Fueling Our Appetite: Kentuckians React to Prices at the Pump

In a 2008 survey of 437 households statewide, Kentuckians indicated that fuel prices have significantly impacted where and how often they purchase food. The Kentucky Food Consumer Panel, a series of online surveys about food and food oriented activities, asked panelists to identify food consumption behavior changes due to higher prices at the pump. Surprisingly, urban dwellers are making similar revisions to those of rural residents.

### FUEL PRICES & FOOD CONSUMPTION

The most common household changes, according to the survey, were an increase in home-cooked meals (66%) and a decrease in dining out (65%). Food retailers, large and small, have a new niche market as a result – the prepared foods department! Families that are pressed for time or expertise in the kitchen pay a premium for fresh, packaged items that are ready to serve. The impact? A higher profit margin for the retailer, and a possible savings of time and money for the consumer.

One significant difference between urban and rural panelists when purchasing food was the frequency of grocery shopping. Fifteen percent more panelists living in rural areas are shopping fewer times a week than the urban dwellers. This may be supporting evidence that rural Kentucky families are traveling a sizeable distance to shop for food.

Although Kentucky’s price per gallon of gasoline is consistently lower than the national average, citizens of the Commonwealth have been making considerable changes in behavior to compensate. Much of the data collected in the Food Consumer Panel supports the notion that demand for locally grown food will continue to increase. However, it also raises concern for restaurants and grocery stores that depend on consistent business from surrounding areas.

Data collected from the Kentucky Food Consumer Panel, under the direction of Dr. Tim Woods and Dr. Wuyang Hu, will be used to provide resources about food behaviors, consumption, and marketing to Kentucky communities.