

## **ESTABLISHING AND STRENGTHENING FARMERS MARKETS A RESOURCE SHEET**

From the perspective of the market customer, farmers markets just happen. Vendors show up, pitch their tents, sell their produce to many customers who show up, and then disappear until next time. Right? Anyone who has actually been involved in operating a farmers market knows that this isn't the case. Markets are complicated. **Farmers markets require planning, clear communication, community organizing, promotions, fund-raising, and other logistical work.** To underwrite the costs of accomplishing these tasks, farmers markets need funding. The difficulty of running a market is compounded by the fact that vendors make the money, not the markets. Perhaps this is why many farmers markets struggle to survive.

*What kind of planning ensures sustainability for the market and its vendors?*

**Assessment.** Know the area where your market will be located, which will influence the number and types of vendors recruited for the market. For an existing market, a thorough assessment ensures that what the market offers matches the host community's needs, including questions like:

- What are household incomes for the farmers market service area?
- What is the population density?
- What languages are spoken nearby?
- How and where do people shop currently?
- What kinds of transportation options will serve the market?
- How many households in the area are eligible for food support?
- What are some of the issues unique to rural and tribal areas that will impact the needs and success of the market?
- How many vendors can local population actually support?
- Where and who are important community members, and how can they be engaged in supporting and promoting the market?

In an existing market, there are tools that have been developed for gathering useful information in a way that makes it a fun, market-based activity ([See Larry Lev, et al, "Tools for Rapid Market Assessments." Oregon State University Extension Service, 2002.](#) and <http://www.marketumbrella.org/marketshare/>) Information generated from this participatory, market based surveys can offer clarity on areas for improvement or existing challenges and assets.

**Define yourself.** Whether your market is in the planning stages or is a community anchor, it's important to define the market's purpose by developing a mission statement. Using the information gathered during your assessment, you can:

- Better understand who can help your market and reveals why potential supporters should be interested in contributing to the success of the market

- Tie all messages (explicit and implicit) and activities to a clear and unified purpose. If you can't briefly and easily describe what and who the market is, other people won't understand either

### Sample Statements of Purpose

The mission of the market is to provide opportunities for farmers to sell their produce directly to consumers while providing consumers opportunities to buy locally grown produce directly from farmers. By doing this, the market increases the local food supply and production, and hopes to create, expand and enhance the economic strength and viability of farmers in Northern New Mexico while also contributing to the health and wealth of city residents. By promoting the economic possibility of farming, the market aims to maintain farming practices for current farmers and their children. The Market's mission recognizes the environmental implications of farming and strives to maintain the regional land and water base quality. (*Santa Fe Farmers Market, Santa Fe, New Mexico*)

The mission of the Minnesota Farmers Market Association is to offer services and programs that support and promote Minnesota farmers' markets. *Minnesota Farmer Market Association*

**Strategically rally others around your market.** Once you have conducted an assessment and developed a mission statement (including who the market will serve), you can use this information to rally key influencers around your market project. Examples of people you might think of approaching:

- Business and other leaders
- Leaders in the faith-based community
- Elected officials or other policy-makers
- Representatives from the health community
- Lawyers
- Teachers
- Representatives from local municipal agencies
- Anti-hunger advocates

Consider asking these people, along with market vendors, to help form an advisory committee, board, or 'friends of the market' group. This effort will create a web of people whose connections extend to all parts of the community. An effective group will help support your purpose and mission by increasing your market's access to resources, influence, ideas, and community well being. This group can also establish and promote your market as an essential community asset.

**Craft the story of who you and what you are doing for the benefit of outsiders.** Once you have your house in order, you can think about how to communicate to the community:

- Relate your messages to your purpose
- Messages should be succinct so they have impact and so people can remember them
- Think about a message that can *only* describe *your* market

**Enlist the right vehicles to get your messages out there.**

- The most important way to communicate your message is at the market! Invest in visible, attractive signage for the market, including hours of operation and a catchy phrase (ex: "The best place in town to meet the people who grow your food"). If your market accepts food assistance payments, make sure this is visible on all market signage. If your market is located where

multiple languages are spoken, enlist help from these communities to translate your signs to indicate your market welcomes everyone.

- Word of mouth is most important way that customers find and shop at the market, according to markets nationwide. Ask advisory group members to visit different groups, organizations, places of worship, book clubs, businesses, etc., to share the community benefits of the market. Identify ways the market can be present at community events. Pass out market carrots, or flyers, or coupons. Make sure to start and keep a buzz going!
- Talk to community newspapers and radio stations. Remember that there may be more than one and some may reach otherwise hard to reach groups of people (e.g. recent immigrant communities). There may be larger media outlets that appear more attractive at first, but it is unlikely that there is much value in your community market's message reaching communities 100 miles away. Community outlets will get your message to the most relevant places which tend to be more interested in your message. Offer to write content (like a feature column) or help them to routinely cover the market's activities (like in a community calendar).
- When there are market activities, pitch the event as a story for media outlets.
- Print simple flyers or brochures for community centers, community clinics, coffee shops, barbershops, etc. Make sure your literature is in all languages spoken in the community! Leave flyers door-to-door. Enlist volunteers to help.
- Put up posters around town; ask owners to post them in shop windows. Have a few different sizes appropriate for different circumstances. Communicate in multiple languages!
- Ask local schools to stuff flyers into children's backpacks
- Create t-shirts, buttons, and bumper stickers with market information to sell at the market

**Ask for resources.** Now it's time to ask for resources. What any market needs and what any community can offer varies substantially, but one thing is true for all markets: *make your "ask" specific*. Instead of asking for a donation, ask for \$100 to become a market day sponsor. Don't forget to ask for donations in kind—office supplies, copy services, legal work, office space, flashlights for the early morning crew, and so on. You will be surprised at how eager many businesses, individuals, and organizations will be to help. Acknowledge all sponsors and donors on all your flyers and other promotional material. Your advisory group should help raise money. That's why they're involved: to use their personal networks to find willing supporters.

### **Additional Resources**

#### **For a great market management guide:**

[http://sfp.ucdavis.edu/farmers\\_market/](http://sfp.ucdavis.edu/farmers_market/)

#### **For general resources:**

- [Farmers Market Coalition](http://www.farmersmarketcoalition.org) (<http://www.farmersmarketcoalition.org>)
- [Market Umbrella](http://marketumbrella.org) (<http://marketumbrella.org>)
- [The Wallace Center](http://www.wallacecenter.org/our-work/current-initiatives/national-farmers-market-network) (<http://www.wallacecenter.org/our-work/current-initiatives/national-farmers-market-network>)
- [Minnesota Farmers Market Association](http://www.mfma.org) (<http://www.mfma.org>)