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# Farmers Markets in Rockingham and Strafford Counties, New Hampshire

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*by*

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**2013**

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# FARMERS MARKETS IN ROCKINGHAM AND STRAFFORD COUNTIES, NEW HAMPSHIRE

In March 2012, the University of New Hampshire (UNH) Department of Natural Resources & the Environment and UNH Cooperative Extension conducted a survey of 25 managers of farmers markets within Rockingham and Strafford Counties, New Hampshire. The purpose of the survey was to obtain information on the characteristics and practices of the markets, and the opinions, attitudes, and practices of the managers. Such knowledge could be helpful in improving the operations of and increasing the number of shoppers at farmers markets which, in turn, could help the marketing efforts of local producers of vegetables, fruits, and other agricultural products.

Most of the respondents completed the survey online; the rest completed printed questionnaires and returned them through the mail. A total of 20 surveys were completed for a response rate of 80 percent. This publication contains selected information on the characteristics and practices of the farmers markets in the two counties.<sup>1</sup>

## GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

The average age of the markets in the study area in 2011 was 10 years old. Fifty-five percent of the markets were six years old or less; among them were two markets that were just getting established in 2011. The remaining 45 percent of markets had been in operation for seven to 35 years; four of these markets were 20 years old or older.

Ninety-five percent of the markets in the study were summer markets, with four of the summer markets also operating in the winter months. Typically, farmers markets in the two counties averaged operating for 6.2 months of the year.

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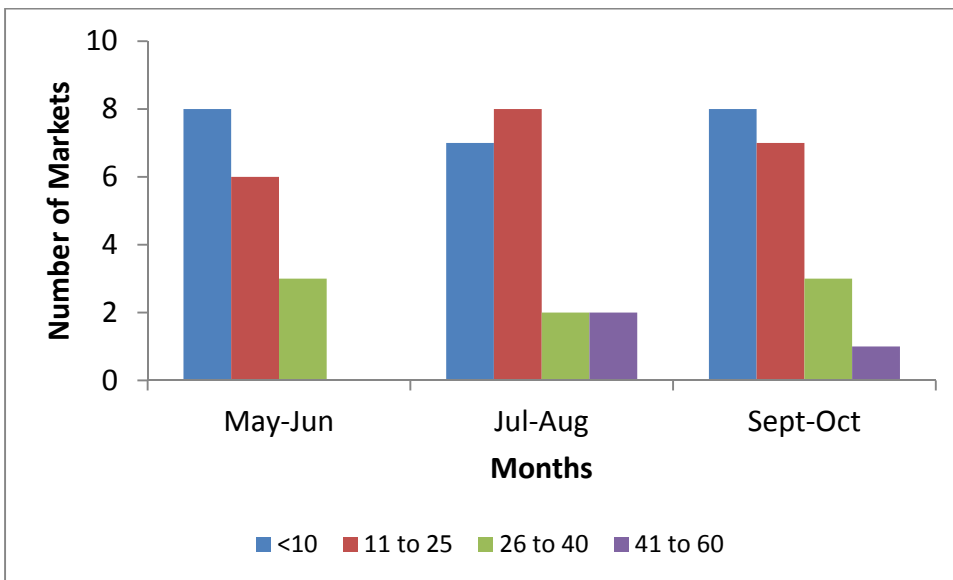
<sup>1</sup> The complete results of the study are presented in McKenzie, Jewel E. *Farmers Markets in Rockingham and Strafford Counties New Hampshire: An Analysis of Market Manager and Consumer Trends, Preferences, and Characteristics*. Directed Research, University of New Hampshire, 2012.



## VENDORS

For May and June 2011, eight markets reported having fewer than 10 vendors, six markets had 11 to 25, and three markets had 26 to 40 vendors. The average number of vendors increased in July and August; the number of markets with fewer than 10 vendors fell to seven, and the number of markets with 11 to 25 vendors rose to eight. Two markets had between 26 and 40 vendors, and another two markets had more than 40. The average number of vendors decreased slightly in the September-October period; the number of markets with 11 to 25 and more than 40 vendors fell, and the number of markets with fewer than 10 and between 26 and 40 vendors rose (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Average Number of Vendors Over the 2011 Season in Farmers Markets in Rockingham and Strafford Counties, New Hampshire**



Nearly 85 percent of vendors in 19 markets traveled 50 miles or less to the market; 42 percent of vendors traveled between 11 to 30 miles, and approximately 26 percent traveled 31 to 50 miles to the market. Two markets had vendors who traveled between 51 to 100 miles, and one market reported vendors traveling more than 100 miles.



Forty percent of the 20 markets reported that vendor numbers grew between 2005 and 2010, while 15 percent reported a decline (Table 1). Vendor numbers stayed the same over that time period for the remaining 45 percent of the markets.



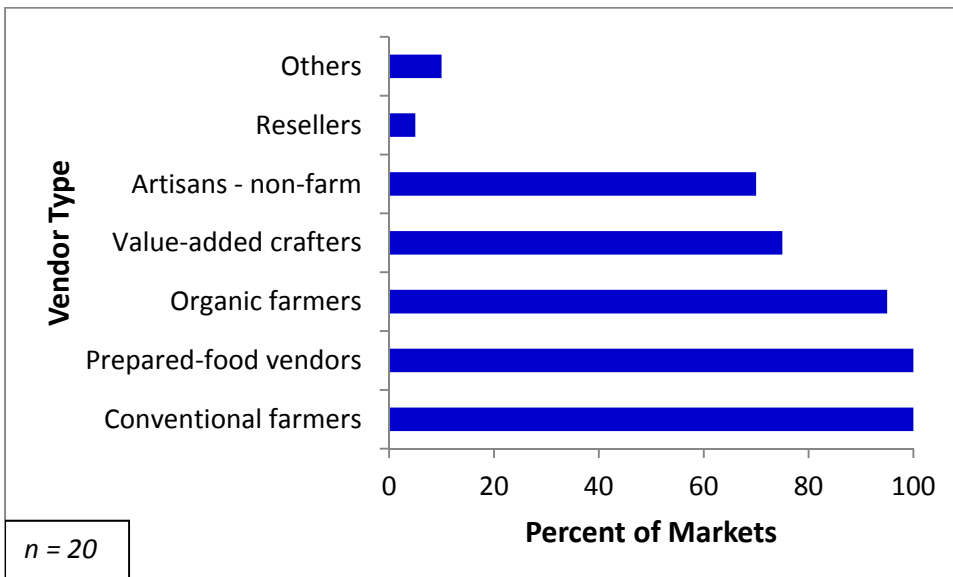
**Table 1: Trend in Market-Vendor Participation in Farmers Markets in Rockingham and Strafford Counties, 2005-2011**

<i>Trend</i>	<i>Percent of Markets</i>
Growth	40
Decline	15
The same	45

*n* = 20

The type of vendor allowed at the markets varied. In 2011, all of the 20 markets that participated in the study had farmers selling conventional farm products and vendors selling prepared food. Organic farmers were found at 95 percent of the markets; crafters with value-added items derived from agricultural products (e.g., goat milk soap or yarn spun from the farmers’ sheep) were at 75 percent; and artisans selling non-farm products were regularly allowed at 70 percent of the markets (Figure 2). Eighty-five percent of the markets required that participating vendors sell only items that they produced, grew, or made.

**Figure 2: Types of Vendors in Farmers Markets in Rockingham and Strafford Counties, New Hampshire, 2011**

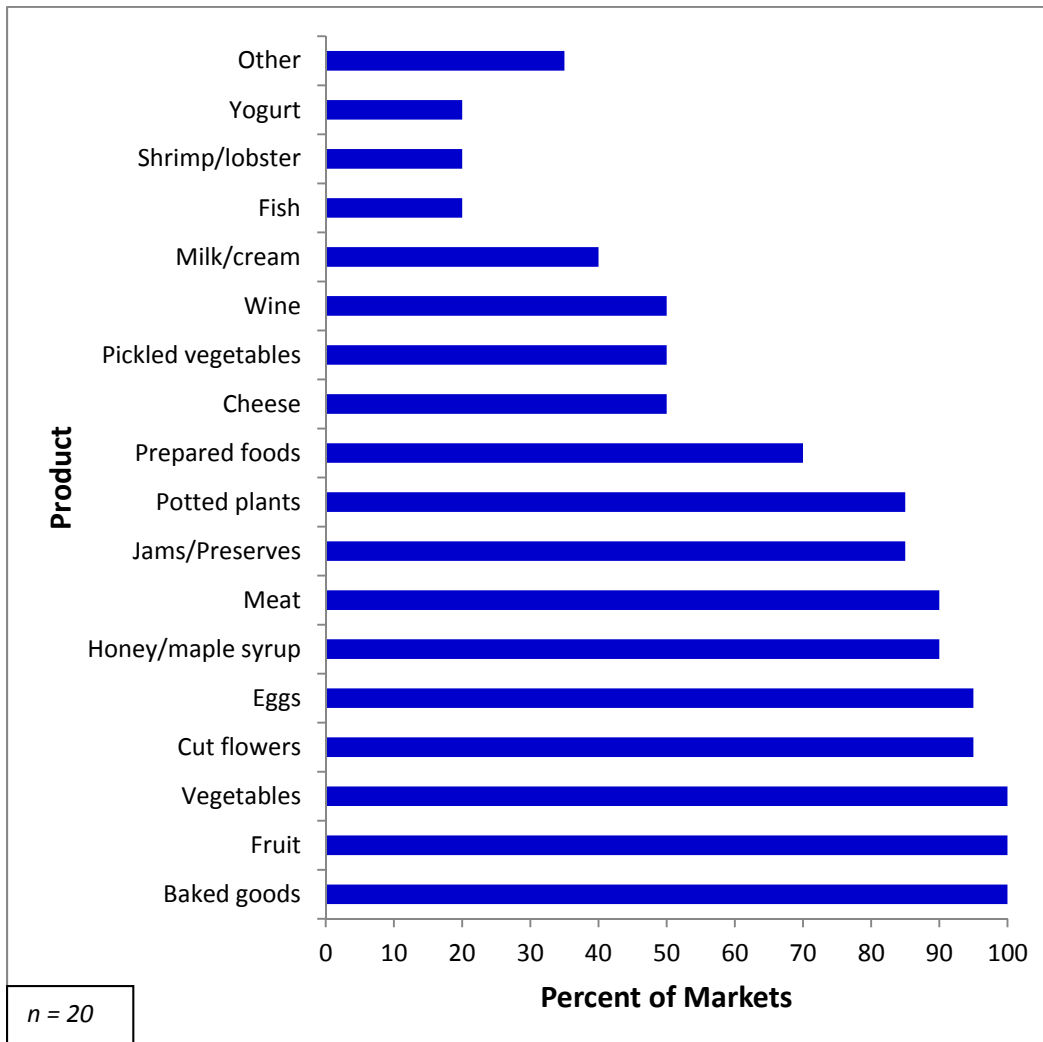




## PRODUCTS

The variety of products offered by the farmers markets in 2011 is shown in Figure 3. All of the 20 markets offered fresh fruit, vegetables, and baked goods; 19 sold eggs and cut flowers; 18 offered meat, honey, and maple syrup products, and 17 sold jams, jellies and preserves, and potted plants. The items specified under the “other” category included ice cream, fudge, mead, soy products, raw milk, nuts, beverages, New Hampshire made products, alpaca fiber, and yarn, among others.

**Figure 3: Products Sold in Farmers Markets in Rockingham and Strafford Counties, New Hampshire, 2011**



## AMENITIES

The managers were asked to identify all of the amenities their market offered to customers and vendors. All of the 20 markets provided free parking (Table 2). The next most common amenities made available were signage (95 percent), drive-by visibility (90 percent), and easy access for vendors (90 percent). Most of the markets used the Internet to connect with their customers; 80 percent (16 markets) provided their customers with the opportunity to contact the market via e-mail, and 75 percent were accessible through social media. Seventy percent of the markets featured an information booth. Thirteen markets provided entertainment, and the same number of markets held special events in 2011. Also, 13 markets provided restrooms. Less than half of the markets provided electricity or water for their vendors.



**Table 2: Amenities Available at Farmers Markets in Strafford and Rockingham Counties, New Hampshire, 2011**

<i>Amenity</i>	<i>Percent of Markets</i>
Free parking	100
Signage	95
Drive-by visibility	90
Easy access for vendors	90
E-mail contact	80
Social media	75
Access through public transportation	75
Information booth	70
Entertainment	65
Restrooms	65
Special events	65
Electricity	45
Water for vendors	40

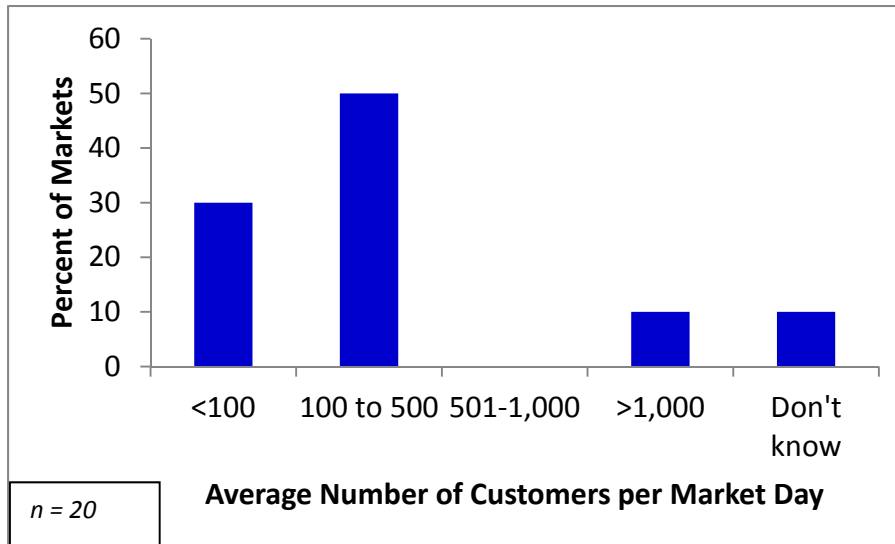
*n* =20

## CUSTOMERS PER MARKET DAY

In the 2011 season, 80 percent of the 20 markets had an average of 500 or fewer customers per market day (Figure 4). Of those markets, 10 saw 100 to 500 customers and six had fewer than 100 customers per market day. Two markets reported having on average more than 1,000 customers per market day; one was a summer market, the other a winter market.



**Figure 4: Average Number of Customers per Market Day in Farmers Markets in Rockingham and Strafford Counties, New Hampshire, 2011**

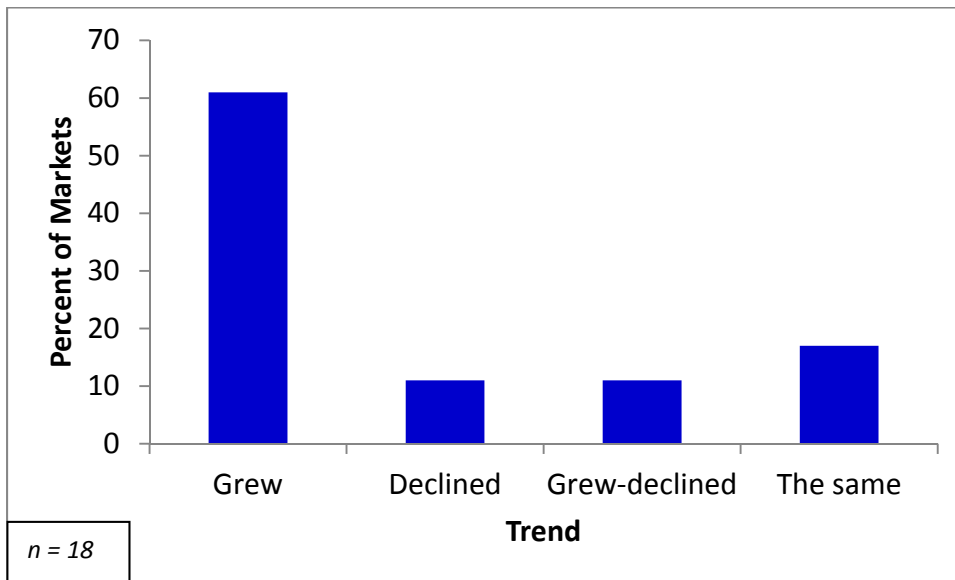




## SALES TREND

Figure 5 indicates that annual sales between 2005 and 2010 grew for 11 of 18 markets (61 percent) and declined for two markets. For that time period, two markets experienced growth in sales followed by a decline and three markets had about the same annual sales.

**Figure 5: Trend in Annual Sales between 2005 and 2010 for Farmers Markets in Rockingham and Strafford Counties, New Hampshire**



## REVENUE SOURCES

Seventeen (85 percent) of the markets relied on stall fees as the primary source of revenue and operating budget in 2011. Twelve markets provided information on stall fees; four markets did not charge stall fees at all, and the other eight markets collected fees that ranged from \$654 to \$18,000. The average stall fee in 2011 for these eight markets was \$3,671. For 75 percent of the 20 markets, their operating income (excluding grants) was enough to cover the operating expenses for the year.

Some markets had other sources of revenue aside from stall fees (Table 3). Other sources included vendor-association membership fees, promotional or fundraising events, sponsorships, and cash donations. Five markets provided information on income from vendor-association membership fees for 2011; for four of these markets, the fees ranged from \$500 to \$1,000. The fees collected by the other market exceeded \$5,000.

**Table 3: Revenue Sources (other than stall fees) for Farmers Markets in Rockingham and Strafford Counties, New Hampshire, 2011**

<i>Source</i>	<i>Number of Markets</i>
Vendor-association memberships	5
Donations (cash)	2
Promotional/fundraising events	2
Sponsorships	2
Donations (in-kind)	1
Grants	1



## MARKET EXPENSES

Eighty percent of the markets reported market expenses below \$5,000 for the 2011 season. One market's expenses were between \$5,000 and \$10,000, another market's expenses were in the \$15,001 - \$20,000 range, and two markets had expenses between \$25,001 and \$30,000.

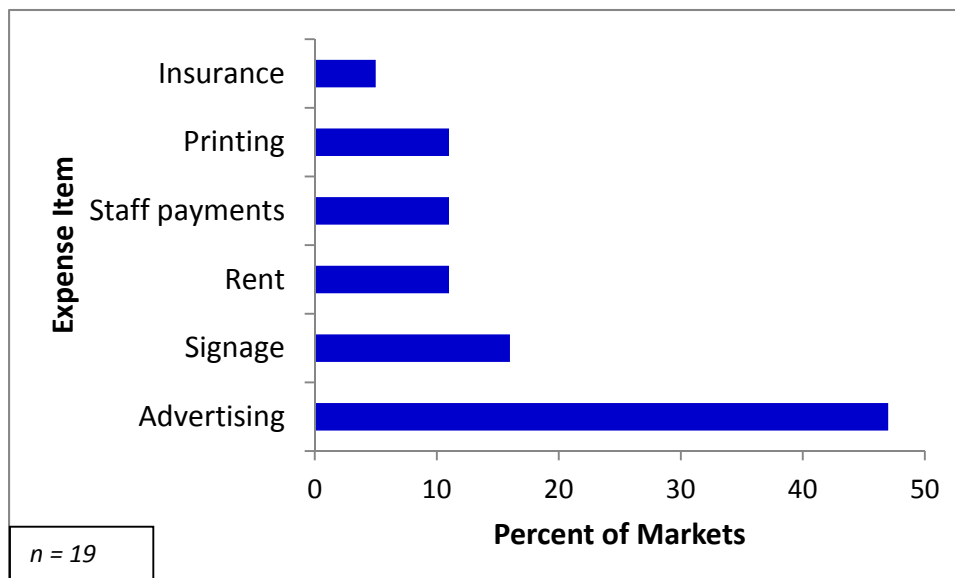
Market managers were asked to indicate the top three expense items for their markets. The items that appeared most frequently on the top-three lists were advertising, signage, insurance, and printing (Table 4). The most frequently cited top expense item was advertising. The other items cited by markets as most important were signage, printing, rent, and staff payments (Figure 6).

**Table 4: Most Frequently-Cited Expense Items for Farmers Markets in Rockingham and Strafford Counties, New Hampshire, 2011**

<i>Expense Item</i>	<i>Percent of Markets</i>
Advertising	75
Signage	65
Insurance	35
Printing	35

*n* = 19

**Figure 6: Expense Items Cited as Most Important for Farmers Markets in Rockingham and Strafford Counties, New Hampshire, 2011**



## TYPES OF ADVERTISING AND PROMOTION

As indicated in Table 5, the farmers markets in the study used a variety of media for advertising and promotion to consumers. Posters and flyers were the most widely used type of advertising and promotion, followed by press releases. Seventeen markets had taken advantage of the Internet and advertised through their own website and through social media such as Facebook. Sixteen markets availed themselves of printed media to communicate with potential buyers.

**Table 5: Types of Advertising and Promotion Used by Farmers Markets in Rockingham and Strafford Counties, New Hampshire, 2011**

<i>Type of Advertising and Promotion</i>	<i>Number of Markets</i>
Posters and flyers	19
Press releases	18
Internet/website	17
Social media (e.g., Facebook)	17
Printed media	16
Church/community spaces	10
Community groups/partners	9



Based on market managers' evaluation, it appears that the most effective types of advertising and promotion were those that use social media and websites (Table 6). Fourteen market managers indicated that both of those methods were either very effective or somewhat effective. Posters and flyers and printed media were judged to be somewhat effective by 10 and nine market managers, respectively; the same number of managers (three) considered both types as very effective.



**Table 6: Perceived Effectiveness of the Types of Advertising and Promotion Used by Farmers Markets in Rockingham and Strafford Counties, New Hampshire, 2011**

<i>Type of Advertising and Promotion</i>	<i>Effectiveness</i>			
	<i>Very</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Not</i>	<i>Don't Know</i>
	<u>Number of Markets</u>			
Social media (e.g., Facebook)	8	6	0	2
Internet/website	7	7	0	2
Press releases	5	6	1	1
Posters and flyers	3	10	0	3
Printed media	3	9	0	3
Community groups/partners	3	5	0	1
Church/community spaces	1	5	1	1

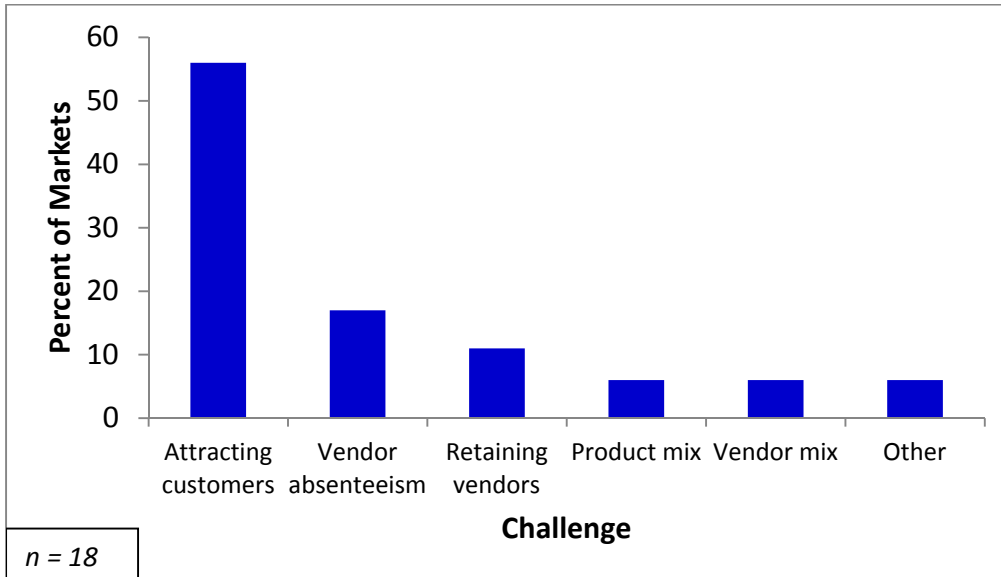
**SURVEYS OF FARMERS MARKET CONSUMERS**

Market managers were asked if their market conducts periodic surveys of their customers. Thirteen of 19 markets (68 percent) do not.

## OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES

As shown in Figure 7, the most important operational challenge for 56 percent of 18 markets was attracting customers. The other challenges that were rated most important by market managers were vendor absenteeism, vendor retention, and improving product mix.

**Figure 7: Most Important Operational Challenges Faced by Farmers Markets in Rockingham and Strafford Counties, New Hampshire, 2011**

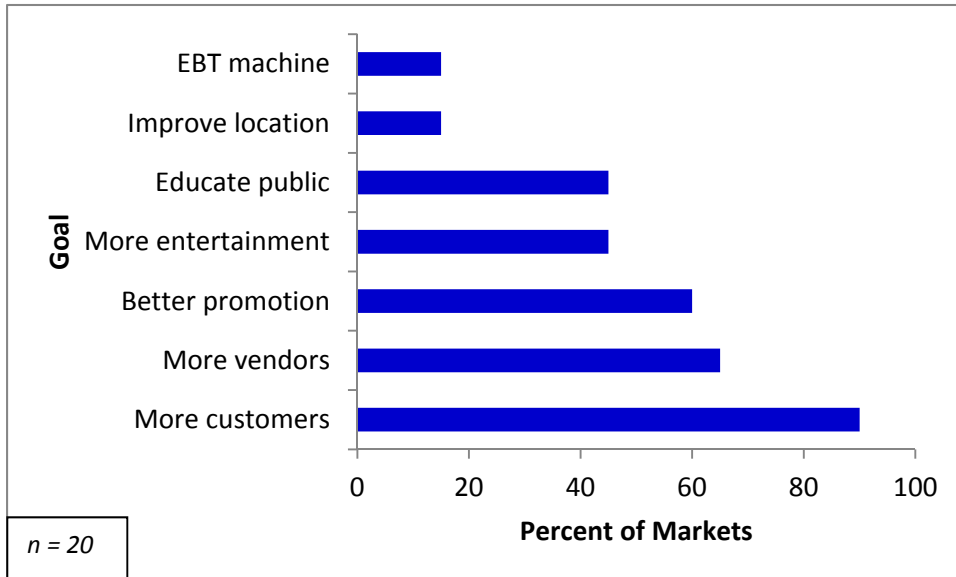




## MARKET GOALS

Ninety-percent of the 20 market managers surveyed want their market to attract more customers in the next three years (Figure 8). Close to two-thirds of the markets have set their sights on having more vendors, and 60 percent hope to conduct better promotional activities.

**Figure 8: Goals for the Next Three Years of Managers of Farmers Markets in Rockingham and Strafford Counties, New Hampshire**



## CONCLUSION

The farmers markets in Rockingham and Strafford Counties, New Hampshire, were diverse and had many similarities and differences. They varied in size measured by the number of vendors and average number of customers per market day. There were also differences in the variety of products offered for sale in the markets; fruits, vegetables, and baked goods were the only items sold in all markets. Aside from free parking for customers, which was available at all the markets, the amenities provided by the markets also differed.

Most of the market managers indicated attracting more customers as a major goal; it was also identified by a majority of the managers as their most important operational challenge. The fact that most of the markets had advertising as their biggest expense item provides evidence of the desire to expand demand.

There are two ways of increasing the number of farmers market customers: one is attracting shoppers who have never been to the market before; another is to encourage existing customers to shop more frequently at the markets. It seems that the market managers were aware that communicating with potential and current customers is essential to increasing sales at the markets. They used a variety of methods to provide information to the public. It is particularly notable that most markets had a presence on the Internet, either through their own website or social media pages. This indicates that the markets were cognizant of how most people today obtain information.

To increase the number of repeat customers, the markets should make sure that visitors or patrons find shopping at farmers markets to be a satisfying experience. While markets should provide the products and activities that the shoppers are looking for, it appears that most of the markets were not aware of their customers' individual needs and preferences as indicated by the fact that only about one-third of the markets in the study conducted surveys of their customers. Whether through surveys or comment boxes, soliciting feedback from first-time and repeat customers is a valuable step for gaining knowledge on what customers need and want with regard to various aspects of the farmers markets. Considering the increasing number of farmers markets in the Seacoast region and across the nation, providing the products, activities, and experiences preferred by their customers could help each farmers market expand its sales and retain its customer base.

## RELATED RESEARCH

The UNH Department of Natural Resources & the Environment and UNH Cooperative Extension also conducted a survey of customers of the farmers markets in Rockingham and Strafford Counties in 2012. Selected results of that study are presented in the publication *Farmers Market Consumers in Rockingham and Strafford Counties, New Hampshire*.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



### FARMERS MARKETS

Atkinson Farmers Market  
Barrington Farmers Market  
Deerfield Farmers Market  
Derry Community Farmers Market  
Dover Farmers Market  
Durham Farmers Market  
Epping Farmers Market  
Exeter Farmers Market  
Farmington Farmers Market  
Hampton Farmers Market  
Hampton Falls Farmers Market  
Lee Farmers Market  
New Durham Farmers Market  
Newmarket Farmers Market  
Northwood Farmers Market  
Nottingham Farmers Market  
Plaistow Farmers Market  
Portsmouth Farmers Market  
Raymond Farmers Market  
Rochester Downtown Farmers Market  
Rochester Four Corners Farmers Market  
Rye Farmers Market  
Salem NH Farmers Market  
Wentworth Greenhouses Farmers Market

### AGENCIES AND ASSOCIATIONS

NH Department of Agriculture, Markets & Food  
NH Farmers Market Association  
Seacoast Eat Local  
Seacoast Growers Association

### THE RESEARCH STUDY WAS SUPPORTED BY:

College of Life Sciences and Agriculture, University of New Hampshire  
University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension, Rockingham County