

Vermont Farmers' Market Manager and Vendor Survey Results

Beginning in 2000, The Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT) sent a survey to all of the farmers' market managers and vendors in Vermont. Although the questionnaire often varied from year to year, a coherent narrative of market evolution is captured by these snapshots. Because the markets are different and each market vendor has such a unique business, we have used the survey results to give a picture of markets and vendors in Vermont in an attempt to find unifying themes.

2000 Survey

Size

Twenty-three farmers' market managers responded to the questionnaire in the year 2000, NOFA's first year of survey-based market analysis. Total vendors range by market from 3-40 with a statewide average of 11.

Finances

Vendors were most commonly charged a seasonal flat rate plus a small daily fee. Prices for yearly space were between \$30 and \$320, with price occasionally varying by size of stall. Daily fees were all generally under \$10. One market took a percentage of profit with the yearly flat fee instead of a daily charge.

While gross receipts were not recorded, market budget info was available. Costs ranged from \$485 to \$22,748, with the majority going toward promotion and management. Only two of the responding markets did not accept Farm-to-Family coupons, in markets that accepted them, they generally accounted for about 5% of total sales. EBT processing was not yet available for Vermont farmers' markets.

Finally, the majority of markets utilized mini-grant funds for advertising, in addition to manager payment and insurance coverage. Managers interviewed often cited improved participation and community interest as a result of the application of these funds, even if the actual monetary impact of this increased traffic was unknown.

2001 Survey

Size

23 farmers' market managers completed the survey in 2001. Number of vendors was highly variable: while the statewide average was 11, regulars ranged from 3 to 41 by market.

Finances

Market budgets averaged \$4,645, with 23% (\$1060) spent on marketing. The largest budget was \$25,954, and the lowest was \$176. Percent spent on advertising did not appear to correlate to total budget. Percentage allocated to PR ranged from 12% to 85%, while actual

spending was between \$92 and \$3500. Farm to Family coupons accounted for approximately 5% of revenue, with a few markets reporting around 25% of purchases with the coupons. Mini-grant funds were used most often for advertising, with manager compensation and entertainment expenses occasionally funded. Many found the ad campaigns to be successful, with two respondents citing customers inquiring about specific items advertised.

In addition to utilizing mini-grants, many respondents requested further NOFA assistance, most often with marketing, special events, and technical expertise.

2003 Survey

Size

Of the approximately 40 farmers markets in Vermont, NOFA received 18 completed surveys. Farmers markets in 2003 ranged from 6 to 210 participating vendors, with 20 vendors as the median. All of the markets had at least 1/3 agricultural vendors.

Finances

Market budgets varied as much as market size, although not in direct correlation. The biggest predictors of a large budget were site fees and/or a paid manager. Markets spent little to nothing on vendor recruitment, the high being \$80. Most markets spent some of their funds on promotion, with over 1/3 spending \$1000+, and a few spending their entire budgets on advertisements. Half of all surveyed spent some money on special events, with amounts ranging from \$100 to \$3000.

For most markets, vendor fees were the primary way of raising funds. The majority have a season rate, varying from \$25 to \$160, and a daily rate, ranging from \$5 to \$15. One market charged 5% of vendor sales per day in lieu of a daily flat fee. In addition, some markets have a \$20 yearly membership fee. Markets also raised money from grants (primarily the mini-grant NOFA-VT offered) sale of tote-bags, and donations from local businesses and community members.

Total sales at markets ranged from \$5000 to \$450,000. A majority of markets reported at least 50% of their sales coming from agricultural products. At all markets prepared foods sales came in second, usually followed closely by craft sales. Farm to Family coupons generally made up less than 5% of market sales. Although several markets reported as much as 15% of sales coming from this state run program, and one market earned over 20% of their gross sales from the coupons.

The most common method to collect gross sales information was the use of an anonymous reporting form. One market assigned private numbers to vendors to anonymously track sales, while other markets felt it was inappropriate to ask vendors for sales statistics.

Customer Attendance

Only one market reported keeping track of customer attendance, but some markets held special events to try and draw more customers. Special events included: live music, hay rides,

live animals, cooking demonstrations, a kids' garden day, harvest festivals, and holiday related celebrations.

Market Location

There was almost an even split between markets that paid for their space and markets occupying their space for free. A common situation for all the markets was a lack of permanence in their location. Only one market reported owning its site, and only one had a long-term lease. However, when discussing needs for a different space, lack of stability did not come up. The primary concerns regarding market space were lack of parking, shelter, bathroom facilities, and visibility.

Manager Compensation (or lack there of)

For many market managers, the only compensation they receive is the gratitude of their fellow market vendors. Half of the managers were volunteers, usually vendors. Markets that did compensate their managers monetarily paid in a variety of ways. Paid managers were either given a fixed salary, paid by the hour, or paid a fixed amount for every market day worked. Some markets had a separate off-season pay rate. Hourly rates reported were between \$12 and \$15 an hour. Pay for a market day ranged from \$80 to \$100. One market compensated its volunteer manager by waiving her vending fee.

On average, managers worked approximately 7 hours a week to run their markets. One third of the market managers reported spending over 10 hours a week to manage their markets. Some spent as little as 1 hour a week.

Volunteers and Community Support

Markets in Vermont relied primarily on their vendors for support. Markets reported that “vendors do everything” and “all vendors are required to do volunteer work.” The market boards were made up of vendor volunteers, and many managers were also vendors who volunteer for the job. Some markets reported getting very little help from any volunteers, even their vendors.

Some markets received community assistance, but the majority did not get help from the area. Community aid primarily came as a free space for their market or through promotional help. Some markets also received donations from the community, and a few managed to be insured under a community group's insurance plan.

Insurance

Every market that responded to the survey was insured in some way. The most popular insurance company was Cooperative Insurance. The markets hold liability insurance and a few also have workers compensation insurance. Markets are paid between \$100 and \$1000 for their insurance, in direct correlation to the size of the market.

Vendors

Fifty-four vendors returned our survey—40 farmers, 7 prepared food vendors, and 7 crafters. Of these vendors, 35 sell only at one market, 14 sell at two markets, and the remaining sell at 3 or more. Over 60% of respondents were full season vendors. These are their thoughts:

Markets in Vermont are Successful

Over 75% of vendors felt their market was successful. The primary reasons were: diversity of product at the market, good location (usually close to a population center), and a loyal customer base. Other common responses were: many vendors, high tourist traffic, access to high-income customers, good management, and a community atmosphere. Here are other comments from vendors on the secret to a successful market.

Not surprisingly, vendors who felt their markets were not successful listed the lack of the elements above, primarily: lack of parking, lack of agricultural vendors, and lack of vendors in general. Poor time of the week and lack of promotion were also common comments.

Sales are Significant

Gross sales at farmers markets ranged from \$200 to \$50,000 with a majority of vendors earning between \$5000 and \$20,000. Average weekly sales ranged from \$17 to \$1800, with most vendors earning between \$300 and \$1000 a week at their market. Forty percent of vendors reported earning 50% or more of their total sales for the year at farmers market, and 60% earn at least a quarter of their gross sales at their farmers market.

Vendors were asked what other outlets they had for selling their product. Most farmers rely on direct sales from their farm or selling to local stores and restaurants. Crafters listed craft shows and galleries as their outlets.

Alternative Labeling: organic but not certified farm products

Until recently, farmers using organic practices could label their products “organic” with or without being certified. Now the USDA regulates the use of the word “organic” requiring farmers using this term to be certified by an accredited agency. Farmers markets are ideal settings for consumers to interact and learn from growers. Because of this, we asked farmers who are not certified how they are conveying to customers their farm practices without labeling their products “organic.” Most farmers in this situation are not labeling their product at all. Instead they are taking advantage of the interaction with their customers to explain their farming practices and philosophy. Others just continue to use the word “organic” when describing their product. Those who are labeling also use the terms grass-fed, sustainable, low spray, no spray, naturally grown, and local.

2005 Survey

Size

Vermont had 55 active farmers’ markets in 2005. The Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont and the department of Community Development and Applied Economics at the University of Vermont collaborated on a survey of market managers during the winter of 2006. Managers were mailed surveys asking about the sales and status of their markets and their opinions about market potential. Follow-ups and some surveys were also conducted by phone. This report is based on the responses of the 39 reporting markets (71%).

Finances

In 2005 the estimated sales from all markets was \$3,511,000 (plus or minus 3%). Average sales per market were almost \$97,000, but size of markets varied widely. The four largest markets (in Norwich, Burlington, Brattleboro, and Montpelier) accounted for over half of total sales in the state, with average reported sales of \$459,000 each. Gross receipts were most commonly calculated with the use of anonymous vendor reports. Markets reported an average of 24 vendors, with actual numbers between 5 and 89.

Total estimated sales were made up of 59% agricultural products, 22% prepared foods, 18% crafts, and 2% other products. Most markets accept Farm-to-Family coupons, but 80% of markets estimate that these purchases account for less than 10% of total sales.

Vendors and size of the markets were highly variable. Markets with sales less than \$97,000 (of which there were 28) had an average of 14 vendors and \$20,262 in sales. 35% of these markets had a paid manager, with the mode of compensation ranging from \$500-\$1500. In contrast, markets with sales greater than \$97,000 (11 in total) had, on average, 51 vendors and \$317,170 in sales. 89% of these markets had a paid manager, generally paid more than \$4,500.

Manager Comments

Based on the USDA Census of Agriculture, Vermont already has the highest state per capita sales of food products from farmers to consumers, at 5.5 times the national average. Farmers' markets are an important (though not the exclusive) direct sales outlet and 69% of managers responding believe that their markets are still growing. Respondents rated attracting additional shoppers as more important to growth than attracting more farmers to the market. Almost 75% of market managers believe that the number of farmers' markets in their areas is currently about right, suggesting that markets neither unduly compete with each other nor that there is a lack of market opportunity for vendors and consumers.

Managers of smaller markets (less than \$97,000 in gross receipts) often cited the need for better visibility and better parking. When asked about improvements necessary for growth, small market managers most often stated that more farmers, shoppers, a wider selection of products, and better promotion are essential. Low priority concerns included decreasing market fees, increasing open hours/days, and improving facilities. In contrast, the large market managers agreed that more shoppers were crucial, but other responses varied. Some thought a wider range of products would improve the market; others referenced facility and promotion issues.

Market Location

Though farmers' markets are clearly an established part of Vermont's agricultural economy, market status is still tenuous in many locations. The majority of markets struggle with small numbers of vendors and consumers and low sales per vendor. Only 29% of reporting markets are formally incorporated. No reporting markets own their sites, with 65% operating on public land and 35% on private land, but only 13% reporting any kind of formal lease for their space. Of those responding to the survey, 91% said they could use some kind of outside help with their markets. 75% of these cited a need for help with promotion and advertising.

Vendor Fees

Assessment of vendor fees ranged widely, with most being charged on a market day basis in addition to a flat seasonal rate. Costs ranged from \$5 daily with a \$10 seasonal fee to \$30 per day and \$150 for the season. Seven markets took a percentage of sales (usually 5%), and three of collected that for the entire vendor payment. Charges for market frontage or stall size were applied in three markets.

2006 Survey

Vermont had 59 active farmers' markets in 2006. NOFA surveyed the market managers during the winter of 2007 to request information on sales, the status of their markets, and potential areas requiring assistance. This report highlights answers from a sample of 32 markets (54 percent response rate).

Finances

In 2006 the estimated revenue for the 28 markets reporting figures was \$2,935,644. Total revenues ranged from \$1,000 to over \$500,000, with a median revenue of \$51,881. The trend of a small number of markets producing most of the reported revenue continued in 2006, with the top seven grossing markets accounting for 73 percent of gross revenues. Market managers (N= 30) reported expenses ranging from \$75 to nearly \$30,000 with median expenses of \$1,837. Market managers also reported income ranging from \$100 to nearly \$30,000, with a median income of \$3,252. The seven largest grossing markets had, on average, 24 agricultural vendors and 27 non-agricultural vendors, while the remaining markets had an average of 10 agricultural vendors and 12 non-agricultural vendors. The top eight grossing markets had market managers, while the bottom nine markets did not. Interestingly, twenty-five of the 32 respondents (78 percent)—mostly market managers—were women.

Non-agricultural related vendors accounted for 54 percent (N= 437) of total vendors, while agricultural vendors made up the remaining 46 percent (N= 376). Although non-agricultural related vendors accounted for more than half of the vendors, the bulk of sales were produce. 58 percent of the reported sales were from agricultural products (\$1,680,806), followed by 22 percent (\$632,211) from prepared food vendors, 19 percent from craft sales and a negligible amount from other sales. These figures are roughly the same as results from 2005. The average weekly vendor fee for the 25 reporting markets was a little over \$10.

Special Events

Market managers reported music as their most common special event, followed by NOFA-VT's "Shop with the Chef" program, food events, crafts, kid events, and animal attractions. Kid events were most frequently rated "very successful", while the music, Shop with the Chef, crafts and animal attractions were "somewhat successful". Food events received a mixed rating, mainly due to bad weather.

Location

Only two of the respondents reported owning their market location (Winooski and Chelsea Grange). Seventy-nine percent of the markets were on public locations.

Comments

When asked to comment on a market's strengths and weaknesses, managers responded in a variety of ways. Suggestions did not appear to correlate to market size or revenue. Most thought that their quality products, music, and location provided an environment conducive to sales. Common responses to what managers would like help with were promotion, customer relations, vendor support, management, insurance, board development, EBT, and attracting more customers.

2008 Survey

In 2008, there were 61 summer farmers' markets operating at least one day a week throughout the state of Vermont. The Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT), with direction from the newly formed Vermont Farmers' Market Association mailed a survey to all the farmers' market managers or coordinators at the conclusion of the 2008 market season asking about sales, the status of their markets, and areas their markets needed assistance. This report highlights answers received from 48 markets (79%). Information received on the survey sheets varied from all questions answered with added comments to very little information.

Size and Venue

The number of individual vendors that attended a given market at least once last summer ranged from 2 to 101. The largest markets averaged between 40 and 50 vendors (8 reporting markets) each week. Ten averaged under 10 vendors, seventeen between 10 and 20 vendors, and 6 between 20 and 40 vendors. Most markets were made up of agricultural product vendors, processed and ready to eat foods and baked goods, and a variety of crafts. Some markets allow massage services. Vendors drove up to 75 miles to sell at markets. The average mileage driven was between 5 and 30 miles, the greater distances are by vendors driving to the larger and more profitable markets where there are a greater number of customers to buy their products.

Finances

In 2008, 35 of the 48 reporting markets collected gross receipt data of their vendors. These totals were (generally) divided into 3 major categories: agricultural sales, food sales, and crafts. The total reported gross sales amount is \$5,660,220. Agricultural products accounted for \$2,870,678 reported; Processed foods \$1,225,063; and Crafts and other services \$664,374. Some of the reporting markets did not break down their total sales into any categories, which accounts for the discrepancy of these subtotals not equaling the total amount reported. Only 5 markets reported Agricultural sales of less than 50% of their total (the lowest being 37%), 21 markets over 50% and of those markets, 12 had sales over 60% (the highest being 87%). Only 2 markets had craft (and other services) amounts over 20%. Processed foods and baked goods averaged around 20% at most markets with 6 markets over 40% and 7 under 20%.

Most markets determined their gross sales using an anonymous reporting form. The form has the date and an area to write in a dollar amount for agricultural products, prepared food, and craft sales. The form is either returned at the end of the market or at the following market.

Some markets ask local businesses to donate funds to help pay for entertainment at markets and two reporting markets stated they gave all or a portion of their operating profit to help other organizations in their community at the end of the market season.

Market (organizational) budgets varied as much as market size, although not in direct correlation. The biggest contributing factors toward a large budget were site fees and/or a paid manager. Last year, budgets ranged from approximately \$40,400 income with expenses of \$42,000 to \$250 income with \$125 expenses. This income comes primarily from vendors' fees. Most markets charge their vendors fees according to the amount of space used. This is calculated in different ways:

- Some markets charge a seasonal rate (from \$25 a season, to over \$800 a season) for “regular” vendors and a flat day rate charge (from \$5/week to \$20/week per space).
- Some markets charge by day rates only (from \$5/week to \$25/week).
- Eight reporting markets charge a percentage of vendors' daily sales. These percentages range from 3% to 6% a week.
- One market (which is paying for their permanent facility) charges both a seasonal rate and 3% of reported weekly gross sales
- Three quarters of the reporting markets charge a yearly membership fee ranging from \$15 to \$80.

For many market managers, the only compensation they receive is the gratitude of their fellow market vendors. Some are paid by the hour, some a fixed stipend, some are given “perks” by the market such as a free vending space if they vend themselves, free products, etc. Twenty reporting markets paid their manager/coordinator amounts ranging from \$600 to over \$13,000, with the funds coming primarily from vendors' space fees.

Farm to Family coupons, used by low income Vermonters at farmers' markets accounted for \$49,623 spent at the reporting markets (though state-wide 4,885 low income households, mostly elderly persons and families with children, used the coupons to buy \$121,992 worth of fresh fruits and vegetables at Vermont farmers markets (*data obtained from the 2008 Economic Services Division VT Department for Children and Families report*).

Other expenses markets had were for entertainment (12 markets reported spending a total of \$19,167), advertizing (18 markets spent \$22,105), porta-potties (3 markets spent \$1,400), general liability insurance, site fees (14 markets spent \$22,674) and office supplies, bookkeeping, market coupons (as incentive for shoppers to attend their market: 3 markets spent \$1,203), website development, tents for manager and/or vendors though few markets shared how much they spent on these items.

Added Comments Managers Shared on Survey

Question: What do you see as your market's 3 greatest obstacles to more success?

- Parking issues (11)
- Problems with the market's site (6) including better visibility (4 more) and more space needed (4)
- Attract new (or more) vendors (9) including more meat, cheese, eggs, fruits, organic products

- More customers (10) including EBT use (1) and population of community (1)
- Vendors coming more consistently (6) and more vendor cooperation (2)
- Ability to pay coordinators (3)
- Need for better signage (2)
- Economically poor community base
- Fees (2)
- Economic downturn (2) Gas prices (1)
- Need for a manager that is not a vendor (2)
- Advertizing and marketing (4) (lack of)
- More public awareness (2)
- Provide (more) entertainment to draw customers (3), need funds for entertainment
- Better organization of market (2)
- Day and Time of market
- Lack of interest in fresh vegetables
- No facility for inclement weather
- Better website (1), more web advertizing (1)

Question: Would you or members of your board be interested in attending special workshops during the summer market season? Yes (6) Topics of interest are:

- Farmers' Market board members for a half day training session and (second) half day for input to the Vermont Farmers' Market Association
- Help with tracking sales
- Vendor recruitment and advertizing

Question: Would you or members of your board be interested in attending special workshops during the winter months? Yes (12) Topics of interest are:

- Help with creating and managing a market website
- Marketing advice and assistance (3)
- Time for vendor sharing

Managers also commented on:

- The need now to do a separate winter market brochure
- That small towns equals a small population equals not large vendor sales
- To buy local first is a new concept to many people and it requires a different outlook as to where one gets their necessities

Conclusion

Farmers' Markets in Vermont are all unique and each provides a service to their community. As the desire for more local food products grows, so does the number and size of markets. Small markets have different needs and face different obstacles than large markets. No matter what the size, in most communities where a farmers' market is present, townspeople are taking the time to visit them and purchase products from local producers as well as having the opportunity to catch up with their friends they see at the market.

The largest markets in the state generally have more capital to work with. Their vendors generally earn more money at the market so the board of directors are able to charge them more to attend which in turn allows the market greater access to better promotion, ability to pay a manager and other fees like bookkeeping and website development. Large markets often have a waiting list of people wanting to vend at their market. Most also have many years of experience, growing from a small market to a large one and have learned much through trial and error. The responsibilities are left to the manager and there is little help supplied by the vendors. Small markets rarely have the funds to pay for more than bare necessities. Most are managed by volunteer help, which is provided by the vendors that sell at the market. Often they have a hard time keeping quality vendors who often leave if a better opportunity at a larger market presents itself.

2009 Survey

In 2009, there were 73 summer farmers' markets operating at least one day a week throughout the state of Vermont. The Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT), with direction from the newly formed Vermont Farmers' Market Association mailed and emailed a survey to all the farmers' market managers or coordinators at the conclusion of the 2009 market season asking about sales, the status of their markets, and areas their markets needed assistance. 62 markets returned their surveys (84%). Information received on the survey sheets varied from most questions answered with added comments (45 markets) to very little information (17 markets). The majority of information in this report has been gleaned from the information surveyed from 45 markets (62% of markets in the state).

In 2009 the Castanea Foundation offered mini grant rewards of up to \$5,000 to Vermont Farmers' Markets to help them improve their sustainability. 38 markets took advantage of this offer and were awarded a total over \$72,000 in funding. Grants ranged from \$1,500 to \$4,000 each. Funds were used for a variety of needs; ranging from light infrastructure (pop-up tents, benches and signage), market promotion, manager stipends, or heavy infrastructure to help with drainage on the market site. In most situations, this infusion of extra market income allowed the market's vendors to have a very successful season.

Size and Venue

The number of individual vendors that attended a given market at least once last summer ranged from 3 to 80. The largest markets averaged between 40 and 50 vendors (7 reporting markets) each week. 10 markets averaged under 10 vendors, 25 between 10 and 19 vendors (up from 17 in 2008), and 10 between 21 and 39 vendors (up from 6 in 2008). Most markets are made up of agricultural products, processed and ready to eat foods, baked goods, and a variety of crafts. Some markets allow services such as massage and tarot card reading. Many markets provide a space for local organizations to promote themselves. Vendors drove up to 60 miles to sell at markets. The average mileage driven was under 20 miles; the greater distances are by vendors driving to the larger and more profitable markets where there are a greater number of customers to buy their products.

Finances

In 2009, 45 of the 62 reporting markets collected gross receipt data of their vendors. These totals are (generally) divided into 3 major categories: agricultural sales, food sales, and crafts. The

total reported gross sales amount is \$6,917,041 (up from \$5,660,220 reported in 2008 from 35 markets). Agricultural products account for \$4,360,648 reported (up from \$2,870,678 in 2008 or nearly 52% increase in reported sales); Processed foods \$1,719,422 (up from \$1,225,063 in 2008); and Crafts and other services \$887,117 (\$664,374 in 2008). Some of the reporting markets did not break down their total sales into any categories, which accounts for the discrepancy of these subtotals not equaling the total amount reported. Nine markets reported agricultural sales of less than 50% of their total (the lowest being 33%), 32 markets had over 50% in agricultural sales (up from 21 markets in 2008), and of those markets, 20 (up from 12 in 2008) had sales over 60% (the highest being 81%). Six markets had craft (and other services) amounts over 20% (same number as 2008). With the exception of seven reporting markets, processed foods and baked goods gross receipts were significantly higher than in 2008 (three markets reported increases of 100%, 300% and 500% respectively). Processed food sales average 25% of gross receipts at most markets with 7 markets over 40% and 10 under 20%.

Most markets determined their gross sales using an anonymous reporting form. The form has the date and an area to write in a dollar amount for agricultural products, prepared food, and craft sales. The form is either returned at the end of the market or at the following market.

Operating Budgets:

Market (organizational) budgets vary as much as market size, although not in direct correlation. The biggest contributing factors toward a large budget are site fees and/or a paid manager. In 2009, 34 reporting markets used their spaces for free (one paid \$3000 and another over \$5000). Last year, budgets ranged from \$54,000 income with expenses of over \$46,000 to \$147 income with \$190 expenses. This income comes primarily from vendors' fees (this year, many markets included the grant funds they received as part of their income). Most markets charge their vendors fees according to the amount of space used. This is calculated in different ways:

- Some markets charge a seasonal rate (from \$25 a season, to over \$800 a season) for "regular" vendors and a flat day rate charge (from \$5/week to \$20/week per space).
- Some markets charge by day rates only (from \$5/week to \$25/week).
- Eight reporting markets charge a percentage of vendors' daily sales. These percentages range from 3% to 6% a week.
- One market (which is paying for their permanent facility) charges both a seasonal rate and 3% of reported weekly gross sales
- Three quarters of the reporting markets charge a yearly membership fee ranging from \$15 to \$80. The rest do not have these fees.

Manager Compensation:

For many market managers, the only compensation they receive is the gratitude of their fellow market vendors. Some are paid by the hour, some a fixed stipend, some are given "perks" by the market such as a free vending space if they vend themselves, free products, etc. Thirty-four reporting markets paid their manager/coordinator amounts ranging from \$500 to \$16,000, with the funds coming primarily from vendors' space fees. 19 markets paid managers/coordinators over \$2,000 for the year. The higher manager incomes come from the largest markets in the state with vendor numbers over 35 each week.

Other Budget Information:

In 2009, very few of the reporting markets recorded the amount of Farm to Family coupons they received. From data obtained from the 2009 Economic Services Division VT Department for Children and Families report, statewide 4916 low income households, mostly elderly persons and families with children, used the coupons to buy \$118,992 worth of fresh fruits and vegetables at Vermont farmers markets.

In 2009, 18 farmers' market established the capacity to accept EBT cards so that customers could use SNAP benefits to purchase food. Some of these markets also set up technology to accept bank debit cards. Total reported sales were \$88,205.00 from EBT and debit card transactions. SNAP transactions totaled \$31,312.00

Other expenses markets have are for entertainment, advertising, porta-potties (three markets), general liability insurance, office supplies, bookkeeping, market coupons (as incentive for shoppers to attend their market), website development, tents for the manager though few markets shared how much they spent on these items on this past survey.

Some markets ask local businesses to donate funds to help pay for entertainment at markets and two reporting markets stated they gave all or a portion of their operating profit to help other organizations in their community at the end of the market season.

Added Comments Managers Shared on Survey

Below is a compilation of the added comments from the surveys received. If there is a number after the comment, it means the number of reporting markets expressing the same comment.

Ways the market supports the community

F to F coupons 4

Youth day 3

Youth involvement poster contests etc 1

Free space to local non-profits 12

Workshop series (preserving foods)

Saturday meeting place 3

Coupon program with businesses

Market ads always included many town business's names

"Community days"... when businesses are allowed to come and sell some of their products at the market

Contribute to food shelf, gleaning 4

Market brings people downtown to shop

EBT 5

Handicapped accessible

Special events that are educational to community

Left over market organ funds given to food bank

Market and the city work hand in hand for added success for both

Ways the community supports the market:

Free rent 18 (many more were not stated on survey)

Town pays insurance 2

Town pays electricity
Number of businesses help sponsor the market (2)
Police keep parking lot free night before the market
Free parking spaces for vendors
Strong support from landlord
Bus stops at market
Bus to transport senior citizens to market
Market and city work hand in hand for added success for both

Does a diverse cross section of host community attend the market?

Yes 16

Large increase in EBT sales from '08 to '09
EBT has really helped market... benefiting both customers and vendors
Young and old attend market and physically challenged 7
Farm to family coupons help bring poorer residents 9
Many tourists 6

No 10

Only wealthy attend 4
Few "born and raised locals" attend 3
Farm to Family coupons down
Few use EBT opportunity
Very artsy "crunchy" town
Don't know 2 (many more markets no response)

Innovations market has explored that have helped sales and market stability or brought in new customers:

Entertainment weekly 6
Great visible signage 3
Special Event Days 8
Weekly children's activities 4
Manager table with recipes and other handouts (many)
Radio sponsored ads/ interviews 2
Vendors selling quality products
Vendors help each other out and encourage the new vendors
Articles about farmers markets in local newspaper brought in many customers
Youth farmers market 3
Handicapped accessibility
Up and running website (4 markets reported this but many more are using them successfully)
Bus for senior citizens
"Traveling market days" – setting up in other towns in county numerous times
Shop with Chef 3
Moving market to better location 3
Changed day 1
Senior Citizen discounts
Using the local cable weather channel screen ticker to promote market (especially on rainy days)

when tourists/skiers needed change of plans for day
Street closure to make market larger (vendors now on street and on the adjacent park)
Market has adapted as the need arises
Friends of the Market emails
Creating festive atmosphere
Created a newsletter

What were your markets 3 greatest obstacles for 2009?

Economically poor community base
Inclement weather 3
More public awareness 4 (including more low income)
Need more customers 14 (especially local ones)
Maintaining good mix of quality vendors/recruiting quality vendors 13 (more produce vendors-many)
Parking 7
More vending space 10
Market evaluation techniques 1
Wider range/scope of Ads
Low pay for manager 2
Vendors to show up every week or don't call to say they are not coming 6
Belief by townspeople that local food is more expensive 3
Small overworked board and/or over worked managers 3
Lack of volunteer help
Clarifying vendor categories
Location security 5
Poor location 2
Lack of Market promotion 2
\$\$ to pay EBT person
Town not supportive of market 2
Dealing with seasonal population base
Customer awareness of diversity of market
Limited budget 2
Good visible signage 3
Being a new market
Wrong day?
Need to move market site 2
*Loss of vendor integrity and trust (vendors selling what they don't produce) 2
Political whims of city council affect market 2
Another Farmers' Market close by
Improve parking and traffic flow
\$\$ for entertainment
Lack of future/strategic plan

Conclusion

During the 2009 season, I visited 35 farmers' markets. It was a real pleasure to see the variety and innovation seen at markets across the state. There are many product gems available and

farmers' markets provide the perfect venue for entrepreneurs to display their goods. Most markets are thriving and looking for more vendors. The ones that are struggling, with a few exceptions, are because they have either outgrown their market space, or have managerial issues.

The largest markets in the state generally have more capital to work with. Their vendors generally earn more money at the market so the board of directors are able to charge them more to attend which in turn allows the market greater access to better promotion, ability to pay a manager and other fees like bookkeeping and website development. Large markets often have a waiting list of people wanting to vend at their market. Most also have many years of experience, growing from a small market to a large one and have learned much through trial and error. The responsibilities are left to the manager and there is little help supplied by the vendors.

Small markets rarely have the funds to pay for more than bare necessities. Most are managed by volunteer help, which is provided by the vendors that sell at the market or an enthusiastic community organizer. Often they have a hard time keeping quality vendors who often leave if a better opportunity at a larger market presents itself.

One main observation (through these surveys) is that much of the information or help market managers are asking for can be accessed through materials available on the NOFA-VT website including: [Organizing and Maintaining Your Farmers' Market](#), "Shared Wisdom," (a DVD prepared by Monica Roth at Cornell Extension). Many markets have received copies of these materials, and managers are encouraged to take advantage of these resources. If you need additional copies, please check the farmers' market resource page at www.nofavt.org

Farmers' markets in Vermont are all unique and each provides a service to their community. As the desire for more local food products grows, so does the number and size of markets. Small markets have different needs and face different obstacles than large markets. No matter what the size, in most communities where a farmers' market is present, townspeople are taking the time to visit them and purchase products from local producers as well as having the opportunity to catch up with their friends they see at the market.

2010 Survey

87 summer farmers' markets operated at least one day a week throughout the state of Vermont in 2010. The Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT), with direction from the Vermont Farmers' Market Association sent a survey to all farmers' market managers or coordinators at the conclusion of the 2010 market season asking about sales, the status of their markets, and areas that markets needed assistance. 65 markets returned the surveys (75%). Of the 65 who returned their surveys, the responses differed significantly from being filled out completely to leaving much of the survey blank. The information in this report comes primarily from the surveys that had the majority of information filled out.

In 2010, the Castanea Foundation offered mini grant rewards of up to \$5,000 to Vermont Farmers' Markets to help them improve their sustainability. 32 markets took advantage of this offer and were awarded a total over \$91,000.00 in funding. Grants ranged from \$1,500 to \$4,000 each. Funds were used for a variety of needs; ranging from light infrastructure (pop-up tents, benches and signage), market promotion, manager stipends, or heavy infrastructure to help with

drainage on the market site. In most situations, this infusion of extra market income allowed the market's vendors to have a very successful season.

Size and Venue

The number of individual vendors that attended a given market at least once last summer ranged from 6 to 376.

Average number of vendors	Number of markets
1-10	2
11-20	12
21-30	17
31-40	9
41-50	10
51-60	2
61-70	2
71-80	1
81-90	1
91-100	2
>100	3
Total	61

Most markets are made up of agricultural products, processed and ready to eat foods, baked goods, and a variety of crafts. Some markets allow services such as massage and bike repair. Many markets provide a space for local organizations to promote themselves. Vendors drove up to 50 miles to sell at markets. The average mileage driven was 20 miles.

Finances

In 2010, 49 of the 65 reporting markets collected gross receipt data of their vendors. The totals reported were divided into 3 major categories: agricultural sales, food sales, and crafts. The total reported gross sales amount is \$7,993,334 (up from \$6,917,041 reported in 2009 from 45 markets). Agricultural products account for \$4,974,775 reported (up from \$4,360,648 in 2009, a 12% increase); Processed foods \$2,062,120.25 (up from \$1,719,422 in 2009); and Crafts and other services \$779,868.28 (down from \$887,117 in 2009). Some of the reporting markets did not break down their total sales into any categories, which accounts for the discrepancy of these subtotals not equaling the total amount reported. 28% (13) of reporting markets reported agricultural sales of less than 50% of their total (the lowest being 22%). 72% (34) of reporting markets had 50% or more in agricultural sales, and of those markets, 16 had sales over 60% (the highest being 83%). Six markets had craft (and other services) amounts over 20%. Processed food sales average 30% of gross receipts at the six markets that reported that income. Of the markets that reported, 23% of them said their sales decreased, 73% said their sales increased, and 4% said they remained the same compared to the previous year.

Most markets determined their gross sales using an anonymous reporting form for each vendor. The form has the date and an area to write in a dollar amount for agricultural products, prepared food, and craft sales sold during the market. The form is either returned at the end of the market or at the following market.

Operating Budgets:

Market (organizational) budgets vary as much as market size, although not in direct correlation. The biggest contributing factors toward a large budget are site fees and/or a paid manager. In 2010, 51 reporting markets used their spaces for free. Last year, budget expenses ranged from \$277 to nearly \$55,000 expenses. Market income to offset these expenses comes primarily from vendors' fees (this year, many markets included the grant funds they received as part of their income). Most markets charge their vendors fees according to the amount of space used or the money they ear. This is calculated in different ways:

- Some markets charge a seasonal rate (from \$10 a season up to \$800 a season) for “regular” vendors and a flat day rate charge (from \$5/week to \$35/week per space).
- Some markets charge by day rates only (from \$5/week to \$25/week).
- Eight reporting markets charge a percentage of vendors' daily sales. These percentages range from 3% to 6% a week.
- 53% of the reporting markets charge a yearly membership fee ranging from \$15 to \$80.

Manager Compensation:

For many market managers, the only compensation they receive is the gratitude of their fellow market vendors. Some are paid by the hour, some a fixed stipend, some are given “perks” by the market such as a free vending space if they vend themselves, free products, etc. 59% (37) of reporting markets paid their manager/coordinator amounts ranging from \$348 to \$14,600, with the funds coming primarily from vendors' space fees. Of those 37 reporting markets, 16 markets paid managers/coordinators over \$2,000 for the year. The higher manager incomes come from the largest markets in the state with vendor numbers over 35 each week.

Other Budget Information:

The Economic Services Division of the VT Department for Children and Families (DCF) reports that 5,083 low income households statewide, mostly elderly persons and families with children, used Farm To Family Program coupons to buy \$123,039 worth of fresh fruits and vegetables at 59 Vermont farmers markets in 2010.

In 2010, 27 farmers' markets had the capacity to accept EBT cards so that customers could use SNAP benefits to purchase food (up from 18 in 2009). Some of these markets also hosted technology to accept bank debit cards. Total reported sales were over \$110,000 from EBT and debit card transactions. 3SquaresVT/SNAP transactions totaled over \$55,000.

Other expenses markets have include entertainment, advertising, porta-potties, general liability insurance, office supplies, bookkeeping, market coupons (as incentive for shoppers to attend their market), website development, and tents for the manager.

Some markets ask local businesses to donate funds to help pay for entertainment at markets.

Added Comments Managers Shared on Survey

Below is a compilation of the added comments from the surveys received. If there is a number after the comment, it means the number of reporting markets expressing the same comment.

Ways the market supports the community

Brings people downtown to support local businesses too (5)
Donation of market products or \$ (4)
Market offers free space for local non-profits (3)
The community is not supportive or slow to support (3)
Market offers a 'gleaning' project (2)
Market offers EBT/Harvest Health coupons
Market provides business incubation
Provide events and music for the community

Ways the community supports the market:

Donated use of space/infrastructure (different at each site but may include electricity, restrooms, insurance, etc.) (20)
Businesses or non-profits in town sponsor events or give donations (11)
Brings people downtown to support local businesses too (5)
Collaborate on advertisements (4)
Town/Non-profit assisted in managing market or paying for manager (3)
Donated advertising (3)
Collaborate on events (3)
Landlords/town helped with or made site improvements (3)
Free parking offered (2)
Member hours at Co-op to volunteer at market
Allowed to put signs on private property with permission
Local children made picnic tables
Town has recycling center at market for all refuse
Market can hang banners across Main Street
Articles about market in local town magazine
Businesses allow advertising, use of restrooms
Local restaurants purchase produce at market
Town/city rewriting jurisdiction to allow for markets
Police help if needed
Local café hosts market meetings
Non-profit allows market to use non-profit status

Does a diverse cross section of host community attend the market?

Yes - 29 responses

EBT, Farm to Family, and/or Harvest Health coupons really help (16)
Easily accessible for those without reliable transportation (2)
Gleaning program (2)
Diversity of music helps
Specific outreach done to assisted living communities and low income housing residents
Sent info about market through the school
Ads on the local radio station help
Market provides pleasant gathering/meeting spot
Weekly FPF post helped bring in more people
Highly visible spot

No – 12 responses

Few locals attend/mainly tourists (3)
Maybe with EBT or Farm to Family, more people would come (3)
Shoppers not utilizing EBT (2)
Perception it's too expensive (2)
Many community members have their own garden
Locals not in the habit of shopping at the market
Not for lower income consumers
Had to give up market table due to cost
Hope to improve with coupons for low-income/seniors
Only wealthy attend

Didn't know – 5 responses

Ways the market has improved sales:

Special events (22)
Better signage/advertising (19)
Coupons (13)
EBT/Debit (10)
Live music (8)
Cooking Demos/tasting days (7)
Improved website (5)
Manager/Events/Info tent (5)
Changed market day or location (4)
Email list (4)
Flyers/Flier every door or postcards (4)
Harvest Health (3)
Gleaning (3)
Benches or covered seating area for customers to rest (3)
Farm to Family (3)
Press releases/newspaper articles (3)
Raffles (3)
Market "kickoff" event (3)
Youth market (3)
Community Booth/Non-profit table (3)
Children's activities (2)
More vendors (2)
Radio ads (2)
Improved parking/Special parking accommodations for seniors and handicapped
Customers (2)
Focused manager/great market committee (2)
New logo
Signs in multiple languages
Master Gardener & Composter booth
Have "shopping carts"
Dog friendly
Part of published guide

Market info tent
End of year customer survey
Refrigerator magnets
Front Porch Forum
Joined Chamber of Commerce
Reached out to local College students
Display in town business windows of vendors products
“Open” sign next to permanent sign
Facebook
Market dollars to use as gift certificates
Offering coffee

Obstacles to Success

Need more variety of vendors/committed vendors (15)
Parking (12)
Competition with other markets, growers, CSAs (10)
Advertising (either costs of lack of know-how) (8)
Limited space for expansion (8)
Having a strong customer base (both summer and winter and diverse populations) (7)
Limited volunteers (5)
Bad weather (4)
Lack of permanent site (4)
Struggling economy (4)
Cost to manage the market (3)
Location (3)
Not having an active board or inexperienced (3)
Overcoming past reputation (2)
Perceptions that farmers’ markets are expensive (2)
Having vendors &/or Board Members share market responsibilities (2)
Entertainment costs (2)
Need to have more affordable prices for lower income population (2)
Restarting with new staff
Need to increase EBT/FF sales
Permanent toilets needed
Highlighting community groups at the market
Lack of community/local government support