



Insights into the management of Wisconsin's farmers markets:

Results from a statewide
farmers market manager survey

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Summary

The number of farmers markets nationally is growing, indicating increased interest in farmers markets among consumers and farmers alike. While this trend is promising, such interest does not guarantee that farmers markets are able to sustain themselves or grow. In the spring of 2017, researchers from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and University of Wisconsin-Extension surveyed Wisconsin farmers market managers to learn:

- What management practices are typical at different types of farmers markets in Wisconsin?
- What resources do farmers markets in Wisconsin need to sustain themselves or grow?

The survey reached an estimated 242 markets. Ninety-eight surveys were completed for a 40% response rate. Some surveys were removed due to substantial amounts of missing data, leaving 86 surveys for analysis. This report outlines the survey results, keeping in mind an audience of farmers market managers, Extension educators, government officials, and other professionals that support farmers markets. While market managers from all types of communities in Wisconsin responded, more markets were represented from small towns compared to rural, suburban, or urban areas (respondents self-identified as from one of those four categories). On average, markets hosted 40 vendors during peak season.

Key insights from the results include:

Farmers markets want low-cost promotion strategies

Farmers market managers view increased promotional efforts to customers as more helpful than other strategies to increase market sales. However, markets are challenged by small marketing budgets (the average reported marketing budget is closest to the survey choice of \$1-3,000 per year). Correspondingly, the desire to learn more about low-cost marketing strategies is strong among survey respondents. Topics of greatest interest include learning about how to encourage word-of-mouth communication between customers, getting partner groups to help promote the market, and establishing market sponsorships.

- Resources for managers should focus on learning opportunities that emphasize low-cost marketing strategies such as how to establish sponsorships and inspire word-of-mouth communication among customers.

Managers like to learn from each other

While managers are interested in multiple learning formats, peer-to-peer learning is more popular than other formats.

- Market managers would welcome more opportunities to hear from each other. Extension educators and others who provide educational opportunities to managers should consider peer-to-peer formats.

Local government support for marketing is generally lacking

While half of the farmers markets surveyed receive free space from local governments, only a third of farmers markets report local government assistance in market promotion. Farmers markets may need help “selling” benefits of farmers markets to local governments in order to receive more help with promotion.

- Tools or resources that help markets showcase their value to local officials could be very valuable to markets as they approach local government officials about increased support.
- Local governments (including public health departments), coalitions, and nonprofit organizations that support local food systems can proactively reach out to farmers market managers to support the sustainability of markets in their communities. A few inexpensive ways that local governments and others can help farmers markets include posting signage and participating in cross-promotion of farmers markets on social media.

Markets want help establishing partnerships

Farmers markets are most interested in establishing partnerships with market sponsors, K-12 schools, chefs, Extension educators, and people affiliated with higher education (other than Extension). Markets would most like to strengthen partnerships with local media, health care agencies, and nonprofits or community groups.

- Extension educators and others who provide support to farmers markets can help farmers markets connect with key groups and institutions, such as sponsors, schools, and chefs. This could include introducing market managers to existing coalitions, when available.

Market managers have limited time and money

Most Wisconsin markets have an official manager, with very few markets reporting no manager. The manager position is usually part-time and paid, though a substantial minority of managers are unpaid, especially at smaller markets. The manager position also experiences high turnover. Nevertheless, market managers are most often the decision-makers for their markets, more so than other key stakeholders such as vendors or boards of directors.

- Resources should be geared toward market managers and leaders, keeping in mind their very limited time.
- High turnover among market managers suggests that markets may benefit from strategies specifically related to retaining and transitioning between managers.

Market managers are key decision-makers and enforce market rules

Only about half of the markets surveyed have boards of directors. This emphasizes the important leadership role of managers. In terms of vendor practices, most markets (69%) have rules about products and confirm that those rules are followed. Rules might address where products were grown, how products were grown, or if reselling is allowed. Fifteen percent have rules that are unenforced, and only 6% have no rules for vendor practices. Three-quarters of markets require fees for vendor participation. The average weekly fee for vendor participation is closest to the survey choice of \$1-30.



Introduction

Nationally, the number of farmers markets is growing (USDA, 2017a). The most recent United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimate suggests there are 308 farmers markets in Wisconsin alone (USDA, 2017b). This growth signals increased interest in farmers markets among consumers and farmers alike. While promising, such interest does not guarantee that farmers markets are able to sustain themselves or grow. In fact, in interviews with Wisconsin farmers market managers, respondents voice concerns about market promotion and stability (Wilson et al., 2017). To learn how to best support farmers markets in Wisconsin, researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and University of Wisconsin-Extension surveyed farmers market managers. The work was funded by a Hatch grant through the University of Wisconsin-Madison College of Agricultural and Life Sciences. The research considers:

- What management practices are typical at different types of farmers markets in Wisconsin?
- What resources do farmers markets in Wisconsin need to sustain themselves or grow?

Research methods

To develop the survey, researchers first sought feedback from select individuals in Wisconsin who work closely with farmers markets. Twelve practitioners provided feedback, including those affiliated with the University of Wisconsin-Extension Community Food Systems Team, Wisconsin Farmers Market Association, and REAP Food Group. In addition, an out-of-state farmers market manager tested the survey and provided feedback to further ensure that questions were appropriate and understandable for farmers market managers.

Once the survey was finalized, an electronic version was distributed to farmers markets in spring 2017 requesting that the person in charge of managing the market take the survey. Most often this would be the market manager, though at some markets that person could have another role or work without an official title. The Wisconsin Farmers Market Association and REAP distributed the survey through their email lists. Additionally, the researchers sent emails directly to markets that are publicly listed through the USDA database and markets listed on the Wisconsin Department of Tourism website.

Respondents

The email survey reached an estimated 242 markets.¹ Ninety-eight surveys were completed for a 40% response rate. Some surveys were removed due to substantial amounts of missing data, leaving 86 surveys for analysis. Farmers markets in 40 Wisconsin counties are represented in the survey. Survey respondents are primarily farmers market managers.

¹ This is the number of unique markets that were sent an email without the email bouncing. There are markets in the state, however, without email addresses that the survey did not reach.

Analysis

This report provides a descriptive analysis of the collected data, in addition to comparisons of markets by community type and market size.² The community types are self-reported by survey respondents as urban, rural, suburban, or small town. To compare markets by size, markets with 26 or fewer vendors are compared to those with 27 or more vendors (26 being the median number of reported vendors).

Report organization

The intended audience of this report includes farmers market managers, Extension educators, local government officials, and others who support farmers markets in Wisconsin. This report is divided into three sections:

- Section 1: Market demographics
- Section 2: Resources wanted by farmers market managers
- Section 3: Market organization

Section 1 covers background information about Wisconsin markets and the parameters of the market manager position. Understanding the market manager position is important because market managers were the intended recipients of the survey and comprise the majority of survey respondents. Section 2 focuses first on what resources farmers market managers want in order to sustain or grow their markets. Section 2 also includes information about what kind of partnerships interest market managers, learning preferences of market managers, and related recommendations. Section 3 focuses on management practices at Wisconsin markets, including how markets are organized and rules for vendors. Section 3 describes what practices are common at markets around the state, as managers have expressed interest in such findings. This may also help supportive stakeholders better understand the characteristics of managers in the state.

² Results were considered significant at $p < .05$. Due to the exploratory nature of this work, Bonferroni corrections were not applied to the multiple comparisons. Note: some community type subgroups had small sample sizes, which can increase the possibility of not detecting statistical differences when they exist.

SECTION 1: MARKET DEMOGRAPHICS

Markets are in all types of communities in Wisconsin

In Wisconsin, there are farmers markets in all types of communities – cities, small towns, suburbs, and rural areas (Figure 1). The greatest proportion of survey respondents self-identify their markets as held in small towns, with fewer markets in rural or suburban areas. Physically, on average, farmers markets in Wisconsin are 10,001-20,000 square feet.³ Small-town markets are smaller on average, however, and are closer to 5,001-10,000 square feet.⁴

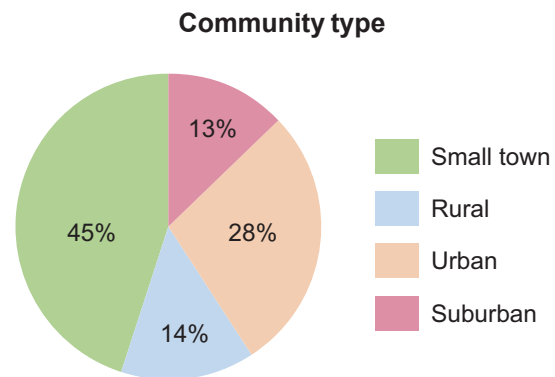


Figure 1. There are farmers markets in all types of communities in Wisconsin.

Markets host an average of 40 vendors

The median number of vendors during peak season at Wisconsin markets is 26, while the average is 40 (Figure 2). There are differences based on community type. Urban markets report significantly more vendors on average (68) than small town (25) or rural (21) markets. Suburban markets are intermediate, averaging 48 vendors during peak season.

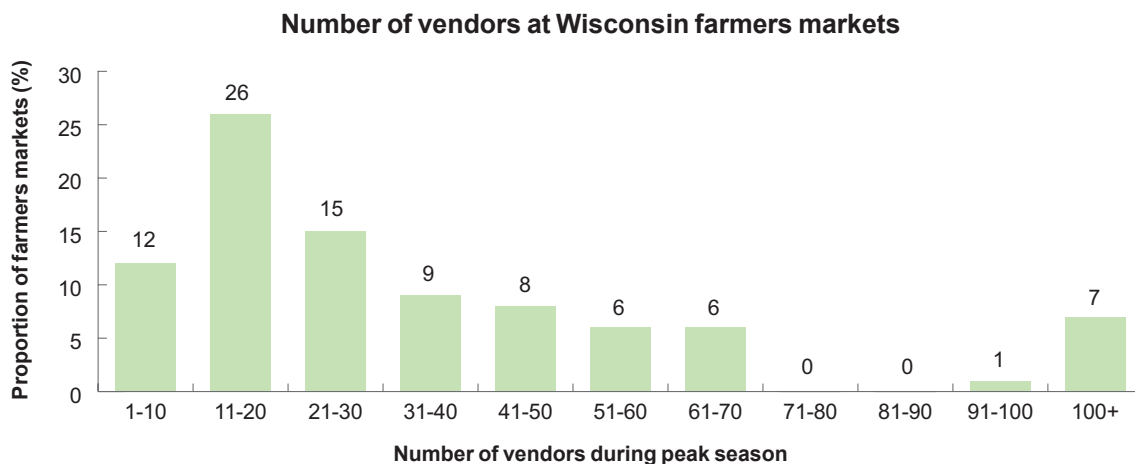


Figure 2. The median number of vendors at Wisconsin farmers markets is 26.

³ Survey respondents were given several size ranges from which to select to make it easier for them to answer this question.

⁴ ANOVA results found a statistically significant difference, with the average reported size of “small town” markets to be significantly smaller than the average size of urban markets.

Market features

Regarding transportation access, most markets (86%) offer free parking (Figure 3). Other means of access, however, are limited. Fewer than half of markets are adjacent to a bus stop or offer bicycle racks. This could potentially pose problems, as research finds that a major barrier to market patronage is an inconvenient location (Byker et al., 2012). However, research examining barriers to shopping at farmers markets among low-income Wisconsin residents has found that market locations and hours are not perceived to be inconvenient (UW-Extension, 2016).

With respect to food sales, most markets (88%) sell locally produced products, with 16% also reporting the sale of non-locally produced products. This finding underscores how farmers markets are an important way to access local food and support local farmers.

On the other hand, only half of markets offer prepared food (Figure 4), which may be an opportunity for growth.

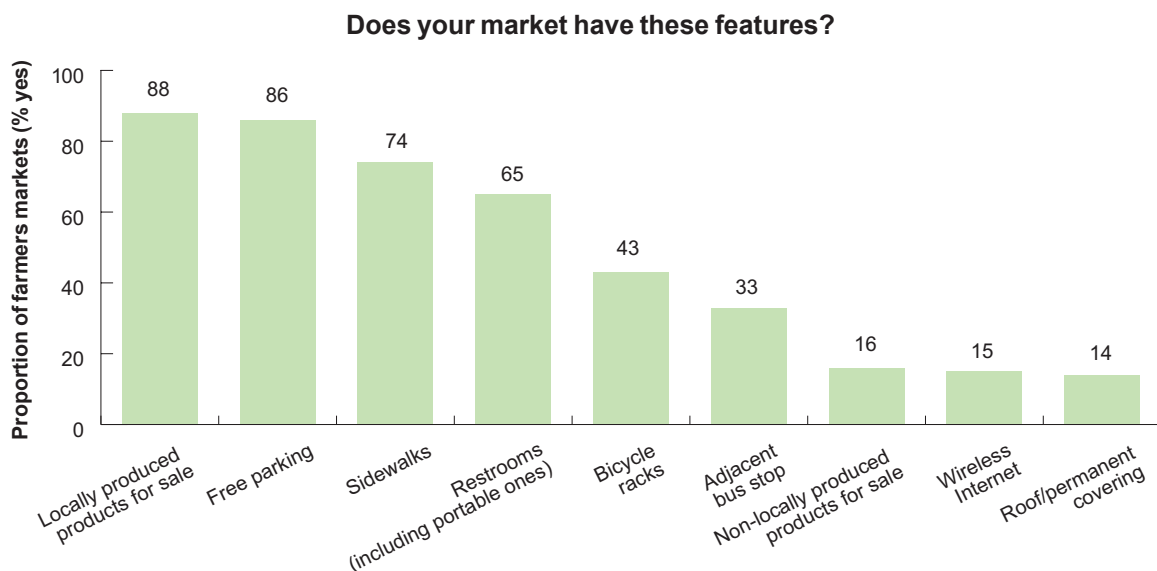


Figure 3. Most Wisconsin markets offer locally produced products and free parking.



Left: About 40% of the markets surveyed accept benefits through EBT. Right: Many Wisconsin farmers markets feature arts and crafts.



Photo Credit: Pat Witzling

Another relatively common market feature is markets' acceptance of Women, Infants and Children Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (WIC FMNP) benefits (65%). In contrast, fewer markets (42%) accept electronic benefit transfer (EBT) cards, which allow people to access benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Low SNAP participation may be explained in part by other research focused on Wisconsin farmers market managers. That research has found that it can be labor intensive and expensive for markets to accept EBT or SNAP benefits (Krokowski, 2010).

"The largest barrier we experience is with SNAP EBT. It is the most cumbersome obtrusive process to get up and running and to maintain. We finally gave up on efforts to have this at the market due to all of the problems it caused."

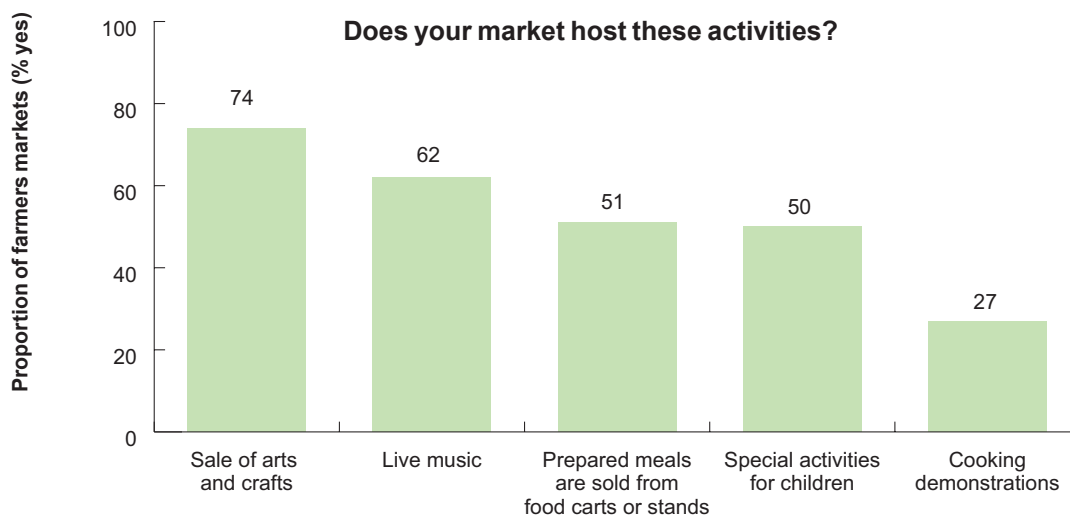


Figure 4. Wisconsin farmers markets host a range of activities.

Most Wisconsin markets have an official manager

The majority of survey respondents (74%) identify solely as a market manager (Figure 5). Of the survey respondents who do not identify as a market manager, only 5% indicate that there is not a manager of their market. For educators or practitioners working with markets, this underscores that directing resources toward managers is appropriate. It should be noted, however, that this sample of respondents may over-represent markets with managers. This is because markets without managers might have been less likely to complete the survey. Of respondents who identify themselves as market managers, the majority (69%) identify as having this role only. Others have additional roles, such as market director, vendor, board member, or volunteer. A market director and market manager may perform the same tasks at some markets, while at others, a manager takes care of operations-related tasks while a director's role is to lead the market in other ways, such as planning, fundraising, or marketing.

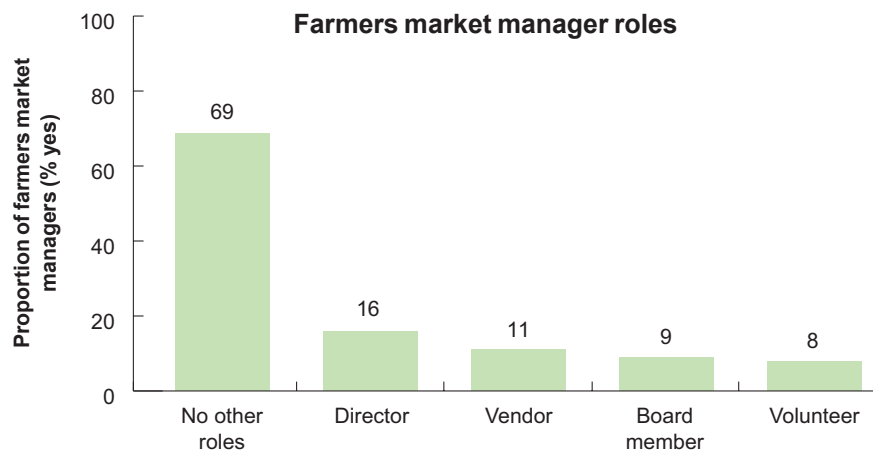


Figure 5. Most respondents serve solely as managers on behalf of their market.

Most managers are responsible for only one market

Among respondents with a market management role (manager, assistant manager, director), most (83%) are involved with only one market that meets at one location. Another 15% are involved with one market that meets at multiple locations or on multiple days. While this clarifies that most managers focus their efforts on a single market, it also indicates that most markets are managed separately. Interest among managers in coordinating market management or sharing management duties across markets might be explored as a way to help markets share resources or find efficiencies through cooperation. The survey does not examine how palatable such an idea would be to managers. However, managers appear open to partnerships with each other, as described in Section 2 of this report.

Managers work part-time

Market managers typically work part-time, between 11-20 hours per week. This means that most managers need promotional strategies that fit within relatively tight financial and time constraints. Managers affiliated with smaller markets work fewer hours (averaging closer to 11-15 hours) than managers of larger markets (averaging closer to 16-20 hours).

Only two-thirds of managers are paid

About two-thirds of respondents report that the market manager is paid for his or her position, either directly or through another job. Another third of managers are unpaid (Table 1). The proportion of unpaid managers is higher at smaller markets (40%) than larger markets (13%). Of managers who are paid, respondents most frequently report that the manager is paid between \$13-16 per hour (Table 1). This does not differ based on market type or size. Most commonly (61%), respondents report that the manager does not receive any benefits such as health insurance or paid time off.

Manager turnover is high

Forty-two percent of managers have been in their position for two or fewer years, suggesting that the turnover rate in market management is high (Table 2). Market ages were not collected, so it is impossible to say to what degree this is related to the age of a market or if older markets have better retention. Nevertheless, it may be that there is high turnover because the market manager position is most often part-time, sometimes unpaid, and usually without job benefits. High turnover may indicate a weakness for some markets, as there is likely a learning curve for new management. Resources aimed at helping markets retain managers could be helpful. Given the nature of the position, however, frequent transitions may be inevitable. Consequently, resources aimed at helping markets transition between management may also be needed.

Table 1

Approximately how much is the manager paid in hourly terms?

	<i>Percent</i>
Unpaid	33%
\$7.25 to \$10 per hour	10%
\$10.01 to \$13.00 per hour	12%
\$13.01 to \$16.00 per hour	15%
\$16.01 to \$19.00 per hour	13%
\$19.01 to \$22.00 per hour	6%
\$22.01 to \$25.00 per hour	4%
Over \$25 per hour	6%

Table 2

For how many years has the market manager had that position?

	<i>Percent</i>
Less than 1 year	21%
1 to 2 years	21%
3 to 4 years	13%
5 to 6 years	9%
7 to 8 years	4%
9 to 10 years	8%
More than 10 years	9%

Managers call the shots

Market managers are involved in decision-making at most markets. Table 3 shows who makes decisions at markets (the survey allowed selection of choices without limit). Vendors make decisions at about a third of markets (35%). Meanwhile, customers make decisions at only 4% of markets. While some markets may be reluctant to invite vendors or customers to make major decisions, inviting them to provide feedback about smaller decisions could increase their buy-in and potentially increase their willingness to take on tasks for the market.

Educators might suggest ways to accomplish this, such as posting questions on social media for customers to weigh in with preferences, holding a vendor or customer listening session, or inviting customers or vendors to serve on a board of directors. About half of markets have a board of directors, but that proportion varies with community type (Table 4), with more urban markets having boards. Additionally, a greater proportion of larger markets (62%) have boards compared to smaller markets (40%).

“Our vendors are fiercely loyal and have strong ownership in the market. We believe our market is a good model for a small town.”

“We have had a challenge for years with vendors having the belief that they ‘own’ the market and ‘own’ the surplus funds associated with the market. In my view, I see this no differently than a landlord/tenant relationship. For a fee, we provide them a space to sell their goods, and we also advertise the market.”

Table 3

Who is involved with decision-making at your market?

Market manager	74%
Board of directors	50%
Vendors	35%
Assistant market manager	20%
Market director	20%
Local government	16%
Chamber of commerce	16%
Non-profit organization	13%
Property owner of the land/building where the market takes place	11%
Business district or downtown association	9%
Customers	4%

Table 4

Is there a formal board of directors for the market?

Community type	Percent yes
Urban	64%
Small town	46%
Suburban	40%
Rural	36%



Photo Credit: USDA

Some farmers markets encourage customers to weigh in with their opinions through surveys or on social media.

SECTION 2:

RESOURCES WANTED BY FARMERS MARKET MANAGERS

Market managers want help promoting their market to customers

Farmers market managers see increased promotional efforts as key to increasing sales at farmers markets. Consequently, resources should be geared toward helping them promote their markets to customers. Topping the list of respondents' preferred strategies to increase farmers market sales (Table 5) is increasing efforts to promote the market to customers. Other highly rated strategies include having more attractions or activities at the market and having a greater diversity of products at the market.

Correspondingly, survey respondents on average rate their markets as only “somewhat” successful at attracting customers, suggesting they believe there is room for improvement. Larger markets average significantly higher on this item than smaller markets, suggesting smaller markets may need the most help.

Table 5

If any of the following changes were possible, how helpful would they be in terms of increasing sales at your market?

	<i>Mean</i>
Increased efforts to promote the market to customers	3.9
More activities or attractions at the market	3.8
Offering a greater diversity of products at the market	3.7
Making it possible to use credit cards	3.5
Making it possible or easier to use benefits such as EBT/SNAP or WIC	3.0
More or easier car parking	2.8
Making it possible or easier to access your market without a car (bus, bike, shuttle, walking)	2.5
More space for vendors	2.0
Different location	1.5
Different day or time	1.5

Note: Scale is 1 (“Not helpful at all”) to 5 (“Extremely helpful”).

Focus on low-cost marketing solutions

While managers believe increasing efforts to promote their markets is necessary to increase sales, most often markets only spent \$1-3,000 in 2016 on marketing (Figure 6). On the other hand, 8% of markets do have substantial marketing budgets (over \$6,000 annually). This suggests that free or low-cost marketing strategies will be more appealing to a significant majority of managers as budgets are small at most markets.

Survey respondents also would consider it “very helpful” to have more funds for marketing as part of an effective marketing strategy (Table 6). Funding appears to be even more desired at larger markets, which rate the desire for more funding significantly higher (4.5) compared to smaller markets (3.9). It is possible that funding is more crucial to larger markets because their size might require more resources for management, or those markets might be pursuing goals that require more funds.

Survey results point toward some specific low-cost marketing strategies that interest farmers market managers. Two survey questions ask respondents to rate their interest in a list of learning topics or resources. Items that relate to promoting the market in low-cost ways are the most popular (Table 7). The top four choices are encouraging word of mouth between customers, having partner groups promote the market, soliciting sponsorships, and making a strategic marketing plan. These items rank significantly higher than items that might cost the market money, such as offering coupons, buying ads (on Facebook, radio, TV, or billboards), or sending paper mailings.

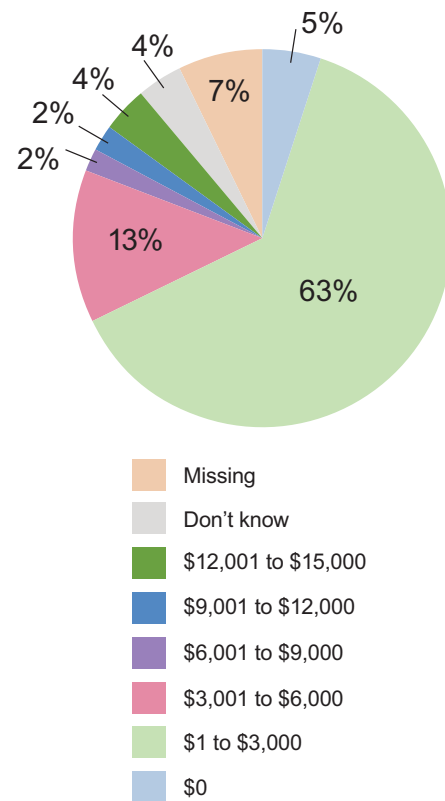


Figure 6. Most farmers markets have a small marketing budget.

Table 6

How helpful would the following items be in order to promote your market effectively?

	Mean
More funds for promoting the market	4.2
More time to carry out promotion plans	3.7
Someone else (volunteer, intern, staff, etc.) to be in charge of promoting the market instead of the market manager	3.6
Learning more about strategies or tools to promote the market	3.6

Note: Scale is 1 (“Not helpful at all”) to 5 (“Extremely helpful”).

Table 7

How interested would you be in the following resources? /
How interested are you in learning more about these topics?

	<i>Mean</i>
Encouraging word of mouth between customers	3.9
Having partner groups mention the market in their social media, newsletters, or emails to their membership	3.5
Having businesses sponsor the market	3.4
Making a strategic marketing promotion plan	3.4
A toolbox of marketing ideas, like sample marketing plans	3.3
Hosting special events at the market	3.2
A database of electronic marketing materials like photos and templates that markets could use	3.1
Generating news coverage (write press releases, build relationships with reporters, etc.)	3.0
Using Facebook effectively	3.0
Distributing brochures at local businesses or places in the community	3.0
Help facilitating a feedback session with vendors	3.0
An online program where you enter and analyze data about your market to help guide marketing decisions	3.0
A training for vendors in product display	3.0
A training for vendors on pricing	2.9
A training for vendors in customer service	2.8
Offering incentives like coupons	2.7
Using other social media (Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, etc.)	2.6
Writing and distributing email newsletters	2.4
Making and maintaining a website or blog (other than a Facebook page)	2.4
Buying ads on Facebook	2.3
Making and buying ads or public service announcements for radio	2.2
Sending paper mailings to local residents	2.2
Making and distributing signage (household yard signs and/or signs throughout the community)	2.1
Making and buying ads in the newspaper	2.0
Making and buying ads or public service announcements for TV	1.9
Purchasing billboard space	1.7

Note: Scale is 1 ("Not interested at all") to 5 ("Extremely interested").

While Facebook ads rank low on this list, they offer a targeted and cost-effective way to reach customers and should be made more accessible to farmers market managers. Facebook ads can target geographic areas of the state and individuals with an interest in food or cooking. Market managers already clearly see the value of word-of-mouth communication, but they may need to be convinced that social media can help serve a similar function for some consumers.

Market managers want to hear from each other

In addition to topics that farmers market managers are interested in learning about, it is also important to consider how farmers market managers prefer to receive information and professional training. It appears farmers market managers are amenable to a variety of learning formats.



Photo Credit: USDA

Farmers markets can encourage customers and vendors to post about their market online, a form of word-of-mouth communication.

Survey respondents “somewhat like” many different formats (Table 8), with a slight preference for peer-to-peer learning. The peer-to-peer format averages significantly higher than two other choices: conference presentations and watching videos online. The popularity of presentations at conferences appears to be especially low among those affiliated with smaller markets.⁵ This suggests that educators might choose many different learning formats, but opportunities for markets to hear directly from each other in a non-presentation format would be welcome.

⁵ Survey respondents affiliated with smaller markets average 3.5 on this item, a statistically significant difference compared to those affiliated with larger markets who average 3.9. The popularity of webinars also differs between large and small markets, with smaller markets favoring webinars significantly less (3.6) than larger markets (4.3).

Table 8

In general, how much do you like or dislike these different formats for learning about market promotion?

	<i>Mean</i>
Peer-to-peer learning event (gathering for managers to learn from each other)	4.1
Fact sheet (1 or 2 pages)	4.0
Guidebook	3.9
Small group workshop	3.9
Social gathering for market managers to network and talk informally	3.8
Webinar (an interactive presentation online)	3.8
Collaborative online platform (like a Google Group) for managers to post questions and answers to each other	3.7
One-on-one consultation with an expert	3.7
Presentations at conferences	3.7
Watch a video online	3.7

Note: Scale is 1 ("Strongly dislike") to 5 ("Strongly like").

Partnerships welcome

As noted previously, the idea of partners promoting the market is popular among managers. But who do managers want as partners? Farmers market managers are interested in establishing partnerships with sponsors (42%), K-12 schools (38%), chefs (37%), Extension educators (35%), and others in higher education outside of Extension (34%). Market managers would like to strengthen partnerships with local media (42%), health care agencies (31%), and nonprofits (30%). On these questions, strengthening and establishing partnerships were mutually exclusive response choices. See Figure 7 for a detailed breakdown. One respondent notes a desire for support with grant writing, and this may be an area where partners in local governments, higher education, or Extension could offer expertise. Few markets currently receive help with grants from local governments, as described in Section 3 of this report.

"Maybe give more resources for grant funding writing help to give a cushion so the market can grow. Grant funding made all the difference in our market to help grow the market effectively."

I want help strengthening an existing partnership / I want help establishing a new partnership

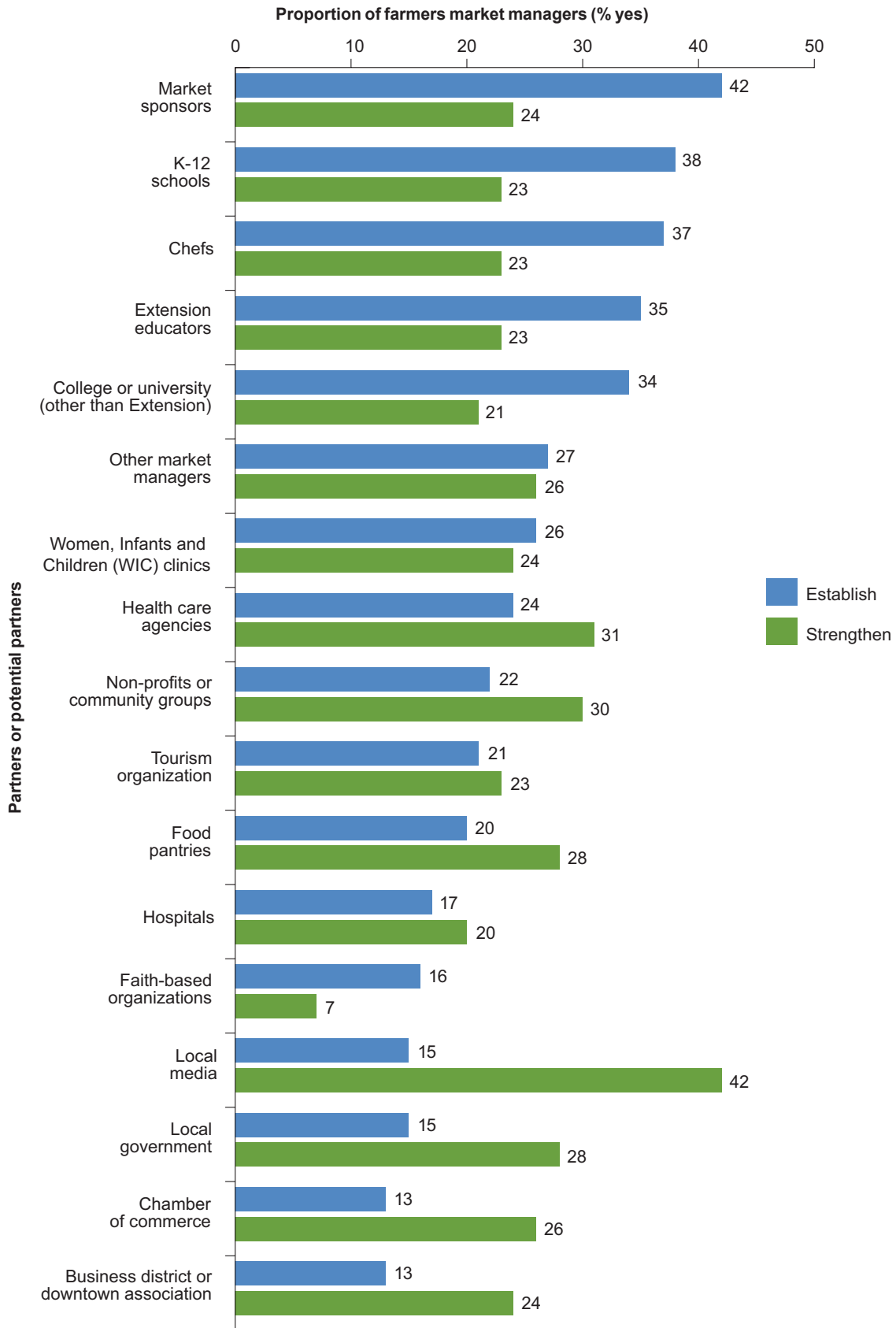


Figure 7. Farmers market managers are most interested in establishing partnerships with market sponsors and strengthening partnerships with local media.

Suburban market managers show more interest in partnerships overall, which suggests they either need the most help or are the most open to it. For example, a majority of suburban market managers want help establishing partnerships with market sponsors (80%), professionals affiliated with higher education other than Extension (70%), tourism organizations (60%), and Extension educators (50%). Although fewer respondents are affiliated with suburban markets, which tempers the value of this finding, it does begin to paint a picture of suburban markets as less connected but very willing to work with other groups.

These findings also demonstrate that about half of market managers are interested in working with one another, with 27% wanting help to establish partnerships with other market managers and 26% wanting help to strengthen those relationships. On these questions, strengthening and establishing partnerships were mutually exclusive response choices. This is promising, as cooperating to learn from each other (Table 8) is a popular idea among managers. Another way to work together, as suggested by one survey respondent, would be to promote markets together on a regional basis. This would allow markets to advertise in a way that individual markets may not be able to afford.

“I also think that even though many markets may be competing, we could accomplish more regionally together (i.e. by county or region) if we could market together or under the umbrella of some organization to educate consumers why it’s important to shop at ANY MARKET.”



SECTION 3:

MARKET ORGANIZATION

Most often, markets operate as their own entity (40%). About a quarter are run by a parent organization that does not operate other markets (24%), and another 4% are run by a parent organization that operates multiple markets. Only 13% are run by local governments, with another 13% sponsored by a chamber of commerce or business association (respondents could choose as many options as applicable). Overall, this suggests that markets are generally split between standalone markets and those that have the support or resources of a larger affiliate organization. Legally, a quarter of markets are operated as a 501(c)(3), with another 21% not incorporated (Table 9).

Table 9

What is your farmers market's management legal structure or that of your parent organization/business's?

	<i>Percent</i>
501(c)(3)	25%
Not incorporated	21%
Not sure	12%
501(c)(6)	5%
LLC	6%
Sole proprietorship	1%
501(c)(5)	1%
Partnership	1%
Cooperative	1%

Markets receive limited assistance from local government

Most markets do not receive support from local governments (Table 10). Table 10 does not include data from 11 markets that are run by city or local governments (those markets are removed from analysis for this survey item only). Correspondingly, tools or resources to help markets communicate the benefits they offer to the community and local economy to community and business leaders could be valuable.

Table 10

Does your local municipality (city, village, county, etc.) provide your market with any of the following?

	<i>Percent yes</i>
Free space for your market	47%
Guidance to understand local regulations related to parking, traffic, accessibility, permits, etc.	44%
Guidance to understand food safety regulations	38%
Free services (police, electricity, wireless Internet, etc.)	31%
Help with promoting your market (signs, place to put brochures, mention in news, sharing posts on social media, etc.)	27%
Staff time	9%
Help with grant writing	9%
Volunteers	5%

More evidence that managers need help with demonstrating the value of their market comes from a question related to marketing goals (Table 11). When it comes to communicating the social or economic benefits of their markets, managers rate themselves around the scale midpoint.⁶

Table 11

How effective has your market been at reaching these marketing goals?

	<i>Mean (scale of 1 to 5)</i>
Communicating with existing vendors	3.7
Attracting new vendors for the market	3.2
Showing how the market helps the community	3.1
Showing how the market helps local farmers	3.0
Increasing access to fresh food for low-income families	3.0
Showing local government officials that the market provides social benefits to the community	3.0
Showing that the market brings people to the area to patronize nearby businesses	2.6
Getting market sponsorships	2.4

Note: Scale is 1 ("Not at all effective") to 5 ("Extremely effective").

Vendor product rules

Most markets (69%) have rules about products and confirm that rules are followed. Rules might address where products were grown, how products were grown, or if reselling is allowed. Fifteen percent have rules that are unenforced, and only 6% have no rules for vendor practices. Managers employ a number of rule-enforcement strategies, such as observing vendors during the market to see that products match what is allowed at the market (e.g., product that would likely be available given the growing season), relying on other vendors to report problems, requiring copies of licenses or permits, and having vendors sign agreement forms in advance of the season. Several managers also conduct on-farm visits when needed. To address problems, some managers use a point system (points are docked when rules are broken), and others issue verbal or written warnings.

"We ask that vendors send photos of their farm or of them making product to help verify they make it (as we don't have resources or time to visit)."

"Enforcement is difficult, but we follow up on any complaints or apparent suspicious products. We have only conducted one farm audit and removed one vendor."

"Vendors affirm on their applications that they will follow the rules of the market. Vendors will tell me if one of them is not. I survey the booths and talk with the vendors each week."

⁶ There are not statistically significant differences among markets in different community types. However, there are statistically significant differences based on market size. Larger markets consider themselves more effective at increasing access to fresh food for low-income families (averaging 3.6 compared to smaller markets at 2.4). Larger markets also average higher regarding sponsorships (2.8 compared to 2.0 at smaller markets).

Vendor insurance requirements

While it is common to have rules related to products, only 27% of markets require liability insurance. Those that require insurance do not necessarily specify an amount. Others require a \$100,000, \$300,000, or \$1 million minimum.

Vendor fees

Three-quarters of markets require fees for vendor participation. Of markets that require fees (Table 12), only 29% have a single flat fee for vendors. The rest primarily charge different amounts based on how often vendors attend (e.g., weekly or daily, seasonally or occasionally). Few or no markets charge different fees based on the type of product sold, location of the stall, vendor sales, or seniority. Some markets offer reduced prices for farmers that live in the village or neighborhood where the market takes place, if vendors are children, or if vendors sign up before a certain date. Of markets that charge fees, almost all (89%) report the weekly fee to be between \$1-30. Another 6% report a fee under \$40 for the entire season, and 2% report a weekly fee of \$31-60.

Table 12

How are fees determined?
Check all that apply.

	<i>Percent</i>
Different fees for seasonal vs. occasional (weekly or daily) vendors	66%
Everyone pays the same flat fee	29%
Other	13%
Different fees based on the type of product the vendor sells	8%
Different fees based on location of stall or table	5%
Different fees based on sales of the vendor	2%
Different fees based on seniority	0%

CONCLUSION

This research suggests that farmers market managers are very interested in learning more about low-cost promotion strategies for their markets, such as ways to encourage word-of-mouth promotion between customers and partnerships with other groups or businesses to help promote the market. Market sponsorships can also help farmers markets grow, and managers may need assistance in establishing sponsorships. Market managers want to learn from each other in addition to making connections with key groups or institutions, such as sponsors, schools, chefs, and Extension.

One limitation of this work is that responses representing markets with managers may be more prevalent, meaning smaller or less-organized markets are underrepresented. Additionally, asking respondents to self-identify their markets as “rural,” “small town,” “suburban,” and “urban” may result in findings being reported less consistently, as these terms were not explicitly defined. Future work might use a standard indicator based on population density to ensure that markets are categorized consistently. This is important because some research finds markets in these different types of communities have different challenges and opportunities. Future work might also investigate how managers perceive competition from other markets. While this research finds that managers are interested in learning from each other and partnering with each other, it does not explicitly ask about perceptions of market saturation. Helping farmers markets evaluate their marketing efforts, including newer types of marketing such as targeted ads on social media, is also an important next step for research in this area.



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