Due to the persistence of drastic losses in honeybees, the supply of U.S. honey is continuing to follow a sharp decline while the demand for honey is reaching all-time highs. This shortage in demand is being met by ever-increasing imports of foreign honey. Although the U.S. has banned honey produced in China because of apparent high levels of pesticides and antibiotics, Chinese honey makes it into imported honey through alleged fraudulent activities. Imported honey, therefore, may pose risks to consumer health, and, thus, consumers may be willing to pay a premium for honey guaranteed to be produced in Wyoming.

**Objectives**

This project aims at analyzing how consumers evaluate health and ethical risks of consuming internationally produced honey and how these risks influence consumer willingness to pay for honey produced in Wyoming. The objective is to answer the following: 1) Are consumers willing to pay a premium for Wyoming honey? 2) Do consumers feel a sense of guilt when consuming non-local honey? 3) Will consumers avoid information about the origin of honey to avoid feelings of guilt?

This report concerns phase one of the project, which consisted of focus group discussions about honey. Focus group results, in turn, were used to design an economic experiment aimed at answering the above objectives.

**Materials and Methods**

Focus groups were conducted in spring 2014 at the James C. Hageman Sustainable Agriculture Research and Extension Center near Lingle and at the University of Wyoming in Laramie. Focus group participants were recruited from the general public in Lingle and Laramie. During focus group sessions, participants were asked about their usage of honey, their value of different honey attributes, the meaning to them of ‘healthy’, ‘ethical’ and ‘local’ honey, the attributes they read into local honey, the kind of information they would like about honey, their knowledge of the retail price of honey, and their trust of information on honey provided through labels. Each focus group session lasted for about an hour. Participants were endowed with both local and non-local honey and paid $30 in our effort to get a more representative sample of Wyoming consumers.

**Results and Discussion**

**Usage of honey:** Focus group participants generally used honey as a sweetener (e.g., in tea, when baking, when cooking, etc.), but some also used honey for medicinal purposes.

**Local honey is highly valued:** Focus group participants stated that they wanted to pay the most for locally produced honey. Many participants thought of locally produced honey as generally healthier and more environmentally friendly than non-locally produced honey.
Some stated that they made an effort to buy local honey, motivated primarily by a desire to support the local community or to derive health benefits associated with locally produced honey. Local honey was stated as especially important to participants interested in honey’s medicinal properties; however, participants had different ideas of the meaning of ‘local’ honey. To some, ‘local’ meant knowing the farmer, while to others it meant that the honey had been produced in a specific county or in the state of Wyoming.

Knowledge of honey prices: Retail prices stated by participants for honey were in the general range of $2.50–$7 per pound, with many participants stating that the price depends on the type of honey and where it is sold. Some participants, however, used honey without ever buying it themselves, e.g., receiving honey as gifts from relatives; therefore, they lacked knowledge of the retail price.

Honey attributes and information: The desire to take information on honey varied over participants and honey attributes. Some participants stated that they always want information on where the honey is produced and the nectar source; others said they do not care for the attributes of the honey and would not take the information if it was offered to them. At the same time, when faced with a specific health or ethical message on honey (domestically produced versus honey of unknown origin), all participants stated that they would like that particular information. Participants stated that they generally trust the labels in the store. Typically, darker honey was preferred to honey lighter in color.

General discussion: The main message from the focus groups to honey bee farmers was that local honey is highly valued to consumers, although there was some confusion as to what ‘local’ really means. The importance of the health attribute of honey provides an opportunity for farmers producing local honey to increase market shares by emphasizing health properties of local honey in their communication to consumers. Information on whether honey is locally produced and healthy was also generally considered to be important to participants.

The knowledge extracted from the focus groups was used for phase two of the project: the design of surveys and an economic experiment on honey. The project group is currently analyzing data from the surveys and experiment.

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Keywords: honey, market demand, locally produced

PARP: VII:5 (although the project concerns honey, not meat)