

FY 2014

\$95,067 to the Rural Advancement Foundation International-USA, Pittsboro, NC, to investigate and adopt marketing techniques at four North Carolina markets, and convene a Statewide conference of farmers' market managers to present its project findings.

Final Report

**Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP)
Final Performance Report**

The final performance report summarizes the outcome of your FMPP award objectives. As stated in the FMPP Terms and Conditions, you will not be eligible for future FMPP or Local Food Promotion Program grant funding unless all close-out procedures are completed, including satisfactory submission of this final performance report.

This final report will be made available to the public once it is approved by FMPP staff. Write the report in a way that promotes your project's accomplishments, as this document will serve as not only a learning tool, but a promotional tool to support local and regional food programs. Particularly, recipients are expected to provide both qualitative and quantitative results to convey the activities and accomplishments of the work.

The report is limited to 10 pages and is due **within 90 days** of the project's performance period end date, or sooner if the project is complete. Provide answers to each question, or answer "not applicable" where necessary. It is recommended that you email or fax your completed performance report to FMPP staff to avoid delays:

FMPP Phone: 202-690-4152; Email: USDAFMPPQuestions@ams.usda.gov; Fax: 202-690-4152

Should you need to mail your documents via hard copy, contact FMPP staff to obtain mailing instructions.

Report Date Range: <i>(e.g. September 30, 20XX-September 29, 20XX)</i>	September 30, 2014-November 30, 2016
Authorized Representative Name:	Edna Rodriguez
Authorized Representative Phone:	919-542-1396 x202
Authorized Representative Email:	edna@rafiusa.org
Recipient Organization Name:	Rural Advancement Foundation International-USA (RAFI)
Project Title as Stated on Grant Agreement:	North Carolina Farmers' Market Initiative
Grant Agreement Number: <i>(e.g. 14-FMPPX-XX-XXXX)</i>	14-FMPPX-NC-0103
Year Grant was Awarded:	2014
Project City/State:	Pittsboro, NC

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Total Awarded Budget:	\$95,067
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FMPP staff may contact you to follow up for long-term success stories. Who may we contact?

X Same Authorized Representative listed above (check if applicable).

Different individual: Name: _____; Email: _____; Phone: _____

1. State the goals/objectives of your project as outlined in the grant narrative and/or approved by FMPP staff. If the goals/objectives from the narrative have changed from the grant narrative, please highlight those changes (e.g. “new objective”, “new contact”, “new consultant”, etc.). You may add additional goals/objectives if necessary. For each item below, qualitatively discuss the progress made and indicate the impact on the community, if any.

i. **Goal/Objective 1:** Create four pilot learning communities in order to test marketing strategies, track outcomes, and develop resources for building the capacity of farmers markets and farm enterprises selling direct to consumers across the state and beyond.

a. Progress Made:

- Seven Learning Community markets were identified and recruited
- Site visits and assessments of baseline data and needs for technical assistance were conducted; marketing and outreach plans were drafted
- During the project period, four of the seven Learning Community markets had manager turnover, and an additional market withdrew from the project, citing insufficient capacity to continue participating. Accordingly a strategic shift was made to provide more individualized technical assistance as needed, and technical assistance plans were updated.
- Technical assistance was provided to markets on topics including new market manager orientation/support, community outreach, marketing and promotional resources, SNAP/EBT and incentives, data collection and record-keeping, fee adjustments, sponsorship options, product mix and vendor management, and networking.
- [Case studies](#) encompassing lessons learned were completed and published.

b. Impact on Community:

- Filming and an initial draft cut was made for a promotional video for the Elaney Wood Heritage Farmers Market for use recruiting community champions (more footage will need to be taken once the 2017 market season begins). RAFI also provided the market with improved marketing materials.
- RAFI’s fiscal sponsorship of the Durham Farmers’ Market made it possible for them to apply for and receive a grant from Burt’s Bees for \$10,000, funds which will be used to increase both food access for the local community and farmer sales. The Durham Farmers’ Market’s Double Bucks program is now also matching WIC FMNP vouchers as well as SNAP.
- With ASAP’s support, by sharing information and experience, Western markets were able address the significant budgetary challenge of much higher than expected fees for city permits and inspections, with good results in terms of fee adjustments.
- Markets around the state and beyond were able to take advantage of the “lessons learned” from the Learning Communities as encompassed in the case studies. The case studies were written on the topics of Diverse Fundraising Strategies, Rural Challenges, Direct Mailing as an EBT Outreach Strategy, and Market Manager Turnover.

ii. **Goal/Objective 2:** Convene a conference for farmers markets, CSAs, produce stands and other farm enterprises selling direct to consumer as a first step towards the creation of a statewide forum with the ability to provide tools, training and peer to peer learning opportunities.

a. Progress Made:

- Organized the conference advisory committee; surveyed more than 130 market managers and farmers statewide on desired conference content.
- Launched the Connect2Direct website.
- Met with committee, stakeholders and speakers to develop the conference agenda and facilitation plan.
- Launched summit registration, conducted outreach and promotion, and prepared conference logistics and materials.
- On December 8, 2015, RAFI and ASAP hosted the “Connect2Direct Summit: Building Vibrant Markets”, a statewide gathering in Winston-Salem of market managers, vendors, and supporting agencies. The Summit was structured to engage participants in different formats throughout the day. It included an expert panel on the state of NC farmers markets, an open space and networking session, a plenary session on data collection tools, breakout action planning sessions, and voting on brainstormed actions and solutions. Four workshops were offered: Managing Change—Leadership Transitions and Preserving Institutional Knowledge; Tools, Resources, and Strategies for Vendor Sales Success; Building Your Customer Base—Market Outreach, Promotions, and Customer Connections; and Cultivating Food Justice. A networking and social hour concluded the event. More information about the Summit can be found online at: <http://www.connect2direct.org/2015-summit.html> .

b. Impact on Community:

- More than 180 individuals registered and participated in the “Connect2Direct Summit: Building Vibrant Markets.” Stakeholders shared knowledge and best practices and Connect2Direct gathered information on what challenges and opportunities exist for markets in North Carolina, and what attendees thought about the need for and potential function of a statewide farmers’ market association. With that information and some additional research we drafted a [report](#) with our conclusions and recommendations concerning a statewide association. [A full evaluation](#) of the summit can be found on the Connect2Direct website.

2. Quantify the overall impact of the project on the intended beneficiaries, if applicable, from the baseline date (the start of the award performance period, September 30, 2014). Include further explanation if necessary.

- i. Number of direct jobs created:** 2
- ii. Number of jobs retained:** n/a
- iii. Number of indirect jobs created:** n/a
- iv. Number of markets expanded:** n/a
- v. Number of new markets established:** n/a
- vi. Market sales increased by \$n/a and increased by n/a%.**
- vii. Number of farmers/producers that have benefited from the project:** A total of 25 farmers attended the Summit and benefitted from the event. The farmer members of the 39 farmers markets represented at the summit also benefitted from the event. More than 80 additional farmers benefit from our capacity building work with markets via the learning communities initiative.
 - a. Percent Increase:** n/a

3. Did you expand your customer base by reaching new populations such as new ethnic groups, additional low income/low access populations, new businesses, etc.? If so, how?

This was the first ever Summit, which meant creating a “customer base” for the event from the ground up. We conducted extensive outreach throughout the state to ensure we reached as many markets and populations as possible. Attendees represented farmers markets, farms, municipalities, public health agencies, nonprofit organizations, state agriculture department staff.

Farmers Markets expanding their customer base was a major theme of the summit, including outreach to underserved communities. Our technical assistance to our Learning Communities farmers markets, especially with the Elaney Wood Heritage Farmers’ Market and the Durham Farmers’ Market, has also been focused on expanding the customer base and making the market more accessible to low income shoppers. At Elaney Wood, we provided market staff with marketing materials to inform community members about their SNAP matching incentive program, and met to review the market’s outreach strategies. We leveraged additional funding from the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust to cover the reimbursements for their matching program and to fund staff to run the program at the market. RAFI’s fiscal sponsorship of the Double Bucks program at the Durham Farmers’ Market supports the market’s outreach to low-income customers. The [case studies](#) that we wrote about the Elaney Wood and Durham markets share some lessons learned in this process with other farmers markets.

4. Discuss your community partnerships.

i. Who are your community partners?

In addition to our farmers market partners, we collaborate with many other nonprofit organizations and agencies including Resourceful Communities, Rural Forward, Rural Support Partners, the NC Catalyst program, a number of county-level health departments and more. We also collaborate with several national partners who provide best management practices and lessons learned from other areas of the country including the Farmers Market Coalition and Wholesome Wave.

ii. How have they contributed to the overall results of the FMPP project?

These agencies are thought partners and resource providers. They provided both content and outreach for the farmers market summit, and increased the reach of the summit results. We continue to work with these partners to communicate about needs we see in our work collectively and about opportunities for collaboration.

iii. How will they continue to contribute to your project’s future activities, beyond the performance period of this FMPP grant?

Partners will help in disseminating lessons learned, through the statewide association recommendations report and the case studies produced via this project. We continue to communicate with these partners to identify challenges and trends in farmers markets and to provide more informed, connected, and comprehensive technical assistance and guidance.

5. Are you using contractors to conduct the work? If so, how did their work contribute to the results of the FMPP project?

Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP) was our main contractor on this grant. They are a key organizational partner to RAFI who we called upon to help us coordinate efforts on the ground in Western North Carolina. ASAP has provided technical assistance to our Learning Community markets in the west, has partnered in creating a report with recommendations on the potential of an NC farmers market association, and has researched and conducted surveys on the issue of market

manager turnover. We also leveraged other sources of funding to bring on an additional contractor to assist with two of the case studies.

6. Have you publicized any results yet?* Yes.

i. If yes, how did you publicize the results?

The [case studies](#) and the [recommendations on a statewide farmers market association](#) are published on our Connect2Direct website.

ii. To whom did you publicize the results?

We targeted farmers market managers through the NC market manager listserv.

iii. How many stakeholders (i.e. people, entities) did you reach?

In the past three months since the case studies were published, the Connect2Direct website, where the case studies are housed, has had 1,256 unique visitors. The RAFI website page where visitors can also find the case studies has had 86 unique visitors.

***Send any publicity information (brochures, announcements, newsletters, etc.) electronically along with this report. Non-electronic promotional items should be digitally photographed and emailed with this report (do not send the actual item).**

7. Have you collected any feedback from your community and additional stakeholders about your work?

Yes. We conducted an extensive evaluation survey at the end of the summit and designed the summit workshops, break-out groups, and open-space session in a way that allowed us to gather feedback from participants.

i. If so, how did you collect the information?

Summit evaluation surveys were conducted with a response rate of 42% (71 of the 170 non-staff participants responded). Surveys results were favorable, with participants expressing their satisfaction with the content and format of the event. Surveys also demonstrated that participants are eager for additional opportunities to network with others and are interested in shared learning/training opportunities.

ii. What feedback was relayed (specific comments)?

A comprehensive report of the summit evaluation is included as an attachment with this report and may also be found at:

<http://www.connect2direct.org/uploads/2/6/5/2/26525050/connect2directsummitevaluationreport.pdf>

Some specific comments included:

"I thought this was well-organized and engaging! The way it was structured allowed for diversity and retained my interest."

"Excellent mix of presentation and discussions—we all feel valued, encouraged, and empowered."

"I've got concrete ideas for things we'll do in 2016. I've got other ideas and concepts that are marinating for future action. Thanks so much for pulling it together for us."

"Great conference! It was the perfect space for me to voice a lot of ideas and meet people who can help me turn those ideas into action."

8. Budget Summary:

i. As part of the FMPP closeout procedures, you are required to submit the SF-425 (Final

Federal Financial Report). Check here if you have completed the SF-425 and are submitting it with this report: The report was submitted by Edna Rodriguez by email in February of 2016.

- ii. **Did the project generate any income? No**
- a. **If yes, how much was generated and how was it used to further the objectives of the award? N/A**

9. Lessons Learned:

- i. **Summarize any lessons learned. They should draw on positive experiences (e.g. good ideas that improved project efficiency or saved money) and negative experiences (e.g. what did not go well and what needs to be changed).**

- Overall, insufficient market capacity (in terms of funds for both market program work and market manager time) limits the work of market managers and their ability to engage with technical assistance providers like RAFI and ASAP. We find this to be especially true at rural markets.
- Insufficient pay/hours, seasonal work, unrealistic expectations, and work overload all contribute to high turnover among farmers market managers, which has a detrimental effect on community relationships, record-keeping, program management, and other essential characteristics of a successful farmers market.
- **Success in efforts to improve funding for markets (specifically diversified, long-term funding) needs to be made a priority** in order for markets to sustainably increase their capacity and to get off the treadmill of insufficient funding, unmet needs, and new managers every season or two. Managers and their markets will be challenged to make long term investments and improvements until markets have sufficient funds to adequately support the work that is asked of managers.
- Additional lessons learned can be found in our four [case studies](#).

- ii. **If goals or outcome measures were not achieved, identify and share the lessons learned to help others expedite problem-solving:**

- Future grantees, while planning their projects and work, should expect some market manager turnover and make a plan that accommodates this possibility.
- Solidifying community partnerships to support the SNAP/EBT outreach program requires time that market managers do not always have, either due to limited paid hours per week or workload overload. Projects that require this kind of time from market managers should account for this need with additional funding in their program budgets.

- iii. **Describe any lessons learned in the administration of the project that might be helpful for others who would want to implement a similar project:**

- The amount of structure envisioned for Learning Communities (ie. the time, energy, and involvement required from market managers) was not realistic for market managers' day to day and week to week capabilities. Programs need to be structured with an emphasis on supporting market managers without adding unduly to their workload.
- It may be incorrect to assume that baseline data will be available or will exist for a market. You may need to plan to put data collection into place, and be sure to account for the capacity needed from the market manager to make this possible. Given the frequency of

market manager turnover, this involves not just capacity in terms of skills and knowledge, but both 1) money/time and 2) a system that the next person can easily use if the position turns over.

10. Future Work:

i. How will you continue the work of this project beyond the performance period? In other words, how will you parlay the results of your project's work to benefit future community goals and initiatives? Include information about community impact and outreach, anticipated increases in markets and/or sales, estimated number of jobs retained/created, and any other information you'd like to share about the future of your project.

- We will share the case studies and the report on a statewide farmers market association at our [Come to the Table Conference](#) on March 16, 2017.
- We will use the case studies as reference documents for future technical assistance, especially the fundraising case study, which will be useful in 2017 as we work with our Fresh Bucks incentive program markets to develop fundraising plans.
- In 2017 we will be completing case studies/market profiles of 4-6 markets with EBT programs to help give markets without EBT programs insight into what an EBT program might look like at their market and in their community. We will use the experience and lessons learned from our Learning Communities to help inform what data points to include in the market profiles, especially what market and community characteristics might contribute to an EBT program's successes or challenges.
- We will leverage additional funding to film additional footage and complete the promotional video for the Elaney Wood Heritage Farmers Market.

ii. Do you have any recommendations for future activities and, if applicable, an outline of next steps or additional research that might advance the project goals?

We believe that the most important priorities for strengthening farmers markets in North Carolina currently include:

- Supporting increased market capacity, especially by helping markets find long-term funding from a variety of sources.
- Researching funding sources for a statewide farmers market association.

Connect2Direct Summit: Building Vibrant Farmers Markets

Evaluation Report

Overview

On December 8, 2015, RAFI and ASAP jointly hosted the first Connect2Direct Summit: Building Vibrant Markets, a statewide gathering of market managers, vendors, and supporting agencies. The purpose of this interactive event was to gather direct-market stakeholders to share knowledge, learn best practices, and for Connect2Direct to gain insight as to what challenges and opportunities exist for markets in North Carolina—and from this, drawing conclusions for the interest and viability of a state farmers market association.

Testimonials

“I thought this was well-organized and engaging! The way it was structured allowed for diversity and retained my interest”

“Excellent mix of presentation and discussions—we all feel valued, encouraged, and empowered”

“I’ve got concrete ideas for things we’ll do in 2016. I’ve got other ideas and concepts that are marinating for future action. Thanks so much for pulling it together for us”

“Great conference! It was the perfect space for me to voice a lot of ideas and meet people who can help me turn those ideas into action”

Who Came?

About 181 guests participated in the summit, including speakers and staff. Through a registration survey, Connect2Direct collected some information on who was attending the conference.

Type of Organization Represented	Number of registrants
Farm	25
Farmers Market	73
Downtown Corporation/City or Town	3
Public Health	32
Nonprofit/market support agency	9
Ag. Dept/State	13
Other	26
Total	181

The table below shows the different ways that registrants heard about the Summit

Method of Communication	Number of registrants
ASAP Email	28
RAFI Email	42
Word of Mouth	34
ASAP Staff	2
RAFI Staff	3
FM Support Organization	29
Listserv	4
Other	58

What did participants say about the conference?

The summit was structured to engage participants in different formats throughout the day. An expert panel spoke to the state of NC farmers markets, followed by an open space session in which participants collaboratively led discussion topics and networked. A plenary session on farmers market metrics delivered information on current national projects, and gave participants tools to conduct data collection at their markets.

Four workshops were offered: Managing Change—Leadership Transitions & Preserving Institutional Knowledge; Tools, Resources, and Strategies for Vendor Sales Success; Building Your Customer Base—Market Outreach, Promotions, and Customer Connections; and Cultivating Food Justice. An Action Planning session followed, wherein participants were assigned a breakout issue to collectively brainstorm solutions. The summit attendees then gathered as a whole and individuals voted on their favorite solutions from each breakout group. Finally, a networking and social hour concluded the event.

Below is feedback on the summit from our survey. 71 surveys were filled out.

What was your reaction to the Expert Panel: The State of Farmers Markets?	Number of Responses
Not at all useful	0
Slightly useful	4
Moderately useful	20

Very useful	36
Extremely useful	6
<i>Total responses</i>	66
<i>Response rate</i>	93%

What was your reaction to the Open Space Session?	Number of Responses
Not at all useful	0
Slightly useful	4
Moderately useful	15
Very useful	31
Extremely useful	16
<i>Total responses</i>	66
<i>Response rate</i>	93%

How useful did you find the networking time provided throughout the event?	Number of responses
Not at all useful	1
Slightly useful	7
Moderately useful	12
Very useful	33
Extremely useful	15
<i>Total responses</i>	68
<i>Response rate</i>	96%

How useful did you find the Plenary: Farmers Market Metrics- Measuring Success?	Number of responses
Not at all useful	2
Slightly useful	3
Moderately useful	13
Very useful	25
Extremely useful	18
<i>Total responses</i>	<i>67</i>
<i>Response rate</i>	<i>94%</i>

Please select the workshop you attended	Number of responses
Managing Change	10
Cultivating Food Justice	26
Building your Customer Base	28
Vendor Sales	9
<i>Total responses</i>	<i>63</i>
<i>Response rate</i>	<i>89%</i>

How useful did you find the workshop you attended?	Number of responses
Not at all useful	1
Not very useful	6
Somewhat useful	24
Very useful	35
<i>Total responses</i>	<i>66</i>
<i>Response rate</i>	<i>93%</i>

What was your favorite part of the Summit?	Number of responses
Networking/connections	21
Information	10
Open Space	21
Peer Learning	10
Plenary	6
Workshops	10
Closing Session	3
Action Planning	6
Expert Panel	3
<i>Total response</i>	<i>54</i>
<i>Response rate</i>	<i>76%</i>
<i>Total comments</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Comment rate</i>	<i>15%</i>

What was your least favorite part of the summit?	Number of responses
Plenary	0
Networking	1
Expert Panel	2
Group Discussion	0
Market Metrics	8
Open Space	3
Facilitation	3

Action Planning	7
Lack of Diversity	2
Summit Logistics	7
Workshop	2
<i>Total Responses</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Response rate</i>	<i>21%</i>
<i>Total comments</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Comment rate</i>	<i>30%</i>

What would you like to see more of at a future summit?	Number of responses
Shared Learning	17
Additional Experts	5
Skill Building	2
Success Stories	7
Facilitation	3
Takeaways	4
Networking	12
Data Sharing	3
More representative/inclusive participant base	5
Best Practices	8
Breaks	3
Farmer Engagement	4
Metrics Resources	2
Market Manager Training/Info	7

Partner Organization Engagement	3
Racial Equity Theme	1
Small/rural market focus	3
Translation Services	2
Workshops	2
<i>Total Responses</i>	39
<i>Response Rate</i>	55%
<i>Total Comments</i>	32
<i>Comment Rate</i>	45%

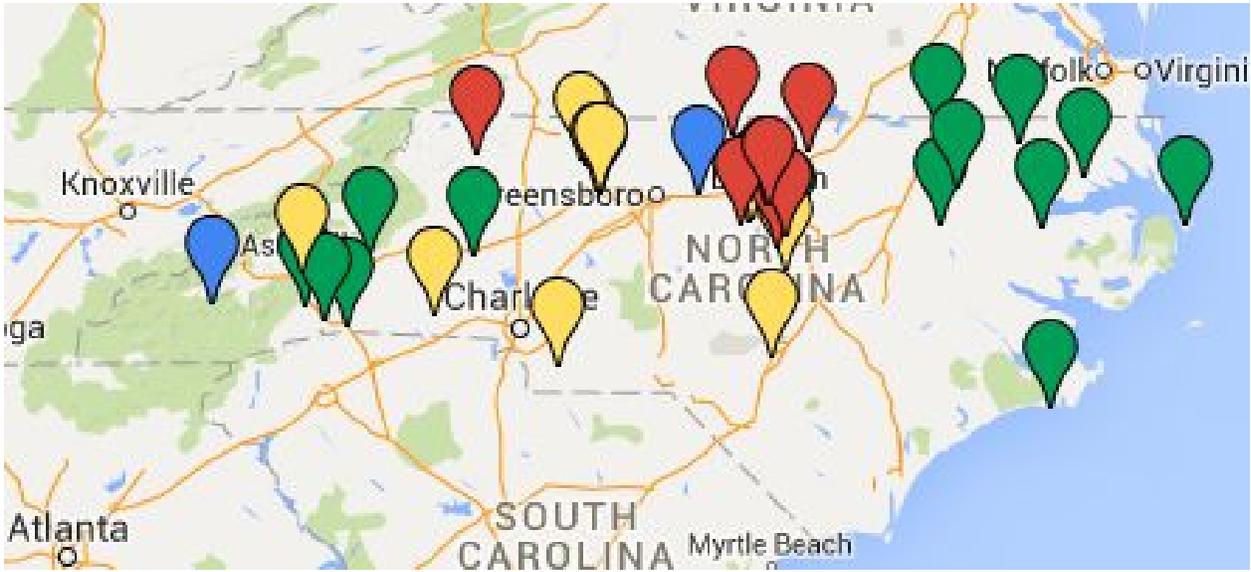
What would you like to see less of at a future summit?	Number of Responses
Group Discussion	0
Powerpoints	1
Lecture Format	2
Market Manager-specific Content	1
Statistics	2
Action Planning	3
Market Metrics	1
“Us & Them” Dialogue	1
<i>Total Responses</i>	4
<i>Response Rate</i>	6%
<i>Total Comments</i>	7
<i>Comment Rate</i>	10%

Other Feedback? Comment Codes	Response rate
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Food Access/Food Justice	4
Logistics	4
Organization	10
Positive Feedback	23
Resources	5
Uncategorized	1
<i>Total responses</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>Response rate</i>	<i>52%</i>

What did we learn about farmers markets and direct marketing outlets in North Carolina?

Before the Summit began, Connect2Direct asked participants to locate the market they represented on a state map with a market according to their perception of market demand in their area. Below is the map representing markets at the Connect2Direct Summit.



- Key:
- Blue—Don't know if markets in my areas are meeting demand.
 - Green—Markets in my area need to grow to meet demand.
 - Yellow—Markets in my area are currently meeting demand.
 - Red—Markets in my area have grown beyond demand.

This map survey indicates that rural markets, particularly in the mountain foothills and the eastern part of the state, would most benefit from interventions to support market growth and vendor recruitment and retention. Conversely, urban areas, such as the Piedmont and Triangle, would most benefit from interventions to strengthen the customer base and increase demand.

Throughout the day, participants learned about resources available for their markets, collaborated to develop strategies to build vibrant markets, and were asked to articulate these ideas in the Action Planning session. Participants were split into groups based on the following questions, which emerged during the Open Space session:

- *What are the most strategic avenues to increasing direct sales in NC?*
- *What emerging opportunities and challenges do direct markets have in NC?*
- *What resources do farmers and markets need to increase direct sales?*
- *What needs/issues would a state farmers market association address?*
- *What changes would lead to increased participation for low-income/currently excluded populations at market?*

After the Planning session, folks gathered to vote on the **three things they thought were most needed to create vibrant markets in NC**. Below are the results from the voting:

Coordination, communication among markets, best practices sharing	33
Improve marketing materials (translate, strategic placement and partnerships)	21
Creating/deepening/enhancing community partnerships	15
State Farmers Market Association	14
More funding and strategic planning	12
Technical support (apps, online services, social media templates and packages)	12
Cooking demos/nutrition education (in and outside of market)	12
Address transportation issues	9
Prioritizing community input on market access initiatives and market operations	8
Food access initiatives to increase sales	7
Incentives	5
Capture sales data	1
Legislative support and advocacy	1

Direct Mailing as a SNAP/EBT Outreach Strategy: A Case Study of the Durham Farmers' Market

By the Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI)

In 2014, RAFI received a grant through USDA's Farmers Market Promotion Program to test direct marketing strategies, track outcomes, and share the resources necessary to build the capacity of farmers' markets and direct marketing farm enterprises. One strategy towards accomplishing this goal was the establishment of Learning Communities: farmers' markets which, with technical assistance from RAFI, could serve as a testing ground from which other markets could learn. From this experience, we have produced four case studies to share insights on specific market topics.

This case study highlights an example of how a **direct mailing campaign can be an effective strategy to promote a market's SNAP/EBT program.**

The Durham Farmers' Market has been in operation for 18 years and is located in Durham, NC, at Durham Central Park, a downtown hub of local businesses, restaurants, and recreational space. Over 70 vendors sell at the market, which is open year-round on Saturday mornings, with an additional smaller market on Wednesday afternoons during the height of the season, from June to October.



The Durham Farmers' Market (DFM) is staffed by a part-time market manager working 32 hours per week, an assistant manager working 20 hours per week, and a SNAP/EBT coordinator working 16 hours per week. Market staff operate the EBT machine on site, manage vendor reimbursements, and train vendors. In addition to engaging with SNAP shoppers at market, the SNAP/EBT¹ coordinator works with community partners to conduct outreach, develop marketing, and enhance the overall program.

The market began accepting WIC² and Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program³ checks in the mid-2000s and SNAP/EBT in 2014. In July of the same year, the market launched Double Bucks, a program that matches SNAP benefits dollar for dollar in market tokens, up to \$10.

In Durham County, 44,288 residents receive SNAP benefits, and an estimated 5,500 SNAP users live within three miles of the market. EBT usage at the market has grown steadily since the program's launch, and many customers are repeat shoppers. Much of the program's success can be attributed to strong community

¹ SNAP/EBT, or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as food stamps, is a federally funded food assistance program for low-income individuals and households. EBT stands for Electronic Benefit Transfer, the method of distributing SNAP funds. SNAP is distributed through EBT cards, which act like a debit card for a participant's monthly benefits.

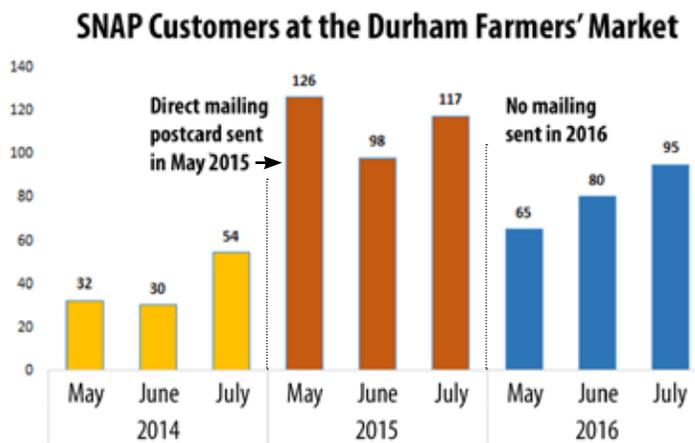
² WIC, or the Women, Infant, and Children Special Supplemental Nutrition Program is a federally funded food assistance program for low-income pregnant, breast-feeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women and children up to age five who are at nutritional risk. The WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program (WIC FMNP) provides checks to WIC participants that can be redeemed at participating farmers' markets.

³ The Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program is a federally funded food assistance program that provides checks for low-income seniors that can be redeemed at participating farmers' markets.



partnerships and direct communication with SNAP participants. By working with the Durham County Department of Public Health, the market has a connection to EBT users.

One effective strategy in increasing EBT and Double Bucks usage has been specific, targeted messaging to community members beyond the market. In 2015 the Durham County Department of Public Health, the Durham Farmers' Market, and the South Durham Farmers' Market created a postcard that was mailed to neighborhoods with high concentrations of SNAP/EBT users. The postcard was sent in May, and DFM saw an almost 200% increase in visits by EBT shoppers over the three month period following the mailing.



A total of 18,500 postcards were sent out and about two hundred people brought them back to the market. The industry average response rate for direct mailers is 3.7% for a “house list” (a group of customers who already have a relationship with the organization) and 1% for a “prospect” list, so the response to the mailer is approximately on par with industry rates, even without counting postcards that were returned to the South Durham Farmers' Market. The mailing cost about \$4,000 for materials, and was funded through the Department of Public Health's discretionary funds.

Keys to Success

Well-established SNAP/EBT program

DFM launched the the SNAP/EBT and Double Bucks program before beginning the messaging campaign. The logistics of the token system—equipment, materials, vendor training, reimbursements, etc.—were in place by summer when the mailers were sent, which

meant that the program was running smoothly when new customers began arriving. This timing also worked well for enticing new shoppers to market, as it coincided with peak season for much of the produce.

Strong partnerships

To conduct SNAP/EBT outreach, DFM sought out community partners that had shared goals and priorities, and staff that could work towards a common vision. The Durham County Department of Public Health has a mission of providing information and community access to healthy choices, so expanding healthy, affordable food options is a shared goal with the market. In addition to SNAP case managers, the Department also has staff dedicated to nutrition outreach with SNAP/EBT clients, a helpful factor considering the market's limited staff hours. Finally, the Department of Public Health is close in proximity to the market, so Department staff can easily visit the market in person to communicate with the vendors and market staff.

Targeted outreach

The postcard was mailed to neighborhoods that had high concentrations of SNAP users or potential SNAP users. DFM found that most customers who came to the market as a result of the mailer were from neighborhoods nearby.

Offering a reward

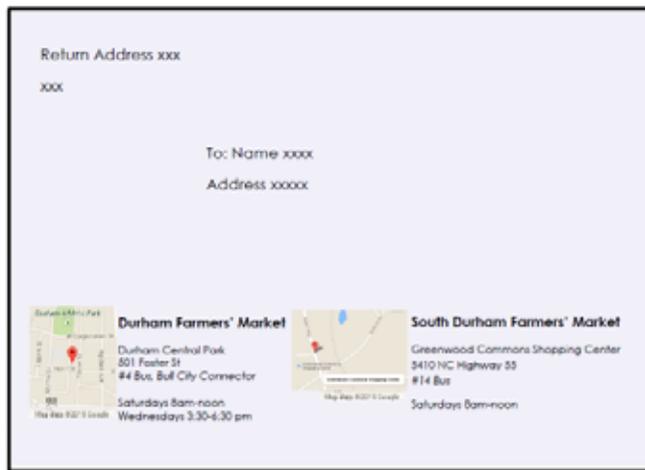
The mailer also served as a coupon for a free tote bag at the market. Offering some additional benefit for bringing a mailing back is a best practice, and provides extra motivation for customers to come to market beyond SNAP or Double Bucks.

Clear messaging

The messaging included simple directions for how the program works, emphasizing the Double Bucks matching incentive. The information was also translated into Spanish, as many local SNAP and WIC clients are bilingual or primarily Spanish-speaking. Finally, the mailer included a small map, showing the market's location in relation to downtown and bus lines. (See examples on the next page,)

Mechanisms to measure response

By having customers bring the postcard to the market welcome booth to obtain a tote bag, staff could get a sense of how many shoppers came to the market as a result of the mailing. DFM also asks for all EBT shop-



The mailers sent out about the SNAP/EBT and Double Bucks Program

pers to provide their zip code when swiping for tokens, which was useful in tracking where the mailer was most effective. Having data helps DFM and the Department of Public Health evaluate the program, project customer counts, and make the case for continued support.

Lessons Learned

- **Partnering with a local organization that works with SNAP or WIC clients has been essential** for the market to initiate the direct mailer campaign. The Department of Public Health identified geographic areas to send the mailer and provided the funding. They also assist in writing grants, guide the program, and advocate for the market in the larger community.

- Throughout the market's EBT program, **feedback has been key to improving the program and tailoring outreach.** After the mailer campaign, the Department of Public Health conducted focus groups on the Double Bucks program, providing insight as to what barriers and opportunities exist for SNAP customers to shop at market, and what outreach methods got custom-

ers to market. The mailer was just one of many strategies to connect with community members about the SNAP/EBT and Double Bucks program.

- While the direct mailer got many shoppers to market, **a good experience is what makes people return.** Market staff and vendors focus on providing quality customer service and work towards making the market a welcoming space. Word of mouth is also one of the most powerful ways to spread the word about the market, so customers' experience is crucial.

Direct communication via a direct mailing campaign with SNAP/EBT participants or potential participants outside of the scope of the market has been an effective strategy to increase SNAP shopper attendance at the Durham Farmers' Market. This campaign was made possible with the strong partnership between the market and the Durham County Department of Public Health. The Department guided the messaging of the mailing to reflect clients' needs and strategized where to send the mailer, and continues to act as a champion for the market.

RAFI thanks the Durham Farmers' Market and the Durham County Department of Public Health for generously contributing their time and wisdom to this case study.



Connect2Direct is a collaboration between the Rural Advancement Foundation International and the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project to support and build equitable community-based local food economies through the development of direct markets for farmers in North Carolina



About RAFI: RAFI's mission is to cultivate markets, policies, and communities that sustain thriving, socially just, and environmentally sound family farms. To learn more about RAFI's work, visit rafiusa.org or call (919) 542-1396.

Sustaining a Farmers' Market through Diverse Funding Strategies:

A case study of the Durham Farmers' Market

By the Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI)

In 2014, RAFI received a grant through USDA's Farmers Market Promotion Program to test direct marketing strategies, track outcomes, and share the resources necessary to build the capacity of farmers' markets and direct marketing farm enterprises. One strategy towards accomplishing this goal was the establishment of Learning Communities: farmers' markets which, with technical assistance from RAFI, could serve as a testing ground from which other markets could learn. From this experience, we have produced four case studies to share insights on specific market topics.

This case study highlights an example of a market successfully using a variety of funding strategies to support its market and programs.

In its 18th year of operation, the Durham Farmers' Market in Durham, NC, hosts over 70 vendors selling local produce, value-added products, and crafts. The market has been in its current location since 2004, and in 2006 was made more permanent with the addition of a pavilion at the market site, Durham Central Park. The market is open on Saturday mornings year-round, and an additional Wednesday afternoon market operates during peak season. The main Saturday market has an average of about 2,500 visitors per market and around 4,000 visitors per market during peak season. The market has a board of directors consisting of 9 vendor-members serving 2-year terms. The staff include a part-time market manager working 32 hours a week, an assistant manager working 20 hours per week, and a SNAP/EBT coordinator working 16 hours per week.¹



The Durham Farmers' Market can attribute its success in fundraising to having a diversity of funding sources and strategies, and throughout the market's growth and expansion community partnerships have been crucial to supporting fundraising efforts.

Revenue Streams

The Durham Farmers' Market (DFM) has multiple streams of revenue, which include:

Vendor Fees and Stall Fees

In 2016, vendors paid an application fee of \$60 and an annual fee of \$50. In addition, vendors pay weekly stall fees based on the size of the market display. During peak season, the Saturday market charged \$15 for a single space, and an additional \$30 to occupy a second stall space. The Wednesday market and Saturday winter market offered single spaces for a \$10 fee.



¹ SNAP/EBT, or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as food stamps, is a federally funded food assistance program for low-income individuals and households. SNAP is distributed through Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards, which act like a debit card for a participant's monthly benefits.

Fundraising Events

The market has a few annual events, such as the vendor Halloween costume contest and market suppers, as well as one-time events that generate a modest income. Non-ticketed events generate income from donations and merchandise sales, and have the added bonus of bringing more customers to the market, increasing daily sales in addition to the market's overall budget.

Grants

DFM partners with various organizations to obtain grants to fund market operations, primarily the SNAP/EBT and Double Bucks program, which matches EBT purchases dollar for dollar up to \$10. The market seeks local funders that support projects that meet a triple bottom line, supporting social, economic, and ecological welfare. Such funders have been local universities and nonprofits, and program partners have been connected to public health.

Individual Donations and Crowdfunding

As a part of its fiscal sponsorship of the market, RAFI set up an online donation platform for individuals who want to support the market. The market also ran an Indiegogo campaign to help launch the Double Bucks program. Over \$8,000 was raised towards an overall goal of \$15,000 to sustain the program. 75% of funds went towards matching SNAP purchases, while the remaining 25% went towards materials and staff time.



Sales of Apparel, Bags, Stickers, and Other Promotional Items

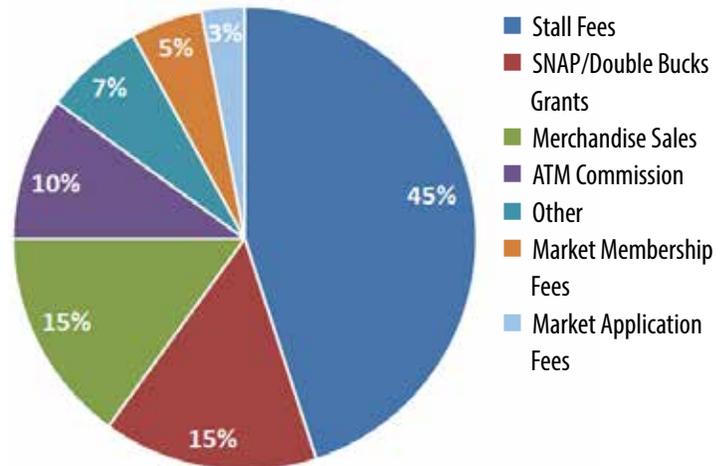
Tote bags, T-shirts, and other items are sold at the information booth. This doubles as marketing, and gives the market some items to use as incentives for

promotions. When possible, the market seeks donated promotional items.

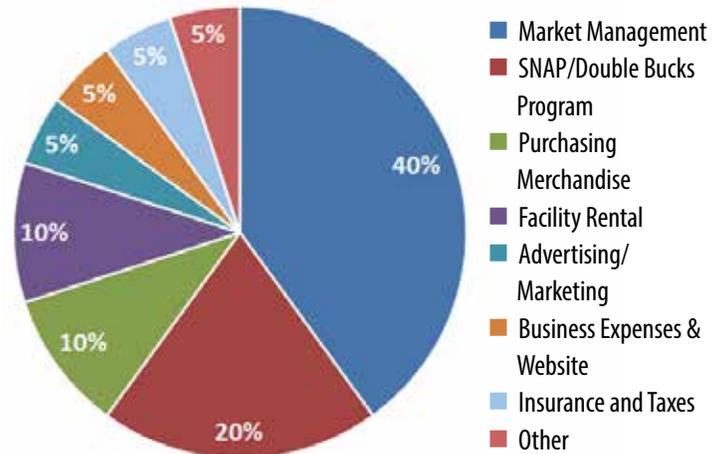
ATM Fees

To accommodate shoppers with credit and debit cards, the market installed an ATM. The screen informs customers that half of the \$3 ATM fee goes towards funding the Double Bucks program.

MARKET INCOME



MARKET EXPENSES



Key Strengths

Sustainability of Fixed Income and Costs

The market can sustain its basic operating costs through stall fees. While total income from stall fees can vary from year to year depending on weather and vendor attendance at the market, stall fees remain the market's most reliable source of income. From this base, the market has been able to expand its staff capacity and services by seeking out additional funding sources.

Board Involvement

The board is made up of invested vendor-members that provide organizational support and institutional memory. This is significant given that turnover of management is a challenge with the market, as with many farmers' markets.

Fiscal Sponsorship

Since DFM is not itself a 501c3 nonprofit, having RAFI as a fiscal sponsor has enabled the market to apply for and receive grants, and to accept tax-deductible donations from local funders. The market mostly seeks grants pertaining to the SNAP/EBT and Double Bucks program.

Community Partnerships

Both RAFI's fiscal sponsorship, and the market's close relationship with the Durham County Department of Public Health provide support and technical assistance to market staff, including grant-writing. These partnerships relieve staff time, offer additional perspectives, and facilitate networking with local organizations and professional contacts.

Relationship with Landlord

The farmers' market has a strong relationship with Durham Central Park, the nonprofit landlord from which the market rents. The market manager shares an office space with Durham Central Park and sits on the board. The Park acts as a champion for the market and brings many people into the market space by hosting and facilitating events.

Lessons Learned

- **“Fun-raisers” vs Fundraisers:** Certain events have worked well as fundraisers; other have been less successful at generating income. While the summer solstice supper raised over \$4,000 it also required lots of staff labor and input from farmers during a busy time of the season. Creating an experience that was worth the ticket price, while within the scope of what market staff could organize, proved to be a challenge and the market decided that it was not an efficient fundraising strategy. Going forward, DFM will focus more on grants to fund Double Bucks, and smaller, at-market events such as the Halloween costume contest, to



attract more customers while raising funds.

- **Investment in staff has payoffs:** While staff time is the market's largest operating expense, budgeting for increased hours has given market staff the ability to approach management in a larger context than basic daily operations.

The Durham Farmers' Market has built its structure and operating capacity over time by pursuing diverse funding streams. In its nearly 20 year history, the market has grown its vendor base, staff capacity, and customer attendance. From a consistent income of vendor fees, the market can sustain staff who have the capacity to seek out more funding opportunities, and the market has grown in size and project areas at a manageable pace. Other additional funding strategies have worked well for other successful farmers' markets, and two merit a mention here: financial or in-kind sponsorships from individuals or local businesses can create a sustained income source in return for advertisement, and local government or cooperative extension may be willing to either support one-time projects or provide annual budget support.

Resources on Fundraising for Farmers' Markets

- **Farmers Market Coalition's Market Manager FAQ**

<http://farmersmarketcoalition.org/education/market-manager-faq/market-growth-outreach-and-evaluation/>

See section entitled, “How can our markets raise funds to cover operating costs? What grants can we apply for?”

• **Farmers Market Coalition's Funding Opportunities page**
<https://farmersmarketcoalition.org/education/funding-opportunities/>

This page includes among other things a helpful summary of potential federal grant opportunities.

• **Farmers Market Manager Training Manual, by the Farmers Market Federation of NY**

http://www.nyfarmersmarket.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/NYFM_Training_Manual.pdf

See fundraising section, pages 48-53.

• **Organizing Details: Funding, by MarketUmbrella**

<http://www.marketumbrella.org/uploads/file/OD-Funding.pdf>

• **Funding, Staffing, and Sustaining SNAP Acceptance at Farmers' Markets, by The Food Trust (thefoodtrust.org)**
http://fyi.uwex.edu/cfsi/files/2013/03/Funding-Staffing-Sustaining-SNAP-at-FM_FINAL.pdf

Their fundraising for SNAP programs guide is a useful resource for food access programs as well as general market fundraising.

• **The Foundation Center's Foundation Directory Online**

<https://fdo.foundationcenter.org>

Find foundations in your area.



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Farmers' Market Manager Turnover: Challenges and opportunities for sustainable management

By the Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI) and the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP)

In 2014 RAFI and ASAP partnered on Connect2Direct, a project funded by the USDA's Farmers Market Promotion Program to test direct marketing strategies, track outcomes, and share the resources necessary to build the capacity of farmers' markets and direct marketing farm enterprises. One strategy toward accomplishing this goal was the establishment of Learning Communities: farmers' markets which, with technical assistance from RAFI and ASAP, could serve as a testing ground from which other markets could learn. From this experience, we have produced four case studies to share insights on specific market topics.

This case study reviews issues and experiences involved with farmers' market manager turnover and captures lessons learned at four farmers' markets in North Carolina. The findings presented here are based on existing research, our surveys of past and current managers, and informal conversations with market stakeholders.



Research shows that markets across the country experience challenges with retaining market managers. A review of markets in Oregon indicated that between 1999 and 2006, on average 30% of markets each year had a new manager.¹ Conversations with various markets in the RAFI and ASAP service area confirm that manager turnover is a common and ongoing challenge for farmers' markets across our region. An extensive study of farmers' markets in Washington noted the role of market manager "appears to be a very demanding position associated with a range of challenges from juggling multiple competing demands to low pay to feeling underappreciated by vendors and market organizations."²

Market manager surveys

To gain a better understanding of market manager experiences and of their perceptions of the challenges of market management, we conducted a survey of past and current managers at the four participating markets in North Carolina. All the market manager positions in question were part-time, not full-time. This is a common situation for markets; in the Washington State summary report, 64% of market employees were part-time. Manager responses to the survey echo the challenges cited in other studies.

Survey Questions:

1. *What were the most important considerations involved when you were deciding to seek (or accept) a position as market manager?*



¹ When Things Don't Work: Some Insights into Why Farmers' Markets Close, Garry Stephenson, Larry Lev, Linda Brewer, 2006, Oregon State University Extension Service.

² Summary Report: Farmers Markets and the Experiences of Market Managers in Washington State, Marcia Ostrom and Colleen Donovan, 2013, Washington State University Small Farms Program

“ I will not have much income from Dec-April. And, it is 15-20 hours per week, so I have had to pick up various other jobs.

2. Was your work and experience as a manager different from your expectations of the position before you were hired? / In what ways do your responsibilities as a market manager differ from what you had expected when you accepted the position?
3. Why did you leave the market manager position? / What job or market related issues, circumstances, or challenges would be most likely to influence a decision to resign as market manager?
4. What considerations, conditions, or circumstances are most important in terms of market manager retention?
5. What advice would you offer to someone considering a position as a farmers' market manager?

Findings

Several themes emerged from the interviews, including fair pay, challenging hours and seasonality of the work, workload, and unrealistic expectations.

Viability of employment as a market manager

Market survey results, together with other anecdotal reports, suggest that the viability of the market manager position is undermined by three factors: low pay, reduced hours (e.g. part-time and seasonal status), and unpaid hours worked. These limiting characteristics are typical for all but the larger, better funded markets. It is common for managers of smaller or limited-resource markets to be unable to earn enough to support themselves, but managers may not be comfortable asking farmers for an hourly rate or benefits when the farmers—also usually overworked and underpaid—may not receive benefits or a decent hourly wage themselves. When asked why they left the market manager position, one former manager stated: “I was ready to have a full time position with a consistent salary.” Another past manager reported having a difficult time finding a second job that could fit with the market schedule. The seasonality of the work also makes it a less vi-



able employment option; a current manager said, “I will not have much income from Dec-April. And, it is 15-20 hours per week, so I have had to pick up various other jobs—so far I have had 4 other part-time jobs throughout the past 4 months!” For those who must patch together job opportunities, the stresses of juggling things like hours, responsibilities, and other jobs impact long-term sustainability. Under these circumstances, there is a limited pool of individuals for whom the manager position is a viable employment option.

Demanding mix of skill sets

While the diversity and variety of tasks given to a market manager can be exciting and keep things interesting for some, it also presents a challenge. As one manager indicated, “I have worked for several nonprofits, and am familiar with the division of labor among management, administration, marketing, fundraising, human resources, infrastructure repairs, and accounting. I wasn’t fully prepared to be all of these various departments myself.” The market manager position can vary in terms of expectations, responsibilities, authority, etc., but typically the manager is (or comes to be) expected to address an array of market needs that require disparate skills and expertise.

High expectations and limited resources

It is common for market managers to have more on their plate than can be managed. In the words of one

“ Vendors tend not to know all that the last manager did and kept track of. ”

manager, “You’ll likely face unrealistic expectations for the position in terms of attracting customers and promoting the market to increase sales.” Another manager mentioned that “vendors tend not to know all that the last manager did and kept track of.” Job satisfaction and performance suffers under circumstances of unrealistic expectations. “This is a bigger, more challenging position than I anticipated,” one manager said. A past manager said that one reason they left the position was that most weeks they worked beyond the budgeted hours of their position. Manager burn-out, especially in light of the typical limits to compensation, contributes to the loss of market managers. Constrained by part-time hours and inadequate funds for staffing, the manager is left with limited options: prioritize responsibilities and leave lesser tasks undone, delegate to vendors or volunteers, or work extra unpaid hours. Each of these options can complicate or undermine effective management, and often decrease job satisfaction and sustainability for market managers.

Recommendations

The Oregon State study cited above identifies high manager turnover as one of five factors associated with markets that fail; however, many of the same factors that contribute to market manager turnover also make it more difficult for markets to take steps to improve the viability and sustainability of the manager position. With this in mind, we provide some recommendations below.

Explore opportunities for additional funding

In most cases, greater financial capacity for markets would do the most for creating a sustainable, viable market manager position and a stronger, more stable market; however, it is hard to devote staff time to finding additional revenue streams without the funding to do so. Funding sources for markets can include vendor fees (both stall fees and annual fees), sponsorships, individual fundraising, merchandise sales, grants, events,



financial and in-kind donations, and municipal/extension budgets. A typical small market generates modest levels of funding from vendor fees (given relatively low sales and fewer vendors) and has limited capacity to generate other forms of revenues through things like fundraising events or sponsorships. Grants, while valuable in the short-term, are not a source of sustainable funding over time; ideally, they can be used as “seed money” to give staff the ability to establish other, longer-term revenue streams. Technical assistance from nonprofits or other outside entities can play an important role in kick-starting the process. Comprehensive recommendations on funding farmers’ markets are beyond the scope of this document; however, a collection of resources may be found in RAFI’s case study, “Sustaining a Farmers’ Market through Diverse Funding Strategies.”

Reduce and clarify the workload of market managers

Frank conversations informed by on-the-job experience are needed to help managers and markets realistically align manager responsibilities with the amount of hours a market is capable of funding. One manager advised “evaluating what work can be covered in [the] budget, and reducing manager’s tasks/workload to meet this.” In addition to bringing their responsibilities and hours paid into closer balance, a common and thorough understanding of managers’ responsibilities and workload should give vendors and market boards a greater awareness of what managers are doing for the market,

and could help managers feel more appreciated and less isolated.

Identify alternative models for market management

If the traditional approach of sustaining a paid market manager is problematic and reducing the responsibilities of the manager fails to meet the needs of the market, alternative models may need to be considered.

- **Employment by supportive agency or nonprofit.**

There are a number of markets whose management is supported by funds or staff provided by nonprofits, cooperative extension, local government, or downtown/community organizations. Opportunities for such support may be limited depending on location and often require a level of organizational involvement not typical for “independent” markets. However, where market structure and governance allow for it, and the will to assist the market exists, this kind of support can be a significant contributor to market stability.

- **Sharing management positions between markets.**

Given the constraint on resources and hours, markets could explore an approach of shared management support (e.g. one manager hired by two markets, which could allow for one cumulatively full-time position). This option failed when tested locally when concerns over conflicts of interest and the distribution of hours were raised and could not be resolved. A strong basis of trust and communication between the markets involved, as well as compatible market hours, would be minimum

requirements for this option to be viable.

- **Non-paid management support.** Individual volunteers (including vendors) are commonly “employed” in support of market operations and management. More structured “non-paid” support could be provided by service/volunteer organizations such as Americorps, or markets could collaborate with educational institutions to provide more structure and a stronger relationship with volunteer interns who are assisting with market tasks.

Conclusions

Markets vary in size, structure, and viability. While market manager turnover can affect even larger, well-established markets, the challenges are most dramatic for smaller, less resourced markets. Unfortunately, many markets do not have the capacity (financial or organizational) to effectively address the problem of turnover and retention. The difficulty is made greater as many markets struggle in isolation, without the benefit of shared experience and expertise.

Farmers’ markets provide social, health, and economic benefits for the communities they are a part of, and for many small farmers, farmers’ markets are a vital source of income. Strong markets help support strong communities, and investing in a market—and its ability to retain experienced staff—is an investment in community.

About RAFI: RAFI’s mission is to cultivate markets, policies, and communities that sustain thriving, socially just, and environmentally sound family farms. To learn more about RAFI’s work, visit rafiusa.org or call (919) 542-1396.

About ASAP: ASAP’s mission is to help local farms thrive, link farmers to markets and supporters, and build healthy communities through connections to local food. To learn more about ASAP’s work, visit asapconnections.org, or call (828) 236-1282.



Farmers' Market Challenges in a Rural Setting:

A case study of the Elaney Wood Heritage Farmers Market

By the Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI)

In 2014, RAFI received a grant through USDA's Farmers Market Promotion Program to test direct marketing strategies, track outcomes, and share the resources necessary to build the capacity of farmers' markets and direct marketing farm enterprises. One strategy towards accomplishing this goal was the establishment of Learning Communities: farmers' markets which, with technical assistance from RAFI, could serve as a testing ground from which other markets could learn. From this experience, we have produced four case studies to share insights on specific market topics.

This case study highlights the challenges faced by **rural markets in recruiting and retaining vendors and in attracting customers.**

Snow Hill, NC (population 1,595¹) is the county seat of Greene County, a rural county with a total population of 21,134.² Greene is a Tier 1 county,³ with a poverty rate of 28% and an average per capita income of \$18,477.⁴ In 2014, 4,518 Greene County residents received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.⁵ There are over 300 farms in Greene County,⁶ including 20 farms that grow produce, and there are 14 farms that sell direct to consumers. Average farm size is 389 acres.⁷ A few other direct-market outlets for fruits and vegetables exist in Greene County: There are 3 roadside stands, and 2 CSAs.



The **Elaney Wood Heritage Farmers Market** in Snow Hill was founded in 2011. In its first year it was located next to the Greene County office building, and in 2012 it relocated to a new market building next to the Greene County Parks & Recreation complex. The market is open on Saturday mornings from May to October. It currently hosts 5 to 10 vendors from Greene County and from within a 50-mile radius, and typically has 85 to 100 people visit the market each week. The market employs a part-time manager and a part-time SNAP/EBT⁸ staffer, both funded through grants, and the director of Greene County Extension also spends time promoting the market. Elaney Wood began accepting SNAP/EBT in 2014, and began offering a nutrition incentive through RAFI's Fresh Bucks program in 2015. The Fresh Bucks program matches customers' EBT spending dollar for dollar up to \$20 with tokens customers can spend on fresh fruits and vegetables.

1 US Census, 2010

2 US Census Quick Facts estimate: http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/37079_00

3 The North Carolina Department of Commerce annually ranks the state's 100 counties based on economic well-being and assigns each a Tier designation. The 40 most distressed counties are designated as Tier 1.

4 US Census Quick Facts estimate

5 US Census, Small Area Estimates Branch: <http://www.census.gov/did/www/saie/data/model/tables.html> SNAP, formerly known as food stamps, is a federally funded food assistance program for low-income individuals and households.

6 As reported by Greene County Agricultural Extension

7 2012 Agricultural Census. Greene County Infographic: <https://cefs.ncsu.edu/resources/greene-county/>

8 EBT stands for Electronic Benefit Transfer, the method of distributing SNAP funds. SNAP is distributed through EBT cards, which act like a debit card for a participant's monthly benefits.



Outreach and Promotion

Market staff actively promote the market and the SNAP/Fresh Bucks program through a variety of avenues.

SNAP/EBT & Fresh Bucks Outreach

Staff passed out postcards in English and Spanish to the Greene County staff who administer SNAP and WIC.⁹ They shared fliers with food banks to include in the boxes of food distributed. They have visited assisted living facilities to make sure residents know that the market site is accessible for those with limited mobility. They have visited the Medical Center (where many clients qualify for Medicaid), met with the director, and passed out fliers in the waiting room.

In-Kind Advertising & Free Media

The Department of Transportation puts magnetic signs about the market on their vehicles, providing free advertising to the market. The local newspaper writes an article on the market almost every month, and the market has also been featured in Greene Living Magazine.

Special Events & Cooking Demonstrations

The market hosts special events to attract more market customers, and publicizes them through their website, the county webpage, the newspaper, Facebook, and the Greene County news & announcements for employees. They secured grant funding to pay for a chef to do cooking demonstrations and samplings at the market.

Community Partnerships

The market partners with a number of community organizations like the fire department, the public library, and 4H, who come out to the market to do informational tabling.

Promotional Video

With RAFI's assistance, market staff are putting together a video to promote the market and to help recruit community champions who can advocate for the market. A first draft of the video has been completed

⁹ WIC, or the Women, Infant, and Children Special Supplemental Nutrition Program is a federally funded food assistance program for low-income pregnant, breast-feeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women and children up to age five who are at nutritional risk.



and more footage will be recorded in 2017.

Challenges

Elaney Wood faces the circular challenge of simultaneously building its vendor base and its customer base.

Building a Customer Base

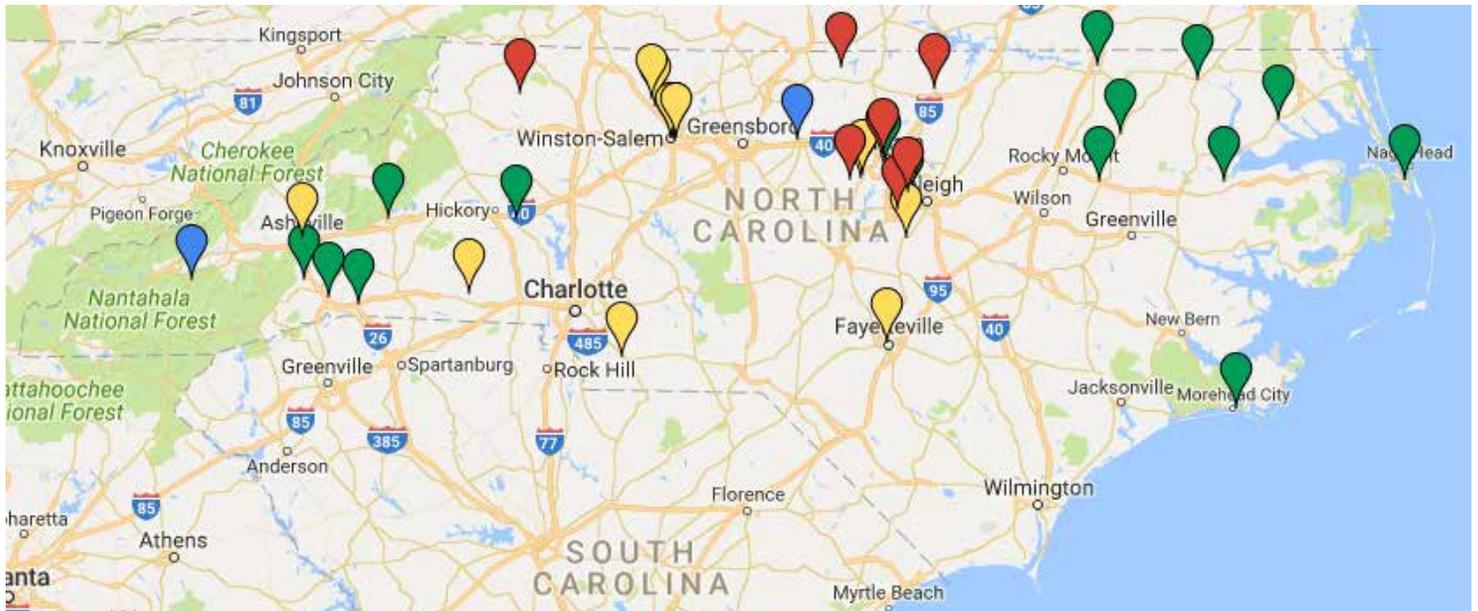
While the new market shelter provides the market with a kitchen and a more comfortable weatherproof place for vendors to set up, market staff has reported a drop in market attendance following the relocation. Many customers who used to walk from their homes downtown to the site by the county office building no longer come to the market; though the new site is barely over a half mile from the original site, the road between them is not safe for pedestrians or bicyclists. In a recent survey of SNAP customers at Elaney Wood, 100% of them reported coming to the market by car.

While market events do help increase attendance, they have not yet resulted in a more stable weekly increase. Given Snow Hill's rural context, the market has fewer local residents and potential customers overall. Market staff have also heard feedback from some first-time customers that there was not a lot of produce at the market. A larger and more varied selection of fresh farm products could help attract and retain new customers.

Perceptions of customer/vendor balance at N.C. farmers markets

In 2015, RAFI hosted a summit for farmers markets and asked attendees to mark where they were from on a map with different colors according to their perception of the customer/vendor balance at markets in their area.

Blue = did not know if markets in their areas were meeting demand.
Green = thought markets in their area need to grow to meet demand.
Yellow = thought markets in their area were currently meeting demand.
Red = thought markets in their area had grown beyond demand.



Building a Vendor Base

When the market was founded in 2011 outside the county office building, the market regularly had around 16 vendors, at least 8 of them farmers. Some of the farmers were single-crop vendors, coming by the market with truckloads of potatoes or corn. When the market moved to the new shelter, those farmers did not return to the market. This may have been due either to the change in location, or simply to the fact that they had tried the market in its first year and found it was not a good enough fit.

At the end of the 2016 season, the market had two anchor farm vendors selling fruits and vegetables. Finding and retaining vendors has been difficult for the market, despite the manager's personal invitations to local farms to come sell at the market. While Greene County is heavily agricultural, most farms are large farms growing cotton, tobacco, or corn, so the pool of farms who market their products directly is small

— just 14.¹⁰ This challenge is not isolated to Elaney Wood. Particularly in the eastern and western parts of North Carolina, markets often have a hard time finding and recruiting vendors, as seen in the map above of market manager perceptions of the customer/vendor balance at their markets across the state.

Past and potential farmer vendors at the market have faced the same challenge: it is difficult for them to make enough sales to justify their time at the market, and they often decide they could make a better income selling at markets in more populated urban areas like Greenville, or having roadside stands that could be open seven days per week. To be a viable direct-marketing outlet for local farms, Elaney Wood needs more customer traffic.

Building a market so that customer traffic and vendor attendance are growing but in balance is a challenge for

¹⁰ For comparison's sake, Avery County, slightly smaller than Greene and with a population of 17,572, had 40 direct-marketing farms according to the 2012 US Agricultural Census.

a market of any size; however it is a steeper challenge for very small markets.

Elaney Wood's experience would seem to indicate that there may be a minimum size threshold that markets need to reach to achieve stability and sustainability. The impact of market size on viability is an area of inquiry that warrants further investigation. In their 2006 report, "When Things Don't Work: Some Insights into Why Farmers' Markets Close," Oregon State researchers have identified market size and a

need for more farm products as two of the five factors associated with markets that close.¹¹

Despite active efforts from market staff, due to its rural context Elaney Wood still faces substantial challenges to building a stable, robust market.

11 When Things Don't Work: Some Insights into Why Farmers' Markets Close, Garry Stephenson, Larry Lev, Linda Brewer, 2006, Oregon State University Extension Service. http://smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/sites/default/files/small-farms-tech-report/eesc_1073.pdf

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Connect2Direct is a collaboration between the Rural Advancement Foundation International and the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project to support and build equitable community-based local food economies through the development of direct markets for farmers in North Carolina



About RAFI: *RAFI's mission is to cultivate markets, policies, and communities that sustain thriving, socially just, and environmentally sound family farms. To learn more about RAFI's work, visit rafiusa.org or call (919) 542-1396.*

Exploring the Desirability and Feasibility of a NC Statewide Farmers Market Association



*A Partnership of
the Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI) and
the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP)*

In 2014, the Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI) partnered with Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP) on a Farmers' Market Promotion Program grant. The purpose of this project, referred to as Connect2Direct, was to increase farmer direct sales and expand local food access in North Carolina. The project had two primary goals: 1) to create pilot sites to test direct marketing strategies, track outcomes, and develop and share the resources needed to build the capacity of markets and direct marketing farm enterprises and 2) to convene a conference for farmers markets, CSAs, produce stands, and other farm enterprises selling direct to consumers. Given the unique role that statewide farmers market associations can play in increasing farmer direct sales and expanding local food access, and further, the lack of a statewide farmers market association in North Carolina, ASAP and RAFI explored the desirability and feasibility of a NC farmers market association as part of this Connect2Direct project. This paper provides an overview of the methods used to examine the issue, discusses the key findings, and offers a set of recommendations based on our findings.

Exploring the Desirability and Feasibility of a Statewide Farmers Market Association in North Carolina

Throughout the country, there is a growing number of statewide farmers market associations. These groups have the potential to bring significant value to farmers market managers, vendors, and the communities in which these markets are located. Farmers market associations can provide a space for networking, collaboration, peer learning, and sharing resources and best practices, and can be a platform for statewide projects such as nutrition incentive programs or marketing campaigns.. Further, they have the potential to foster the professionalization of farmers market management and allow new markets to learn from the knowledge, skills, and expertise of those with more experience. On a community level and particularly for low-capacity markets, statewide farmers market associations can greatly enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of farmers market operations, thereby increasing farmer direct sales and potentially expanding local food access. Given that North Carolina does not have a statewide farmers market association, ASAP and RAFI explored the question:

Is a NC statewide farmers market association both desirable and feasible?

Our Methods

We used three methods of data collection to assess the desirability and feasibility of a statewide farmers market association (FMA).

First, we conducted research on several existing statewide farmers market associations to gather information on their size, scope, and operations. This includes the California Alliance of Farmer's Markets, the Maine Federation of Farmer's Markets, the Michigan Farmer's Market Association, the Virginia Farmer's Market Manager Association, and the Washington Farmer's Market Association.

Next, we conducted phone interviews with representatives from statewide farmers market associations. This included one representative from each of the following states: Vermont, New York, Massachusetts, Minnesota.

Lastly, in the winter of 2015 we held a Farmers Market and Direct Sales Conference in Winston-Salem, NC, as mentioned previously, designed as a forum for communication, training, and resource sharing. This conference, attended by an estimated 128 farmers market managers and vendors, included discussions on best practices for customer attraction and retention, information about compliance with regulations, funding sources for staff positions, and promotion programs, and other resources for boosting sales and diversifying the customer base at farmers markets. One of the primary objectives of this conference was to determine the need for and potential capacity of a statewide FMA. During one of the break-out activities, participants were asked to share their perspectives on the desirability and feasibility of a statewide FMA and to indicate their preference for whether North Carolina should create one.

Our Findings

A statewide FMA is wanted by farmers and markets

At the summit, when asked to share their preference for whether North Carolina should have a statewide FMA, all 16 participants in the break-out session indicated that a statewide FMA is needed to support vibrant farmers markets throughout the state. On a scale of 1-5, 5 being the most interested, 69% of the break-out participants gave a rating of a 4 or a 5. Additionally, participants had the opportunity to brainstorm about the benefits of an FMA. Participants expressed that they see an FMA as an opportunity to develop a short- and long-term vision for farmers markets through the state, support

farmers, advocate for state and federal policy, improve community health, set clear standards, share funding opportunities, and serve as a collective voice.

The financial sustainability of a statewide FMA is questionable

Statewide FMAs tend to have limited financial resources

During the summit, participants also identified a range of challenges for FMAs. Among these challenges is time and money. This challenge was also identified during our phone interviews with representatives from statewide FMAs. None of the representatives that we spoke to reported that their FMA is sustained by membership. Instead, they tend to receive funding from grants and other sources, which are not sustainable over the long term. Consequently, none of the FMAs that we learned about are self-sustaining. One way other FMAs have addressed this is to operate within a larger parent organization and thereby share resources with another entity. For example, the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont is the parent organization of the Vermont statewide FMA.

Statewide FMAs tend to have few, if any, paid staff members

Given their limited financial resources, FMAs have very low staff capacity with very few, if any, paid staff members. Instead, they rely heavily on the work of dedicated volunteers. Further, representatives expressed challenges in retaining their volunteers.

Recommendations

Based on the information that we gathered through research, phone interviews, and the Farmers Market and Direct Sales Conference, we have concluded that **a statewide FMA is desirable but financial sustainability is a challenge.**

Given this, we recommend the following next steps:

1. Conduct more in-depth research on existing statewide FMAs to learn about their operations, funding, and most importantly, sustainability. Representatives from FMAs can provide valuable guidance for beginning an FMA and may be willing to share lessons learned from their own experiences.
2. Explore the option of creating an FMA within an existing umbrella or anchor organization, such as a nonprofit or a state government agency. This could potentially increase the sustainability of the FMA over the long term.
3. Partner with the Farmers Market Coalition to explore ways in which it could support the development of a regional farmers market association.

This option could potentially be cost-effective, while still achieving the intended outcomes of a statewide FMA.

4. Seek funding for a pilot program for the development of a statewide FMA. This could heighten awareness of the need for an FMA and continue to build interest and support for one in the state. As part of this process, explore potential partners or future funding sources that could help sustain the FMA once the funding cycle ends.



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About ASAP: ASAP's mission is to help local farms thrive, link farmers to markets and supporters, and build healthy communities through connections to local food. To learn more about ASAP's work, visit asapconnections.org, or call (828) 236-1282.