

Farmers Market Promotion Program

Final Performance Report

For the Period of October 1, 2014 – September 30, 2016

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PROGRAM SUMMARY

Farmers markets offer many benefits to producers and communities; however, their impacts go largely undocumented. Information on the more than 8,000 known markets, with roughly 150,000 vendors and untold millions in fruit and vegetable sales alone, is not being tracked or analyzed in a meaningful way. As a result, little is understood about why some markets succeed while others fail. The only regularly collected annual data available on markets is gathered from self-reporting farmers market managers in response to requests for the USDA's farmers market directory.

In response to the lack of or limited data collection and evaluation tools that exist today for market managers, FMC created a six-unit training program for market managers on using practical, user-friendly and evidence-based tools for data collection, analysis and communication. This unique and comprehensive package of modular training materials called Farmers Market Metrics (FMM) Training is made available through FMC's website and in-person trainings at regional conferences and meetings with markets across the country. In

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Goal #1: Strengthen and stabilize farmers market organizations, so that they may have the capacity to expand farmers market services, reaching more customers and increasing sales for producers and vendors.

Objective and Activity: Increase training opportunities for farmers market managers, to help equip them for the varied demands of managing a successful market.

Goal #2: Empower farmers market managers with the knowledge and tools required to quantitatively monitor their market's activities and communicate effectively with stakeholders.

Objective and Activities: Create a training curriculum that walks market managers through the process of a) identifying market goals; b) selecting relevant metrics to track; c) creating and executing a data collection plan; d) analyzing the data; and e) effectively communicating the data to stakeholders.

Goal #3: Improve the quality and increase the quantity of current and historical data on farmers markets across the country, facilitating stronger community partnerships with markets, and increased interest from prospective funders.

Objective and Activity: Provide a standard set of appropriate metrics and data collection best practices, relevant to all local food practitioners.

ACTIVITIES & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The Farmers Market Metrics (FMM) Training Materials are a new series of guides, presentations and worksheets for farmers market practitioners on project and market measurement. In creating these materials, current tools appropriate for grassroots market communities were researched and adapted for farmers market use. The goal is for FMC is to use these materials when working with market networks and to offer them to market partners to use in their own data collection strategies. The need for an iterative process for designing materials useful for a wide set of market types made the use of an FMPP project ideal, as many markets, network leaders and partners were consulted during the development of these materials. Presentations were offered at a number of state and network meetings during this project to gather more comments and feedback before the final draft and to share the news of this set of materials. Additional materials were added to the original plan, based on feedback from markets and network leaders.

At the beginning of the project, the team reviewed the available tools for data collection currently available to market leaders. Using a market measurement literature review drafted by University of

Wisconsin-Madison and FMC, the team focused on examining the training materials including these toolkits:

1. British Columbia Farmers Market Association's Demonstrating Value FM Toolkit
2. Market Umbrella's trans•act toolkit
3. Wholesome Wave's FM Tracks materials

At the time of the research, these toolkits represented the most heavily used data collection training material available to markets for no cost. In addition, some state-level measurement materials were reviewed including those offered by the West Virginia Farmers Market Association, the Michigan Farmers Market Association and Washington State Farmers Market Association. The well-known Whole Measures framework was also reviewed as it remains the most comprehensive graduated impact measurement system in food systems. The FMC Research Associate established a shared research library of these tools and articles, that FMC continues to host on the Mendeley platform.

Why & How

As expected, it was clear that all of the materials spent very little time describing why some methods are more acceptable to other partners (especially to researchers), and instead focused more on what general data to collect. For example, most of the state-level materials use Oregon State's Rapid Market Assessment methodology for data collection almost exclusively, and yet offer little insight as to why Dot Surveys et al may not be suitable for collecting sensitive data.

Additionally, any instruction as to how to analyze the data was inadequate as was information as to how to use the data to communicate with different project audiences or for internal strategic planning.

Lastly, very little background was offered to readers as to how to select or define the best metrics for their needs. Every report used a different set of metrics, making any aggregation or trend analysis impossible.

This review made some of the content creation needs for these materials obvious: it would need to address the above while explaining data collection methodology in accessible and engaging ways to harried market leaders.

Metrics and Protocols Review Process

In partnership with University of Wisconsin-Madison, FMC has spent the last three years testing a

number of data collection protocols and establishing a refined a set of metrics through the Indicators for Impact AFRI-funded project (2013-2016). This project enlists nine markets to pilot different methods of data collection under the supervision of the university/FMC team. The collection methodologies offered to the markets in this project attempted to balance between those used regularly by disciplined researchers and those used by DIY collectors. The metrics were collected from existing reports as the most appropriate and useful measures for markets to collect that *could be reasonably collected* by low-capacity markets. Once collection began in the AFRI project in 2015, the need to deeply revise the 37 chosen metrics was discussed by the team but deemed as impossible to revise within the AFRI project hours allotted. Additionally, while the AFRI project will result in a set of data collection protocols, the need for training and guidance on which data points to collect, why it should be collected, and what to do with the data once it's available remained. Therefore, the FMC FMPP project became the place where a smaller set of metrics were developed and refined, with comprehensive discussion of metrics selection, data collection, data entry, data analysis and communications strategies. It was vital that language for the metrics be tailored for farmers market managers, but also useful to a wide range of audiences.

The original project plan accounted for multiple rounds of review from market leaders and research partners. However, the editing process expanded into a much more time consuming process. More and more grants and programs are increasing their data reporting requirements, and market managers voiced a clear desire for any data reporting tools to be usable across programs, or at the very least be compatible. Editing of the training materials were continually revisited as market managers shared more of their current data collection practices and desires.

The final sample set of metrics chosen to be used for these materials were those that demonstrated the multiple impacts of economic, ecological, social and intellectual benefits, and were relevant to multiple reporting platforms. Additionally, the metrics from the sample set demonstrate a range of data collection protocols within the three main recommended data collection methods: document review, survey, and observation.

The ten (10) metrics used as examples in the training units include (metrics are annual unless noted otherwise):

1. Estimated number of visitors
2. Total market sales
3. Average distance in miles traveled from farm to market
4. Agricultural acres owned, leased, or managed by market vendors
5. Number of SNAP transactions
6. Average spending per shopper per visit
7. Number of volunteer hours contributed
8. Average number of SNAP-eligible goods available per market day

9. Number of food education activities hosted
10. Transportation methods used by market visitors

The project team attempted to keep the collection methodologies consistent with those used in the AFRI pilots, although some revisions were made, particularly to the number of days and the samples sizes needed for certain metrics. Once the existing materials were reviewed and the metrics and protocols chosen, the module writing began. All six were drafted at the same time, worked on by senior researcher Darlene Wolnik, with Unit 4 drafted by consultant Stacy Miller, Unit 6 by Honesta Romberger, and with editing of all sections lead by Jen Cheek.

External reviewers were enlisted to offer rounds of feedback on each module. Those external reviewers were either those researchers who had written training materials for markets (Colleen Donovan) and/or were market leaders who would use the materials for their markets (Dru Montri) or could give feedback based on their experience in running markets (Sharon Yeago). Each reviewer offered detailed comments and revisions via email and phone.

In late spring of 2016, the team decided to add another content review by employing a one-time copyeditor. This phase was deemed as necessary for two reasons: 1) the number of people within FMC that had added edits had resulted in a hodge-podge of styles within some units and 2) the concern among the reviewers that the content was still too academic. The copyeditor was recommended by one of the reviewers, Dru Montri, based on her experience in managing markets and in writing materials for markets in the past. The copyeditor gauged the writing as college-freshman level and assisted the FMC team in revising for a more general reading level (high-school level).

Data Entry Workbooks

The biggest change to the original plan for the materials was the addition of a set of linked Excel Workbooks. Multiple online data entry tools are available, as well as currently in the works (FM Tracks, Managemymarket.com, MIFI Markets, etc.). FMC itself has developed a website: Farmersmarketmetrics.org to facilitate data collection, storage and analysis. However, as noted earlier, it was important that the training materials be useful across programs and platforms. The farmers market field will benefit if consistent metrics, guidance, and methodologies are in place, no matter which data entry tools are in use. For this reason, a universally usable data entry system was deemed to be a worthwhile companion piece to the training materials. Excel is the most widely used data management program, with multiple benefits. Managers can enter and save data while offline (new tools often require internet connection, which isn't consistently available to market managers when onsite), Excel data is easily unloadable, or transferable into other systems, and managers are able to save the data on their own files. The team agreed to draft one workbook, focusing it on the

annual data collected from market vendors. The reviewer selected for the data entry unit was Michigan Farmers Market Association (MIFMA) Executive Director Dru Montri, who had created similar training materials. Her enthusiasm for the workbook led to more related worksheets being developed and also led to a pilot of the Excel workbooks with a small group of nine MIFMA markets.

The MIFMA markets were engaged in an economic analysis project, and used the FMM materials to collect, store and analyze their data. This pilot was conducted over the spring and summer with monthly check-ins with questions or issues on the materials from the participating markets and semi-regular check-ins from the project advisory team, including project advisors and Michigan researchers. That pilot allowed for deeper development of the workbooks than had been previously been expected in the project. The workbooks allow markets to gather rounds of data with calculations embedded for each data point with the resulting metric available for immediate use by the markets. The use of these Excel workbooks for data entry became an illustration of one crucial point in the Farmers Market Metrics strategy: for markets to see and use the raw data internally even while sharing it with their partners. The team realized that even at the point when a web-based portal becomes available for markets to enter and hold their data, the ability to manage the data using offline workbooks should remain part of the training on data collection.

The MIFMA team offered detailed and practical input on the development of the workbooks, which soon included linked worksheets where other data could be entered, updating on the final workbook.

The enthusiasm for the workbooks meant the project team needed to quickly become expert in creating linked and formulated workbooks. Experts in Excel were enlisted and reduced the lag time in development of new or updated worksheets.

Another important lesson from engaging the MIFMA markets, was that the FMM Training will be most beneficial if offered in small group setting, such as the MIFMA pilot. FMC will focus on using the training materials with market networks—state associations, regional market partnerships, etc.—rather than offering it to individual markets. This setting allows for stronger support for market managers, and the opportunity to ingrain and normalize the data collection practices among local groups. The networks benefit by being able to quantify their impact, as well as supporting data collection at individual markets.

Lessons Learned: Communications Guide

The last module to complete was also the first drafted. Unit six was originally based on a series of templates that had been drafted by Wolnik and Cheek for a spring 2014 pilot which tested reporting templates. Those templates—while appealing to the markets who tested them—clearly required

refinement and development of a more wide-ranging communications strategy. The drafted templates was used as the basis for Unit 6, but was much lengthened and clarified to match the expanded and updated metrics and collection protocols, with communication experts consulted for feedback. The feedback on this unit indicated that markets gained a deeper understanding of why choosing shared metrics would be helpful to external audiences, how to use individual and summarized metrics and that researchers were gratified to get support in helping markets to communicate data.

Sharing Findings & Gathering Feedback

The FMC team presented on the Farmers Market Metrics (FMM) Training Materials at multiple venues and conferences during 2015-2016, including state farmers market conferences in North Carolina (November 2015), Oregon (February 2016), Washington (February 2016), Massachusetts (April 2016), the Wholesome Wave Summit (January 2016), and the California Small Farms Conference (March, 2016). An estimated 375 participants attended the presentations. During each event, the team gathered feedback and input from market managers and state leaders to continue to inform the development of the training materials and plans for delivery and technical assistance support to markets implementing a data collection project.

The Training Units are in final edit form. FMC anticipates continuing to host the units online, where they will be regularly edited to ensure that they remain current and relevant. The training currently resides on a password protected site at:

<https://farmersmarketcoalition.org/farmers-market-metrics-guide/>. The training units include: 1) Introduction to Data Collection at Markets; 2) Metric Selection; 3) Methods and Implementation Part 1 and Part 2; 4) Data Entry and Management; 5) Analysis and Reporting; and 6) Communicating Data. Data collection templates, Excel workbooks and other resources are also available for download. The training units range in length from five to 20 pages. Additionally, a set of evaluation questions have been finalized to assess the effectiveness and quality of the training materials to inform future edits and updates.

At the onset of the project, FMC projected that 500 farmers markets would benefit from the FMM training. With about 375 presentation attendees, we came in lower than that initial estimate. However, this is a result of the development of the training materials taking longer than expected to finalize. FMC expects that we will reach the 500 mark by March of 2017, and will continue to grow from there. The other measures of success noted in the original project plan will not be able to be tested until the year after FMM training has taken place. That projection was that markets who participated in the training would see an estimated revenue increase of \$42,650,000. This estimate is based on the experience of FMPP grantees from 2006-

2011 who in an FMC-conducted survey reported that after implementing market manager training, individual market revenues increased an average of \$85,300. This represents an estimated 30% increase in revenue after manager training.

Next Steps for FMM Training

Following the end of the grant, FMC will build upon this body of work by creating recorded webinars to support selected units in the final reporting period, including a brief overview of the Farmers Market Metrics Program, goals and deliverables. The webinars will be embedded with the training materials online. Each unit features a companion worksheet that includes quiz questions, exercises and activities that will result in a tailored evaluation plan for that market at the end of the training.

The FMM Training Units will be used in 2017 with multiple state networks, including continued work with MIFMA, and planned training with the Maryland Farmers Market Association, the Virginia Farmers Market Association, and the Vermont Farmers Market Association. FMC will continue to present widely on the work, and encourage markets to use the FMM vendor summary questions as an entry point to data collection. FMC's Farmers Market Metrics website will be available for participating markets to automatically generate summary reports and individual graphics for promotional purposes. Initially, the website features will only be available to markets who have completed FMM training. Eventually, the training will be opened up to all FMC members (FMC currently has 1,060 members representing about 4,500 farmers markets).

FMC will be entering into a new FMPP project in the fall of 2016, which will use the FMM training, and expand upon the FMM Communications Guide. Integrated Marketing Solutions (a marketing firm based in Chicago) will train markets in Virginia and DC to distribute data-driven promotional messaging by creating relationships with 'influencers.' The data used in the influencer messaging will be consistent with FMM principles, as all participants will go through FMM training as a first step in the project.

As of September 30, 2016, a total of \$96,014 in grant funds was spent on generation and promotion of this Farmers Market Metrics Training project