



Keeping Farmers' Markets **Strong and Sustainable**

From the beginning

Cooperative Extension has been assisting local farmers for decades. In the 1990's, as farmers' share of the retail price of agricultural products declined to as little as twelve cents of every dollar, many began marketing their products directly to consumers to keep their farms profitable. Cooperative Extension continued to work with farmers to develop their direct marketing skills and knowledge of food safety regulations. During this process, it became apparent that one of their greatest challenges was finding good marketing opportunities. For most farmers that includes the farmers' market. To meet the needs of agriculture and horticulture producers, Cooperative Extension educators Kristin Krokowski, Waukesha County, and Rose Skora, Kenosha and Racine Counties, undertook an assessment of farmers' markets in Southeast Wisconsin from the perspective of the farmer, the customer and the market manager.



Who benefited?

Over a two-year period, 428 customers, 216 farmers' market vendors and 16 market managers were surveyed to assess the current successes and challenges of the 22 farmers' markets that participated in our survey. A project overview of the data and individual market reports were written for the participating markets to review the vendor and customer survey data and suggest areas that might be addressed to improve their markets' appeal. Assessment of farmers' market vendors was done through evaluations and day-long educational sessions held annually for the last three years. Market managers identified marketing and promotion as the areas of their greatest educational needs. In response to this, a grant was written and funded through the USDA for nearly \$70 thousand dollars to create an intensive marketing and promotion study course and self-study guide. An additional grant has been awarded to Cooperative Extension to assist market managers throughout the state of Wisconsin in creating a farmers' market association.

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What's ahead?

Building on the interest and excitement generated by the surveys and educational sessions, we are currently planning workshops for market managers and vendors around the areas of food safety and the new federal Guaranteed Assurance Program (GAP). We have applied for funds to complete a research study on the value of incorporating Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) technology, which will allow farmers markets to accept Food Stamps/FoodShare dollars.

Report: "Keeping farmers' markets strong and sustainable": <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/quad/projects/documents/fm.pdf>

For more information:
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