



King County Farmers Markets

CARES Act Funding Impact Assessment - 2020

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Thank you to Patrice Barrentine, King County, and Melissa Balding, WSFMA, for their vital contributions to this project and report. And thank you to all the farmers market organizers in King County who persevered amid huge challenges to serve their mission as well as collecting and sharing this information with us to help tell their story.

Purpose

In August 2020, the King County Council allocated \$410,000 from the CARES Act to assist King County farmers markets comply with the Washington State Department of Health (“DOH”) and Public Health – Seattle & King County (“Public Health”) safe operating requirements to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other losses attributable to COVID-19 (“emergency relief funding”). The King County Ag Program contracted with the Washington State Farmers Market Association to help farmers markets comply with all funding requirements. This impact assessment was conducted in December 2020 to evaluate the procedural support provided to farmers markets, financial impacts on farmers market organizations, and concerns with regards to future operations in 2021.

Context

In 2020, there were 41 farmers markets that planned to operate in King County. However, in early March 2020, the severity of the new Coronavirus became clear. Three, year-round farmers markets were open at that time in the City of Seattle. Each began to add additional handwashing stations and take other preventative steps. On March 13, the Mayor’s office informed these three farmers markets that they would be suspended for at least a month. This was particularly challenging for farmers who rely on these farmers markets for outlets and cash flow during the seasonal bridge between winter and spring, when capital is especially tight.

On March 23, 2020 the Governor issued the “Stay Home, Stay Healthy” order, which included farmers markets as essential services that could continue to operate. On March 26, Public Health-Seattle-King County issued its first “Farmers Market COVID-19 Plan Requirements,” before the Washington State Department of Health issued its first guidance on April 12. Since early COVID-19 cases were concentrated in King County there was added attention along with oversight from the Seattle Mayor’s office. The cumulative result is that guidelines for farmers market operating in King County, and especially the City of Seattle, have been more restrictive than other jurisdictions in Washington.

As of the end of June, only 27 of the 41 King County farmers markets had been able to open (or re-open). Of those markets that were able to open, many opened later than planned, which resulted in significant financial loss to both markets and farmers. Of the remaining 15 markets, which had not opened at the time of this survey, 10 did not open in 2020; 8 of which are in the City of Seattle.

King County farmers markets are committed to safe operations – for their staff, volunteers, vendors, shoppers and other visitors. They are on the front line of essential services, ensuring neighborhoods are able to buy healthy foods from local farmers.

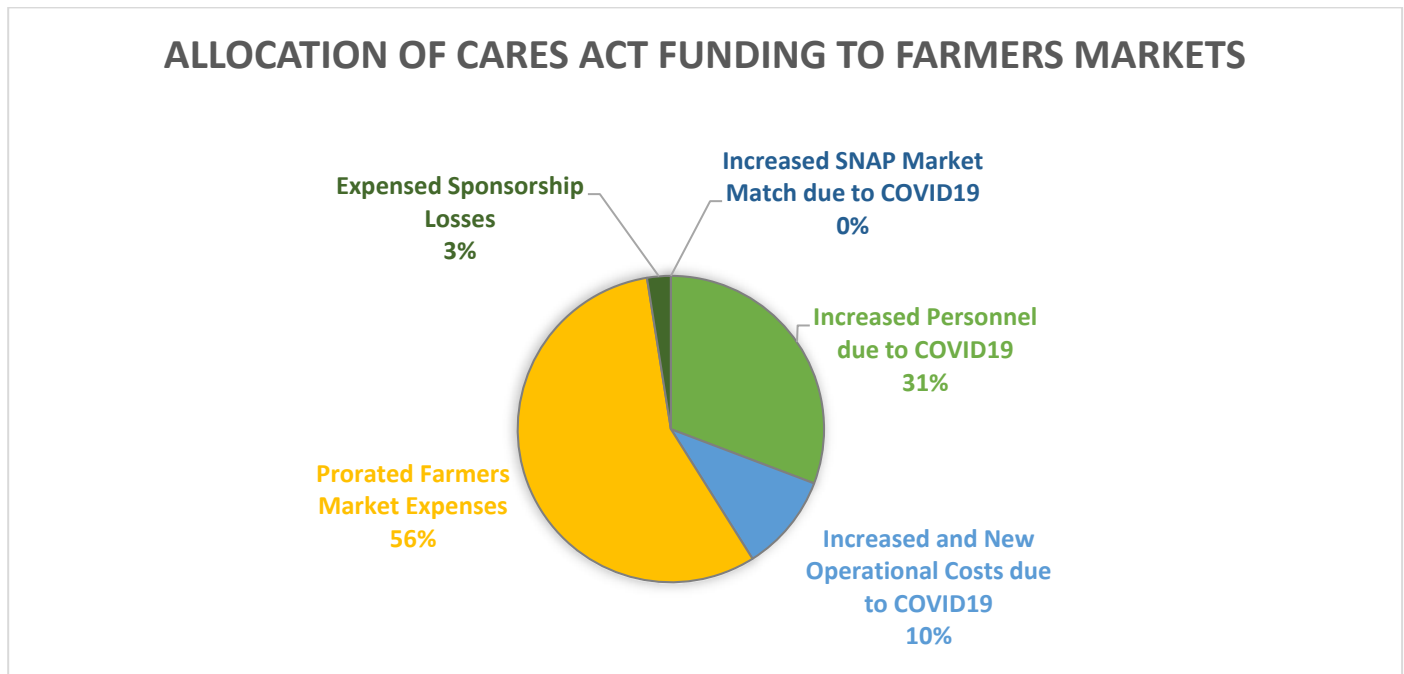
The combination of reduced farmers market revenue (due to fewer vendors and fewer market days), increased costs (especially staffing, equipment, and signage), and ongoing uncertainty has placed farmers market organizations under unprecedented stress. In addition, many farmers markets have lost sponsorships as businesses have reduced funding and sponsored activities are not allowed at markets. Markets also struggle to secure volunteers, as many of their previous volunteers are in high risk categories.

In addition to assessing the needs of farmers markets at this particular historical juncture, the survey also included a series of questions pertaining to personnel. There is no current industry information available about how farmers markets positions are structured and compensated. Setting personnel norms is an important step towards recognizing the professional work done and needed to sustain farmers markets.

Highlights

The assumption was that King County CARES Act funding would ensure that farmers markets received much needed revenue to compensate for COVID-19 losses. It is critical to ensure that King County farmers continue to have access to local markets and farmers markets remain open, operate safely and continue to provide the variety and quality of locally produced food that many King County residents depend upon.

King County disbursed a total of \$397,354.51 to 23 farmers market organizations that operated 27 farmers markets in 2020. The average reimbursement was for \$12,817.89 and the highest amount per farmers market was \$15,000 (which was the maximum allowed). Most funding (56%) was reimbursing farmers market expenses and increased personnel expenses (31%) due to COVID-19.



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¹ Pie chart is for \$399,507 requested by 26 farmers markets.

Among the King County Farmers Markets that opened in 2020, by far the most severe impact was the loss of vendors. This was first due restrictions limiting vendors to only essential services and then later due to lack of space in the market. Farmers market sites are not able to expand to allow for 10 feet between vendor booths. Each vendor lost represents lost sales opportunities for small businesses, decreased products for shoppers, decreased product mix for markets, and decreased revenue from vendor fees for farmers markets.

Lost Vendors at King County Farmers Market (n = 23)	Number of Vendors
Average # of vendors that the farmers market planned to have in 2020 season	993
Average # of vendors that farmers market was allowed to have in 2020	549
Total number of vendor spots lost in 2020	445
Average decrease in average number of vendors per farmers market	19
Highest decrease in average number of vendors per farmers market	37
Lowest decrease in average number of vendors per farmers market	1

Farmers markets also lost Market Days due to COVID-19 and, to a lesser extent, poor air quality due to wildfires. As with vendor decreases, the loss of Market Days represents lost business for all vendors as well as for the farmers market.

Lost Market Days at King County Farmers Market (n = 23)	Number of Market Days
Number of Market Days you planned to operate in 2020, pre-COVID-19	611
Number of Market Days you are or were actually able to open in 2020	523
Number of Market Days Lost	88
Average decrease number of Market Days lost in 2020	3.8
Highest decrease number of Market Days lost in 2020	15
Lowest decrease number of Market Days lost in 2020	0

Given the loss of vendors and market days, COVID-19 resulted in severe financial impacts to the market organizations.

- 86% of farmers market organizations projected that they will end 2020 with a deficit in their operating budget.
- Over half, 55%, of farmers market organizations projected that they will end 2020 with a deficit of **over 25%** in their operating budget.

Of the farmers market organizations that received CARES Act funding, 100% reported that it would have a positive impact on their finances, with 91% reporting that it would have a “very positive impact.”

With regards to the project process and support provided, all aspects were considered “very useful” by at least 74% of respondents. Technical assistance from WSFMA in completing application, Grant Agreement, reimbursement request, and documentation received the higher percent of “very useful” at 95%.

Among farmers markets organizers’ concerns about the 2021 season:

- 100% are concerned about the prepared food vendor restrictions.
- Over 90% are concerned about securing the sponsorships and other fundraising they need.
- Over 90% are concerned about their ability to expand their current market footprint which is needed for social distancing.

- 86% are concerned about being able to recruit and retain the needed volunteers in order to meet increased labor requirements to manage restrictions.
- Farmer and other vendor recruitment and retention are also top concerns among farmers market organizers (82% and 86% respectively).

Most (91%) of King County farmers market organizations reported that they plan to operate their market in 2021.

Methodology

The impact assessment is comprised of 12 questions and administered via an online survey (Google form). A link was emailed to all King County Farmers Market organizations that were eligible for CARES funding on December 11 and it was due on December 31. This email was followed up with reminders and promoted by the WSFMA via email and phone calls. The survey was a mix of quantitative and qualitative questions. Data was cleaned, analyzed and reported by the WSFMA.

Respondents and the unit of analysis are farmers market organizations in King County. Most farmers market organizations operate one farmers market; however, there are three multi-market organizations that normally operate a total of 14 farmers markets in the City of Seattle.

Response Rate

The survey had 23 respondents, representing 31 unique farmers market locations in at least 19 different cities that received CARES Act funding. This represents 100% of King County farmers markets that received CARES Act funding.

Two farmers market organizations in King County did not meet the CARES Act eligibility requirements and four markets that did meet the eligibility requirements opted not to apply.



Queen Anne Farmers Market, May 2020.

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Farmers Market Organizations – King County: 2020

Multi or Single Farmers Markets Organization	Count	Percent
Multi-market organizations	3	13%
Single farmers market	20	87%
Total	23	100%

Number of Farmers Markets Organized per Market Organization in 2020	Count	Percent
1	21	68%
2	1	10%
4	1	23%
Total	23	100%

Legal Incorporation of Farmers Market Organization	Count	Percent
Corporation	1	4%
Government	4	17%
Nonprofit	17	75%
Public Development Authority/quasi-governmental	1	4%
Total	23	100%

City where Farmers Market Organization is Located	Count	Percent
Auburn	1	4
Bellevue	1	4
Burien	1	4
Carnation	1	4
Duvall	1	4
Enumclaw	1	4
Federal Way	1	4
Issaquah	1	4
Kent	1	4
Kirkland	2	9
Lake Forest Park	1	4
Maple Valley	1	4
Mercer Island	1	4
North Bend	1	4
Redmond	1	4
Sammamish	1	4
SeaTac	1	4
Seattle	4	17
Shoreline	1	4
Total	23	100

Financial Impact of COVID-19 on Farmers Markets

How farmers market organization projects it will end 2020 in terms of its operating budget		
Responses	Count	Percent
With a budget deficit of over 25%	12	55%
With a budget deficit of 10 to 25%	4	18%
With a budget deficit of under 10%	3	14%
With a balanced budget	2	9%
With a budget surplus of under 10%	1	5%
With a budget surplus of 10 to 25%	0	0%
With a budget surplus of over 25%	0	0%
Total	22	100%

Impact the CARES Act Funding provided through King County on farmers market organization finances in 2020		
Responses	Count	Percent
Negative impact	0	0%
No impact	0	0%
Somewhat positive impact	2	9%
Very positive impact	21	91%
Total	23	100%

Usefulness of support receiving CARES Act funding through the King County Ag Program

Webinars in August 19 and September 11 (or recordings of webinars)			
Responses	Count	Percent	Cumulative
Not Useful	0	0%	0
Useful	4	17%	19%
Very Useful	17	74%	81%
N/A	2	9%	
Total	23	100%	100%

Email updates about CARES Act funding for Farmers Markets			
Responses	Count	Percent	Cumulative
Not Useful	1	4%	4%
Useful	5	22%	22%
Very Useful	17	74%	74%
N/A	0	0%	
Total	23	100%	100%

Responsiveness to farmers market needs in how reimbursements were structured			
Responses	Count	Percent	Cumulative
Not Useful	1	4%	4%
Useful	3	13%	13%
Very Useful	19	83%	83%
N/A	0	0%	
Total	23	100%	100%

Technical Assistance from WSFMA in completing application, Grant Agreement, reimbursement request, and documentation			
Responses	Count	Percent	Cumulative
Not Useful	0	0%	0%
Useful	1	4%	5%
Very Useful	21	91%	95%
N/A	1	4%	
Total	23	100%	100%

Timeliness of processing reimbursement requests			
Responses	Count	Percent	Cumulative
Not Useful	0	0%	
Useful	2	9%	12%
Very Useful	15	68%	88%
N/A	5	23%	
Total	22	100%	100%

Level of Concern about the 2021 Farmers Market Season

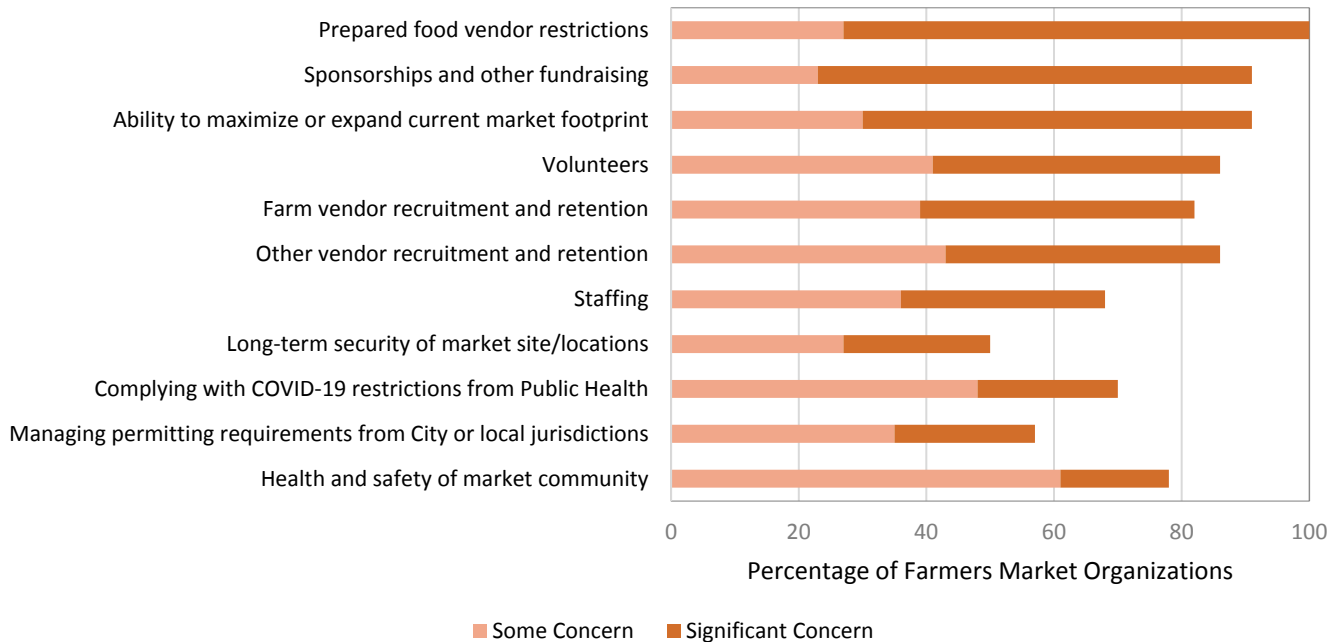
Level of concern about farmers market(s) being able to operate in 2021		
Responses	Count	Percent
Not Concerned	5	22%
Neutral	1	4%
Some Concern	13	57%
Significant Concern	4	17%
Total	23	100%

Level of concern about farmers market organization's viability in 2021		
Responses	Count	Percent
Not Concerned	6	27%
Neutral	5	23%
Some Concern	9	41%
Significant Concern	2	9%
Total	22	100%

*Other: I am concerned that the continuing reduced capacity for both vendors and shoppers will permanently damage the long-term health of the market, and in turn our organization that runs it.

Level of concern regarding specific topics

Concerns for the 2021 Farmers Market Season (n=23)



Complying with COVID-19 restrictions from Public Health - Seattle & King County (assuming similar to 2020)

Responses	Count	Percent	Cumulative
No concern	7	30%	30%
Some Concern	11	48%	48%
Significant Concern	5	22%	22%
N/A	0	0%	
Total	23	100%	100%

Ability to maximize or expand current market footprint

Responses	Count	Percent	Cumulative
No concern	2	9%	9%
Some Concern	7	30%	30%
Significant Concern	14	61%	61%
N/A	0	0%	
Total	23	100%	100%

Managing permitting requirements from City or local jurisdictions

Responses	Count	Percent	Cumulative
No concern	10	43%	43%
Some Concern	8	35%	35%
Significant Concern	5	22%	22%
N/A	0	0%	
Total	23	100%	100%

Long-term security of market site/locations			
Responses	Count	Percent	Cumulative
No concern	11	50%	50%
Some Concern	6	27%	27%
Significant Concern	5	23%	23%
N/A	0	0%	
Total	22	100%	100%

Farm vendor recruitment and retention			
Responses	Count	Percent	Cumulative
No concern	4	17%	17%
Some Concern	9	39%	39%
Significant Concern	10	43%	43%
N/A	0	0%	
Total	23	100%	100%

Other vendor recruitment and retention			
Responses	Count	Percent	Cumulative
No concern	3	13%	13%
Some Concern	10	43%	43%
Significant Concern	10	43%	43%
N/A	0	0%	
Total	23	100%	100%

Prepared food vendor restrictions			
Responses	Count	Percent	Cumulative
No concern	0	0%	0%
Some Concern	6	26%	27%
Significant Concern	16	70%	73%
N/A	1	4%	
Total	23	100%	100%

Staffing			
Responses	Count	Percent	Cumulative
No concern	7	30%	32%
Some Concern	8	35%	36%
Significant Concern	7	30%	32%
N/A	1	4%	
Total	23	100%	100%

Volunteers			
Responses	Count	Percent	Cumulative
No concern	3	13%	14%
Some Concern	9	39%	41%
Significant Concern	10	43%	45%
N/A	1	4%	
Total	23	100%	100%

Sponsorships and other fundraising			
Responses	Count	Percent	Cumulative
No concern	2	9%	9%
Some Concern	5	22%	23%
Significant Concern	15	65%	68%
N/A	1	4%	
Total	23	100%	100%

Health and safety of market community			
Responses	Count	Percent	Cumulative
No concern	5	22%	22%
Some Concern	14	61%	61%
Significant Concern	4	17%	17%
N/A	0	0%	
Total	23	100%	100%

Comments

We are transitioning to a new organizational model and currently have no funding sources or staff for the 2021 season.

Murphy's law - if something can go wrong it will. So there is some concern about new rules and regs in all areas. Every rule takes more volunteer time. Counting shippers, requiring masks, fencing market etc. Volunteers are burnt out. Dealing with conflict (free breathers or folks who don't believe in lines to get in). We cannot afford to hire more people and the one staff person can handle no more items.

I'm very concerned about the safety (physical and mental) of market participants, with the anti-masker movement growing and getting more vehement as time goes on, if masks are still required in 2021

While systems have been developed to operate under the current circumstances, this model that requires such a significant reduction to operations is not sustainable.

With regards to health dept, our concerns are monetary - 1. will we need to buy all the supplies again like 1,500 feet of caution tape a day for example? 2. If our food vendors can't come, not only are they out of business, but we will be missing their booth fees and commissions, which drastically help our market operating budget. 3. If the restrictions are such that it makes it impossible for crafts vendors to come, again lack of fees for the market. 4. If no sponsor booths or community service booths are allowed, we will lose that precious money too. 5. our permit from the city will be \$10,000 this year, yes we are concerned!

Our City Gov. are not interested in partnering with site, which makes things difficult.

Our greatest concern is for vendor recruitment and retention, and maintaining a strong enough vendor base to maintain shoppers, high levels of integrity, and the financial viability of the market organization. Related, the time and capacity to understand, train, and respond to changing public health guidance, permitting, or reporting requirements takes away from the time we are able to invest in our vendor relationships and good market management.

Plans for the 2021 farmers market season

At this point, do you plan to operate your farmers market(s) in 2021		
Responses	Count	Percent
Yes	21	91%
No	0	0%
Will need to close one or more (if manage multiple markets)	0	0%
May need to close one or more (if manage multiple markets)	0	0%
Not Sure	1	4%
Other ⁺	1	4%
Total	23	100%

*Other: The plan right now is to operate in 2021 but staffing requirements related to Covid restrictions will be the deciding factor.

Comments
<p>Miracles do happen!</p> <p>Hopeful that rules we become more consistent across retail and markets</p> <p>While we plan to operate, our budget has been significantly cut for 2021. Level of operations will depend on support in terms of grants, sponsorship and vendor sign ups.</p> <p>Depends on if downtown workers are able to return to work</p> <p>We are doing our very best but probably could not withstand two more years like last year. We operated with 30 vendors instead of 85 so we are draining our reserves by the minute.</p> <p>It will cost us more, but we know how much having our market means to our Community.</p>

Comments for King County Ag Program about their responses to COVID-19 and the CARES Act funding

Appreciation (16)
<p>A very huge thank you to King County Ag for the Cares Act funding. This is so helpful to keep us going thru the winter months.</p> <p>We are very grateful to have been able to receive funding from the CARES Act through the King County Ag Program with the help of WSFMA. Thank you for advocating for farmers markets. The boost of revenue will help us get to next season and we'll have to go from there.</p> <p>THANK YOU FOR EVERYTHING!</p> <p>Thank you for making this funding available - it will make the difference for a lot of markets in the county surviving! Much as this has been hard on us all - this bit keeps us in the game.</p>

Thank you so much for ALL of your help!

We couldn't have done it without your organized and patient leadership!

Thank you! We appreciate all the time and effort that went in to making this happen.

Thank you for all the hard work. We know a lot went into this grant and we are forever thankful. the CARES act funding enables us to continue to work and keep our market above water. We want to continue to keep farms working and our community access to food.

The funding is wonderful and all the information and guidance provided, plus tailoring it to the needs of farmers markets, was terrific.

THANK YOU TO ALL

Thank you for advocating for farmers market support. Again, this season would not have been possible without this funding source!

We appreciate all the support we can get

Funding farmers markets in response to the pandemic was a boon to many of our organization's survival. Funding allocated for farmers market's direct operational support provided by KC Ag in "peacetime" could take us from surviving to thriving.

You good folks are appreciated by us. Thanks for all your long and tedious hours of crunching figures and reading the submissions, not an easy task. You helped us, we are grateful!

The CARES Act funding that was provided to the farmers market allowed us to continue staffing during the winter months and properly prepare and plan for the uncertainties of the 2021 season. Without this funding the market may not have been able to continue operations.

I cannot underscore how important the King County CARES ACTs funding was for our organization this year. This funding helped us end the year in a better financial position that previously anticipated. With it, we were able to reduce reliance on fundraising, maintain the investment in staff, and cement plans to re-open two of our suspended seasonal markets in 2021. Thank you to the Ag Team and King County Council for the support of farmers markets and local producers.

Other (2)

Reimbursement was difficult because we were not able to spend much, but loss of income was significant and not eligible.

No food vendors really hurt the market. Hope it can be added in 2021!