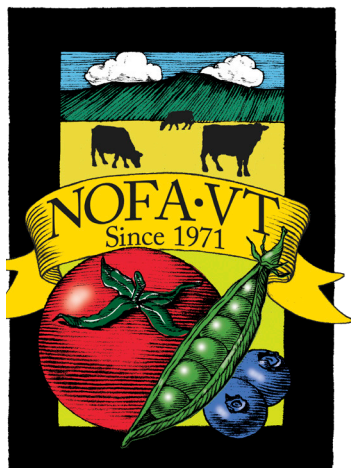


# Farmers Market Metrics: A Toolkit for Collecting & Using Data



## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Collecting Gross Sales Data.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Conducting Visitor Counts.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Conducting Visitor Surveys .....</b>	<b>9</b>

*This report was funded by Grant no. 16FMPPVT0023, through the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service.*





# Introduction

In 2016, NOFA-VT was awarded a USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP) grant. Part of the project was to work with select farmers markets around the state to help them collect data using customer surveys, visitor counts, and gross sales tracking. The goal was to develop detailed resources to support more markets to implement and use these data collection methods. In this toolkit, we are sharing such resources with detailed instructions and data collection templates for you to use at your own market as well as ideas for how to use this data to help support your market. If you aren't collecting data already, we hope this will provide a good framework for how and why to do it. For those of you who are already collecting data, we hope these resources can help you make better use of it!

## Why collect data?

There are several reasons why a market might want to collect data, including providing a baseline from which to measure future change, identifying trends, informing decisions, answering key questions, and showing the impact of your market. Data provides relevant information that can help your market assess its business and plan for the future.

## Data Types

There are two types of data markets can gather: qualitative and quantitative.

*Quantitative data* is often represented by numbers and can be displayed in charts, graphs, etc. Examples of quantitative data are:

- Gross sales data, including breakdowns by vendor category (e.g. Agricultural, Prepared Foods, Crafts, Other)
- Number of vendors per day, per vendor category
- Average distance food travels to get to your market



- Number of acres of land in agriculture supported by the market
- Vendor and customer demographics
- Number of jobs supported by the businesses at your market
- Economic impact of your market on the community
- EBT/SNAP benefit sales showing support for food access within your community

Graphic representations of data points are more compelling than lists of numbers. Charts and graphs help your audience to understand the data and the "story" you are trying to tell. Use of data can be important to marketing efforts, and is often essential if you plan to apply for any grants to support your market.

*Qualitative data* are descriptions, anecdotes, opinions, quotes, and interpretations. This data cannot be reduced to numbers but can be very valuable to your market's narrative. These are more subjective but can reveal reasons why something is or isn't working in a way that numbers cannot.

Qualitative data can:

- Illustrate the overall health and performance of your market to your

- board and vendors
- Evaluate the impact of market decisions
- Inform new decisions
- Tell your market story to customers or grant reviewers
- Show community partners and stakeholders the impact of your market - why they should support it and/or the results of their support
- Get new ideas about your market from your customers' perspective

Markets collect data in a variety of ways. You may consider collecting some of your vendor data as part of the vendor application process. Daily sales data can be collected via paper slips or online forms. You may do visitor counts, car counts or conduct customer surveys at your market or online.

As part of this toolkit, NOFA-VT worked with markets to create and refine resources to help conduct visitor counts, survey customers,

### Example quantitative data:

Market Statistics at a Glance

Saturdays open for business this season - 22

Total number of shoppers surveyed - 200

Average number of shoppers per market - 1,520

Estimated summer Saturday market shoppers - 33,528

analyze gross sales and share the impacts of their market within and beyond their organization. In this toolkit, you will find detailed instructions for how to collect these

data as well as templates that you can use to collect it. Ideas for how markets can practically use this data are also provided. We know it can be a challenge to collect data so

we want to share tools and strategies to make that task easier, as well as ideas on how to put that data to good use!



## Collecting Gross Sales Data

Tracking and analyzing gross sales data provides important information about your market. An obvious goal of any market is to generate income for its vendors. By tracking your market's weekly sales, you will be able to assess your market's health and viability, track whether the activities you do to improve your market are having an impact, plan for the future, and more. After several years, you will be able to see trends in your market season. Knowing these trends can help you make key decisions about when to open or close your market for the season, when to schedule special events, when you may want to do additional advertising to draw in customers, and inform decisions about which types of vendors to bring onboard or turn away. Gross sales data can be extremely helpful to board members or market organizers in many ways, from understanding what customers are buying at your market to providing benchmarks that can help to inform decisions on how or when to grow your market. You can look at this information in comparisons from week to week, month to month, season to season, and year to year. Presenting market data to your vendors can also help them to plan for peak times and expected slower periods.

### Is your market new to collecting gross sales?

If your market is not already collecting gross sales data, it's important to get your market leadership and vendors fully on board. Ideally, you will have 100% participation from your vendors so the information you're using is as accurate as possible. To get buy-in from your vendors, make sure that you explain why you're collecting this data and

have a transparent process for how you'll use it and share it back, and make sure your vendors know that you have a process to ensure anonymity. To make this clear to vendors, you can include this expectation in your vendor guidelines. Periodically reporting back to vendors how the market is performing overall can also help motivate them to submit their data in a timely manner!

### How and what to collect

More and more markets are collecting weekly gross sales data from vendors using a variety of methods ranging from paper slips completed by each vendor (see example to the right) to online forms that vendors can complete at their convenience. With either method, it's important to determine what data you want to collect and then set up your form, be it paper or online (see online form tips in the case study on page 5), to prompt vendors to provide those specific data points.

Many markets ask vendors to report data broken down into categories that will be useful to understanding their market. It is a best practice for markets to collect at a minimum Agricultural (AG) Sales, Prepared Food Sales, Craft Sales and Total Gross Sales. Some markets decide to further breakdown the AG category into Produce, Value Added, and Meats, and may break down their Prepared Food category to highlight which prepared foods include local ingredients and which do not. Many markets aim to support local agriculture and thus have criteria that AG sales must constitute a minimum percentage of the market's gross sales. Collecting sales data allows markets

### DAILY SALES REPORT

AG-Produce \$ \_\_\_\_\_

AG-Value Added \$ \_\_\_\_\_

AG-Animal Products \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Prepared Food \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Crafts \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Total Gross \$ \_\_\_\_\_**

5% Commission Amount \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Booth Fee Paid today (if any) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

*Value of tokens & coupons redeemed today:*

EBT (\$1) \_\_\_\_\_

Debit (\$5) \_\_\_\_\_

Crop Cash \_\_\_\_\_

to monitor the health of their AG sales and confirm that they are meeting their goal. Gross sales data may also signal the need for a market to make tweaks aimed at enhancing those sales when needed. Categories of gross sales can easily be put in a pie chart such as in Fig. 1. Such a presentation is easier to digest than a list of numbers.

Since vendors will be turning in the gross sales report regularly, this can also serve as an easy point around which to organize other processes your market may require, such as collecting market tokens or commission fees. Some markets distribute a plastic bag with a sales reporting slip for each vendor to turn in at the end of the market. Vendors put the completed slip in the bag at the end of the market, and also use it to hold tokens, coupons, etc., which they turn in to pay

market fees and/or collect reimbursement.

### Combining sales data from all vendors

Once you've started to collect gross sales data, the next step is getting all that data into a robust spreadsheet that enables you to easily see what's going on at your market. Combining sales data with other information, such as the number and type of vendors at market each week, weather, events, etc., can help you keep the pulse of your market. You can organize your spreadsheet to give you a variety of information. Some key information we recommend you consider including are:

- gross sales totals;
- sales category breakdowns and averages;
- number of vendors;
- average weekly sales overall, by category, and/or by vendor.

As each market is different, you will need to determine which data points are relevant to your market, and how you want to parse and view your data. Some markets like an overall picture of the season, along with a comparison to past seasons. Other markets prefer a monthly snapshot of market performance. Next, we review a generic gross sales workbook that you can use.

### The Gross Sales Workbook

We have developed a Gross Sales Workbook template to share with markets. You can use it with Excel or Google Sheets. Use the link to this folder to view and download the templates: [www.nofavt.org/farmersmarketmetrics](http://www.nofavt.org/farmersmarketmetrics)

First save the workbook as a template. Then make a new copy of the workbook file, renaming that new file for the market season.

Start by reviewing the instructions on the first tab of the worksheet. It is set up with a separate worksheet for each market date, and you'll need to rename the tabs accordingly. Each day's data (see Fig. 4) feeds into a season totals table and contributes to the market overview shown on the Dashboard

tab (see Fig. 5). Note that in the Google Drive folder there is also a version of the workbook that allows you to enter daily sales data into a single table rather than using a separate tab for each market date. You can choose whichever version you like best. There is also a Past Totals tab, where you can add past season data. This enables comparisons between your current season data and one or more previous years. This can easily be used to create charts showing multi-year comparisons such as the bar chart in Fig. 2.

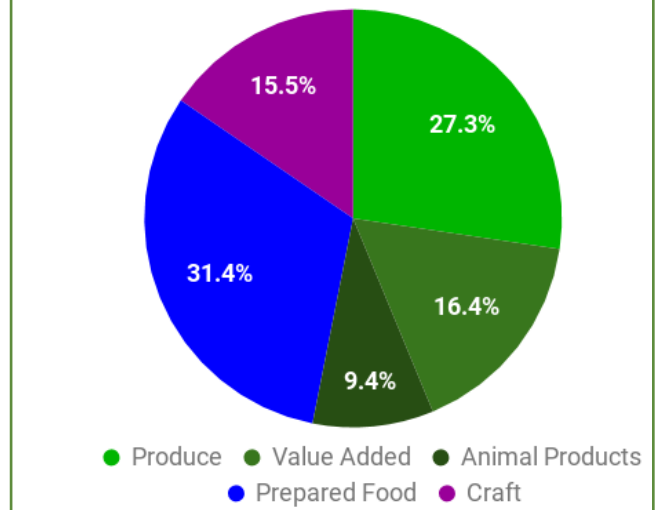
### Analyzing your sales data

There are many ways to analyze gross sales data. Below we list some of the

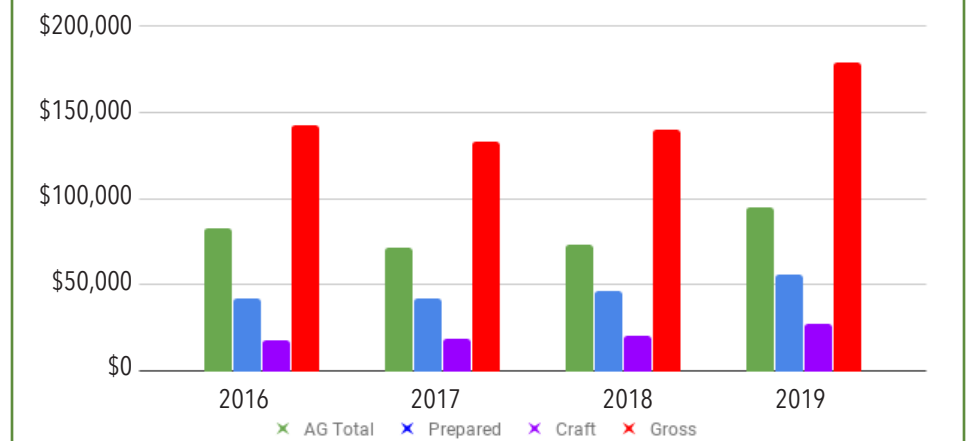
most common, and suggest some uses for your data.

- **Percentage change comparisons**  
Market leadership often ask how gross sales compare from year to year. Monitoring the percentage change from

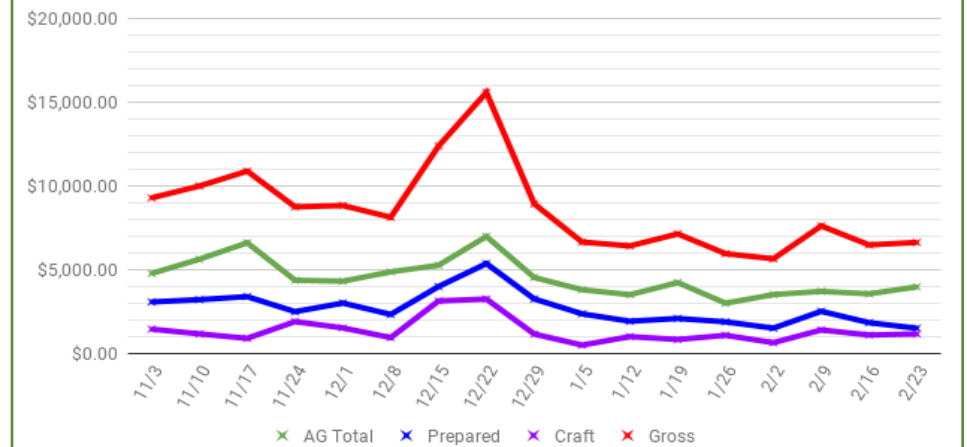
**Figure 1: Breakdown of Total Gross Sales by Category**



**Figure 2: Gross Sales Across Seasons by Category**



**Figure 3: Weekly Sales by Category**



the previous year or as compared to a baseline year can be a good indicator of your market's growth or decline, but make sure to take into consideration key ways that the data may differ from year to year to help you more accurately interpret that change. For instance, comparing gross sales data from one year to the next is common. However, if you added or lost vendors, or had more or fewer markets in a given season, accounting for such variations in your

data will be critical to an accurate understanding of your market.

- **Average weekly sales**  
With sales data across market categories, you can look at weekly sales for the market as a whole, broken down into categories, or as weekly averages for the whole market. If you include weekly vendor counts in your data, you can even calculate average weekly sales per vendor.

- **The Dashboard**

Get a quick up-to-date summary of your market on the Dashboard tab (see Fig. 5) of the Gross Sales Workbook. The Dashboard is derived from data entered in the daily worksheets.

**Visual representations of the data**

Your combined spreadsheet will have a lot of information on it. For someone who isn't used to looking at rows of numbers, it may feel overwhelming. Creating visual

**Figure 4: Market Day Worksheet** – Here is a sample section from a market day worksheet showing part of the data entered for that day. Note: totals for the day at the top are calculated as the individual vendor data is entered. In this example, each vendor was assigned a number for confidentiality.

TOTALS	AG	Val Added	Meat	Prepared	Craft	GROSS
<b>12/15/2018</b>	<b>\$2,916.00</b>	<b>\$1,449.00</b>	<b>\$907.19</b>	<b>\$3,996.50</b>	<b>\$3,136.00</b>	<b>\$12,404.69</b>
AG Total	\$5,272.19	Vendor Count	AG - 14	PF - 9	CR - 7	
V#	AG	Val Added	Meat	Prepared	Craft	Total Gross
1	\$144.00					\$144.00
2		\$160.00				\$160.00
4	\$468.00		\$200.00			\$668.00
5	\$750.00					\$750.00
6	\$544.00	\$16.00			\$4.00	\$564.00
7	\$210.00	\$40.00	\$114.00			\$364.00
8			\$124.69			\$124.69
9		\$398.00				\$398.00
10	\$211.00					\$211.00
11	\$45.00	\$180.00	\$140.00			\$365.00
12		\$246.00	\$39.00			\$285.00

**Figure 5: Market Dashboard** – Here is a sample section from Dashboard tab. Note: totals are calculated from the market day worksheets.

Sales Breakdown - Season Totals to Date							
Total Gross	Produce	Value Added	Meat & Eggs	Prepared Food	Craft	Other	Avg Wk Gross
<b>\$145,560.16</b>	<b>\$39,823.04</b>	<b>\$23,318.00</b>	<b>\$13,574.27</b>	<b>\$45,745.20</b>	<b>\$23,099.65</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$8,562.36</b>
Avg # Weekly Vendors	<b>28</b>	Avg # By Category	AG	PR	CR	Avg Weekly Vendor Sales	
			<b>14</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>\$303</b>	



representations of the data can be a very important and more accessible way to share back this information with vendors, your market leaders, community supporters, and funders, and can help you highlight some of the key points that you think are the most impactful. The Dashboard tab in the Gross Sales Workbook includes a variety of automatically generated charts (see Fig. 2 and Fig. 3 for examples) that provide a snapshot of the market to-date and can easily be shared with stakeholders.

### Case study

In the winter of 2016, NOFA-VT started to work with the Waitsfield Farmers Market who, as of then, had not been collecting gross sales data. Their manager had formerly worked for another farmers market that had collected sales data, and she had seen how useful it could be. With the support of NOFA and the Farmers Market Coalition Metrics project, she was able to convince her market's board to start collecting data. They realized that they had basically been flying blind as a business. Next, she had to get her vendors on board, which was a bit of a challenge. Knowing that it was part of

a research project with support was very helpful to make the case to her vendors. She kept her communication and data collection as simple and clear as possible, which helped as well. She set-up an online system in order to minimize her work related to collecting gross sales data. Each week, right as the market closes, she emails a reminder to all vendors when the data is due. If that message doesn't go out until the day after market, the entries from vendors tend to be lower. Tracking whose data is missing can be a challenge, so staying on top of this each week saved her a lot of time doing catch up later. Plus, she made sure that all fill-in vendors are aware of this requirement, and are listed on the form before they vend.

Today, she regularly gets all but one or two vendors submitting their data and has found many uses for the data during board and vendor meetings. Having two years of data now, the vendors have seen the benefit of knowing how the market is doing overall. The market is now fully behind the need to gather this data regularly.



## Conducting Visitor Counts

Visitor counts are just that, counting the visitors that are at your market. Some of these visitors may be shoppers, but probably not all. Visitor counts can provide an indicator of how a market is doing as well as valuable information for studying long-range trends at your market. Knowing for certain if customer traffic is increasing, decreasing or holding steady is like taking the pulse of your market. Having real data can inform a variety of important decisions, and can help you to tell your market's story in a compelling way.

Decisions about when you count, how often, and with which methodology will depend on factors such as your market's resources and size. Since the success of any given market

day is made up of a variety of factors that you may or may not have control over (e.g. weather, market and community events, the time of the season), the more visitor counts you can do at your market, the more you can learn from the data.

### OVERVIEW

#### Frequency of counts

Think of visitor counts as a good way to capture snapshots of your market reflecting the phases of your market season. Aim to do at least two counts, but preferably three or four counts each season. That way you'll have a good sense of what is typical for your

market during peak season or the slower times of the year, good or bad weather, etc., as there are so many factors that can influence a day at the market. The more counts you have, the more data you have to work with and you can start to see patterns, anomalies, and trends that may impact important decisions about your market.

Conducting a minimum of one count per season will give you a basic understanding of how many visitors you have coming through on that particular day. If the day you chose for your count didn't feel typical (e.g. it was rainy and there were seemingly fewer visitors than usual), then you may be able to make some guesses about what is more typical for

your market. Conducting multiple counts per season will give you far more valuable information. It will give you a sense of how your market visitors change over time and can help you shape the expectations of your vendors and market leadership.

### When to conduct counts

Knowing how you want to use the data or what questions your market has will help guide your date selection. In addition, visitor counts are an important metric to monitor changes at your market from year to year. You may hear from your vendors that they think visitors are down over previous years. Having visitor counts will help you provide important information back to your vendors and market leadership when faced with questions or concerns. When thinking about long-term trends, it's important to try to compare similar dates from year to year. For instance, comparing an early season May market one year to a high-season harvest market at the end of August the next will not result in an accurate comparison. Instead, consider choosing your date(s) carefully and then repeating visitor counts on those same dates each year. While the data won't necessarily give you a perfect comparison, after you have a few years of data as well as notes about any other factors that may have impacted the visitor count, you can start to see if there are any long-range trends that your market should be aware of.

### Consider your questions

Visitor counts can give insights into questions your market is exploring. For instance, do visitors increase when you have an event (and subsequently, how do your gross sales correlate with this)? Are the hours of your market the right hours or, for example, should you consider starting your market an hour later because very few customers are coming in the first hour and a lot of customers are there in the last 20-30 minutes? Is there information you can gather by the rate/frequency people are coming into your different market entrances that can inform decisions about where

certain vendors are placed or the market's information booth location(s)? Know the questions you want to answer with visitor counts before you plan. It will then be easier to determine when and how frequently to conduct them.

## LOGISTICS

How your market will conduct visitor counts is important to consider when planning. This may impact the number of counts you are able to conduct based on the time and effort it will take. When thinking about how your market will conduct visitor counts, consider:

- How does your market's layout affect your ability to conduct counts?
- Are there ways for you to conduct counts with technology or will you need to enlist market staff or volunteers to help with the count?
- If using market staff or volunteers, how many will you need to help you do the count?
- What methodology will you use?
- Who will you count as a visitor?

**TIP:** If you are asking counters to count people who are coming in through "cracks" in your market, make sure each counter knows which areas they are responsible for. Identify a vendor booth or landmark where a counter knows they will count everyone who enters on a certain side of it. If your market path is on a sidewalk or pavement, another option is to draw a chalk line. That way a counters know that if a person enters on a certain side of the line, they should or should not count them.

### Market layout

How many entrances your market has is one of the key factors that will help you determine how to conduct counts. Is your market located in an area where visitors almost exclusively drive to or in a building that has one primary entrance? If so, you may only need one person counting the

number of individuals arriving in each car or standing by the primary entrance to your indoor market counting visitors. On the other hand, if your market is located where people arrive by walking, biking and driving, you will need to count visitors at each entrance. Examine your entrances. Are they clearly marked and intuitive? If you have customers entering from many different locations, you will need to consider what can happen to help your counters get an accurate count. In order to make your entrances more clear, you can construct barriers and/or put up flagging to clearly mark entrances during the count days so customers are funneled past your counters. If you have a very large market and staffing each possible market entrance is impossible, you may need to consider technology, such as capturing unique mobile phone pings within the market space, or using a drone to capture overhead images of the crowd and then count by quadrants.

### People vs. technology

Most likely you will use people to conduct your count, but we have heard some interesting ideas of markets using technology to help streamline the process and limit staff/volunteer time. For instance, if your market is indoors and has one main entrance, you may consider investing in or borrowing a door counter that counts each person coming through the doors. If nearly





everyone drives to your market, you may be able to get a strip to put at the parking lot entrance that counts the number of cars on any given day. While counting cars is slightly different from visitors, comparing the number of cars (and therefore groups of visitors) could provide a data point that could be as useful to your market as individual visitors.

## METHODS

### Counting visitors

- **Full Visitor Counts** attempt to count every single visitor attending the market during one day.
- **Sample Counts** are when you pick a certain amount of time each hour to conduct your counting, and are often adjusted with a multiplier to get an estimate of how many visitors your market had throughout the whole day.
- **Walk Through Counts** are when one or more counters walks through the market at a predetermined time and takes a headcount of each individual that's at the market during that time.

Full visitor counts are the most accurate, but they can be challenging for a market to do regularly. Aside from a higher degree of accuracy, the benefit of doing a full count is that you can then compare that number to gross sales data for the day. If it is too difficult to conduct full counts, you can opt to do a sample count of 10 or 20 minutes in the middle of each hour. When doing a sample count, people usually multiply the count for the interval by a factor (by six for 10 minute intervals and by three for 20 minute intervals) to estimate the number of visitors in that hour. It's important to note that this is not necessarily accurate as the shopping patterns of your customers will vary quite a bit during any given hour. Alternatively, you can do a walk-through count, where every half hour once your market opens, one or more counters walk through the market and take a headcount of each individual that's at

the market during that time. This will not give you an accurate count of all visitors, but, if done regularly, it will reveal trends and be an indicator of customer traffic in your market that you can compare over time. For more detailed discussion on the pros and cons of the various methods, read Darlene Wolnik's article "Counting Visitors at Markets" ([farmersmarketcoalition.org/counting-visitors-markets/](http://farmersmarketcoalition.org/counting-visitors-markets/)).

**TIP:** For full counts, have your counters set a 10 minute timer on their phone or watch. At the end of each 10 minute period, they note the tally for that interval, reset the counter, restart the timer, and begin the tally for the next time block.

### Who to Count

Setting standards for who you are going to count should not be overlooked. Will you count just adults or will you also count children? Some markets count older children as long as they look like they may also be shoppers. Others count children separately from adults, if that data will be useful to their market. There is no right answer. The key is to set standards so that your counts are consistent between counters and comparable over time.

**TIP:** One market collected license plate origin, as they wanted to get a sense of where their visitors were coming from in order to inform marketing, etc.

## DAY-OF DETAILS, RESOURCES & NEXT STEPS

### How to Count

Counters can use manual click counters though there are also a number of free smartphone apps for tally counting. One app that markets have used successfully is called "Counter." **Visitor Count Template**

We have adapted a template from Farmers Market Coalition's Metrics work that markets can use for gathering visitor count data. The workbook can be used in Excel or Google



Sheets. The first tab of the workbook has instructions—be sure to read these carefully. The template allows for easily collecting and compiling data from up to four market entrances. The formulas in the worksheets are locked, and you can easily hide extra entry point columns or time blocks that don't fit your market's needs. The workbook includes a Season Totals tab that compiles data from each of your counts, a Past Totals tab where you can input visitor count data from past seasons, and a Dashboard tab that automatically creates graphs showing current and past season trends. The template can be found in the folder at this link: [www.nofavt.org/farmersmarketmetrics](http://www.nofavt.org/farmersmarketmetrics)

Figure 6 on page 8 is an example visitor count using the template to illustrate how it is used. Within the example, you'll see there is a full count (counted in 10 minute intervals for each hour) and 10 and 20 minute sample counts. Notice that the example only shows two full hours of the market. For the full count, the tallies for each 10 minute interval are entered in the column for each designated entry point. You'll notice in the far right column, the summed total for both entry points is presented. Below each hour segment, the spreadsheet summarizes that hour, thus enabling you to quickly see the slow or busier hours of your market and/or the entry points that have more or less traffic. The 10 and 20 minute time blocks are

used when conducting a sample count rather than a full count. They also total to the right.

The 10 and 20 minute sample counts multiply the count by a factor of six or three, respectively, thereby providing an estimate for the full hour based on the timed sample. Although either the 10 minute or 20 minute sample count can be used, the 20 minute sampling has been shown to be the more reliable indicator of your actual visitor count. You can conduct a full count in 10 minute intervals to see how a sample count

compares to a full count. In the template, all of the gray shaded cells are locked to protect the formulas that calculate your data. The workbook also has a tab for collecting walkthrough count data.

### Using your data

Once you've conducted your visitor counts, it's important to put the data to use. You've gone through a lot of work to get the data and you don't want it just sitting on a shelf or in a file on your computer. Sharing this information back with your market

**TIP:** You should save a copy of the workbook as a blank template. Each season, make a new copy of that workbook.

leadership and vendors is a good start. This data is important, especially if you are hearing concerns from someone within the market about their perceptions of customer traffic. The data collected during your visitor counts will provide important context for knowing how to respond to these concerns should they arise.

Visitor counts can also be used in tandem with other data points to help make decisions such as if you should extend or shorten your season, if you should consider changing the operating times of your market, or if there are specific times of the season that you should focus more attention or funding on marketing. Visitor count data will also inform your decisions about customer surveys. When you conduct a visitor survey, a best practice is to try to survey at least 10% of visitors, so knowing how many customers you usually have will give you an idea of how many surveys you need to collect. Also, conducting a visitor count on the same day you survey is important for knowing you reached 10%.



**Figure 6: Sample Visitor Count Template**

Hour	Period	Timeframe	Entry Point 1	Entry Point 2	Total by Time Period
9:00	1	9:00-9:10	5	4	9
	2	9:10-9:20	10	11	21
	3	9:20-9:30	15	10	25
	4	9:30-9:40	12	12	24
	5	9:40-9:50	18	3	21
	6	9:50-10:00	30	9	39
<b>Full Count by Entry Point</b>			90	49	139
<b>10 min Sample by Entry Point</b>			90	60	150
<b>20 min Sample by Entry Point</b>			81	66	147
10:00	1	10:00-10:10	14	15	29
	2	10:10-10:20	16	10	26
	3	10:20-10:30	10	15	25
	4	10:30-10:40	12	23	35
	5	10:40-10:50	7	25	32
	6	10:50-11:00	9	30	39
<b>Full Count by Entry Point</b>			68	118	186
<b>10 min Sample by Entry Point</b>			60	90	150
<b>20 min Sample by Entry Point</b>			66	114	180
Totals	<b>Full Count by Entry Point</b>		158	167	<b>325</b>
	<b>10 min Sample by Entry Point</b>		150	150	<b>300</b>
	<b>20 min Sample by Entry Point</b>		147	180	<b>327</b>

# Conducting Visitor Surveys

Visitor surveys are yet another important tool in a market's toolkit. Visitors' responses can help you to test out theories about your market, or gain insight that managers, board members and vendors who are so close to the operation may miss. You can equate it to the parable of the blind men trying to describe an elephant as a reminder of the limits of perception and the importance of a more complete context. As the story goes, the blind man touching the leg "sees" this unknown creature as a pillar like a tree, while the one holding its tail described it as a rope. Similarly market vendors often serve different segments of your market's customer base and thus, may have differing perceptions of your market. Gathering input directly from your customers can help to fill in the gaps and provide actual data points that can help your market make more informed decisions.

As each market is different in terms of size, layout, and customer traffic, you will want to adjust the guidelines below to be appropriate for your market. It is also recommended that you conduct surveys in conjunction with visitor counts so that you can accurately determine what percentage of your customer base for that day provided input (see *Conducting Visitor Counts* for more details).

## OVERVIEW

### Frequency of surveys

The frequency with which you survey will depend on what kinds of questions you are asking. Also, consider whether there is value in comparing results from one part of the

season to another, or from year to year as opposed to a one-time input from customers.

### Questions to ask

Likely, you'll have a long list of potential questions to ask your customers. You can use these questions to understand more about who your customers are, their shopping habits, what they want to see changed or held constant about your market, and more! For short, in-person (also known as intercept) surveys, we suggest keeping your number of questions to a maximum of 10, or fewer, if possible. In the next section we share ideas for specific questions.

### Number of surveys

It is recommended that you survey a minimum of 10% of your visitors on any given day, though smaller markets are advised to aim for 15 - 20%. If you have conducted a visitor count in the past, coming up with your goal for number of surveys should be relatively easy. If you are doing your first visitor count and your first survey, take your best guess and check-in throughout the market with your counters to see if you are on track for an appropriate number of surveys. It's not an issue if you collect too many surveys, it's just more data for you to manage!

Divide your target number of surveys by the number of surveyors you have and the number of hours the market is open to determine how many surveys each person should aim for each hour. For example, a smaller market with a visitor count in the range of 600 might want to aim for 15%. If you have three people surveying customers

**TIP: Consider how many surveyors will you need.** It's important to make sure that the number of surveys each surveyor is expected to conduct is realistic. For example, a surveyor conducting 30 surveys per hour has to do one every two minutes and it will mean going right from one to the next with little downtime. Practice conducting your survey to make sure that two minutes is enough to complete it and move on to the next customer. You may also want to consider having a floater that can provide breaks so people do not get too worn out, or adding more surveyors to your team.

for three hours, each surveyor should aim to survey 10 customers per hour (approximately one every six minutes). If your market is larger, has an average visitor count of 1200, is four hours long, and you have two surveyors, each would need to conduct approximately 15 surveys per hour to get to your 10% target of 120 surveys.

### How to conduct surveys

Make sure that your surveys are spread out over the course of the market. Aim for the same number of surveys during each hour of your market, so that you get a good representative sample. Early birds may have different opinions than late shoppers! Surveying people on their way out of the market is best practice, especially if you're asking them to estimate how much they spent at the market that day. After they've done their shopping, they'll have a more accurate answer than a guess at the beginning of their visit to the market.

### Surveyors

You may have market staff that can conduct the surveys, but in many instances you will also be relying on volunteers. If your market has had a hard time finding volunteers for ongoing programs, don't be discouraged. We have found that loyal market goers are often

**TIP FOR VERY LARGE MARKETS:** You may opt to set up a survey tent where customers can complete paper surveys or use laptops to access the survey online. This can enable the team to collect many more surveys with fewer volunteers than the intercept method. It will be important to have good signage at the survey tent as well as all around the market. Also have your vendors and your counters at the entrances encourage customers to stop by the survey tent.



excited to help with a one time effort such as this, and are glad to share their input on your market. They may also have a background that lends itself to conducting surveys. Some of the markets we have worked with have found volunteers by posting a request for help on Front Porch Forum or via their market's social media accounts, and others by contacting a local college or community service organization. Some markets have also paid their surveyors a small amount with market tokens/coupons as a thanks for helping out. From our experience, surveyors are frequently interested in the results of the surveying so don't forget to share the findings with them at the end!



## DEVELOPING YOUR QUESTIONS

For this project, we have used Market Umbrella's Sticky Economic Evaluation Device (SEED) as a starting point for collecting economic impact data of markets. In many cases, we have added additional questions to better understand things such as the impact of advertising, the residency status of visitors, and visitors' opinions about events.

### Economic impact questions

Using the SEED Survey, developed by Darlene Wolnik while at the Louisiana nonprofit, Market Umbrella, you can measure the economic impact of your market on your vendors, host neighborhood, and the surrounding region. SEED provides a template for surveying a sample of your shoppers. Once the survey is complete, you can enter your data online and it will automatically generate a report. The survey materials you need are available to download for free and are the same for every market, regardless of size or location. Combined with a visitor count on the same date you do a SEED survey, the data analysis uses a multiplier effect to create an impact report about spending for that day and the entire season, by projecting those dollars being recirculated in the larger local economy. This is the "stickiness" of those

dollars spent at your market, or the impact they have as they recirculate locally. The SEED tool can be found here: <http://www.marketumbrella.org/marketshare/seed>. A modified sample can be found on page 13.

The SEED survey includes questions about:

- the frequency with which the customer shops at the market
- if the market was their primary reason for visiting the neighborhood on that day
- how much they estimate they spent at the market
- if they think they'll spend money elsewhere in the neighborhood that day
- if yes, an estimate of how much
- customer zip code
- customer gender

### Developing your own survey

We worked with a diverse group of markets for this project, and while the SEED tool provided a good starting place, markets often had other questions they wanted to answer. Often these questions were very similar across markets. Typically, we used questions

**TIP:** For questions with a long list of answers, use an index card with letters and corresponding answers. The customer can refer to the list and select their answers while the surveyor notes their response.

from the SEED survey template addressing frequency of attendance, spending at market and nearby businesses, and zip code. We then added additional questions depending on what each individual market wanted to find out. Below are several sets of questions that you can use or tweak to fit your market and your customers.

### Questions about advertising

Advertising can be a large expense for markets and it's hard to know which methods are giving you the best bang for your buck. In order to understand where your customers are hearing/seeing your market advertised, we developed these sample questions. Note, the answers can be updated based on where your market advertises.

***Have you seen any of the following advertisements promoting the markets on the Island this summer?***

- A) Market Posters
- B) Website
- C) Facebook
- D) Market Newsletter
- E) Front Porch Forum
- F) Islands Agriculture Map & Guide
- G) Islander article or ad
- H) Roadside signs
- G) None

***Which of the advertisements are most effective for you?***

- A) Market Posters
- B) Website
- C) Facebook
- D) Market Newsletter
- E) Front Porch Forum
- F) Islands Agriculture Map & Guide
- G) Islander article or ad
- H) Roadside signs
- G) None

***Are there any other ways of advertising that we're missing that would be more effective for you?***

- A. Yes (please list ideas)
- B. No

## Questions about residency

Especially in communities with high levels of tourism, it's good to know what percentage of your shoppers are locals vs. seasonal residents or tourists. You can dig further into the data to see if locals vs. non-locals answer any of the other questions differently and this may help you differentiate your advertising or other strategies.

### *How would you describe yourself?*

- A) Year round Islands resident
- B) Seasonal Islands resident
- C) Occasional visitor to Islands from VT
- D) Occasional visitor to Island from outside VT
- E) First time visitor to the Islands

Asking your shoppers their zip code is a great way to understand where your shoppers are coming from. For instance, are the most common zip codes what you'd expect? Knowing the answer to this can help you target your marketing and advertising to specific zip codes you think should be shopping more at your market.

## Questions about events

Markets can put a lot of energy and money into organizing events, but it's important to determine if they really make a difference. These questions can help you understand more about how your customers view the events you have at your market.

### *When considering whether to come to the market on a given day, how much does music or other activities affect your decision?*

- A) More likely to attend
- B) Less likely to attend
- C) Doesn't affect decision

### *Which, if any, events would make you more likely to attend?*

- A) Music
- B) Cooking demos
- C) Kid's activities
- D) None
- E) Other (please specify)

## LOGISTICS

### Training your surveyors

It's typically best to have your surveyors show up about 45 minutes in advance to be trained and make sure they are clear on their jobs and stations. If they have helped with counts or surveys in the past, they probably don't need to be there that early, but it is still good to get everyone together before the market starts to make sure all are on the same page. Going over each question and the meaning of all the answers is important. It's good to have surveyors practice asking the questions to each other one or two times - that way if they do have questions, it will become clear and you can make sure that everyone is operating with the same understandings. Make sure to use the same criteria from year to year (i.e. what age of visitors are eligible to be surveyed), to be consistent, and be sure to note that for future reference.

Below are some tips to ensure that your surveyors are all set to successfully implement your survey at your market.

1. Make sure the volunteers survey only one person at a time. If they are talking with a couple and one person is the primary one to answer, make sure to list the gender of that person and their zip code. Do not try to survey more than one person at a time when doing intercept surveys.
2. Use the answer key to write down the responses (i.e. A or C, not 20-35).
3. For some questions, your surveyor may need to write multiple responses (e.g. if they saw multiple forms of advertising).
4. Try to catch people as they're leaving the market so they are more likely to provide an accurate number for what they spent today rather than an aspirational estimate that might be increased to please the surveyor.
5. Only survey people who look like they're old enough to have money to spend at the market.
6. Be sure to sample throughout the

market hours as evenly as possible.

Stacking all your answers at the top of the hour, for example, may skew your results to a certain type of shopper.

7. It's helpful to note on the survey sheet the market hour that those responses were gathered.
8. Include some blank pages for the surveyors so they can capture additional feedback from your customers. Or, have visible comment sheets at your table for visitors to note their thoughts, but be sure to look it over briefly before they leave to make sure you can read it!

**TIP:** The coordinator should check in with surveyors hourly during the survey and count to be sure targets are being met. Having an handle on the actual visitor count as you go, and ensuring that you are collecting enough survey responses will help to make the effort a success.

### Let your vendors/customers know what is happening

At least a week before you start surveying, you should let your vendors know that you're going to be conducting counts and surveying customers so they know what's going on! Customers may ask them what is happening at your market and you want to make sure they can answer their questions and be encouraging. You'll also want to make sure that the location of the surveying doesn't hinder any vendor's traffic.

It's also good to let customers know what you'll be doing the week leading up to the surveying. Sharing a message about what you're up to via your markets' newsletter, social media, or a local forum (like Front Porch Forum) is a great way to generate some buzz. Here is an idea of a sample message to share: "This Saturday, we'll be doing short customer surveys at the market - please stop by and help us out!" It's also a best practice to have a sign or two where the surveyors are (i.e. on a market chalkboard). You can write a message like, "Please help the market! Stop by to do a short survey on your way out



today!"

## Supplies

If you have an extra umbrella, tent and/or small card table, set these up where you want your customers to be surveyed. If there's a more natural exit, that's a great place to set these up and survey from. Having a shaded area will give people a more comfortable place to stop and talk if it's hot, and a place to put their bags so they don't have to stand there awkwardly holding them. Having a water cooler and cups at the table also encourages folks to stop! One market had a supply of branded pens, and gave one to each person as a thank you for completing the survey. Or consider having a "thank you" raffle drawing for a market bag or tokens. This might encourage more people to complete the survey, as well as give you an opportunity to capture email or phone numbers for future promotion efforts.

## Using technology

For larger markets where you may need to gather 250 or more surveys, think about creating a duplicate of your survey in a Google Form or in Survey Monkey. Then obtain a QR code that links your customers to the survey. Print out a few flyers with the

QR code image so folks can take a picture with their phone camera and be taken right to the survey to complete online. This can be a great alternative for those shoppers who would love to help but are in a hurry on survey day. Just be sure they know to complete it in a few days, so you can shut it down and complete your analysis. Also, keep in mind that you do not want to send the QR code out via email lists, because you only want to capture people who actually were at the market on that day.

## DATA ANALYSIS

Once you have completed your surveying, you have a few options for data analysis. If you choose to use the same questions laid out in the SEED tool, you can input your data into the online SEED data analysis form. Once you input all your data, you have the option to generate a summary report. Even if you did not use all of the SEED questions, you can still use their online tool to analyze the data for questions that do match SEED. In that case, you'll just need to put null answers in for the questions you didn't collect and recognize that the corresponding parts of the report will be meaningless for your market.

If you didn't use SEED questions, another

good option for analyzing your data is to create a Google Form or Survey Monkey with all your questions. With either of these tools, you create the survey, then input your responses one by one. Here, it is important to have your visitors and survey takers use the letter key rather than writing out the answers. Once all your answers are in, Google Forms or Survey Monkey will do some simple analysis of each question (ie. the #/% of people who responded with each of the possible answers).

Another option is to create a spreadsheet, putting your questions in columns across the top and entering each of your surveys in the rows. Using a spreadsheet also gives you the option to create charts and graphs, or use the pivot table function to filter and analyze your data (e.g., the average spending of people in a certain zip code or the average spent by first time visitors at your market). Digging into the data a little more deeply can provide more nuance that can be useful.





# SAMPLE MODIFIED SEED SURVEY FORM

**Sticky Economy Evaluation Device for measuring the financial impact of a public market**

**Champlain Islands' Farmers Market**

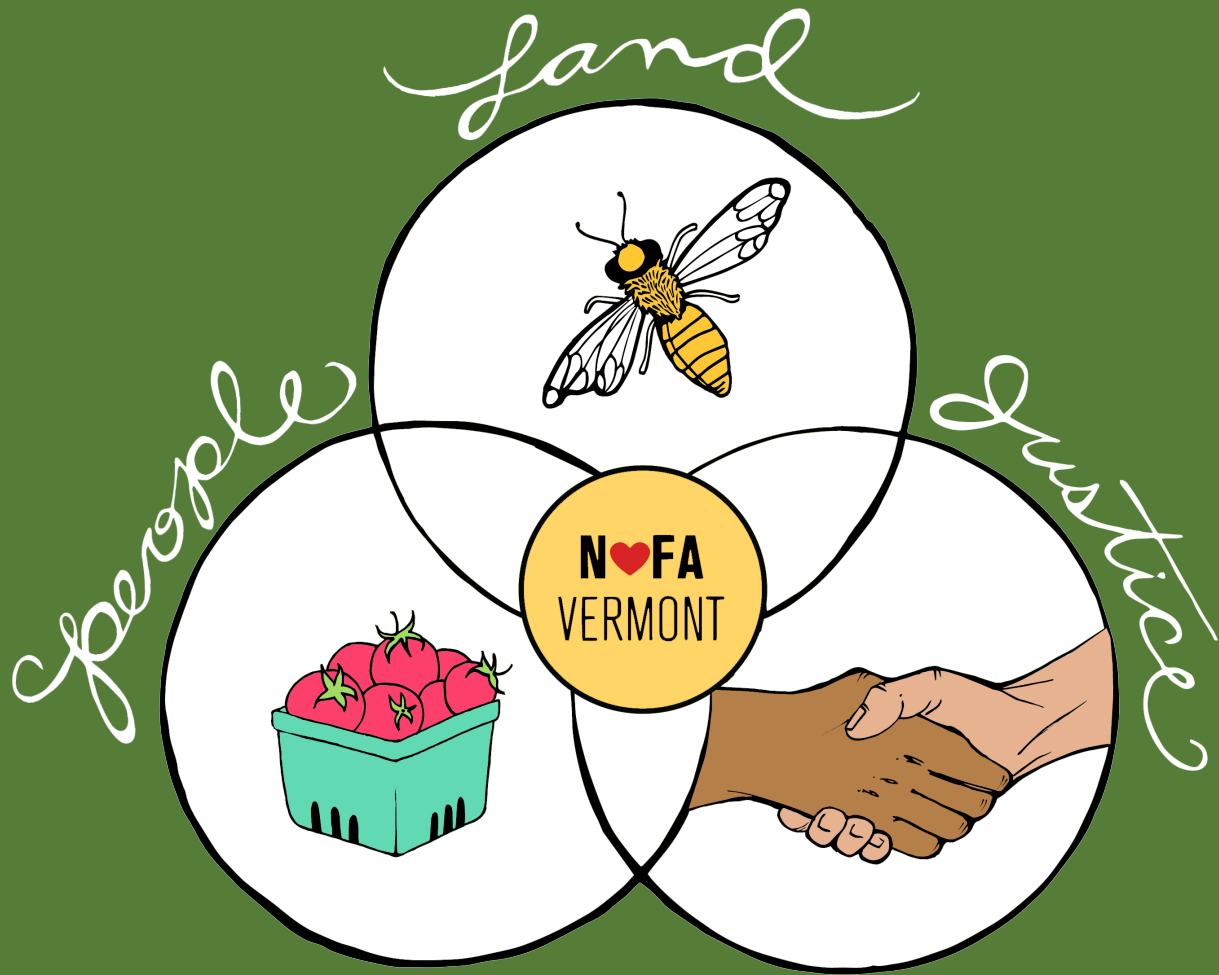
**Pollster name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Saturday, July 14, 2018**

**TIME (circle one): 10-11am / 11-12pm / 12-1pm / 1-2pm**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
<i>How often do you visit the Champlain Islands markets?</i>	<i>How much do you estimate you spent at the market today?</i>	<i>Have you, or do you expect to spend money elsewhere in the Islands today?</i>	<i>When considering whether to come to the market on a given day, how much does music or other activities affect your decision?</i>	<i>Which events would make you more likely to attend?</i>	<i>Have you seen any of the following advertisements promoting the markets on the Island this summer?</i>	<i>Zip or Postal code</i>	<i>How would you describe yourself?</i>
A) Twice weekly B) Weekly C) Several times per month D) Monthly E) Several times per year F) Rarely G) First time		A) Yes B) No C) Don't know	A) More likely to attend B) Less likely to attend C) Doesn't affect decision	A) Music B) Cooking demos C) Kid's activities D) None	A) Market Posters B) Website C) Facebook D) Market Newsletter E) Front Porch Forum F) Islands Agriculture Map & Guide G) Islander article or ad H) Roadside signs G) None		A) Year round Islands resident B) Seasonal Islands resident C) Occasional visitor to Islands from VT D) Occasional visitor to Island from outside VT. E) First time visitor to the Islands.

1							
2							
3							
4							
5							
6							
7							
8							
9							
10							



**OUR MISSION** - The Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT) promotes organic practices to build an **economically viable, ecologically sound**, and **socially just** Vermont agricultural system that benefits all living things.