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IS LOCAL A MATTER OF FOOD MILES OR FOOD TRADITIONS?

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ABSTRACT

In the last decade, the local food movement has achieved a growing popularity in the Italian food system. Nevertheless, the Italian food market still lacks a shared definition and labels indicating the local origin of the food products. In this study, we explore the meaning of “local food” in the Italian market using a qualitative approach. Results from twenty-three individual semi-structured interviews show that the meaning of “local” should be explained more in terms of connection between a community traditions and a geographical area than in terms of food miles.

Keywords: food traditions, Italian food market, local food, qualitative research

1. INTRODUCTION

In the Italian market, local food is defined with the expression "Chilometro Zero" (Zero Kilometers), since the first form of direct marketing was represented by the points of sales organized by producers within their farm, where the supply of food products to consumers occurred in the same location as the production (BUGNI, 2010). The popularity of local food products in Italy has been considerably growing: 1141 Farmers' Markets (FMs) organized by "Campagna Amica" (the most popular format of FMs in Italy) are recorded in 2016 (CAMPAGNA AMICA, 2016). In addition, the presence of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and direct marketing outlets as open markets, solidarity purchasing groups, small shops and farm-shops has been significantly growing in the last few years (Aldinucci, 2014; GIUCA, 2012; FRANCO *et al.*, 2015; PASCUCCI *et al.*, 2013; VASQUEZ *et al.*, 2017; WELLNER and THEUVSEN, 2015). With the so-called "De Castro" Decree, currently in force since the 1st of January 2008, guidelines have been set for the realization of marketplaces exclusively dedicated to direct retailing by farmers. Moreover, the Veneto Region, first in Italy, on the 25th of July 2008 issued regional law number 7 aimed at promoting the consumption of regional products in public food services in order to support the local economy. In addition, other Italian regions such as Emilia-Romagna and Abruzzo are tending to follow the same approach (COLDIRETTI, 2013). Given the increased popularity of the local food movement, large retail chains started, as well, to highlight the origin of the products that have been locally produced.

However, in the Italian market, labels certifying the local origin of the products are not present yet and what is local or not is not yet regulated. Admittedly, according to Italian and international literature reviews, it is difficult to identify a shared definition of "local food" (BAZZANI and CANAVARI, 2013:30).

Thus, the aim of the present study is to determine a definition of "local food" that can be shared throughout Italy, where the variety of resources in different territories and an ancient culinary art tradition lead to a high diversification in food consumption. In particular, the main goal of the research is to establish whether "local" can be better interpreted in terms of physical distance (i.e., food miles) or in terms of belonging to local community and food traditions.

We performed an explorative qualitative research, based on the use of semi-structured interviews. To the best of our knowledge, previous research related to the definition of local food was mostly based on an anthropological analysis of geographical and cultural conditions which lead to the starting up of local food networks (D'AMICO *et al.*, 2013; CHOLETTE, 2011; GIOVANNUCCI, *et al.*, 2010; MARTINEZ *et al.*, 2010; AMILIAN *et al.*, 2007, BRUNORI, 2007; SONNINO and MARSDEN, 2006; DUPUIS and GOODMAN, 2005; KIRWAN, 2004; HINRICHS, 2003; BARHAM, 2003; LA TROBE, 2001) or they were mainly focused on the description of consumers' perceptions towards local food (PENCARELLI *et al.*, 2015; APRILE *et al.*, 2012; DARBY *et al.*, 2008; ZEPEDA and DEAL, 2009). Therefore, this study represents one of the few attempts, the first one in Italy, to explore the meaning of "local food" using a qualitative approach. We interviewed twenty-three participants purposely chosen among consumers, farmers and experts of the food system asking about their opinions on local food consumption.

Through the exploration of concepts such as food values, quality perception, attitudes towards origin certification, we were able to highlight the main issues related to the definition of "local food" and we attempted to draw a possible scenario of the development of "local food" labels in the Italian market.

In the following sections we describe the methodology, then we summarize and discuss the results, and finally we draw our conclusions.

2. BACKGROUND ON THE CONCEPT OF "LOCAL FOOD"

BRUNORI (2007) suggested the distinction between "local food", "locality food" and "localist food". The term "local food" implies the instauration within a community of short-distance relationships, based on food habits and food traditions. On the other hand, the definition "locality food" is mainly focused on the origin of a product from a particular place, giving less importance to the "community factor". Finally, the concept of "localist food" implies consumers' willingness to reconstruct local identities by the regular consumption of food products, although they do not belong to the rural traditions of that local area. HAND and MARTINEZ (2010) stated that the re-valuation of local food was first supported by the Slow Food movement and defines whether a product is local or not on the basis of a maximum distance range of 100 Km (approximately 60 miles) within which the consumption and production locations are situated (SLOW FOOD, 2013). It is necessary to point out that the "Slow Food" association itself does not strictly respect this distance constraint. For example, at the Earth Market (the Farmers' Market organized by Slow Food) of Bologna seafood products originate from the coastal area of the Emilia-Romagna region, which is more than 100 Km away from the city of Bologna (BAZZANI *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, the concept of "local" has been often associated with regional, national boundaries (COSTANIGRO *et al.*, 2014; FEAGAN, 2007; HU *et al.*, 2012; LOMBARDI *et al.*, 2013; SCARPA *et al.*, 2005) or in terms of "traditional" food from a certain area (AKAICHI *et al.*, 2012). Some authors (AMILIEN *et al.*, 2007; APRILE *et al.*, 2012; BARHAM, 2003; GRACIA, 2013) associate to "local food" the well-known French term "*terroir*". This term highlights the influence of social and cultural factors in determining consumers' food habits: "the territorial reputation of a product is more often derived from a mixture of messages rather than the actual geography" (AMILIEN *et al.*, 2007:55). This term also refers to the so-called post-modern consumer, who is interested in the symbolic or cultural value rather than in the functional and utility value of products and services (VIGANÒ *et al.*, 2015).

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to account for the complexity and diversity of meanings embodied in the concept of "local food" we developed the study using an explorative qualitative analysis approach. This approach was chosen because it is more suitable for achieving a level of depth and understanding that is usually not easy to obtain with a quantitative survey based on statistical methods (MOLTENI and TROILO, 2012). Interviews were chosen as the most appropriate tool for analysing the social, cultural contexts through which informants can build cultural meanings (DENZIN, 2001; MOISANDER *et al.*, 2009). We performed in-depth interviews, supported by a semi-structured interview schedule, which served as a non-binding guideline for the interviewer.

A convenience, non-probabilistic sample of twenty-three individuals was selected. Three interviews were conducted by phone, the rest in person. The face-to-face interviews were performed in the cities of Bologna and Genoa. The selected sample consisted of six consumers, eight farmers and nine food market experts. We decided to interview different actors in the supply chain in order to have a broader interpretation of the issues related to the local food system. The consumers were recruited on the basis of their interest in the local food networks, indeed, four of them were regular Farmers' Markets shoppers and two of them were members of a CSA initiative. All the interviewed farmers regularly participated in Farmers' Markets and the selected experts were mainly involved in direct marketing activities or certification bodies (Table 1).

Table 1. Description of survey participants.

No.	Consumer/Farmer/Expert	Location of the interview	Residence of the respondent	Activity
1	Consumer	Bologna	Bologna	Regular Farmers' Markets shopper
2	Farmer	Bologna	Siracusa	Farmer participating in direct marketing activities
3	Farmer	Bologna	Borgo Panigale (Bo)	Farmer participating in direct marketing activities
4	Farmer	Bologna	Crevalcore (Bo)	Farmer participating in direct marketing activities
5	Expert	Bologna	Bologna	Brand manager involved in the direct marketing of a wine company
6	Consumer	Bologna	Treviso	Regular Farmers' Markets shopper
7	Farmer	Bologna	Crespellano (Bo)	Farmer participating in direct marketing activities
8	Farmer	Bologna	Rocca di Roffeno (Bo)	Farmer participating in direct marketing activities
9	Expert	Bologna	Imola (Bo)	Member of Coldiretti Association
10	Expert	Bologna	Bologna	Small Retailer of local food products
11	Farmer	Bologna	Casalfiumanese (Bo)	Farmer participating in direct marketing activities
12	Farmer	Bologna	Borgo Panigale (Bo)	Farmer participating in direct marketing activities
13	Consumer	Bologna	Catania	Regular Farmers' Markets shopper
14	Consumer	Bologna	Padua	Regular Farmers' Markets shopper
15	Expert	Bologna	Bologna	Researcher at the University of Bologna
16	Expert	Bologna	Bologna	Farm Assurance Technical Coordinator of a certification body
17	Consumer	Bologna	Ravenna	Regular CSA shopper
18	Expert	Bologna	Bologna	Member of Slow Food association, Bologna
19	Expert	Telephone interview	Viterbo	Brand manager involved in the direct marketing of organic fresh fruit and vegetable company
20	Expert	Telephone interview	Bologna	General manager of Italian vegetable seed company
21	Expert	Genoa	Genoa	General manager of a retail company
22	Consumer	Genoa	Genoa	Regular CSA shopper
23	Farmer	Telephone Interview	Lugo (Ra)	Farmer participating in direct marketing activities

Source: Data from the survey.

The recruitment of consumers was the most demanding among the three categories of respondents, since most of the consumers contacted affirmed that they had insufficient knowledge of the topic and did not accept the invitation to participate in the survey. In contrast, most of the contacted farmers and experts agreed to take part in the research (Table 2).

The interviews were administered during summer 2013. Once respondents were contacted, they were asked to take part in a research regarding the local food system. They were informed about the duration of the interview (30-45 minutes) and they were assured that their participation would be anonymous. Finally, the interviews were scheduled according to respondents' availability.

Table 2. Contacted and selected respondents.

	Contacted	Accepted	Response rate (%)
Consumers	17	6	34
Farmers	11	8	73
Experts	12	9	75
Total	40	23	57.5

Source: Data from the survey.

As previously mentioned, the interviews were structured according to a semi-structured interview schedule that was not strictly followed in order to minimize researcher influence and other sources of bias (ALVESSON, 2003). Therefore, general questions (open-ended questions) were posed to introduce the argument and, along the discussion, informants tended to be induced to raise issues that were considered important and relevant to the subject of interest (MYERS, 2009). All the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcribed interviews were analysed using, firstly, an open coding approach to examine the discrete parts. Then, axial coding was applied for the re-assembly of the data in categories and subcategories, which were finally brought together using selective coding (STRAUSS and CORBIN, 1998).

4. RESULTS

The adoption of an explorative approach, based on the use of in-depth interviews, turned out to be appropriate for the aim of the research; we were able to collect a high variety of information that let us highlight the different aspects of the proposed topic. The semi-structured interview guideline was also effective in helping the interviewee to initially face the problem using a wide-angle lens, then turning the discussion into more specific issues related to the local food system (Fig. 1).

The definition of food values and respondents' perception of quality was essential in introducing the concept of origin, since nearly the totality of the interviewees marked the important issues as environmental and biodiversity safeguards, suitability of land and local traditions (Fig. 1).

Furthermore, the variety of issues mentioned in the interviews was also due to the choice of addressing different actors in the food supply chain. Indeed, results show that, generally, consumers were more focused on aspects such as organoleptic features of the products and support to the local economy, while farmers were more focused on environmental safeguards and, finally, experts highlighted the hygienic-sanitary safety aspect and cultural factors related to food consumption.

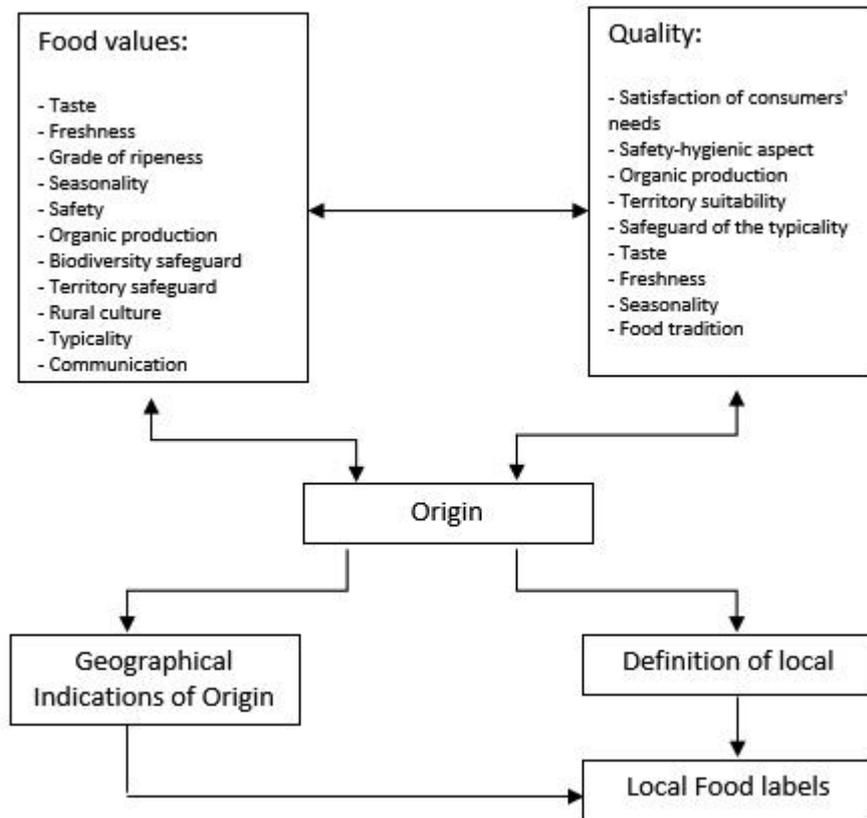


Figure 1. Issues extrapolated in the research.

4.1. Food values

Respondents suggested different interpretations of the concept of food values: they referred to features such as organoleptic characteristics and nutritional value as well as to the environmental and ethical aspects related to the production and the supply of food products.

Taste was defined as the feature that mainly explained the value of a product. It is necessary to point out that, in the case of fresh food products, taste was mostly mentioned in combination with **freshness** and **correct grade of ripeness**; interviewees indicated “good products”, such as the ones that were harvested and sold within the day. **Seasonality**, as well, was mentioned as an important value in the food system, since the consumption of seasonal products implies both a better organoleptic quality and the respect of natural cycles. Furthermore, common opinion was that conventional agricultural techniques, early harvest and the post-harvest treatments, generally, were the main cause of quality loss, not just from the organoleptic, but also from the nutritional point of view. In fact, **safety** was pointed out as one of the primary factors in food consumption: a good food product is one that a “mom can give to his child without worrying whether it is healthy or not” (Interviewed farmer) and that “does not contain poisons” (Interviewed farmer). Accordingly, several respondents stated that an important value was whether the product had been **organically** produced. One expert argued that the industrialized food system lead to the research of agricultural techniques aimed at the production of “attractive” foods on large scale and he highlighted the necessity to turn to the use of techniques that were focused on the protection of soil fertility and the “respect of

nature". Indeed, **safeguarding biodiversity** became a crucial aspect in the definition of the food values, in order to preserve the variety of the products, which are typical of the different Italian regions. Particularly, **protecting the countryside** was defined as a very important aspect, both from the environmental and the social-cultural point of view: "*the respect of natural conditions of the countryside must be considered as an investment in improving our lifestyles, the economy of local farmers and the re-vitalization of rural areas*" (Interviewed expert). Indeed, re-valorisation of the role of farmers and of **rural culture** has been defined as the crucial point in the Italian food system, where the dominance of large retail chains tends more and more to large scale production and does not focus on peculiar characteristics (**typicalities**) of regional production, which represent the strength of products "made in Italy". Therefore, several interviewees argued that **communication** between farmers and consumers or information provided by labels and certifications are essential in a context where consumers are increasingly unaware of and less interested in food traditions. Finally, **price** was mentioned as a value that had a relative importance, but did not outweigh the items previously mentioned; only one consumer suggested price as one of the main attributes in purchasing food. In most of the cases, interviewees agreed on the fact that price had to be consistent with organoleptic characteristics of the product and quality of production techniques used. Therefore, an expert mentioned the slogan of Slow Food: "Buono, Pulito e Giusto" (Good, Clean, and Fair) in order to summarize the values that should be related to food consumption: food products must have a good taste, must comply with food safety regulations and environmental safeguard, and must be purchased at a price that is fair to consumers and profitable for farmers.

4.2. The definition of quality

Most of the interviewees mentioned the word "quality", when they were asked to explain the values related to food products. The concept of quality was mainly interpreted in two different ways: some interviewees tended to be more focused on the definition of intrinsic characteristics such as taste, freshness and seasonality, while others referred mainly to cultural, geographical and environmental factors related to food consumption.

Some experts argued that quality is a subjective concept, it can be interpreted as the "*satisfaction of the needs of those receiving the product*" (Interviewed expert): consumers, for example, tend to look for good taste, flavour, while large retail chains are more interested in characteristics such as colour, standard shape, and long shelf life. In this respect, quality is therefore interpreted as excellence or differentiation according to consumer preferences, but it can also be interpreted as standardization and compliance with customers' contractual requirements. Indeed, quality was also defined as the respect of standards, laws and regulations that control the food system, thus potentially encouraging producers to aim no higher, quality-wise, than the minimum compliance requirements.

Food safety was mentioned as a basic feature or a prerequisite that food products must achieve at every stage of the food supply chain, therefore it should not lead to any differentiation among food products available on the market. In some cases, however, safety has been associated with organic production that, on the other hand, has been identified as a feature strictly related to quality. First of all, it implies the absence of synthetic chemicals, which allegedly alter the taste, flavour and healthiness of products. Secondly, but not less important, the continued use of artificial fertilizers (as it is linked to conventional agriculture) might encourage soil exploitation and damages to the food's nutritional value. Soil protection and use of sustainable agricultural techniques have been mentioned as crucial aspects in giving a definition of quality in the food system, but in this case interviewees, especially farmers and experts, highlighted the importance of the suitability of the land: "*the land must do what it can do*" (interviewed expert). Fruits and

vegetables should be grown in the most favourable soil and climate conditions, animals should be kept living in their natural habitat, their welfare should be respected, and food product processing (cheese and wine production, for example) should be applied where environmental conditions make a particular food product part of the community's traditions. On the basis of these issues, quality can be interpreted as the respect of natural cycles and the safeguard of food typicality.

Regarding organoleptic characteristics, interviewees stated that taste was the main attribute in defining food quality: "*it does not matter whether a product looks perfect, the important thing is that it tastes good!*" (Interviewed consumer). It is necessary to point out that respondents argued that a product is good and healthy when it is fresh, since avoidance of preservatives, and in the specific case of fresh fruits and vegetables, seasonality and sound harvesting time, allow products to develop their authentic aromas and flavours.

4.3. The importance of the origin of food products and attitudes towards Geographical Indications

The origin of food products was one of the most recurrent factors in relation to the concept of quality. In this paragraph, we will describe motivations that lead interviewees to explain the importance of this issue and their opinion regarding Geographical Indications (GIs).

First of all, they reaffirm the importance of land suitability and potential: soil and environmental conditions of a certain area are crucial for producing particular kind of food products. Respondents suggested the examples of Pachino cherry tomatoes and of Parma ham. A farmer argued that Pachino cherry tomatoes are typical from an area of Sicily where soils are characterized by a high salinity and a very dry climate, and it would be difficult to obtain their typical sweet flavour in different environmental conditions. One expert stated that Parma ham would not achieve its distinctive taste if raw materials were not kept exposed to the right grade of humidity that prevails in the Parma area. Generally, interviewees pointed out the variety of climate conditions in Italy, which determined the presence of different food traditions and their historical value in the different regions. Some experts stated that the process of selection by the population of a certain area, generation by generation, resulted in the best food products that they could obtain. They had learned, over the years, how to grow them and process them. The introduction and development of new varieties may cause confusion in local farmers and, therefore, result in lower quality products. For all these reasons, several informants agreed on the fact that, in a "*world of growing indifference towards food traditions*" (Interviewed expert), it is necessary to educate consumers to "*respect what the land can give*" (Interviewed expert) and to re-discover the value of agriculture's role in the Italian economy. Accordingly, when interviewees were asked their opinion about GI certification, some of them affirmed that this kind of certification may be a starting point for re-building a connection between consumers and land and to the re-evaluation of rural areas. However they highlighted the need to give more information about their function and meaning. Indeed, interviewed consumers affirmed that they could not give their opinion about GI certifications, since their knowledge of these certifications was not sufficient. On the other hand, several interviewees were sceptical regarding this kind of certification for different reasons: (1) they affirmed that it is not difficult to fake a food product, especially when they are unpackaged, (2) origin specification of a product does not provide crucial information such as agricultural techniques and treatments that have been used. One farmer suggested that collective self-certification within a community of farmers would be the appropriate tool to overcome these drawbacks.

It is necessary to point out that in several cases, when interviewees were asked their opinion regarding the importance of food product origin, they referred to proximity. The argument concerning the advantages of shortening the distance where the food is produced and where it is consumed will be the subject of the next section.

4.4. Local food and its role in the food market

In Italy, "local food" is widely defined as those products defined with the expression "Chilometro Zero" or "Km0" (zero kilometers). General opinion was that this label may be misleading, since it is barely possible to purchase food products that were produced in a range lower than one kilometre (around half a mile). Interviewees stated that "Km0" may have been developed just to persuade consumers to buy these products. Indeed, the interviewed consumers appreciated this expression, they affirmed that it explained clearly the concept of a food product sourced from a nearby location.

Most respondents suggested that the designation of a food product as local was closely related to the distance of the production area from the place of purchase, and that it should be defined in terms of miles; some of them suggested 50 km (30 miles) as a reasonable threshold. On the other hand, it is necessary to point out that, once interviewees had analysed the issue more deeply, they considered that food miles restrictions should depend on the kind of product. Several of them suggested the example of oranges, which are mostly cultivated in the South of Italy (in particular in Sicily and Calabria), but they are typically consumed all over the country, thus implying hundreds of miles of transportation. Interviewees agreed on the fact that in this case Italian oranges could be defined as a local product, whereas non-local products are those coming from other countries, such as Spain or Morocco. The same can be argued for olive oil: the interviewed farmers in Bologna were aware of the fact that very few olive groves were present within a range of 50 km, since the city is located at the northern limit of the natural distribution area of the olive tree. However, acknowledging that extra-virgin olive oil is consumed in significant quantities in the area, they affirmed that, in this case, the original olive oil from Emilia-Romagna, or from neighbouring regions (e.g., Tuscany), could be defined as "local". Indeed, the term has been frequently combined with food traditions and land suitability: Parmigiano-Reggiano (Parmesan) cheese, for example, is produced in an area that includes four different provinces of the region Emilia-Romagna, where similar environmental conditions and land configuration has induced the development of the same culinary traditions. Hence, local food has been valued as a factor linking farmers and food products to a certain area (VANDECANDELAERE *et al.*, 2009) and, especially, bringing farmers closer to consumers. Local food supply is generally limited to forms of short food supply chain such as farmers' markets, CSA, or direct marketing, where consumers come into direct contact with producers. This aspect has been considered crucial in educating consumers to build a connection with their traditions and rural areas. Thanks to the direct communication with farmers, consumers can obtain information about when and how to consume what they buy and especially about the agricultural techniques that have been used. They become an active participant of the local agriculture and are aware of helping the local economy to grow. Indeed, the interviewed farmers stated that these forms of short supply chains are the only ways for small farmers to maintain their business in a food system that is dominated by large retail chains. Local consumption has also been associated with environmental safeguards, because of the reduced need for transportation, and consequently of gas emissions along the supply chain, as well as favouring a reduced use of packaging. Another common opinion was that local products were fresher compared to non-local ones and that the face-to-face

relationships between farmers and consumers were an encouragement for producers to sell higher quality products.

On the other hand, interviewees agreed on the fact that these forms of short food supply chains have some limitations: first of all, food products supplied directly from farmers may be subject to less stringent food safety controls in comparison to conventional food streams. In fact, several small producers who take part in farmers' markets state that they cannot afford certifications. Moreover, Farmers' Markets and services organized by CSA may sometimes take place in periods and locations that are not convenient to consumers. Another inconvenience may be given by the difficulty in providing variety to consumers, supplying them all the kind of foods that a household may need. For these reasons, interviewees were asked about their opinion regarding the possibility, in large retail chains that some food products labelled as "locally produced" could be sold. In most cases, interviewees said they would appreciate this initiative, since it may also represent a way to teach less aware consumers on how to value-enhance their local, seasonal food products and to re-establish a connection with their food traditions. They suggested that a "local food label" should be mainly focused on farmers' identification and it should tell their "story": location and features of the farm where food has been produced, agricultural techniques used, how tradition suggests to consume the product, etc.; one expert suggested that the use of QR-codes may be appropriate to give this kind of information. On the other hand, the opinion of some interviewees was that information given to consumers in this way may not replace the information given directly by farmers. Most of them were sceptical about integrity of food certifications, especially where labels would define the origin of a product. Furthermore, interviewed farmers commented that large retail chains usually request amounts of products that small farmers are often unable to supply and that the reward that large retailers offer is not worth the higher cost of production. Finally, one expert argued that large retail chains would be interested in promoting the consumption of local food products only within the framework of a marketing strategy in which these products were characterized by a local brand owned by the large retail chain.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The results show that the meaning of "local" must be explained more in terms of connection to a geographical area than in terms of food miles. Some authors (AMILIEN *et al.*, 2007; BARHAM, 2003; GIOVANNUCCI *et al.*, 2010) suggest that the meaning of local can be associated to Geographical Indications. Our opinion is that the interpretation of "local" should be more related to the concept of belonging to a community within a certain area, where a culinary tradition has been preserved generation after generation. In accordance with BRUNORI's classification regarding local food systems (Brunori, 2007), we would rather associate the concept of Geographical Indications to the definition of "locality food" that is focused on the origin of a product from a particular place, while "local food" is more based on re-valuation of food traditions within a community. Furthermore, according to our results, distance restrictions and tolerance in defining "local" strictly depend on the kind of product. Therefore, the concept of local goes further than simply food miles, in cases when a food product is an expression of the identity of a region or of a country. Indeed, in several cases, respondents associated consumption of local food to re-valorisation of Italian food products and support to the national economy. Accordingly, "local food" labels would differ from "Food Miles" labels, since the latter are mainly associated (perhaps naively, according to CHOLETTE, 2011) to environmental impacts due to food transportation. "Local food" labels, instead, should highlight the

connection between a community and the land it occupies, and provide information not just regarding environmental benefits related to local food consumption, but also regarding support to local economy, and safeguard/conservation of land biodiversity, food traditions and, especially, characteristics and activities of food-producing farms.

The supply of local food products is mainly associated to forms of alternative food networks (KIRWAN, 2004; LA TROBE, 2001; MARTINEZ *et al.*, 2010; D'AMICO *et al.*, 2013) and respondents agreed upon the fact that the introduction of labels which determine the local origin of the products in mainstream food outlets may educate to local consumption even the more "distracted" consumer. Nevertheless, results show that different limitations would affect the supply of locally grown products at large retail chains' outlets. In the first place, general opinion was that consumers do not usually have a good knowledge of the meaning of certifications and the addition of a label may mostly generate confusion between consumers. In the second place, small farmers, who are generally the main actors in supplying local food (GOODMAN, 2004; RENTING *et al.*, 2003) may not be able to satisfy the volume requirements of large retail chains and they may not have the economic advantages that they usually obtain through alternative food networks. Finally, but not less important, quality and quantity of information given by a label could not replace information given by producers, and a lack of direct communication between farmers and consumers would imply a loss of the connection between urban and rural traditions that represents the main issue for local food networks. Local food seems to command a strong experiential content, authenticity, and low standardization of products and services (PENCARELLI *et al.*, 2015) therefore an innovative approach to marketing is required.

In future studies, it would be interesting to propose the same research question in other countries, with different climate conditions, culture and food habits. Our results suggest that, at least in Italy, local is strictly related to food traditions, but diverging cultural environments may induce to the value-enhancement of different food values and, therefore, to a different interpretation of the meaning of local food.

NOTE

·DECRETO 20 Novembre 2007, MINISTERO DELLE POLITICHE AGRICOLE ALIMENTARI E FORESTALI, Attuazione dell'articolo 1, comma 1065, della legge 27 dicembre 2006, n. 296, sui mercati riservati all'esercizio della vendita diretta da parte degli imprenditori agricoli. Gazzetta Ufficiale N. 301 del 29 Dicembre 2007.

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