

Why local food production doesn't prevent shortages in a pandemic

Throughout this pandemic, there have been many prognostications about the future of eating and proposals to make sure we are better prepared for the future. A common solution that I hear being offered is more direct to consumer, more local, more distributed food supply systems.

These ideas have an intuitive appeal and most take it as self evident that these food systems would be more robust and more resilient relative to the status quo. However, I haven't seen much serious discussion about how these alternative types of food supply chains and systems would have actually performed if faced with the same massive and unexpected shocks witnessed over the past couple months.

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What is it about direct to consumer food delivery or farmers markets that would have performed better to these demand shocks? Most of the vegetables that we saw being plowed under were destined for restaurants. Demand at restaurants was destroyed by shutdown orders.

This demand destruction would have occurred regardless of whether the supplier to the restaurant was a small and local or whether they were large and distant. The issue wasn't geographic proximity or scale, rather there was a lack of demand from particular buyers

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