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Group Surveys Locally Sourced Food Preferences

WOODSTOCK, Va.— THE RESULTS ARE IN! -- Shenandoah Forum's local foods survey reveals that area consumers care most about food quality when purchasing food, think more local foods should be included in our public school menus, and want more locally available dairy products, meats, berries, grains, and a wider variety of vegetables.

Conducted in October 2011 as part of the Forum's *Farm to Table* effort to enhance local agriculture, the survey *Consumer Interest in Local Foods in Shenandoah County* was distributed to gain a better understanding of how important locally sourced food is to Shenandoah County residents, and how we as a community can strengthen our local food system. More than 230 community members responded online or on copies distributed at farmers' markets, libraries, and other locations throughout the county.

Among the survey's key findings are:

- 66% say that quality is the most important factor when purchasing food, followed by cost (19%), and source (9%);
- When purchasing locally grown products, quality is the most important factor for 58%, followed by food safety (24%), and price (9%);
- Reasons for wanting to buy food from local sources are to support local farmers (33%), better taste (26%), and to strengthen community (13%).
- The local food items most frequently purchased are fresh fruit (85.4%), fresh vegetables (83.9%), meat (53.8%), and eggs (49.2%);
- Locally grown items are purchased, on a seasonal basis, from farm stands by 51% of respondents and from farmers markets by 47%;
- 69.5% grow, or have access to seasonal produce from home gardens, mostly tomatoes, cucumbers, greens, squash, and beans;
- 79.2% would be willing to travel farther if the selection of products was significantly better than available at a closer market or store – 41.2% would be willing to travel 10 to 20 miles, and 36.1% would travel 5 to 10 miles.
- 59% said it is very important for public schools to include locally grown foods in school menus.

Regarding respondents' age, 36.3% were between 51 and 65, 25.7% between 36 and 50, 19.9% 66 and over, and 17.3% between 21 and 35.

"Community support and participation was very important for the success of our survey and we wish to thank all those who participated," said Shenandoah Forum Chairman Carolyn Long. "The Forum will continue to use this information in our ongoing efforts to strengthen the local agricultural economy."

In the coming months, Forum board members will meet with local producers, community leaders and organizations to review the survey results and determine how best to apply the information garnered to enhance local agriculture in Shenandoah County.

Complete survey results are available at the Forum's website www.ShenandoahForum.org.

Shenandoah Forum is a group of Shenandoah County residents, formed in 2001, in response to the need for accurate, useful and balanced information to help meet the rising pressures of growth and development within our rural community, in a manner that maintains economic vitality, a high quality of life and our rural character. Its mission is to ensure the county remains essentially rural, preserves a healthy environment, promotes a sustainable economy, and provides a high quality of life for the people who live here. Through the sponsorship of public forums, workshops and media outreach, Shenandoah Forum www.ShenandoahForum.org has achieved a reputation of community-building and has been recognized as a resource shaping a brighter future in not only our county, but throughout the region.

On the web:

Shenandoah Forum: www.ShenandoahForum.org

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