THE SHED Tags

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December 12, 2018

Dr. Veronica House
317 UCB
Boulder, CO
80309

Dear Dr. House:

Enclosed is our design proposal for our idea, The Shed Tags. The Shed does not have a set definition of local food which allows for a range of perspectives but makes it difficult for consumers and other stakeholders to know how to engage. The Shed Tags consists of six tags that contain clear and concise descriptions meant to highlight the different attributes of local food rather than narrowly define it.

The proposed tags are Miles, Sustainability, Organic Practices, Non-GMO, Animal Welfare, and Economic Impact. The description for each tag uses broad and comprehensible criteria, allowing consumers to easily understand how local food can be defined with no research needed. For easy distinguishability, a uniquely colored and designed icon also accompanies each tag.

We are thankful for the opportunity to work with The Shed. We hope our design proposal offers The Shed valuable insight that could bolster its mission.

Sincerely,

The Shed Tags Team

Enclosure: The Shed Tags Design Proposal

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Design Proposal

Written and prepared by The Shed Tags Team:
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Prepared for the board members of The Shed: Boulder County

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Design Overview

With no set definition of what "local food" means, it can be difficult and confusing for people to understand. Our team is pursuing a design solution called The Shed Tags. We have created a set of icons, or visual tags, that will define and identify different aspects of local food for The Shed's users. We envision these tags to be used on The Shed website where users will be able to search and filter local food resources based on the tags they select. Our research has demonstrated that there are many different definitions of local food. In addition, The Shed has made it clear that they do not want to promote a singular definition of local food. The Shed Tags solves this problem by presenting users with many different types of local food, defining the types for them, and helping them locate the food they want. This will help The Shed educate consumers about many different types of local food and will also be a resource for users of their website.

Design Challenge

Since local food is such a broad topic, consumers are often unaware of the specific aspects involved. Eliminating this confusion has benefits for consumers, local food sellers/producers, and other organizations in The Shed's network. This is because conscious consumers are less likely to be frustrated and more likely to return to a local food seller later. To do this, The Shed Tags will be creating an overarching definition of local food that is inclusive to all aspects of local food.

There are several constraints and requirements for this challenge. Because The Shed wants to be inclusive, the definition created must align with the concepts of local foods held by all consumers and local food organizations. This means that the definition created must be modular. In addition, the definition should be flexible to accommodate any new elements of local food that may arise. For example, if there was a new attribute of local food to highlight, a new tag can simply be added without affecting the rest. Finally, the definitions must be easily understood by consumers, and any designations given must be easily distinguishable.

The solution created by The Shed Tags is a tagging system. In this system, each aspect of local food has a tag, and an organization will have all of the tags that it is qualified for. In addition, each tag has a special designation if a product has a third-party certification for that aspect of local food.

Design Principles

Our design encompasses four major principles.

1. We Respect The Shed's Wants and Needs

First and foremost, we wanted to respect the wishes of The Shed in that local food can not be bound by a singular, narrow definition. Because of this, we had to design a system that instead to highlights the elements of local food.

2. We Take Into Account All Definitions and Views

In order to deliver accurate information, we took into account all definitions and views. We used many different sources in our research to develop each tag.

3. We Make it Easy

It was important for us to make it easy for consumers to understand what local food is. Therefore, we decided to use general, easy to understand descriptions and avoid using scientific language that can be daunting.

4. We Educate and Connect Consumers

Along with making it easy to understand, it becomes an educational process. We wanted to make sure that anyone could easily learn about all the elements of local food in just a few minutes by visiting The Shed website. This way, consumers can spread this information and awareness easily which creates an effective network of followers.

Design Concept

Following these design principles, we developed our design concept of Local Food Tags. Our design features 6 broad categories: Miles, Environmental Sustainability, Organic, Non-GMO, Animal Welfare, and Economic Impact. These categories are meant to define and categorize the different attributes that can be assigned to local food in an organized, understandable way. In terms of visualization, we created six colorful, pleasing tags to make the categories distinguishable and easy to sort through. Should The Shed implement these tags on their website, it will add a searchable element that filters eligible farms, restaurants, etc. with their respective categories.

Organic Practices

Animal Welfare

Miles

Non-GMO

Environmental Sustainability

Economic Impact

Each tag is a result of our findings on what local food comprises. From there, in-depth research was done for each tag using information from trustworthy organizations. By using notable sources, anyone unsure of our research can be directed to verified information. The sourced information could be cited at the bottom of the web page as footnotes for users to access and view.

Our descriptions for each tag are worded in a straightforward way so that anyone could understand what each tag represents. With these clear and concise descriptions, the learning process is quick and painless for consumers. By keeping the definitions short and sweet, it will not discourage anyone from trying to learn what local food is, and the tags can act as an effective marketing tool when paired with the distinguishable icons.

Considerations in Defining Tags

In developing the criteria for each tag in the system, we chose to give each tag a very broad definition, rather than a set of specific criteria. We chose to do this for two main reasons:

1. If The Shed were to adopt a strict definition of local food, it might alienate some of The Shed's stakeholders, which could diminish participation in the organization in the long term. When developing broad definitions for each tag, we minimized the possibility of excluding a particular producer or group who may consider themselves local.

2. Our tagging system for The Shed is designed first and foremost with the users in mind. If individuals in the community look to The Shed for information on local food, they will expect clear, concise, and meaningful definitions of local food. By creating broad, yet understandable definitions for each tag, we minimize the amount of information that the user has to take in. If the users of our tagging system have to put in a minimal amount of effort into understanding the different tags, they will be more receptive to using it as a basis for communication regarding local food.

Proposed Tags

Utilizing the different definitions and views on local food that we discovered in our research, the team created the six tags. Each tag consists of a colorful icon to identify it, as well as a description of the food producer, and why they have been assigned that tag.

We plan on having an additional level of distinction within each tag, marked by a gold star. The gold star will indicate that the tag, (ex. Non-GMO) has been verified by a third-party (e.g. The Non-GMO Project). Tags without a gold star indicate that the tag has been self-reported by the food producer.

The Shed Tags system was designed knowing that The Shed's resources are currently limited. Therefore, the tagging system relies on self-reporting by producers and third-party certification from other credible organizations. By having two different reporting options, The Shed Tags allows for smaller farms to participate with self-reporting, as these farms likely cannot afford the cost of obtaining a third-party certification. However, the system also incorporates a way to recognize those producers who have obtained third-party certifications related to each tag. This distinction is made by the addition of a gold star to the tag for third-party certifications.

Relying on self-reporting and third-party certification requires the least amount of resources from The Shed, and involves the least amount of risk as well. If The Shed feels that it would better suit their goals to certify producers themselves, this tagging system can easily accommodate that. However, if in-house certification is not an option that interests The Shed, they do not have to pursue it.

Miles

One of the elements that defines local food is the distance that it travels from producer to consumer. Our Miles tag is intended to include the element of distance into our local food definition. We chose to define the Miles tag as:

- Food produced within 400 miles or produced within the same state

- Special distinction for food produced within Boulder County

We chose to define the distance as 400 miles or within the same state, as that is the definition of local food used by the USDA. However, our group recognizes that the primary focus of The Shed is to support food produced within Boulder County. To address this, our group decided to add a gold star next to the standard Miles icon, as a way to distinguish between food that is simply local, and food that is local to the Boulder County.

Environmental Sustainability

In developing the tagging system, our group also found that recognizing the environmental impact of farming practices contributes to how a food is viewed. Many consumers consider sustainable farming practices to be a factor when considering a food to be local. We have defined the Environmental Sustainability tag as:

- Food produced with farming practices that reduce environmental impact

- Special distinction for third-party or Shed certification

Because there are so many factors that contribute to a producer's environmental impact, we decided that it was best to define this tag as broadly as possible. While creating more specific criteria could be more informative, we felt that it would diminish the tag's relevance to consumers.

Organic Practices

The use of organic farming practices is considered vital to local food by many consumers. Our tagging systems incorporates this view by defining Organic Practices as:

- Produce grown without the use of pesticides, synthetic fertilizers, sewage sludge, or ionizing radiation

- Animal products free of antibiotics or growth hormones

- Special distinction for third-party or Shed certification

Our challenge with developing a tag for organic food was that the USDA has a very strict set of guidelines for what can be advertised as organic. However, many small family farms are not able to afford the official USDA certification, even though they may qualify. Our goal when including this tag was to give consumers a way to recognize that these small farms use organic farming practices, even though they may not have the USDA certification.

Non-GMO

Many consumers also consider local food to be free of GMOs. Although organic and non-GMO are often grouped together, we wanted to make a distinction between the two, so as to provide accurate information to consumers, and prevent any confusion that organic and non-GMO might have the same meaning. We have succinctly defined non-GMO as:

- Produced without the use of genetically modified organisms

- Special distinction for third-party or Shed certification

As with other tags, there are often very technical definitions of what can be considered genetically modified. Our goal in defining the tag with general terminology was to give the users a more succinct definition.

Animal Welfare

The humane treatment of animals is an aspect of food production that is considered by many to be part of defining local food. We therefore decided that it was deserving of its own tag in our system. We have defined the Animal Welfare tag as:

- Food products produced with consideration to the humane treatment of animals and humane farming practices

- Special distinction for third-party or Shed certification

Because treatment of animals is largely considered to be an ethical issue, our group was wary of putting constraints in the definition of the tag. However, we still feel that the tag is meaningful to the users.

Economic Impact

In our study of local food definitions, we found that many consumers are concerned with how a producer is supporting their workers and the economy. While the local economic impact of a producer can be related to the distance to the consumer, we found that this was not always the case. We therefore wanted to create a tag category that reflected the economic aspect of local food production, without constraining it by distance. We have defined our Economic Impact tag as follows:

- Food from producers that support the economic wellbeing of their communities

- Special distinction for third-party or Shed certification

The goal of this tag is to account for the sense of "giving back to the community" that many consumers of local food seek. This tag also allows for recognition of small producers in other parts of the world. By including this tag, our hope is to highlight that food producers can still have a great impact in their local community, even though they may be far away from the consumer.

Implementation

The Shed Tags would involve a searchable directory of all local food producers and sellers on their website. Each of the farms or restaurants within this directory would be searchable by both producer name and by specific local food tags. For instance, if a consumer valued supporting local food produced within Boulder County, they could simply filter the directory with the starred Miles tag for special distinction of production within Boulder County. An example of what the current list of farms could look like with the tagging system. Below is an example of what the current list of farms could look like with the tagging system added:

Benefits

The benefits of implementing these tags on The Shed website would be twofold. One, The Shed would educate their audience through these tags, teaching them about the different aspects of local food and their meanings. Two, The Shed would empower their audience, allowing them to search and filter the categories that matter to them for their specific food decisions.

Personal Biographies

Brittany Choy

Brittany Choy is a junior majoring in Technology, Arts, and Media and double minoring in Computer Science and Business at the University of Colorado Boulder. Her passion for technology along with a diligent work ethic and attention to detail drives her to pursue a career in visual design, digital marketing, or a similar field. Brittany has experience in graphic design, front-end development, facilitative methods in teamwork, and creative ways to solve problems. She is currently part of the marketing team for T9Hacks, the hackathon for women and non-binaries.

Connor Guerin

Connor Guerin is a junior student at the University of Colorado Boulder. He is pursuing a major in Computer Science, with a minor in Business. In addition to his academic work, he is also an IT Technician for the university's Facilities Management division. Through this work he explores ways to communicate and present technical designs in clear and approachable ways. He has also worked with several design groups on a variety of projects through his courses at CU Boulder. Aside from his academic and professional pursuits, Connor volunteers on occasion as a bicycle mechanic for a Boulder non-profit.

Jensen Keller

Jensen Keller is studying Strategic Communication and Media Design at the University of Colorado, Boulder, with a minor in Media Studies and a certificate in Technology, Arts, and Media. He is a creative, unique individual with a range of experiences and knowledge. Jensen is currently the Director of Outreach and Engagement at Radio 1190 KVCU Boulder. He has experience designing and creating visually pleasing materials such as posters, art pieces, and most recently a book cover.

Kian Tanner

Kian Tanner is a senior studying Aerospace Engineering, with a minor in Applied Mathematics at University of Colorado Boulder. In his studies, he tries to find novel solutions to problems. During his free time, he often can be found climbing in Boulder Canyon.