef/ Business owner	Value-add producer (sells goods at farmers' market, but purchases organic and local produce)

* Names have not been listed to maintain anonymity — as participants have public profiles within social media circles, using first name would enable recognition.

All but one participant was from NSW, most from the Sydney area. One participant was currently living in regional NSW (Northern Rivers district) but previously lived in Sydney and maintains social ties with people in the city. The non-NSW participant lives and works in the ACT.

Two participants knew each other through social media. Two participants were in a personal relationship and were interviewed together to gain some insight into how food may play a role in relationship dynamics, and vice versa.

Research objectives

The interviews sought to gain insight into:

- key drivers for existing customers (e.g. those that attend farmers markets) buying local and/or organic produce
- barriers to existing customers buying local produce (e.g. of those motivated participants, what stops them from buying more regularly)
- the current level of use of social and mobile technologies with customers, producers and market promoters
- drivers of participation in online and social media technologies in relation to food
- the level of interest/capacity for producers and customers to contribute to an online service such as that proposed by the FlavourCrusader concept

¹ <http://twitter.com>

² <http://facebook.com>

While some preliminary exploration of producer perspectives was undertaken, as the research project progressed, the scope of the interviews was reduced to focus on customer groups. Two additional interviews were undertaken, one with a farmers' market promoter and another with a community-supported agriculture producer. However, due to space constraints these interviews act only as background research for the purposes of this report. No engagement with non-customers has been undertaken at this point.

The customer interview script is included as an addendum to this paper.

Conventions used in this document

To distinguish participants in text, the first letter of their name has been bracketed — e.g. quotes from participant B are displayed as [B] within the text.

Key themes

Support for local food production

Noted benefits for engaging in local food sourcing varied among participants. They included:

- **Provenance** — knowing where and how food was grown
- **Connection to producers** — in the case of farmers' markets especially, although these connections extend beyond farmers' markets for some participants, supported in some cases by social media activities
- **Social justice & equity** — fair prices to producers
- **Supporting local economy** — linked to social justice in some ways, but subtly differentiated. Emphasis on more of customer's money reaching the producer and staying within producer communities.
- **Improved taste & quality** — perception that local fresh produce purchased through non-mainstream retail channels was fresher, of higher quality, and more flavoursome
- **Health** — perception of reduced chemical use/inputs into food and better nutritional content of food sourced through non-mainstream channels
- **Lower carbon emissions** — local produce was perceived to have lower "food miles" and therefore lower emissions than imported produce, or produce purchased through mainstream retailers (where food may have traveled significant distances to distribution centres etc.)
- **Distrust of mainstream retailers** — in relation to meeting expectations on the factors outlined above

While there was commonality across the body of reasons stated by participants, each participant expressed a different primary interest in local food production. For [C] the primary reason was social justice and equity (fair farm gate prices to producers). For [A] it was knowing the provenance of food. [E] indicated that quality and taste was the primary reason. For [D] and [B] the focus was "healthy" food.

While, technically speaking, local food production and farmers' markets are separate domains of concern, interviews with participants suggest that these concepts are very closely linked in the participants' minds. In this sense, the purchase of local produce and participation in the non-mainstream food market seems to be a "rule of thumb", or heuristic, for many participants — acting in some sense as a short-hand embodiment of

the attributes outlined above, even if these attributes are not explicitly verified in every case. This comment from [D] is suggestive of this perspective:

...we don't really focus on organic but I feel like most of the produce here is a lot, I don't know... I just have a concept that it's healthier somehow because it's not in a supermarket... which might not be the case. It just feels 'organic' even though it might not be. We kind of don't focus on just buying [certified] organic, it is quite a bit more expensive actually, and I guess I talk about it but I don't feel desperately [that I] have to buy organic.

This bundling of environmental and social attributes with the idea of “local” could be perceived as akin to the “unreflexive localism” outlined by DuPuis and Goodman (2005, p. 1). However, as we shall see in comments reproduced later in this report, participants do seem to be aware of the limitations of this approach, and they seem to possess a deeper appreciation of the complexity of the underlying issues.

[D]’s previous comment also highlights participants’ relationship with certified organic produce — it is deemed a “nice to have”, but not essential — a view shared by all participants. A direct, personal connection to producers was more important to participants, providing sufficient confidence in the provenance of the produce, as [A] outlined:

The most important thing for me is that I like to have an interaction with the person who's grown it... or at least to know where it's grown. Because I just like the story that comes with it. And I want to support the local economy. I want to eat organic food because it's better for me and it tastes better. And if I buy it locally I can talk to the people who've grown it about their growing practices and be comfortable with how it's been grown.

In fact, for some participants there is a degree of distrust with certified organic produce, especially as it is adopted by mainstream retailers. [C] expressed this distrust:

When I go to the markets and I'm working there, people go 'is it organic?' and I say 'no' and they walk away. It's like this 'cult of organic' without people ... really understanding. ... if Woolworths can brand and package organic and sell it, that really sort of says that that's not necessarily the be all and end all... That it's about sustainability, that it's about respecting our environment; respecting the animals. ... I think this whole organic thing is a big con, basically. ... you've got to pay through the nose for it and it's still not as good quality because, again, they're [mainstream retailers] using organic or whatever as a marketing term just to move more units...

Influence of family background

Most participants traced their relationship to food to a positive connection to family. For example, [B] relayed the influence his Italian heritage had on his relationship to food:

...my parents were Italian, farmers; emigrated from Italy to Canada and they took that with them, very much. So a lot of food came out of the garden. In the summer and autumn a lot of what we'd be eating in, certainly in terms of veg would be coming out of garden. During winter, a lot of it would come out of the freezer from what was produced in the garden, ... or in jars — preserves. My father worked at an abattoir, so we had good inexpensive and good quality meat coming through his discounting relationships with the guys who worked there, with the distributors. ... At every meal, you'd be discussing the next few meals, because there'd be prep time: 'should we get

that out of the freezer?', 'Should we get these, there's a deal on pork, should I pick that up? Because I want to make some more prosciutto...' So food was always part of most discussions, in one way or another. And get togethers always, again, revolved around food, celebrations always revolved around food. The meal had to hold a place — there was drinking and dancing and all those other things but food was very central to it.

In contrast, [B]'s partner [D] experienced a more functional relationship with food:

...my Dad's [D] fairly 'meat and three veg' type and the food in the house... it was healthy, simple food. But you'd have your piece of chicken or meat then your three veg and potatoes. And anything other than that was a bit unusual... food was more a functional thing: you'd have food for dinner but it wasn't like J's family where food was a joyful experience and, you know, really much part of the lifestyle and part of the home and all of that.

However, [B]'s family impacted [D]'s relationship to food:

I didn't have that enjoyment of food until I met J, I guess, and met his family and went downstairs and there's prosciuttos hanging there and cured cheeses... And that really introduced me to that whole real love of food... So that really changed my perspective I think.

This shift in food habits is reflective of the findings of Devine *et. al* who suggest “the life course as an important input into food choices, involving both individual life stages as well as historical and cohort effects.” (Devine *et al.* 1998, p. 1)

[B]'s experience also hints at the variety of roles that food plays in different ethnic communities. [C] suggested a strong ethnic influence on people's relationship to food:

In Sydney a lot of [food] bloggers are Malaysian or Chinese, Australian-born Chinese. ... And we've often had discussions amongst ourselves of 'why is this?' And it all comes down, we all think — even for the non-Asian bloggers — that different ethnic, non-Anglo-Saxon backgrounds have much stronger focus on food, than the more Western European... and that's where it comes from. So much more tied into daily life, you know. ... I remember as a kid going to Egypt and, you know, seeing the guy on the street downstairs making falafel, which is eaten for breakfast in the Middle East not necessarily as a lunch or dinner, and they had this massive mortar and pestle — and I remember, I must've only been about 9 — massive mortar and pestle, like massive! And doing, making the falafel in that and then shaping it and throwing it in the fryer, and eating it really fresh. And different, you know, it's so ritualised and it's so much part of social... how you connect with people. ... everyone's sitting around doing things together communally to prepare the food. Which doesn't seem to happen here [in Australia]. So a lot of it probably comes, maybe even sub-consciously from that.

Building efficacy

Brand Story and Horticulture Australia Limited (2010, p. 2) suggest that building consumer confidence with preparation and cooking of fresh produce is an important factor in increasing fruit and vegetable consumption. Most participants seemed to have a reasonably high degree of confidence in food preparation and cooking, as indicated by this comment from [C]:

...when I went to Marrickville there were these big bunches of rainbow chard and I've never used it before, and so I bought a big bunch of that and cooked a few different things with it to see whether I liked it, to see how it behaved, learn about it. So I find that I like to buy things that I've not used to try and figure out what to do with them.

[A] relayed a similar story:

Yesterday I was in Lismore and I went to this cute little fruit shop and they had some interesting things. And they had some cape gooseberries, and I've never seen them before, never eaten one, and so I tried one and it was this crazy, amazing flavour. So I just bought some, I didn't know what I was going to do with them. But I came home and I looked up the, you know, the history of them, and the description in Stephanie Alexander's book. And then looked through my recipe books and found a really good one in the Danks Street Depot cookbook, actually, that I'm gonna try. So, if I see something unusual I'll always pick it up and figure out what to do with it.

Multiple participants noted a similar process of finding a new or unusual ingredient and having a desire, and the confidence, to try it out. Participants also noted the educational role that farmers' markets, local restaurants and chefs, along with food-related mainstream media (such as popular Australian television series Masterchef) in increasing their skills. In relation to farmers' markets, [D] shared one such experience:

They [producers at Eveleigh farmers' markets] quite often will engage with you, they want to engage. They'll explain the food, they'll give you some recipe sheets, they'll kind of show you how to cook it. At Christmas we bought all our food here, we bought a duck and they gave us a recipe to cook the duck and we had fantastic duck. ... And I think a lot of people probably come here for that experience of connecting with the producers. ... with shows like Masterchef being so popular, people are all excited about food at the moment, they want to know more, they want to find out how to cook things that they've never cooked before. ... that's a lot of it I think — buying things you wouldn't otherwise buy and they can tell you how to cook those things.

Manzini (2006, p. 4) describes “disabling solutions” as:

systems of products and services that, seek to reduce user involvement and sequester formerly widespread knowledge and skills to integrate them into technical devices. In so doing they have ended up dramatically reducing the skills, abilities and know-how that traditionally enabled individuals and communities to deal with the most diverse aspects of daily life: to take care of the environment, of others and often themselves.

Considering this “reduction of skills, abilities and know-how” in the context of food production, there is a long-running trend towards “convenience products” (Nicolas & Ferraro 2007, p. 3) — for example, products that are designed for “instant” cooking such as “quick oats”, “instant noodles”, so-called “microwave dinners” etc. For some participants, their food experiences include (re)discovering skills “lost” by current generations who have grown up in a convenience products market. [A] noted that part of her journey involved reconnecting with “lost” knowledge:

Now that I'm back living with my family after a long time away I'm sort of trying to learn some of those skills [creating preserves]. So that's an important thing for me as well... like, learning from my Mum and my Grandmother, 'coz they've got so much knowledge. I'm also joining the CWA, the Country Women's Association, so I hope to

learn from, you know, some of the nannas in that too. [Taking traditional skills] and also reinventing them for a new generation. ...now we've got access to a lot more variety, of flavours, than what they would have traditionally had in previous generations. So I'm sort of trying to take tradition but also reinvent it.

Sense of community

Attendance at farmers' markets was seen as participating in an overarching social and community-oriented experience, not simply an alternative mode of "shopping". [D] highlighted the importance of community and social participation:

I just love the atmosphere... the vibrant atmosphere. It's just my favourite part of the week is actually coming here and, it's just so life-affirming; there's kids running around, dogs running around. You know, it's just looking around and just seeing all these people enjoying their Saturday morning, sitting in the sun having a coffee and ... it's just the most fantastic atmosphere. It's just really lovely, just full of all different kinds of people, hanging out, and ... interacting, it's just a real kind of melting pot, you know, ... a really happy atmosphere.

[B] contrasts this with the chore of shopping:

We make time for the market because the experience is positive whereas going out to do groceries is stress that we try to compress.

This is a familiar theme in literature on farmers' markets, also reflecting Coster and Kennon's finding that 70% of customers at the three farmers' markets in their study attended with other people, contrasted with supermarket attendance being a primarily individual activity (Coster & Kennon 2005, pp. 26–7).

The following comment from [B] is suggestive of the complexity and multi-layered nature of the politics of the "local" (DuPuis & Goodman 2005):

Well, part of it's neighbourhood, because we'll often bump into people we know we know from the neighbourhood, or who we didn't know lived in the neighbourhood who are here. ... we often visited other cities in Europe and we always went to the markets because you got a sense ... more than going to a business district or a shopping mall you got a sense of a cross section of a lot of people. So I suppose there is around that a bit of a feeling of community. And then there's a connection to communities beyond, because you've got producers who come directly; you have distributors, like there's a cheese person here [at Eveleigh farmers' markets] who represents cheesemakers from different areas, but they're connected to each of those. So it goes beyond the local community to ... a wider collection of communities who are serving this area. It's a great connectedness I guess.

This comment suggests that participants' are somewhat aware of this conceptual complexity of the local situated within a globalised food production system. [A] provides a further example, this time considering the interplay of economic, cultural and environmental factors:

An economy can't just function buying locally. In order to have a functioning national economy we do have to buy some imported stuff and we do have to support growers around other parts of the country. And I find it difficult to come up with a solution for that in my mind. ... You know, when you weigh up all of the positives and negatives, like carbon pollution from transport... but, you know, supporting artisan cheesemakers in Italy is also a good thing, but you've got to balance that against the

carbon pollution and all that stuff. I think all those issues are really complex, and it's sort of hard to arrive at a suitable answer. So, how much you should buy local, how much you should support other industries.

Both comments are suggestive of “cosmopolitan localism” (Manzini 2007, p. 236) — a localism grounded in an awareness of a globally interconnected economy.

Participants noted that mainstream retailers are attempting to capitalise on this sense of community, as indicated by [A]:

The fact that major retailers, who basically dictate the conditions under which things are produced, the fact that they are making ethics-based decisions like that makes me think that consumers are demanding it more and that it's becoming a more accepted mainstream movement. So I think this whole locavore³ thing is really becoming a lot more mainstream... Like with farmers markets, like more and more farmers markets, and Coles... I went into a Coles recently in Leichhardt and they had chalkboards up saying 'We support NSW farmers' and, you know, they've totally changed the style of their retailing to reflect that kind of, that local thing.

The level of trust in retailers by participants remains low — there is a sense that such expressions are disingenuous (see *Social justice and equity* below).

Authenticity/“real-ness”

Participants seemed to positively connect with the stories behind the food they were buying. [C] recollected her interest in authentic stories throughout the interview, for example:

It's very local. I have a friend who I met on Twitter ... I love reading what she writes because ... so many bloggers ... just write very straight up and down 'this is what I ate. I liked it/I didn't like it.' [She] really writes with a lot of passion about, around food. ... it's so much more than just what's on the plate.

And later:

... Tammi Jonas⁴. She's doing a PhD. And at the moment she's in Italy and... she's wandering around markets and eating this street food and I'm loving her blog posts because she's describing these meals she's eating and... oh... it's just amazing!

Similarly, [A] noted how this sense of wider context influences her writing and connection with readers:

I've found through my writing that I've managed to bring together a number of things that communicate to an audience that isn't necessarily a foodie audience. And I think a lot of blogs are mainly written by foodies for foodies, or by bloggers for bloggers, and ... don't necessarily have wide appeal. But I've found that by introducing other information like historical information and sociological information and creating or, like, telling a story behind the recipes that I'm making, I've found that people who aren't necessarily into food and cooking have become interested in it, or are interest in learning more about it.

³ “Locavore” is a term applied to a movement, initiated in the USA, focused on sourcing food from local producers.

⁴ Tammi’s blog: <http://tammijonas.blogspot.com/>

There is a strong sense from participants that fresh produce in mainstream retailers is not “authentic”. This exchange between [D] and [B] is reflective of this:

[D]: [There's a sense] that it's [produce at farmers' markets] come off the back of a truck a couple of days ago... And that it's, sort of, the farmer's there with his bucket of apples and there's ones that are bruised and dirty and not perfect, and it feels more real than going to Coles and picking a six perfect apples that, you know, I just feel... it just feels very unnatural.

[B]: They're too shiny. Yeh, when the fruit glows like that it's... it sometimes is a concern... 'coz I'm worried that it's waxed. You know, I don't feel it's real produce.

This overly processed approach to food production has become the new norm for some people, as indicated by [C]:

Having now become a convert to unwaxed apples... you know I see a shiny apple and I think 'I don't want to pay for that!' I don't want to pay for the 'shiny' — I don't need shiny. And my boyfriend doesn't like the unwaxed apples because he finds them too foreign. You know, he's like 'what's wrong with it?' I'm like 'Nothing. It's unwaxed. It hasn't been buffed and shined...'

Social justice and equity

A strong theme and driver for sourcing local produce via non-mainstream outlets is a distrust of major retailers in relation to their treatment of producers. This passage from [C], who indicated that social justice issues were a high priority in her sourcing of locally sourced produce, reflects a perspective noted by all participants:

It's also an economic thing. ... in Australia we have this massive duopoly and realising how they treat producers, contracting them and then paying them an absolute pittance for what they're producing. And the actual physical man-hours that go into it, and getting paid two cents a kilo for something, you know, that we're paying eight dollars a kilo for... that's just... on the plain mathematics of it wrong! That's so wrong! These people work really hard, regardless of whether they're organic, or not... it's still bloody hard work.

Most participants indicated a willingness to pay more for produce, within certain limits⁵, when they were:

- aware of the work/effort involved (direct connection to producers)
- confident of the provenance of the produce

[D] noted that this extra cost may limit the availability of fresh produce to those with the means to participate:

I guess, the future of food for people who can afford it is to be able to afford to buy interesting, varied food which is considered healthy and low on use of chemicals, and connecting with growers and all those luxurious things that we have access to. But the future of food generally in the world is, I think, going to become a really pressing issue even in Western countries, because of the population growth. And it's just going to become a much more, probably more expensive. There's going to be food that people used to be able to buy that they can't afford to buy. So it's going to

⁵ As [A] notes: “Obviously I do supplement the stuff that I buy with stuff from Woollies and whatever. I would rather not, but cost is a part of that too. Like I tend to buy the local stuff but not if it's really, super expensive.”

become more of an issue that people are going to have to think carefully about. And the markets here, you know, they aren't cheap. So, you know, it is a luxury that we are lucky to have access to.

The direct connection to producers afforded by farmers' markets and social technologies played a role in educating participants about food production processes, as indicated in this comment from [C]:

...I remember meeting this amazing guy at the growers market at Pymont once. ... He supplies [Sydney restaurant] Danks Street Depot⁶ with cornucopia biodynamic poultry. Geese, chickens, eggs. And he kept me and a friend enthralled for 45 minutes at the Pymont growers market telling us about his farm. ... inviting us to come and visit, talking about how he built these chicken coups that he puts on the little tractor and moves around every day to keep the land happy and the chickens happy... So by the end of it, even though the eggs were really expensive comparatively, I was like really happy to pay that because I knew what he did every single day to get those eggs to me, and to grow them.

In addition, participants saw these personal connections as a means of expressing their appreciation, in non-financial terms, to farmers for their efforts, as [D] suggested:

I really love buying from the farmers themselves, and having appreciation for their food and their processes, and saying 'thanks, that looks great', and just really appreciating that, how hard they work, and just kind of having that contact with them and must give them great satisfaction. Rather than selling to a supermarket chain that kind of bashes them down on price, and they have no contact with their customers. And the meat here is actually really quite expensive, but there are organic meats and I'd happily pay three times the price for meat where the animal's been treated well...

Preparedness, time and convenience

Nicolas and Ferraro (2007, p. 2) suggest that the modern-day consumer operates in a “pressure cooker environment” where “convenience and time have become extremely valuable commodities.” The following passage from [D] reflects this:

I guess for me a lot of it is time factor. That, you know, working long hours I don't feel like I have the time to, kind of, really, cook as much as I'd like to. ... it's probably something that [B] enjoys more than I do. So it's more kind of fitting it in around things and that's why weekends it's nice to kind of really get into food at the markets and try something different because through the week ... everything is driven by how much time you have. And although I know it doesn't take longer to cook and make those things it's more the kind of routine, getting into the habits of, you know, being healthier.

Four of the five participants highlighted the importance of being prepared through a weekly shopping expedition for local produce and/or pre-cooking meals for use during the week. They also lamented the lack of alternatives when needs arose between market days. This story from [A] is typical of participants' experience:

⁶ <http://www.danksstreetdepot.com.au/>

...I would like to be able to buy more local products, and more regularly, but I can't access it all the time. So I do a big shop at the farmers market on the Thursday, but I don't buy the whole week's vegetables in one go. And while some local stuff is available at the independent grocer it's just not available [always] during the week. So I guess access is the biggest challenge that I come up against, because I'll often want something, but not be able to get it locally at the time that I want it.

This also hints that a significant habitual behaviour change may be required for people not currently sourcing local produce through non-mainstream channels to participate.

All participants noted that they relied on mainstream retailers (Coles and Woolworths were most commonly cited) for “in-between” purchases, or for non-fresh produce (such as canned goods and other non-food commodities).

Simplicity

In part a reflection of time pressures, but also potentially related to efficacy, participants noted a turn towards “simplicity” in food more generally, but also in relation to their own food habits. An example from [D]:

...a lot of the food I think now that's considered great now is very simple food, simple and healthy, and Jamie Oliver's very much of that style, really simple put together, not complex.

[A] also noted this shift and links it to available time for food sourcing, preparation and cooking:

I ... began to cook more complex dishes because I had more time. And, you know, I have time to visit the markets, and time to source different produce. And now that I'm a freelancer I have a lot of flexibility around when I can do my shopping and where.

“Simple produce-driven food” relies on good quality produce, as additional flavours and processing are minimised. It is unclear whether this reflects broader consumer/cultural trends towards “minimalism” and simplicity (see, for example, Boyle 2003, pp. 16–21), a self-reinforcement of participants’ food attitudes — e.g. cooking simply may be in some sense a justification for purchasing fresh, local produce — or simply an opportunity afforded by the richer flavour associated with locally sourced produce.

Online services

Twitter was singled out by [C] and [A] as being home to a strong food-related community of interest, with both often connecting with “real-life” acquaintances. Twitter was seen as a platform enabling education and the building of stronger ties within this community, as this comment from [C] highlights:

Since I've been on twitter and met some extraordinary people, meeting people like Katie⁷ and Beau from Farmgate⁸ and knowing that they not only grow the stuff themselves, they'll resell stuff from neighbouring farms, they have a deep understanding of their region, their climate, why they're growing the food, how they're doing it, what they're using, and how hard they work, I would much rather give them

⁷ <http://twitter.com/katiefarmgate>

⁸ <http://thefarmgate.wordpress.com/>

my money then to give it to Woolworths, where a farmer that's contracted to Woolworths is only getting two cents a kilo for his potatoes.

[A], who is a freelance food writer, also notes the importance of Twitter for connecting with food-related contacts:

...on Twitter I communicate with a huge network of chefs and food writers ... to keep on top of news. ... I also have a lot of contact with producers on there. So, for example, I am friends with a beef farmer down in South Australia and if I have a question about raising cattle and what practices are in Australia I'll be able to ask him ... directly what his perspective is.

Social media did not play a significant role in general food-related conversations or activities for other participants. Notably, while most participants had a presence on Facebook, this site was only noted as being actively used for food-related activities by [E], who used a Facebook page to promote his pastry business.

Participants were asked about whether or not there were any specific tools that they wish they had, but that weren't already available. Three key elements were reflected in participant responses:

- **Mobile tools** — to be used at the point of purchase/decision of what to cook/eat e.g. at a supermarket
- **Tools that increased efficacy** — e.g. determining what's in season, how to cook it, recipes, seasonal produce guides etc.
- **Localised content** — participants had often found tools they would like to use, but were discouraged because of the tools' US-centric nature. Localised information is, of course, especially important when considering seasonality.

For example, [C] commented:

I wish I had my 'eat your books'⁹ for mobile, I would love that as a mobile app. Because often, if I know that I want to go home and I want to cook something, I know what I've got in the fridge... and I'm at work and I'm thinking I really want to go home and cook. And even though I can do it at my computer, if I'm in a supermarket and I suddenly see something I want to be able to ... look up a recipe...

Similarly, [A] noted:

Something I'd really like is a local site that has ... a list of products ... like say guavas, pineapples, pecan nuts, strawberries, apples, oranges... just a massive list of fruit and vegetables, and I can click on that and see where they're grown locally. ... for example in Sydney if there was sort of a regularly updated resource where you could find out what's seasonal and where you could get. I don't know if it would be like ... a user-generated content thing, or if there would be an organisation providing and updating that information. I just find that there are lots of pockets of good information, and organisations like the markets, but no umbrella ... overarching resource where you can find out everything that's out there at a glance.

⁹ <http://www.eatyourbooks.com/>

Addendum – customer interview script

- Demographic questions: Age? Suburb of residence? Occupation?
- Tell me about an average day for you, from a food perspective?
- Can you tell me a bit about your relationship with food?
- What inspired your food habits?
- Who (or what) influences you most about food?
- Tell us your take on the "future of food"?
- Do you buy local produce? What about organic?
- Where/how do you get your local produce?
- Why do you buy local/organic? What's the most important reason?
- Tell us about the challenges you experience around food? (e.g. purchasing fresh produce, etc.)
- Do you experience any barriers or challenges with the local/organic produce you buy?
- What do you consider the positives and negatives of local/organic produce?
- What's your perspective on the relationship between food producers and "consumers"? Do you think this is important?
- Where do you get your information about food? What sort of information do you look for?
- What social technology tools do you use in relation to food? (e.g. blogs, Twitter, mobile) If yes, tell me about the benefits of these tools/why you use them?
- How do you usually find such tools?
- Where/when do you usually use these tools?
- Considering the tools you use to promote/contribute your own story — what motivates you to post?
- What are the frustrations/barriers/challenges with using these tools?
- What's missing — are there any tools you really wish you had that you haven't found?
- How do you think social technologies (mobile, social media etc.) could be used to improve the food experience? How might they connect producers, markets and food lovers?
- (optional — if not covered by rest of interview) I've read that ethnic background has a lot to do with food patterns and habits, do you mind if I ask about yours?

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