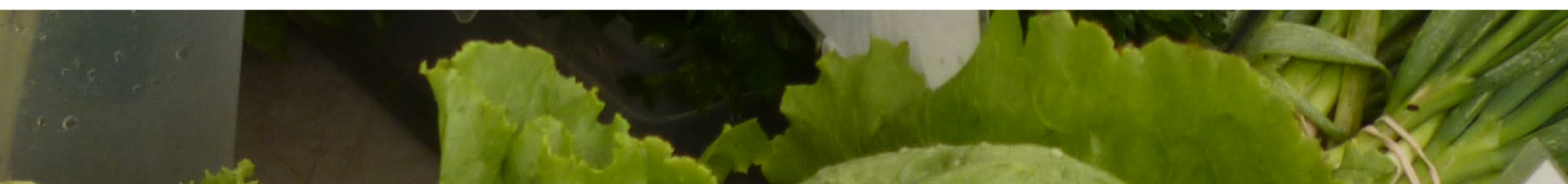




**Farmers Markets as a Strategy to
Improve Access to Healthy Food for
Low-Income Families
and Communities**



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Sweet
Farm by cco

Introduction

Entering a farmers market is a breath of fresh air, devoid of the fluorescent buzz and stale smells of your average big-box grocery store. Aesthetics aside, farmers markets play an important role in the fabric of a community. Historically the center-pieces of urban planning, markets provide a space to purchase fresh, affordable products that reflect the diversity of a community and region. Furthermore, the very nature of the buying and selling process creates a level of socialization non-existent at a regular supermarket, transforming farmers markets from just another place to buy food to an engine for community life.

The expansive growth of markets nationwide reflects the well-documented benefits of market shopping. Since 2000, the number of markets across the United States has increased by 150%, standing at over 7,000 in 2011. For policy makers and community advocates interested in urban food access, markets represent an important strategy in the efforts to bring affordable, healthy food options into low-income communities. However, knowledge gaps remain within the food access community about what characteristics and strategies best attract low-income shoppers to markets. Accepting food assistance programs like the Special Supplemental Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), the Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is one strategy that has been widely used by market planners to attract low-income customers.

In 2009, Project for Public Spaces (PPS), with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and in partnership with Columbia University, undertook a study to examine what market characteristics successfully attract low-income shoppers. In addition, PPS wanted to understand any obstacles which may prevent low income individuals from shopping at a farmers market when one existed nearby.

Three target questions were devised for this study:

1. **What strategies are most effective in developing financially sustainable farmers markets in low-to-moderate-income communities across a range of settings?**
2. **What market characteristics are most effective in attracting low-income and minority community shoppers to shop at farmers markets?**
3. **How do children-/youth-oriented farmers market programming affect orientation to healthy eating?**

To answer these questions, PPS examined eight markets throughout the United States that served low-to-middle income communities with higher than average ethnic and minority compositions. Each market had unique attributes that identified them for selection. In addition, each market was a previous recipient of a PPS grant, funded by the Kellogg Foundation, which offered technical assistance between the years 2006-2008 in addition to funding.

THE EIGHT FOCAL FARMERS MARKETS

East New York Farms! (ENYF!), Brooklyn, NY

—ENYF! was founded in 1998 with support from a coalition of local and city-wide organizations and neighborhood residents. Recognizing the existing abundance of kitchen garden plots in East New York, ENYF! began with the mission of strengthening community, nurturing leadership and organizing local youth and adults to advocate for food justice issues and participate in sustainable urban agriculture. ENYF! was the community's response to urban decline and the need for more safe green spaces. Since its inception, ENYF! established and runs two farmers markets, two urban farms, and a community youth internship program. The neighborhood of East New York has a sizeable immigrant population and a poverty rate of 36.2%. ENYF! was selected for inclusion in this study because a high proportion of its market customers rely on government nutritional support programs. In addition, its markets are primarily supplied by local urban gardens and farms, a distinguishing feature from the other markets in the study.



Allen Street Farmers Market, Lansing, MI

Allen Street Farmers Market is a relatively small market that opened in 2005. The market serves a diverse, moderate income community with a 10% refugee population. The market's success is attributed to its strong programming and the market buzz created by an expansive network of volunteers. The volunteer buzz has allowed the market to increase sales and widen its customer base, in part, by improving its SNAP capabilities. Allen Street Farmers Market was included to highlight the challenges and successes of a small market in a diverse community.



The Lynn Farmers' Market, Lynn, MA- The Lynn Farmers Market has operated in Lynn's downtown area since 1997. Lynn is an ethnically diverse city that has struggled with industrial decline in recent years. With a poverty rate of 19.4%, improving access to SNAP capabilities at the market was a very important strategy for raising market revenues. In addition, both the market management and PPS diligently encouraged vendors to understand the food needs of their community and diversify their product mix to better meet these needs. The Lynn Farmers Market was chosen for this study because a high percentage of its revenues come from SNAP and WIC; the highest of any market included in this study.



Fondy Farmers Market, Milwaukee, WI - Fondy began on Milwaukee's Near North Side in 1970. Since the market's founding, the surrounding neighborhood experienced a drastic economic downturn that reflects Milwaukee's industrial decline. As such, 39.2% of the neighborhood's residents now live below the poverty line. Fondy continues to demonstrate a dedication to the community's economic development efforts week after week. Featuring over 30 vendors, local cooking demonstrations, and partnerships with local service agencies and community gardening projects, the market is a centerpiece of the neighborhood, creating a safe and inviting community space. In addition, the market is an important component in helping neighborhood residents gain access to healthy, affordable food options. Fondy was included in the study because of their success in adapting the market to meet the needs of a very poor community through market innovation.



The Midtown Farmers' Market, Minneapolis, MN-

Midtown began in 2003 and has since expanded to 80+ vendors and roughly 55,000 visitors a year. In 2006, the Midtown Market became the first farmers market in Minnesota to accept SNAP. The neighborhood surrounding the market is highly diverse both economically and ethnically. Furthermore, Midtown has positioned itself as a true community gathering place, hosting a number of community events and producing an e-newsletter. This market was included in this study to examine its successful outreach to low-income consumers.



The Mount Vernon Farmer's Market, Mount Vernon, WA-

The Mount Vernon Farmers Market opened in 1987 and has grown to approximately 65 farmers participating at one of two market locations. Mount Vernon, located about 60 miles north of Seattle, is a rapidly expanding suburban city in the midst of a demographic shift as large numbers of low-income Hispanic farm workers move into the area. Mount Vernon was included to demonstrate how a well-established market in a moderate-income area can adjust to attract and meet the needs of a new population demographic.



CitySeed, Inc., New Haven, CT – City Seed operates four farmers markets in New Haven, CT, an economically, racially and culturally diverse city. Over 23% of New Haven residents live below the poverty line, a stark contrast to the affluence associated with Yale University. Market research shows that a large percentage of CitySeed’s shoppers are affluent, with low levels of market use among lower income shoppers. This market was included to explore how an established market can change to attract and serve low-income residents.



Toledo Farmers’ Market, Toledo, OH –The Toledo Farmers Market is one of the country’s oldest farmers markets, operating for over 175 years. With more than 45 vendors located near downtown Toledo, this market attracts a large percentage of suburban shoppers who come into the city for the market. This market was included to study its ability to attract inner city low-income residents and downtown employees while retaining the suburban shoppers who traditionally support the market.



Methodology

Three different data tools were used to conduct this study. First, for the market selection process, existing PPS market records, known as market management spreadsheets, as well as U.S. Census information and InfoUSA business location data were reviewed to confirm the chosen markets' demographics. This data was important to ensure we maintained the focus of the study on markets that primarily served low-income, high minority communities. Market management spreadsheets provided data such as the total number of vendors and their ethnic composition, estimated gross market sales, sales from food subsidy coupons (FMNP and SNAP), the number of local partnerships and the annual number of shoppers.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of farmers market ZIP code area neighborhoods

City/State		% Below Poverty Level	% Black or African American	% Asian and Pacific Islander	% Hispanic or Latino	% Urban
Brooklyn	NY	36.20%	66.00%	1.10%	34.30%	100.00%
Lansing	MI	18.50%	13.80%	3.00%	9.80%	100.00%
Lynn	MA	19.40%	13.40%	7.10%	24.10%	100.00%
Milwaukee	WI	39.20%	94.60%	1.00%	0.80%	100.00%
Minneapolis	MN	18.40%	22.50%	5.00%	18.70%	100.00%
Mt Vernon	WA	14.60%	0.40%	2.90%	23.80%	77.60%
New Haven	CT	23.40%	44.90%	6.60%	11.50%	100.00%
Toledo	OH	43.10%	41.40%	0.80%	11.40%	100.00%
Mean: 8 focal markets		26.60%	37.13%	3.44%	16.80%	97.20%
National average		12.40%	12.20%	3.70%	12.50%	79.00%

The second tool employed was a shopper survey of both market shoppers and non-market shoppers. Respondents were classified on the basis of whether they had completed the survey at one of the eight case study farmers markets or at an area supermarket. This was the first time non-market shopper data was collected, enabling researchers to gain critical insight into the perceived barriers for not shopping at a farmers market according to non-market shoppers. The third tool, used specifically for addressing the third question on youth, was small focus groups with market youth internship programs (Lynn, MA and ENYF!).

While every effort was made by both PPS and Columbia University to collect and analyze data as systematically and accurately as possible, our conclusions are constrained by our small sample size. The project's goal was to survey 125 subjects per site: 50 from the farmers market and 75 from off-site food retail outlets. However, a variety of obstacles, including inclement weather and logistical issues, prevented the surveyors from always reaching the survey target goal. The following numbers of surveys were conducted by site:

- New Haven: 125 subjects
- Brooklyn: 122 subjects
- Milwaukee: 117 subjects
- Lansing: 110 subjects
- Toledo: 110 subjects
- Minneapolis: 97 subjects
- Mt Vernon: 96 subjects
- Lynn: 96 subjects

Question #1 examines the most effective strategies for developing financially sustainable farmers markets in low-to-moderate income communities across a range of settings. This question was addressed through a review of locally-generated data such as the market management spreadsheets from the eight focal markets, combined with analysis of the shopper/resident survey data, and economic and demographic data used for market context.

Question #2 focuses on the market characteristics most effective at attracting and meeting the needs of low-income and minority shoppers, and was addressed through analysis of the shopper/non-shopper survey data.

Question #3 examines the impact of youth-oriented farmers market programming on healthy eating, the youth's view of the market and local food system, and the youth's own personal development. All areas in question #3 were explored through small focus groups.

Results

OVERALL OBSERVATIONS

The data analysis of the market management spreadsheets and on-site/off-site surveys resulted in two emerging trends:

1. Price is not a barrier

Among our survey sample almost 60% of farmers market shoppers in low-income neighborhoods believed their market had better prices than the grocery store. And, among those who did not shop at farmers markets, only 17% cited price as a barrier to shopping at their local farmers market.

Among low-income farmers market shoppers, an interesting trend emerged in regards to how they used the markets. According to our survey sample, low-income market shoppers used markets more intensively than medium to high-income market shoppers. Intense shoppers were defined as buying more than half of their total consumed produce at the market when they shopped. This trend has important implications for market organizers struggling to develop a financially sustainable shopping base for their markets.

2. Information is key

Farmers markets, unlike a grocery store, typically lack permanent structures and are therefore more ephemeral by nature; often operating only seasonally, or once or twice a week with limited hours. Among our sample size, the top three consistent reasons which non-market shoppers gave for not shopping at markets were:

- a. They were unaware of open market hours - reported by 53% of respondents
- b. They were unaware of the market location - reported by 48% of respondents
- c. They were unable to complete all of their shopping at the farmers market

Among farmers market shoppers in our study sample, 48% learned about the market by word of mouth, and 24% by walking or driving by the market. Effective outreach and advertising by markets could go a long way to overcome the knowledge gaps that seem to surround market times and location.

Furthermore, we found that low-income shoppers who receive WIC and SNAP were not using their benefits at the farmers markets sampled. For example, at Midtown Market in Minneapolis, 10 respondents reported participating in SNAP, while only two respondents reported using SNAP to purchase items at the farmers market. This trend continued throughout all eight of our sample markets. Unfortunately, a definitive conclusion as to why respondents were not using SNAP at these markets was not possible based on the study's survey data alone.

Question 1: What strategies are most effective in developing financially sustainable markets in low-to moderate income communities across a range of settings?

To answer the first study question management spreadsheets collected from the eight focal markets were analyzed, which included data from the 2006(7)-2009 market seasons. From this analysis, three financial models were identified for categorizing markets, enabling PPS to create a more focused strategy for increasing the financial sustainability of farmers markets. The management categories are 1) "mission driven," 2) "traditional" and 3) "social enterprise."

"Traditional" – these markets' revenue streams are primarily funded through vendor fees, with a smaller percentage of the market's total expenses being dedicated to labor. In general, such markets were financially self-sustaining (i.e., Toledo, Mt. Vernon and Minneapolis).

“Mission-driven” – these markets’ revenue streams were primarily funded through outside private and public funding. These markets spent a large percentage of their expenses on labor costs, specifically creating partnerships and establishing relationships with funders. The mission of the market’s founding organization is typically reflected in the market’s goals and the market is often founded and focused around the needs of low-income residents (i.e. East New York, Lynn, Lansing, Milwaukee and New Haven).

“Social enterprise” - these markets’ revenue streams were funded through both stall fees and outside funding and their expenses were relatively evenly split between labor costs and other operating needs. These markets have a strong business foundation (perhaps they started out as a “traditional” market relying solely on stall fees), but they also have a strong community benefit focus. (Since the concept of a “social enterprise” model is still evolving, we did not assign any of our study markets to this management category, instead distributing all eight local markets between the “traditional” and “mission-driven” market models).

A market’s financial model is determined by its mission, goals, location, size and customer base. Both the “traditional” and “mission driven” models can be financially sound. However, the “social enterprise” model is somewhat of a hybrid between the two of them, conveying both a way for a market to be financially stable while also reaching a new population through increased programming.

No matter what model a market is categorized, a market manager should consider the following factors when thinking about long-term financial stability:

“Traditional” markets should focus on broadening their community impact which, in turn, will increase vendor sales. Such broadened community impact can be accomplished by:

- Expanding partnerships – becoming a player in key local issues like public health and food access.
- Outreach to low-income shoppers by providing services such as free health screenings and clinics and SNAP eligibility screenings at the market.
- Expanding fundraising capacity and applying for grant support.

“Mission driven” markets need to achieve more financial sustainability by:

Market operations:

- Charging percentage-based rents to vendors. Rent is a share of a market’s operating costs. Farmers are making money due to the market’s ability to attract customers. Without the market’s success in attracting these customers, the farmer would otherwise not have access to this group of shoppers.
- Maintaining effective fundraising campaigns and an experienced development team.
- Sharing operating costs and looking for ways to reduce operating expenses (sharing spaces, free rent, volunteers etc).

Vendors:

- Diversifying/ increasing the quality of products so as to attract higher paying customers.
- Increasing SNAP and other food assistance program sales as a percent of total income.

Paying attention to vendor’s economic sustainability (i.e., vendors need to make enough money) is critically important for market success. Furthermore, a strong customer base is essential for a market to survive and thrive. For “mission driven” markets, finding a way to put money back into the pockets of customers so they can buy products is important for attracting this customer base. This can be done by accepting SNAP and FMNP, for example.



Question 2: What market characteristics are most effective in attracting low-income and minority community shoppers to farmers markets?

Our second study question examined what market characteristics are most effective in attracting low-income and minority community shoppers to farmers markets. General observa-

tions from the data analysis indicate that markets located in minority communities are doing an effective job of attracting minority shoppers. However, according to our sample, the rate of low income market shoppers who received food assistance (SNAP, WIC, or other) and used their benefits as payment at the market were lower than expected. Survey data revealed that misperceptions existed among non-market shoppers as to whether or not farmers markets accepted SNAP/ WIC as methods of payment.

Market shoppers – the top four reasons cited by respondents surveyed at the market to why they shop at the farmers market were:

- Good prices (more than 60% of farmers market shoppers in poor neighborhoods believed their farmers market offered better prices than the grocery store)
- High quality of the products/produce
- Convenience
- Increased level of socialization

Non-market shoppers – among non-market shoppers, the top three reasons cited for why they believed others did not shop at a farmers market included:

- The importance of completing all of their shopping at one location, something they felt they were unable to do at the farmers market
- Unaware of the location of the farmers market
- Unaware of the day/ time of the farmers market

Question 3: How does children/youth-oriented farmers market programming affect orientation to healthy eating?

The third question was addressed by conducting focus groups with participants of youth programs operated at East New York Farms! (ENYF!) and The Food Project in Lynn, MA. PPS was interested in exploring the impact of youth programs on eating habits and the perception of the market position in the community. Focus group questions explored the process of youth involvement with the market's program, how the youths' involvement with the program impacted their friends' and family's engagement with their local market and the impact on eating habits and the youths' knowledge of healthy food choices.

One of the most important lessons learned by PPS from the focus groups was that the end goal of both youth programs was to produce excellent citizens, not necessarily urban farmers. While eating well, advocating for food justice, and increasing the youths' knowledge of the local food production process were all taught, it was the emphasis on leadership, personal development, and responsibility that ultimately made the programs successful and left the strongest impact on the youth surveyed. Food and markets were the methods for helping youth develop these tools and self-confidence.

ENYF! and the Food Project's youth engagement process delivered highly beneficial results. As a result of their involvement in the programs, youth who participated in the focus group reported an increased knowledge about healthy food choices; improved self-confidence and a strong, supportive social environment. As enumerated by an ENYF! youth, "It's like a second home, my hangout spot". The focus groups also revealed that the social component of market-

based youth groups is crucial to the program's success. Both ENYF! and the Food Project built a community of peers, learning and working together to improve their local food system. This framework created a nurturing and comfortable space to grow and develop as leaders. One young man directly cited his involvement with the youth program as the primary way he avoided falling into drugs and a gang.



Youth in the focus groups confirmed that the markets are a crucial element in maintaining the vitality of their respective communities. The market served as both a source for fresh and affordable produce as well as a place for socialization. Furthermore, youth reported that their involvement with the youth programs had implications for their family and community. Gaining easy access to fresh fruits and vegetables through their work, youth reported bringing the produce home as a means to help feed their families and friends. Youth that came from first or second generation immigrant families reported an increased appreciation for their mother's cooking and the cuisines of their culture. In

general, youth spoke very highly of their involvement with both programs. The only criticism received was aimed at unpleasant and undesirable working conditions, such as hot days during the summer, or the unpredictability of traveling to and from the worksite. These did not reflect the quality of the program, but rather external influences outside of direct programmatic control.

Lessons learned for market planners and organizers:

A number of important things were learned from the focus groups that are applicable to other youth, market-based programs:

- 1. It is not just about the farm or market -** youth programs work because they focus on both social justice and self-esteem.
- 2. Strong commitment from the youth is key –** this can be done in a variety of ways: engaging workshops, a diversity of activities, and a strong level of socialization go a long way to successfully ensuring active participation on behalf of the youth.
- 3. Payment is important –** Compensating the youth created a formalized incentive for active participation, as well as a reward that demonstrated that their time and energy was valued. Youth said the payment helped them feel as though the programs had invested in them, which increased their own commitment to the success of the program.
- 4. Kids are kids –** while the focus group participants all stated an increased knowledge of healthy food choices, and even reported incorporating this knowledge into their daily eating habits, the fact remains that kids are kids, and still enjoy sweets and fries and other “sometimes” foods. An important benchmark for

youth-oriented market programs is not the strict elimination of all sweets and fatty foods from the participants’ diets but rather helping youth develop the necessary knowledge to help them make better and healthier food choices over the course of their lifetime.

5. Growth takes time – a continued and dedicated investment on behalf of the program manager is an important part of establishing a successful youth market program. By establishing a positive reputation in the community, a program increases its reach and community interest. However, development of such reach and interest takes time. Patience and dedication is key.

EMERGING TRENDS

After analyzing the data collected, a number of questions for future study and research emerged:

1. What is the difference in the intensity of market use by low-income shoppers versus medium to high-income shoppers?

Market managers should pay special attention to who their most intense or high-use shoppers are. It is important to remember, though, that intense/high-use shoppers are not necessarily those who are spending the most money but rather the shopper that is purchasing the most as a percentage of their total food consumption (i.e. more than half of their produce/food was purchased at the market). For our given sample size and collected data, this shopper was typically low-income. A market’s most-intense use shopper will potentially vary market to market. By collecting this data, however, market organizers can focus on creating outreach materials, hours, locations, and programming attractive to

meet the needs of their “high-use” shopper. The question for future study and for markets to keep in mind is how to identify their most “intensive” shoppers. By identifying the demographic(s) that purchase a majority of their household food produce from the market, organizers can both tailor products to meet these shoppers’ food needs and cultural preferences, as well as offer services and outreach programs that attract this demographic. Furthermore, market organizers who identify their best and most intense shopper demographic can simultaneously identify who shops least at the market. Markets should be wary of spreading themselves too thin. Attempting to serve everyone all the time without the proper resources can ultimately come at the cost of underserving everyone. As a result, it is important for a manager to understand its shoppers and their needs and wants and focus on serving them.

2. Why do WIC/ SNAP recipients who use their benefits at supermarkets not use these same benefits at farmers markets?

Since farmers markets have reintroduced acceptance of SNAP, through the use of Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT), market managers have been working very hard to increase the number of SNAP participants at markets. Several markets across the country have even begun incentive programs to increase SNAP usage. However, as mentioned earlier, our study showed that even among market shoppers SNAP participants use their nutrition assistance benefits at a surprisingly low rate. Organized by market type (mission-driven and traditional) our survey sample reported that while 43% of respondents at mission-driven markets receive SNAP only 27% have ever paid with SNAP at the farmers market. The results are even more striking at traditional markets where only 9% of SNAP recipients have used the program at the farmers market even though 33%

of respondents report receiving SNAP. While this was not the focus of this study, it would be of value to discover why that is and what markets can do to increase SNAP usage.

Some possible explanations for the low rate of SNAP usage at markets may be that farmers market purchases, which are often seasonal, are tricky to include into a strictly-managed food budget. Another possibility is that if a market is using a token redemption system to accept food benefits, as many do, customers may feel it unnecessarily adds more time and effort to their purchase. Or it could simply be that shoppers just do not know the market accepts SNAP/WIC, as we saw in the non-shopper survey results. According to our survey sample, 26% of non-farmers market shoppers gave “farmers markets don’t take food stamps” as a reason for not shopping and 19% gave “farmers markets don’t take WIC coupons” as a reason for not shopping at farmers markets, even though all eight of our survey markets accept both SNAP (food stamps) and WIC. There may also be some measure of social stigma on both the part of the shoppers and the sellers since markets are dominated by cash and SNAP/WIC recipients have to use an EBT card to purchase items. Due to the somewhat confidential nature of WIC/SNAP benefits, further exploration of this issue may be best examined through focus groups. For markets and policy makers who are serious about engaging low-income customers, however, determining why their food benefits are not being used at markets remains a very important question to explore.

3. Are more supermarkets the answer to solving our food access issues?

Our survey sample, although small, showed that the density of or distance to supermarkets may not be a sensitive measure of food environment. Survey respondents, who had a higher density

of supermarkets, also had a poorer subjective evaluation of their supermarkets. Policy makers should keep this in mind when discussing “food deserts” and food access issues. To improve food access within low-income neighborhoods, the quality of produce and products in urban communities must be kept in mind. It’s not simply convincing corner stores and supermarkets to open in low-income communities but ensuring that the products offered are fresh and of the same high quality found in wealthier communities in addition to being economically affordable. Farmers markets, which feature fresh, local produce that increasingly can be purchased using SNAP and WIC, provide one important alternative to simply increasing the number of supermarkets.

Recommendations

Based on the data collected, focus groups, emerging trends, and our previous experience working with market operators, PPS puts forth the following recommendations for market managers, policy makers, and interested community leaders.

1. Location, location, location – A common reason cited by non-market shoppers for not using a farmers market was the need to complete their shopping at one location. While it is unlikely that farmers markets will be able to serve that one-stop shop purpose, or necessarily should aim to, positioning markets in locations that give the appearance of one-stop shopping may overcome this access barrier. Placing farmers markets near other important amenities for shoppers, such as banks, schools, or even supermarket parking lots of willing stores, may increase the access and use of the markets therefore increasing the potential for financially sustainable markets. In addition, the survey results showed that market shoppers cited walking or driving by the market as one of the top ways they first learned about the market. Therefore, market operators need to locate markets in visible, attractive spaces that receive a good amount of foot and car traffic.

Given our experience with the transformative power of successful Placemaking, we advocate that market operators who are serious about long term sustainability turn their market into a destination. The market should not only be a place to buy produce, it should incorporate programming that integrates the market into the fabric of the surrounding community. This can range from live performances during market hours, cooking demonstrations, health fairs, SNAP/ WIC sign-ups, or other engaging programming that will attract customers and help the market become a community destination for socializing and shopping alike.

2. Know your shoppers – One of the most interesting emerging trends from our data was the varying intensity in market use depending on the income of shoppers. What this tells us is that knowing your most frequent shopper, as well as the shopper demographic who purchases the highest percentage of their produce at the farmers market, is important for markets to achieve financial sustainability and develop a more stable consumer base. Knowing your shopper has implications for both the kind of marketing and the location of marketing that the market should produce. To identify this intense shopper we recommend market managers survey their market's customer base, with a focus on how frequently people shop at the market, how much they spend, and how much of their total food purchases come from the market. This survey could also be followed up with focus groups to gather even more information about their shoppers.

3. Markets targeting a low-income customer base must partner with organizations that share the market's goals – Partnering with neighborhood organizations helps facilitate better outreach efforts to the intense-use shopper, as previously identified. Furthermore, if the market could operate through an existing organization that shares its mission there is a potential cost sharing component in terms of office space, co-promotion and community recognition.

4. Farmers markets need to expand marketing and outreach efforts to reach consumers - We recognize that many market organizers are already well aware of the importance of successful marketing for the success of their farmers market. However, the data from this study re-affirms the need for constant marketing and outreach to local consumers

to educate them about the location, time, and acceptance of SNAP and WIC benefits. Furthermore, this finding strengthens the continued need for the USDA's Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP). Created through a 2002 Farm Bill amendment, this Federal program provides grants for a variety of market expansions including, expanding advertisement and market operations, consumer education and outreach, and helping to bring more local farm products into Federal nutrition programs.

Conclusion

In working to solve our country's food access issues, farmers markets offer a powerful alternative for effectively reaching low-income communities. The relatively low startup costs, for both farmers that sell at market and the market itself, allow fresh food options to enter communities where healthy, affordable food choices may not previously have existed. It's a misconception based on our given sample that farmers markets are too expensive for low-income shoppers. Food policy makers and advocates must continue to advocate for farmers markets as accessible, affordable food alternatives in low-income communities. The socialization and health benefits should not be ignored.

Despite all of the benefits of farmers markets, we recognize that challenges still exist for market organizers. It is critical that markets focus on outreach to local communities, especially educating consumers on the acceptance of SNAP and WIC benefits. Furthermore, market organizers must keep in mind the needs of their shoppers, including convenience of location, their intensity of use, and the financial constraints. Markets are excellent places to build and strengthen community, but organizers must be sensitive to the financial, time, and knowledge barriers that prevent low-income shoppers from fully utilizing their local farmers market. We believe these access barriers can be overcome through diligent planning and awareness of the needs of the community by the market organizers and community leaders alike. This study demonstrates that our target audience - low-income shoppers - is already, in some instances, intense users of markets, and market organizers should do what they can to reach more of them to increase their customer base and tap into a network of potential advocates of farmers markets.

In the end, a truly successful farmers market, through the lens of Placemaking, is more than just a venue to purchase excellent, fresh produce. A successful farmers market is a great community gathering place, economically sustainable, and has a broad impact on the community's development. It is a destination allowing the convergence of producers and buyers that fosters a sense of community and integrates all stakeholders, making the farmers market a truly central part of the community. PPS encourages all market organizers to engage the community that surrounds the farmers market and understand their food access wants and needs. Not only does this level of engagement have the potential to improve the food access needs of communities, it can ensure market sustainability long into the future.



A woman with her hair in a ponytail, wearing a blue and white striped polo shirt and dark jeans, is looking at the produce. She has a gold hoop earring and is holding a white plastic bag.

A woman with curly hair, wearing a white off-the-shoulder top and blue jeans, is reaching for a peach. She has a gold necklace, hoop earrings, and a bracelet. She is holding a small white card or receipt.

Crates of fresh produce including peaches, strawberries, and tomatoes are displayed on a table. In the background, other market stalls and people are visible under a white canopy.

A can of Mountain Dew is visible on the table.