Tools to Enhance the Success of Farmers Markets

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Three points:

Don’t fail
Match market size with appropriate management structure
Focus on what you can influence.
Don’t Fail…

We are in a period of unbridled enthusiasm for and support of farmers’ markets yet…

Farmers’ Markets are Fragile
Understanding why and how markets fail is an important step in improving the viability of farmers’ markets and all of the good things they stand for.
Between 1998 and 2005 the number of farmers’ markets in Oregon increased from 38 to 68, an increase of 30 markets.

Not bad, eh?
However,

62 markets opened and 32 closed.

This is a more complicated picture!
Five Factors Associated with Markets that Fail

Interrelated...

1. Small Size
2. Need for Products (vendors)
3. Administrative Revenue “Have-Nots”
4. Manager was Volunteer or Paid Low Salary
5. High Manager Turnover
Circular Condition (or downward spiral) of Smaller Markets

- Not Enough Vendors
- Not Enough Customers
- Low Administrative Revenue
Match Market Size and Organizational Structure…

We talk about market size informally but never know exactly what that means.
## Size Categories of Farmers’ Markets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size Category</th>
<th>Number of Vendors</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Micro</td>
<td>5 to 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>9 to 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>31 to 55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>56 to 90</td>
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</tbody>
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Min/Max 5 to 90 vendors
Markets of specific sizes should have management structures that are appropriate for their size. As markets increase in size they add management structures and management complexity.
Basic Management Tool Kit
Some examples

**Site management tools**—
- Vendor *spaces are arranged* to meet specific goals
- Vendor *spaces are assigned* using a detailed map

**Market governance tools**—
- The market has written *guidelines*
- The market has a *board of directors*
- The board of directors has *committees*

**Labor resources tools**—
- Managers are *paid or are volunteers*
- The market uses *additional employees*
- The number of hours *worked in-season and off-season*
Micro and Small Markets

Increasing Management Structure

Smaller

Medium and Large Markets

Increasing Management Complexity

Larger

Critical Transition Point
Take home messages for market planning...

- Be sure have management tools appropriate for market size in place
- Don’t use management tools unnecessary for size category
- If growing, plan for appropriate management tools—structural readiness
- Heed critical transition point between small and medium size markets
Focus on what you can influence…

We asked managers:

What are the characteristics or traits of a good farmers market?
Characteristics or traits of a good Farmers’ Market?

• **Atmosphere**
  – “For customers, environment that is friendly, inviting, leisurely…”

• **Products**
  – “Good products. Don’t have anything unless you have good products.”

• **Community**
  – “Personal relationships with customers. Community ownership.”
An Easy Target…
But it isn’t that easy.
Atmosphere

Can be influenced by market manager

Beyond the control of market manager but requires a response

Local Site & Regulatory Influences

Local Agro-Ecozone Influences

National & International Regulatory and Trade Influences

Local Social & Demographic Influences
Products...

Long story short....
Markets Create Atmosphere
Markets Build Community
Who Did This?
Focus Market Resources on the Local Market and…

Atmosphere

Focus Collective Resources to Address Local & National Policy

Local Site & Regulatory Influences

Local Agro-Ecozone Influences

National & International Regulatory and Trade Influences

Social & Demographic Influences
Some keys to success

1. Don’t fail. Plan new markets carefully to assure success
2. Match organizational structure to market size
3. Individual markets focus on Atmosphere, Products, and Community
4. Collectively markets focus on policy