

## REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

# Focus Groups & Consumer Research for Direct Markets in Vermont

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The Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA Vermont) seeks proposals from consultants to conduct focus groups and other research to inform the development of a statewide marketing campaign to grow direct market sales (farmers markets, CSAs and farm stands).

### 1. Description of Organization

NOFA Vermont is a nonprofit association of farmers, gardeners, and consumers working to promote an economically viable and ecologically sound Vermont food system for the benefit of current and future generations.

Since 1971, NOFA-VT has served as the voice for organic production for commercial producers, homesteaders and gardeners. We work to support local, organic farmers and gardeners, make healthy food more accessible to all Vermonters and build strong, agriculture-based communities.

### 2. Overview of Direct Market Programs, and this Focus Group Project

NOFA Vermont supports direct farmer-to-consumer markets because we believe in strengthening the relationships between food producers and consumers. As a result, consumers will be more likely to make purchasing decisions that support the farming practices they value, and farmers are trusted to share their values and practices transparently with their customers. Together, consumers and food producers enhance the viability of Vermont's working landscape.

A decade ago, direct markets were the primary place where consumers could purchase local foods. Now, we are increasingly seeing competition not only from within direct markets, but from a wide range of retailers too. In order to continue to grow direct market sales, we need well-crafted messages that resonate with Vermont consumers. The purpose of this project is to conduct consumer research to inform these messages. Key questions to be explored in the research include: 1) the frequency and motivations for shopping direct from farmers (via farmers markets, farm stands, and CSAs), 2) barriers that prevent more direct purchasing, 3) best communication channels to reach the target audiences, and 4) testing reactions to common assumptions about direct markets. This project should employ a mix of focus groups, individual interviews, and an online survey aimed at out-of-state participants (tourists). The research should take place in different locations across the state of Vermont, representing a diverse mix of rural and urban participants. The target audiences for the research will be from specific segment populations: 1) Retirees, 2) New Families, 3) Aspiring Vermonters, and 4) Tourists. More information about these segments can be found here: <http://www.vtfarmtoplate.com/features/vtconsumerprofiles#.WRH2UfKZOHg>. In addition, we want to understand more about Vermonters who shop at direct markets and could be encouraged to shop more regularly.

### 3. Project Tasks

The Consultant will be responsible for leading the following tasks:

- Develop key questions, working with NOFA staff.
- Organize and conduct three focus groups and 6-8 individual interviews (secure venues, identify & recruit participants, arrange for light refreshments, etc.)
- Provide contact information for all participants to NOFA-VT staff, who will arrange their financial compensation (travel reimbursement and slight incentive).
- Create an online survey to gather data from Vermonters that currently shop at direct market.
- Create an online survey to gather data from out-of-state tourists who may visit Vermont regularly (e.g. Boston residents with family in the state).
- Organize data, and analyze all research findings.
- Other duties that may become necessary as the project unfolds.
- Provide a detailed, written report with findings, particularly:
  - What resonates most with consumers? How do the key audiences differ?
  - What are the barriers to buying direct from farmers/reasons for not buying direct from farmers? Why do consumers choose to not buy direct from farmers?
  - What types of “marketing messages” would be most effective to increase direct purchasing?
  - What other key takeaways can be used to develop an effective marketing campaign?

### 4. Selection Process

This RFP will be posted publicly and widely distributed. In addition, NOFA Vermont will contact marketing professionals in Vermont, inviting them to submit a proposal. Bidders will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Experience with conducting focus groups, interview and surveys
- Experience with local food systems and marketing local food businesses/concepts
- Familiarity with direct markets
- Ability to appropriately represent NOFA-VT
- Ability to meet with project staff in person for some or all in-person check-ins
- Capability to accomplish the outlined tasks within the available project budget and timeline
- Clear and well developed proposed scope of work
- Clear writing skills

### 5. Timeline

July 1 to October 15, 2017

- Proposals are due by 4pm on **Monday, June 12, 2017**.
- We anticipate awarding the contract by the end of June and expect to schedule a first meeting with the Consultant in early July.
- Monthly in-person check-ins will be scheduled with the project team.
- A draft report of the work will be completed by September 29, 2017, with all final work due by October 15, 2017.

## 6. Proposals and Submission

Proposals should include:

- Overview of your experience (and team, if working with others)
- Proposed timeline and relevant logistic requirements to meet research criteria by October 15, 2017 deadline,
- A budget with detailed description of services, and
- Examples and references from previous, relevant experience.

Please respond by email to Erin Buckwalter at [erin@nofavt.org](mailto:erin@nofavt.org) with any questions and your interest in this project. Each bidder must describe their ability to accomplish the above described deliverables and activities within the required budget and timeline. Proposals are due by 4pm **Monday, June 12, 2017**.

**\$9,200 is available for tasks associated with this bid.**

**Thank you!**