

## CHAPTER 5

# Improving and Measuring Market Performance



There are many ways to encourage and measure the growth of your farmers market. Raising funds and securing sponsorships can help your market afford what it needs to expand. Marketing and promotions can help boost awareness and attendance of your market. And collecting data and feedback will help you make improvements and changes moving forward.

# FUNDRAISING

## IT TAKES MONEY TO MAKE MONEY

Fundraising and sponsorships increase awareness, build relationships, and engage staff, volunteers, board members, vendors, and market-goers. And a market's effort to gather data and report metrics makes a request for funds stronger.

First impressions are important and so is a communication strategy that is sustainable. Be realistic. Practice your pitch.

## 6 C'S TO CONSIDER WHEN PLANNING YOUR MARKET'S FUNDING STRATEGY

### CAPACITY

Consider your capacity as market manager. Coordinate your asks, activities, and stewardship accordingly. Some fundraising methods require more time and different skills than others.

### COMMITTEE

Who can help you? Do you have a board member with grant writing experience? A volunteer who does graphic design? Can you assemble a small committee to help seek sponsors, write letters, and follow through? It's okay if you need a year to build that core team and create a strategy, then spend the next year putting a plan into action.

### CORRESPONDENCE

Will your committee be making the funding request or will it come directly from you? In letters, will you use "we" or "I" when requesting donations? If you have board members with strong ties to potential sponsors, would you want them to send a more personalized letter?

**MARKET AFTER DARK**  
Presented by the Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance

**AUGUST 24, 2019  
6:30 - 11 P.M.  
DOWNTOWN CEDAR RAPIDS**

**THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS**

**SUPPORTING**

**NORDSTROM** **Wickwire CHIROPRACTIC**  
and Wellness Center

**PRESENTING MEDIA**

**The Gazette**

**LOCAL BEVERAGES BROUGHT TO YOU BY**

Cedar Ridge Winery and Distillery  
Clock House Brewing  
Iowa Brewing Company  
Lion Bridge Brewing Company  
Quarter Barrel  
Sutliff Cider

**BEVERAGE TENT HOSTS**

Alzheimer's Association  
Cedar Rapids Ultimate  
Cedar River Gang  
Corridor Running  
Dupaco Community Credit Union  
Families Helping Families  
Hawkeye Fire & Safety  
GoDaddy  
Miron Construction  
Van Horn Automotive Group

**ID TENT HOSTS**

Alzheimer's Association  
Camp Courageous  
Iowa Giving Crew  
Metco Credit Union  
TrueNorth Companies

**THANK YOU TO OUR TRASH CHAMPIONS,**  
MT. MERCY UNIVERSITY  
ENACTUS TEAM AND MARION MUSIC BOOSTERS

**Support Local Businesses!**  
Beverages are sold at tents throughout the venue, and also at participating bars & restaurants. Stop in for a bite or beverage while enjoying the many attractions inside the venue.

**Beverages at Market After Dark**  
Wine, beer or cider inside the venue must be in a designated Market After Dark souvenir cup. No outside beverages will be allowed.

**SS Overnight Parking in All Downtown Ramps**

**Please no pets\*, coolers, chairs or outside beverages.**  
\*Service animals welcome.

**No smoking in the venue pursuant to the Iowa Smoke Free Air Act.**

### CREDIT

Give credit where credit is due. Follow through with what you promise sponsors in return for their support. Put their logos on marketing pieces. Give them a booth. Write thank you notes.

### CONNECTIONS

Examine your existing relationships in the community. You probably already have supporters who are willing to invest their resources (cash, time, skills) in your market's success.

### CLARITY

Be clear in all you do—clear boundaries, clear schedules and reminders, and clear expectations for yourself, your team, your sponsors, and your vendors about who is doing what, when, and why.



# 15 WAYS TO RAISE FUNDS FOR YOUR FARMERS MARKET



## 1. MARKET BANNER

Sell space on a large banner that will hang at every market. Offer different sizes of ad squares for different sponsorships levels, ranging from \$150 to \$1500. Estimated cost of one banner: \$450 (designed by the market manager or staff, then printed by a local print/design company). It costs more to hire a graphic designer, but you could save money by ordering printing online. The design and/or printing could be a sponsorship opportunity, too, by offering the designer or printer space on the banner that matches what the design/printing fees would have cost.



**"Sponsorships are key."**  
**Jenn Draper, Cedar Rapids Downtown Farmers Market**

## 2. BRANDED MERCH

Put your market logo on merchandise for sale at the info booth. Many markets do this for cloth shopping bags, aprons, hats, t-shirts, or mugs.

## 3. CALENDAR

Create a calendar of images from the farmers market. This is a great option for year-round markets who can sell the calendar at the end or beginning of the calendar year. You can order inexpensive calendars in bulk online, but a local print or design shop may be willing to print the calendar free or at a discount as an in-kind donation.

## 4. PERCENT OF SALES

Partner with a grocery store, restaurant, or other business for a giving day or week. Many restaurants offer dining fundraisers. How it works: The restaurant schedules a day that your organization will benefit from sales. The restaurant will likely create a flyer for you to promote and post on social media, encouraging patrons to dine at that establishment on the given day. For each diner that shows the flyer (on their phone or a printed copy), the restaurant will donate a percent of that patron's sales to you.

## 5. RAFFLES/AUCTIONS

Raffle or auction off donated products. Have a board member who makes quilts or a vendor who bakes amazing pies? Local businesses may donate a spa gift card, wine tasting, hotel/restaurant package, or tickets to a concert, musical, or sporting event. Note: You may need a permit to do a raffle/auction.

## 6. LOCAL CLUBS & CHURCHES

Some markets have found success funding their SNAP programs by reaching out to local pastors to help raise funds from congregations. Community clubs may do a donation at their meetings, too.

## 7. FACEBOOK

If you're a non-profit, you can apply to accept donations via your Facebook page. By providing proof of non-profit status and basic financial info, you can add a "Donate" button to your page, run fundraising campaigns, and even have other Facebook users (board members, vendors, or followers) ask for donations on your behalf.

## 8. ONLINE

Look into online platforms like Fundly (fundly.com). Give Lively (givelively.org) is free for non-profits.

## 9. MARKET WEBSITE

Work with your website admin to add donation functionality, a "Donate" button, and a donation/sponsorship page to your website. This is a great place to explain how funds will be used and recognize past and current sponsors with their logos.

## 10. SPECIAL EVENTS

Raise money by hosting a pre-season potluck, mid-season meal which a local chef prepares using farm fresh produce, or end-of-season benefit concert played by a local band.

## 11. SPONSORSHIP

Look at who is already going to or supporting the market. Reach out to businesses who support similar causes. Be sure to give the sponsor something in exchange (scaling up what you give them based on what they gave you). For example: logos on banners, materials, maps, and posters; recognition on social media and in newsletters; mentions when you talk about the market on the radio/news; a stall at the market; or handing out promotional items at the info booth.

## 12. IN-KIND

Dollars make a big difference, but don't underestimate the impact of in-kind donations. A printer in town may donate flyers, posters, a banner, or other promotional materials. Local media may provide in-kind advertising in the newspaper or on the tv/radio. Businesses and individuals may donate their time and skills related to design, websites, grant writing, or marketing.

## 13. VENDOR FEES

Most markets already charge fees, but if yours doesn't, consider starting. Even the smallest market offers vendors a place to sell their products. It's reasonable to charge a small fee to help support operating costs, improvements, and promotions of the market. Clearly communicate any new fee to all vendors early and in-person, and don't implement or raise rates mid-season.

## 14. GRANTS

Local businesses, area banks, and community foundations are great places to start. Consider partnering with other markets for larger state or federal grants.

## 15. DONATION JARS

Grocery/retail stores, gas stations, and coffee shops may be willing to put out a jar to collect donations for your market for a week or month.



*It's really important to make sure you're partnering with the right people who can share your values. We have sponsors and partners around the community that support the market not only by giving dollars, but also by participating and adding value with different programming. A good way to start is to think about who in your community might have shared values and a similar mission. For example, we partnered with UnityPoint Health. Their values are really focused around healthy community and healthy people, and it's a great synergy we've created that helps us both reach our potential, missions, and goals. In a smaller community, see who those people are. Local convenience stores, grocery stores, and hospitals can be great partners.*

**Kelly Foss, Des Moines Downtown Farmers Market**



*Our market runs for four months. We have four businesses that we ask annually for \$600 sponsorships—a local bank, a car dealer, a tractor company, and a local hospital. One of our board members has a good connection with the hospital and plays a big role in that relationship. Each one sponsors a specific month. We put our sponsors on banners around town and note them in radio and print advertising. We also encourage them to come to the market. The tractor company brought little tractors for their visit, which the kids loved!*

**Brigham Hoegh, Atlantic Farmers Market**

# FUNDRAISING IDEAS FROM IOWA MARKETS



"A friend of mine actually mentioned that Swisher has a community foundation through the county. Turns out, a member of my market committee is the library director and she'd actually used it before—so she knew how to write a grant. She stepped forward and wrote our grant. We'd been talking about writing a grant for over a year, so I was really glad to finally go ahead and do it. We got very fortunate that this was the first year we applied for it and we were able to get that extra funding. We're going to use it to replace all the signage and the canopy tent for the musicians. We also want to put some additional seating around the tent so people can sit down after they've shopped and enjoy the music."

**Alice Linhart, Swisher Farmers Market**

"For years, the Rock Rapids Farmers Market has raised extra funds by collecting and turning in recyclable cans. The nearest can redemption center isn't accessible to many residents due to hours and location, so it's easier for many people to put their cans in the farmers market's can shed. Since the market doesn't sort the cans, the redemption center charges two cents per can to sort. So, the market receives three cents per can instead of five—a decent payout for little labor, considering the market raised up to \$3,000 in some years. When it came time for the farmers market to replace their can sheds, they bought the supplies to build new ones, gave the supplies to the local high school, and the shop class built the new can sheds."

**Angie Jager, Rock Rapids Farmers Market**

"We do a fundraising dinner each week. The fundraising group that has the supper pays \$36, covering half of the cost of the ad that we run in the paper telling what produce will be there, what non-profit/entertainment will be there, and what the meal will be. I also do my best to get local sponsorships so it doesn't actually cost the Chamber anything."

**Julie Madden,  
Akron Farmers Market**

"For each market, our volunteer market team prepares a hot meal for purchase. We just remodeled our kitchen and we regularly use a grill outside. We publish the menu in the paper the Thursday prior to our Tuesday market. It's a good value meal and we feature vendor product as much as we can, often when it's the start of a popular produce season. Half of our patrons are from Fort Madison or Keokuk. We also have people who drive from Navoo, Illinois and even up from Missouri to our tiny town of 800 people. The profits from the meal cover our utilities, railroad lease, and allows our Montrose Riverfront complex to offer free admission for the museum."

**Greg Ruth,  
Montrose Farmers Market**

"We get about \$5,000 every year from Polk county grants. We use it for marketing, signage, radio ads, and a police officer. Having a police officer there is our highest expense every week."

**Jane Gasperi,  
Beaverdale Farmers Market**



# SEEKING & SECURING SPONSORSHIPS

## HOW JO LYNN PIKE WITH THE DUBUQUE FARMERS MARKET ENGAGES SPONSORS

### What do you seek sponsorships for?

"We look at sponsorship funding for the overall market, Double Up Food Bucks (DUFEB), and our Kids at Market program. We also explore grants to enhance outreach programming."

### How do you begin sponsor relationships?

"It is different for each sponsor. Most have connections with our organization through other programs. With a new sponsor, we start with a letter and a follow-up call a week later. We have had one-on-one meetings with a few of our sponsors."

### What types of businesses might sponsor markets?

"Businesses who would be good potential sponsors could be anyone who finds benefit to their name being associated with the farmers market. For example, we have a financial institution that needs to have money directed to low income families to receive accreditation. We are asking one business who is connected to agriculture to donate wagons to a program."

### What is the dollar range that you are comfortable seeking? Do you propose that amount in the beginning or is it a back-and-forth with the sponsor?

"The dollar amount proposal comes from us. Every sponsor has a different range they are willing to give. Depending on your impressions—marketing, attendance, and programming—the asking range can vary from \$1,000-\$10,000 for contributions. Contributions can include monetary, supply donations, and staffing/volunteering."

### In what ways are you recognizing the sponsors and stewarding the relationship so they will sponsor again in the future?

"Ways in which we recognize our sponsors would be through marketing: social media, banners, radio, flyers, maps. Every sponsor has their own request so in our letter, we always list that if other opportunities arise we are open for conversation."



*Sponsors not only help fund your market, but also help build relationships within your community. Be considerate of how you identify, communicate with, and recognize each sponsor.*

**Jo Lynn Pike, Dubuque Farmers Market**



WONDERING WHAT TO INCLUDE IN A LETTER TO POTENTIAL SPONSORS?

**CHECK OUT A SAMPLE LETTER AT:  
[NORTHEASTIOWARCD.ORG/IOWA-FARMERS-MARKET-TOOLKIT](http://NORTHEASTIOWARCD.ORG/IOWA-FARMERS-MARKET-TOOLKIT)**

# MARKETING YOUR MARKET

## BRANDING IS MORE THAN YOUR LOGO—IT'S YOUR VIBE

### DEVELOP YOUR BRAND

Your brand is often a customer's first impression of your market. It's the public-facing part of your overall marketing plan. How customers perceive your brand can increase awareness, attract new customers, and build trust and loyalty that leads to return customers. From an eye-catching logo to consistent colors, there are several elements to consider. A brand can feel vague at first, but it will become more specific as you start identifying what you want customers to feel and perceive when they interact with your market.

#### THE ELEMENTS OF YOUR BRAND

**Personality:** Think of your brand as the personality of your farmers market. What sets it apart from other markets? What are its values? Its mission? How do its products, programs, and events fit into the customer's life? What words and feelings do you want vendors, customers, and the community to associate with your market?

**Voice:** Consider how you talk about your market—online and in-person. How do you sound? How do you want to sound? Down-to-earth? Fun? Silly? Polished? By identifying how you want to come across, you can set guidelines for the tone and words you choose to use in social media posts, news interviews, and face-to-face interactions at the market.

**Color:** Colors are powerful. They inspire feelings and set moods. The colors you use in your branding will affect the overall look and feel of your market. Take some time to research the psychology of color as it relates to the rest of your brand's image and its vendors, programs, and events. If your market takes place in a park, green might feel right. If your town uses blue in its branding, it might make sense to incorporate a similar shade into your color scheme. Choose two to four colors—you can create additional variation by adjusting their hues.

**Typeface:** Choose 1-2 fonts to use on signage, social media, website, logo, and other materials. The little details matter! Is it easy to read? Does it reflect your personality? What emotions does it evoke?

**Tagline:** Can you sum up your market in just a few words? Brainstorm a list of ideas. Ask a few close friends, loyal customers, or vendors to weigh in. Narrow it down to the words and/or phrase that best expresses your brand. Use your tagline in your logo, social media, website, newsletter, press releases, merchandise (such as t-shirts), posters, and more.

**Consistency:** Strive to be consistent in the voice, colors, fonts, logo, and tagline that you use so that people begin to recognize how your market looks and sounds. You're reinforcing your brand through all the words and visuals you use in marketing and at the market itself (info booth, signage, etc.). When something is "on brand," that means it's consistent with your market's personality. In everything you do, ask yourself: Is this on brand? Does this show my market's personality?



When it came time to update the market's logo, Jane Gasperi turned to her illustrator board member who was able to help with a fresh look.

# SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

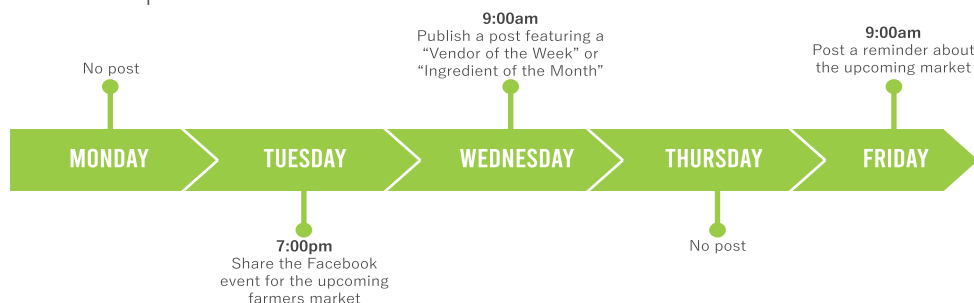
## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### Where should I post?

Social media is always changing and a platform that is popular at the moment may not be next year. If you're just getting started, focus your efforts on Facebook. With its wide range of users (Baby Boomers, Gen X'ers, and Millennials), event functionality, and pages, it's a great way to get the word out about your market. Once you've got the hang of Facebook, set up an Instagram to reach more potential customers in their twenties and thirties. You can even link your accounts to automatically publish Instagram posts directly to Facebook.

### When and how often should I post?

Your audience may be more active on social media on certain days and at different times. According to SproutSocial, global engagement is highest mid-day on weekdays, especially around noon when people are on lunch breaks. When it comes to posting, there's a fine line between too much and too little. One post a day is ideal, while two posts every day can be excessive. It's important to find what works for you and be consistent. If you're just getting started, aim for three posts per week. For example:



## TIPS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA SUCCESS

### Use Facebook Events

Create Facebook events (or a series of events) for your market dates and any special events throughout the season (such as a farm-to-table fundraiser or a kids day at the market).

### Photos and Videos Rule

Include pictures with your social media posts because they're more likely to catch the eye and get engagement than a regular plain text post. Better yet, use video and Facebook Live.

### Copy is Still Key

Even though images and videos quickly grab people's attention, the accompanying text can make or break engagement with your content. Generally, shorter is better. Experiment until you find a winning combination.

### Encourage Engagement

Engagement is when someone likes, shares, comments on, or reacts to your post. Notice what your audience engages with and post more of that. When someone comments, like and/or reply to their comment. In all interactions, strive to be positive and helpful—social media is also a valuable customer service tool!

### Tag, Mention, and Share

If your vendors have Facebook, tag/mention their pages in your posts and share their posts on your page.

### Tap into a Local Hashtag

Identify any local hashtags used in your city/area that relate to community, events, etc. For example, the hashtags #ThinkIowaCity and #Iowacity focus on the Iowa City area, while #ThisIsIowa is statewide.

### Share User-Generated Content

Pay attention to Facebook and Instagram users who tag your market in a post, such as this photo a local videographer shared of the Des Moines Farmers Market. Then, ask for permission to share that photo on your social media page.



# MARKETING DOS & DON'Ts FROM MARKET MANAGERS

## DO MAKE A MARKETING CALENDAR & CHECKLISTS

Plan out your entire year (not just the market season) of what you want to promote and when you need to promote it. For example: You may want to promote a special event 4-5 weeks before it happens, while you want to promote Double Up Food Bucks once a week all season long.

At a glance, your marketing calendar should show what's going on and coming up. Using the calendar as a guide, stay on track with more specific to-do lists for tasks such as creating a Facebook event, posting on Instagram, or sending a press release.

Jodie Huegerich (College Hill Farmers Market) makes herself a weekly marketing to-do list. "I do social media posts three to five times a week and also press releases for the local newspaper about once a month, especially when we have special events," she says.

## DO CONNECT WITH LOCAL MEDIA

To promote opening day, an event, or other exciting news, send out a press release. Reach out about free on-air interviews. Offer to contribute a weekly/monthly article. If you're a 501(c)(3), ask about non-profit discounts on advertising.

Bob Shepherd, manager of Washington Farmers Market shared, "The newspaper would come to each market at no charge and give out 50 papers. In exchange, they allowed me to write a column. I did that every week for 15-20 years. When we first got started, those newspapers were crucial. The columns were informative, but also hit on the social side. My closing line every single time was 'See you down there.'"

"The media and consumers love local businesses," says Josie Rozum of Dan & Debbie's Creamery. "It seems like a lot of work to throw together a press release, but it's worth it. For us, the newspaper reach is fantastic. It's one of our best sources for free marketing."

## DON'T PUT ALL YOUR MARKETING EGGS IN ONE AUDIENCE'S BASKET

Social media can be a great way to get in front of market-goers in their twenties and thirties. "I use Facebook and Facebook Live to promote each market," says Kendra Vincent, manager of Grinnell Farmers Market).

But keep in mind, customers in their fifties and sixties may be more likely to read the newspaper or listen to the radio. "We run a weekly newspaper ad to reach our older audience, then I use video and Facebook Live to reach our younger audience," says Julie Madden, manager of Akron Farmers Market).



The Grinnell Farmers Market updates their Facebook page's main cover photo with an eye-catching, easy-to-read image, such as this one promoting the Winter Farmers Market.

## DO PUT YOUR MARKET ON EVERY CALENDAR

Local magazines, newspapers, TV/radio stations, businesses, banks, and Chambers of Commerce often have community calendars online or in print.

"It takes time to go through and get on everybody's calendar, but it's a great way to be part of their recurring events every week," says Andie Donnan, manager of Millwork Night Market). "We put ourselves everywhere because you never know who your audience is and what they're reading. There are several local magazines in town and even if we're not featured in an article, they still support us by putting our market in the event section."

## DON'T UNDERESTIMATE "OLD FASHIONED" MARKETING

Even in an age of social media and digital advertising, strategies like canvassing and giving out flyers and promotional items can still make a huge impact.

Andrea Vaage manager of Global Greens Farmers Market used grant funds to test out different marketing strategies. "We tried Facebook ads targeting different demographics. We distributed flyers to local neighborhoods. We did ads on Iowa Public Radio," says Andrea. "What actually worked best was word-of-mouth and having a lot of stuff up in the neighborhoods. For us, spending lots of money on social media and radio ads didn't help as much as putting posters in local coffee shops and businesses."

Jenn Draper manager of Cedar Rapids Downtown Farmers Market advises putting your market dates on something you can physically give to people. "We started putting our dates on brightly colored magnets. Now, people look for them and collect them. They're really effective. Try to find that thing for your audience. Maybe it's magnets. Maybe it's flyer if that's all your budget allows for. Find some way to get those dates into the hands of your customers."



Cedar Rapids Downtown Farmers Market magnets include the dates/times of the market as well its annual special event, Market After Dark.

## ANATOMY OF A PROMOTIONAL PRINT PIECE

Printed flyers and posters can be valuable marketing tools. This poster for the North Iowa Farmers Market is a great example of how to balance important details (name, date, location) with additional information (dogs allowed, produce/goods from within a 100-mi radius, sponsors) and fun, eye-catching graphics. Manager Robin McClelland even uses the poster as a way to cross-promote the Saturday market in nearby Clear Lake for folks who can't make it to Mason City's market on Tuesdays and Fridays. (She manages both markets.)

### Before distributing, double-check:

- Is the market name and date/time/location prominently displayed?
- Is all the info correct? Any typos?
- Are all the fonts clear and easy-to-read?
- Do the colors show up well when printed? (Medium/darker colors will show up better than pastel/neon colors.)
- Does it reflect your market's personality?



Tagline

Market name (BIG and bold)

Dogs are allowed

Fun, eye-catching colors and graphics

Mission (selling produce and goods from within 100 miles)

Social media

Shoutout to Clear Lake market

Time/date/location

Logo

Family-friendly

Sponsor/partner recognition

# MEASURING YOUR FARMERS MARKET'S PERFORMANCE

## WHY AND HOW TO COLLECT DATA

### 5 REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD COLLECT DATA:

#### 1. ECONOMIC IMPACT

Demonstrate to local government, economic development groups, and other partners the market's economic contribution.

#### 2. POTENTIAL SPONSORS

Provide potential sponsors with evidence of how many customers will see their logo on your signage if they fund the market.

#### 3. VENDOR RECRUITMENT

Show potential new vendors the number of customers they will see and the desire for their specific product.

#### 4. PROPOSED CHANGES

Support any proposed changes to the market (e.g., change of location, change of hours, addition of programming or events.)

#### 5. TREND AWARENESS

Be aware of trends in market sales, attendance, or customer demographics that can help improve the market over time.

## HOW WILL DATA HELP YOU?

The time and effort it takes to collect data is an investment in the future of your farmers market.

If you are looking to add new vendors, change your hours, start new programming, bring in a new customer base, woo sponsors, or just learn more about how your farmers market is doing, data can help. While there are endless approaches to measuring your performance, here are a few tried-and-true methods for you to start implementing at your farmers market.

## DATA IMPROVES...

**Decision-Making.** Analyzing data helps market managers spot significant changes and areas that need attention. With relevant data, managers and boards can also track key indicators over time and use that knowledge to make decisions.

**Market Promotion.** Having specific metrics in marketing messages makes them much more likely to be shared. Metrics also help reinforce the benefits of shopping at farmers markets.

**Media Relations.** Reporters typically want to know more about the market than its opening date, location, and hours. Press releases that include relevant data (such as annual attendance) are much more likely to be picked up by publications.

**Advocacy.** Sharing the market's community impact with public officials, partners, market neighbors, and other stakeholders helps increase understanding and support for the market.

**Funding.** Financial supporters want to understand the impact their investments have on the communities they serve. Accordingly, they frequently require outcome measurements.



# THE BASICS OF MEASURING MARKET PERFORMANCE

## HOW-TO GET STARTED

Ready to start measuring performance? Whether you are new to data collection or a seasoned data collector, attendance counts and surveys are the two best sources for performance measurements for market managers.

### **Stick to one method**

An important place to start is deciding how you want to collect data over a long period of time. To be able to look at trends over time, you need to collect data in the same way. This is most important when it comes to attendance counts.

### **You don't (and shouldn't) have to do it alone**

Develop a committee of interested individuals to help. Vendors should also be at the table. You may reach out to a nearby Boy Scout or Girl Scout troop, student volunteers from a local college or high school, 4-H groups, Master Gardeners, and other like-minded groups that may be sources of volunteers for conducting an attendance count or surveying customers.

### **Try to record something about every market**

Certain measurement practices, like dot surveys and attendance counts, require planning and help from outside partners. Luckily, these don't need to be done at every market (try to do these at four markets each year, more on that later in this section.) However, try to collect some data at every market. Try to answer at least these questions in a Daily Market Report: How many vendors came? What's the weather like? Is there a special event or program? Include an additional note section for other important pieces of information, like "First tomatoes of the season at the market" or "Farmer Jane says it was her best market ever."



***The job of the modern farmers market manager is absolutely data-driven.***

**Darlene Wolnik,  
Farmers Market Coalition**



# MEASURING PERFORMANCE: ATTENDANCE COUNTS

## HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE COMING TO YOUR MARKET?

Farmers market research conducted by the Farmers Market Coalition, University of Wisconsin-Madison, and Oregon State University over the past decades has advanced our understanding on how to get accurate attendance counts at farmers markets.

What they found was that the most commonly used, accurate method of measuring market attendance is through a 20-minute sample count every hour of the market at a consistent time interval. Since this is the gold-standard, we will go into depth about this method. However, other methods exist and should be considered depending on the specific needs and layout of your market.

**What You'll Need:** Tally counters (the object), market counters (the individual), and a count coordinator\*

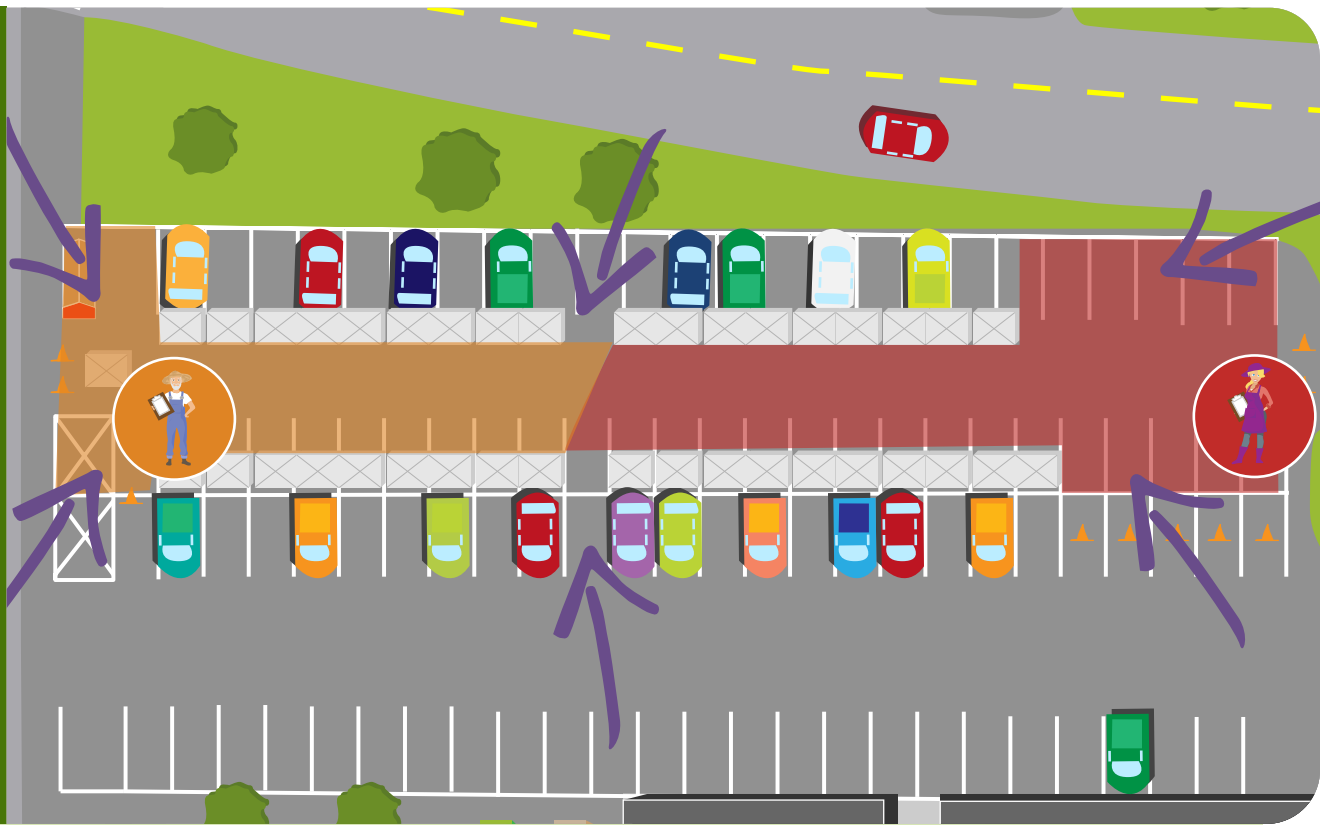
*\*The market manager has so many other roles that it will be easy to get pulled away from the attendance count. Select a dedicated staff member or long-time volunteer to serve as the count coordinator.*

Market counters can be trained the day of the event, before the market starts. They need to know 1) their specific “zone of responsibility,” 2) that they are only to count adults, 3) that they will only count from :20 to :40 of each hour of the market, and 4) how they will relay that information to the count coordinator. The zones of responsibility will be different for every market (see next page). It may be best to have these zones drawn out on a sheet for each counters to keep with them. The count coordinator will likely know where most customers enter the market and can make sure to have counters near those areas. But also consider if customers enter between stalls, from businesses along the street, out of parking garages, or from any corner of a grassy area.

Your market’s layout—including the location of vendor stalls, the information booth, and other market elements—will impact the flow of customer traffic. Designing your market to have suggested entry points will help with customer traffic and attendance counts. (For market layout examples, see pages 38-41).

From :20 to :40 of every hour of the market, the market volunteer/staff counter will stand in a designated zone of responsibility and count every new adult customer that enters that market in that area. At :40, the “count coordinator” should walk around to each counter and collect that hour’s data to keep track over the course of the market. Each counter then has 40 minutes to drink coffee, eat donuts, chat with vendors, and enjoy the market until :20 rolls around again.





This market is divided into two “zones of responsibility.” The arrows indicate suggested entry points for customers.

At the end of the market, add up all of the 20-minute interval counts and multiply them by three to get the full market attendance count.

This count is meant to get an average count of customers. The :20 to :40 time period is set to avoid rushes in visitors during the beginning and end of the market. Also, make sure to conduct attendance counts on “average” market days—try to avoid days that may have an unusually high or low attendance because of a special event or a competing event in town. Whenever non-average market day attendance is shared, include details of the day it was collected—factors like weather, competing events (Hawkeye/Cyclone games), and time of year can drastically impact attendance.

### There are two other common methods:

**The Full Count.** Every unique adult customer is counted as they enter the market for the entirety of the market. As you can imagine, this is time-consuming and would be best for markets with specific entry points.

**The Walkthrough.** Market staff walk through the market at set intervals—every half hour, every twenty minutes—and count every adult at the market. This method requires an idea of how long the average customer stays at the market. For instance, if you know the average customer stays for 20 minutes, then count every adult customer during one 20-minute interval every hour. Then multiply that number by three to get the full attendance for the full hour. If it’s 10 minutes, multiply the total by six. If it’s 30 minutes, multiply by two. Because of the difficulty in estimating the length of stay of the average visitor, this is considered to be the least accurate method of measuring attendance.

LOOKING FOR MORE DETAILS  
ABOUT VISITOR COUNT  
OPTIONS AND APPLICATIONS??

READ DARLENE WOLNIK’S ARTICLE  
“COUNTING VISITORS AT MARKETS” AT:  
[FARMERSMARKETCOALITION.ORG/COUNTING-VISITORS-MARKETS](http://FARMERSMARKETCOALITION.ORG/COUNTING-VISITORS-MARKETS)



# MEASURING PERFORMANCE: CONDUCTING SURVEYS

## COLLECTING VALUABLE FEEDBACK

The majority of people have participated in some type of survey in their life. And most people despise them. Because of that low-tolerance for answering survey questions, your job is to create a survey that quickly and easily gathers information from a valuable population—customers, vendors, partners.

## SURVEY BASICS

- Focus on what you need to know, not what you simply want to know.
- Develop simple questions that are easy to answer. Avoid subjective questions.
- Multiple choice questions are best.
- Stress how important the information is.
- Provide some kind of incentive or reward. (e.g., entered to win a raffle)

## IOWA GROWN SURVEY TIPS:

The following tips are informed by the outstanding research by Iowa-native, internationally-recognized survey researcher, Dr. Don Dillman.

All surveys should focus on convincing the respondent that the benefits of answering the survey outweigh the costs to them in answer.

**Benefits:** A chance to win a raffle or other incentive, a sense of improving their community or the market they care about.

**Costs:** Time it takes to respond to the survey, energy to think about responses, having to share personal information or opinions.

There are several strategies to swing this Cost/Benefit ratio in your favor.

### Increase Benefits:

- Stress how the survey results will help the market.
- Ask interesting questions that are easy to understand and easy to answer.
- Make it clear that there are limited opportunities to respond to the survey.
- Share that others have already responded.
- Use incentives to engage respondents (e.g., a raffle to win a market coupon or a basket of products from the market).

### Reduce Costs:

- Make the survey short with simple questions.
- Limit (or avoid asking for) personal or sensitive information.
- Make sure the survey method matches the target population (e.g., younger populations likely prefer online surveys, older populations likely prefer paper).

### Build Trust:

- Make sure respondents know how they can learn more about the survey and prove the survey is authentic.
- Clearly state that all information will be kept confidential and protected.
- Focus on making all communications and survey elements look professional. Ask for help if needed.
- If your market hasn't built up community trust, try getting sponsorship from a trusted, legitimate organization (e.g., the town government, local chamber or economic development group, area college, etc.).

# TYPES OF SURVEYS

## DOT SURVEYS

A dot survey entails one question written on a poster that has several potential answers written out below the question. Customers are then given one colored circular sticker to place next to their answer. Up to four questions on four different posters can maximize the amount of information gathered.

For more information on dot surveys, check out the excellent “Tools for Rapid Market Assessments” article published by Oregon State University Extension Service.

## VERBAL SURVEYS

If gregarious market volunteers or staff are available, a verbal survey is an easy way to get a high response rate from customers. Choose fewer than five, easy-to-answer questions and instruct a team of individuals to walk through the market asking questions to a random selection of customers.

## ONLINE SURVEY

There are many free, online survey tools (like Google Forms and Survey Monkey) that are slick ways to gather feedback on the market. They require a little online saviness, but otherwise are simple to construct and send out to potential respondents. Response rate will be likely be low if sent out to the general public. This tool may be best for a select group, such as vendors, a market board/committee, or a select group of dedicated customers. An added incentive (such as being entered to win \$50 market gift certificate) may increase the response rate, but keep in mind that this will be not be a representative group of all those who shop at the market.

## PAPER SURVEYS

While expensive, paper surveys can be highly effective and earn a high response rate. You can either hand out surveys at the market or mail them out with a pre-stamped return envelope. To make this work, you'll need to have mailing addresses for a targeted group of respondents.

## NET PROMOTER SCORE

When crafting your survey question, one possible question to include is what is called the “Net Promoter Score.” The magical question is:

**On a scale of one to ten, how likely are you to recommend our market?**

Respondents that list a nine or ten on a scale of ten are considered to be “promoters”. In a business landscape where 92% of consumers report they trust word-of-mouth over any other form of advertising, these promoters are critical to business success. The number of customers who are in this promoter zone will be a good picture into the amount of customer loyalty the market has. If you are able to build stronger relationships with these promoters, they can play an out-sized role in the continued marketing and improvement of the market.



***Using Google Forms, I sent out surveys to all vendors. I asked some really detailed questions. What were your peak times? What was the average dollar amount spent at your stand? Did it seem like you had new customers or regulars? What was your customer base like? How had customers heard about the market? Customers don't usually come right out and say that, but they might say, 'I've never been here.' and that's an opportunity to engage. It's important for each vendor and the market as a whole to know how people are finding out about us. At the end of the survey, I also asked: Would you do it again? And I included a basic comment section. We thought about all of this feedback when deciding if and how to do our night market the next season.***

**Andie Donnan,  
Millwork Night Market**

## SURVEY SPOTLIGHT:

### College Hill Farmers Market, Cedar Falls

***We are growing and we need to show everybody around us that vendors and customers are growing. But we also need to show that economic development part as well—that sales are increasing.***

**Jodie Huegerich, College Hill Farmers Market**

To develop a culture of data collection, market managers need to take the lead on the various ways to gather information at the market. Jodie Huegerich, Local Food Program Director at the University of Northern Iowa and manager of the College Hill Farmers Market in Cedar Falls, has been conducting surveys from customers and vendors for a number of years. In 2019, Jodie began using the Farmers Market Coalition's Metric program.

Jodie used survey information to decide what decisions to make for the market. "We had done a pretty good job at increasing our customer base and number of vendors, but we wanted to take the next step," Jodie says.

Jodie recruited extra college students to work at the market on customer survey days. She gave the students clipboards with the questions on them and has them walk around the market to ask customers the questions. Each survey has fewer than five questions. "The big questions were: 'How did you hear about the market?' and 'What would you like to see at the market?'" says Jodie. She also wanted to know where customers live in order "to try to see if we were capturing the people close by or if they worked at the University. And if not, could we target those areas a little bit more?"

To incentivize survey responses, those who took the survey would be entered to win a basket of College Hill Farmers Market vendor products. The College Hill Farmers Market also has a rewards program, so respondents were given a rewards card with a few punches already taken out of it. Respondents can then use that rewards card to get deals at area businesses. (Read more about the rewards cards in the Community Building section on pages 19-23.

In addition to using Metrics to transition from paper surveys to storing information digitally, Jodie used the program as "an excuse to start tracking sales from vendors." Despite pushback from vendors who didn't want to share this information, Jodie saw that sales data was crucial to building the future of the market. "We are growing and we need to show everybody around us that vendor and customers are growing. But we also need to show that economic development part as well—that sales are increasing," Jodie says.





## HOW MUCH TO DO?

If you've never collected data at your market before, you may want to start slowly and not try to adopt all these new measurements at once. Trying to do too much at one time can lead to spreading yourself too thin and getting discouraged when the data isn't collected properly.

### If you do nothing else:

- Fill out a daily market report that answers: How many vendors came? What was the weather like? Were there any special events?
- Send out an end-of-year vendor survey

### When you're ready for more:

- Fill out a daily market report
- Send out an end-of-year vendor survey
- Conduct one dot survey
- Conduct one attendance count

### The Gold Standard:

- Fill out a daily market report
- Send out an end-of-year vendor survey
- Conduct two dot surveys per season
- Conduct four attendance counts per season
- Use Farmers Market Metrics to analyze and record your data

### Beyond the Gold Standard:

If a manager is considering any big changes to the market or seeking to reinvigorate its status, a more thorough assessments (such as the Rapid Market Assessment) can be helpful. Local extension offices, Chambers, Main Street organizations, economic development groups, or tourism offices may be interested in helping markets conduct these more rigorous assessments.

Focus groups and targeted interviews can be also very helpful in conducting a more detailed assessment. These are more time-intensive than a survey and will require some skill to do well, but can be highly informative.

## FARMERS MARKET METRICS

Once you've collected data, it can also be challenging to know what to do with it. The Farmers Market Coalition offers an easy-to-use online data management system called Farmers Market Metrics. Currently, Metrics is available at a discounted rate to all members of the Iowa Farmers Market Association. Metrics has contributed to a culture of data collection and use of data for markets.

Metrics includes guides on best practices and provides a platform to input all market data. It has an analysis function to help understand the data and is customizable to your goals and capacity. Plus, its dashboard has built-in graphics (below) that look great on reports, grant applications, social media, and websites. These visuals can help tell the story of the market's success. For example, knowing how many acres are in production by the market's vendors can help make the case for sustained support by nearby businesses or the municipality.



**ASK AN IOWA FARMERS MARKET ASSOCIATION REP HOW TO GET METRICS AT YOUR MARKET.  
OR LEARN MORE ABOUT METRICS ONLINE:  
[NORTHEASTIOWARCD.ORG/IOWA-FARMERS-MARKET-TOOLKIT](http://NORTHEASTIOWARCD.ORG/IOWA-FARMERS-MARKET-TOOLKIT)**

# STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

## YOU'RE NOT ALONE

It's hard work to run a farmers market. It can feel isolating, especially if you're in a small rural town. But remember: You're part of a bigger network—there are 200+ farmers markets in Iowa! You don't have to start from scratch or go at it alone. You can gain inspiration from markets of any size. And even managers with decades of experience are still learning and making changes. Take it from Bob Shepherd, who has managed the Washington Farmers Market for 30+ years. "Every market is unique," Bob says. "Make your market fit your community. It takes time."



***As manager, you're the face of the farmers market. Smile, and your customers will, too!***  
**Lojean Peterson**  
**Ames Main Street Farmers Market**



## SEE THINGS FROM THE FARMER SIDE OF THE TABLE

**Kelly Foss**

Des Moines Downtown Farmers Market

"Be willing to try new things, but be open to feedback. That's how we've grown as a market—listening to vendors. Frequently throughout the season, I work at vendors' booths to truly experience the market from their perspective.

Vendors tell us that they love how their customers are so passionate about coming to see them—they value the bonds they've created with their customers. I really want to see those interactions. So for a couple hours in the morning, I sit at a booth or take over so a vendor can take a break. I get to see those vendor/customer exchanges. The customer gets an amazing product and the vendor gets payment for that product. You can see that transaction happening in a business sense, but you can also see the human element—the excitement to be purchasing garlic from a favorite vendor.

It helps me as a market manager to see beyond the commerce. There's only so much that metrics can tell you. Giving myself a point of view from the farmer side of the table better connects me to the market."