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**Access and Availability of Local Foods for Promoting
Sustainable Diets in Rural South Africa –**
An Analysis of Food Sourcing and Pricing within the Formal
and Informal Food Retailer Sector based on
Households' Food Purchasing Patterns

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of
Master of Science in Agricultural Economics

This work was financially supported by the Foundation fiat panis

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Handed in: 27. February 2015

Abstract

Objectives: There is an urgent need in the transition of South Africa's food system. While the prevalence of food insecurity is still high, in addition the numbers of people being overweight and obese are increasing. The study's objective was to reveal household food purchasing patterns and access to and availability of local foods for the promotion of a sustainable diet. Further, the food sourcing and pricing within the formal and informal retailer sector was investigated.

Study design: A mixed methods approach was applied. First, a quantitative household survey about their food purchasing patterns was carried out. Afterwards, qualitative interviews with the owners and managers of the most often visited retailers were conducted. In addition, observations in the shops and recordings of prices for the most often consumed food items were made. The recording of prices was done in supermarkets, grocery shops, spaza shops and for informal street vendors.

Setting: The study was conducted in the Northern Cape province of South Africa. The Vaalharts region, where the investigation took place is geographically defined as an area with a diameter of 150 km between Taung and Warrenton.

Study sample: 101 households in three rural communities were interviewed about their food purchasing habits. Furthermore, six chain supermarkets, four grocery shops, four spaza shops, three butchers, two bakeries, six informal vendors, three fast food outlets, one wholesaler for fruits and vegetables, one wholesaler for milk products and two abattoirs were included in the interviews and observations and if applicable in the recording of prices.

Results: Grocery shopping is done in different business categories. Most households buy in supermarkets, butchers and spaza shops. Own food production and purchases at farms are not very common. The business practices, as well as the procurement systems of the investigated shops are very different and depend on the size and business entity. Supermarkets procure required foodstuffs via distribution centers, whereas the independent formal and informal sole traders procure most of the groceries from big wholesalers. The availability of local food in retailers is rather the exception than the norm. Some independent sole traders procure local food by chance via intermediaries due to reasons of convenience. But a local background is decisive for the awareness of local support and the active procurement of local food. Those shop owners and managers, who deliberately acquire local products, agree on the freshness and good quality of the products.

Conclusion: Despite the fact, that the Vaalharts region is highly influenced by agriculture, the access to local food is limited and the availability of local products in the retail outlets is rather low. However, the diverse retail environment and the local structures provide opportunities to increase the availability of and thus the access to local foods.