

FARMERS' MARKET IMPACT TOOLKIT – PROJECT EVOLUTION

As the market season enters its full swing for the 20 markets participating in the 2012 Toolkit pilot year, the Toolkit methodology and materials have gone through numerous major evolutions. What follows is a glimpse at the assumptions that have transformed and integrated themselves into a more complex, relevant, and streamlined Impact Toolkit.

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Original Assumption What we Thought	Lessons Learned What we Learned	Resulting Changes What we Did
Market Relationships		
The project will be administered largely by a team of volunteers.	Market managers understand the value of the toolkit more than volunteers do. They also have the closest relationships with the vendors and other stakeholders.	The onus is shifted to managers gathering survey responses themselves rather than on gathering and managing a large, involved volunteer team. A project manager is still likely a major player, for technical data file and snapshot work.
Farmers' market food is fresher than food bought at the supermarket.	Economies of scale and technological sophistication of the industrial food market mean produce bought in the supermarket is often the same varieties and freshness as farmers' market food. The advantage of produce accessible at the market is a question of transparency and trust in vendor practices, not of freshness.	Therefore, the toolkit refocused on these issues of vendor practices and their intersections with market relationships , as opposed to the quality of food sold at the market.
This tool can be used to influence policy .	The snapshot can be one good part of what is most important to make any policy change: a trusting relationship between market management and an internal champion.	Communication about the potential of the snapshot and intentions was reframed to be more realistic and reflective of markets' simultaneous desire for the data just as much as a marketing aide.
Farmers will not share sales figures, because they are unwilling or unable to track sales.	Many farmers view their operations as businesses, and therefore keep excellent records. However, regardless of the quality of those records, sharing that information depends on the level of trust they have with the market or whoever is asking for it.	The surveys ensure anonymity of respondents. While qualitative elements of the surveys mean many managers know who most respondents are, the toolkit stipulates guidelines for data visualization to ensure complex data comparisons do not reveal vendor identities, and the BCAFm ensures the aggregated snapshots are only shared with market permission. The effectiveness of these arrangements remains to be seen, when vendor survey results are actually collected.
Market Goals and Capacity		
Vendor surveys should be administered in person because of the anecdotal responses required.	It is completely unrealistic to ask for so much time from market volunteers and vendors. To get a significant number of responses, surveys must require less investment.	Vendor surveys are now anonymous and intended to be completed alone, in approximately 15 minutes. Most qualitative elements remain, although we sacrificed conversations with market volunteers in favor of anonymity and anticipated greater responsiveness.
Market managers do not have advanced computer skills.	Many of them are very computer proficient, and complex data collection does not have to be difficult to enter into the data file.	Reformatted data entry enables complex data analysis . Protected cells and sheets in Excel will prevent accidental loss of highly referential formulas.

<p>Markets will adapt questions to suit their own goals and context.</p>	<p>Market managers want the process to be simple, and keeping questions consistent will allow for comparison across markets.</p>	<p>Survey materials are ready to print and use. Automation of the vendor survey, and writing better questions, made everything simpler and more user-friendly. Plus, a guide with some general and specific context gives necessary guidance.</p>
<p>Market management is mostly overworked, under-skilled, volunteer staff.</p>	<p>Market management is often part-time, well-educated, well-informed, paid staff with complex awareness of the value of data collection and market assessment, regardless of available time and resources to collect necessary information.</p>	<p>The bottleneck lies less with market managers' skills or capacities than with volunteer dependability and/or vendor time and willingness to participate. It's a management challenge, not a skills one.</p>
<p>An acre is an acre is an acre.</p>	<p>An acre of row crops farmed organically is a completely different size in every way than an acre of wheat or an acre of pastureland. Measuring yields in volume and dollar sales are difficult and multifaceted, and variability of agricultural practices by season on the same piece of land is common, which makes land use surveying very difficult.</p>	<p>The complexities of measuring agricultural data are profound, and the toolkit does a good job of measuring only a small portion of relevant, interesting information. The data collected, however, has the potential for great analysis in this area.</p>

Subjects of interest to participating markets: customer satisfaction, food security, health, education, child development, professional development and strategic planning, tourism development, food prices, land access and regulation, vendor growth & development, business incubation, marketing,