

The

Farmers Markets

of Douglas County, Kansas

SYNOPSIS OF FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS



Overview of Project



As part of their ongoing commitment to building a healthier local food system, the Douglas County Food Policy Council and the Lawrence-Douglas County Sustainability Department undertook to analyze and strengthen the farmers markets in Douglas County and the City of Lawrence. This work was funded by a USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program Grant awarded to Douglas County. SCALE, Inc. of Abingdon, Virginia, was hired to assess the county farmers markets and make recommendations to support this critical sector of the local food system. After two site visits encompassing nine days, surveys gathering responses from hundreds of shoppers and scores of vendors, and multiple interviews and focus groups, SCALE, Inc. completed its work in November, 2016.

LOCAL PROJECT CONTACT

Helen Schnoes

Douglas County Food Systems Coordinator

hschnoes@douglas-county.com

785-832-5157



Key Findings and Recommendations

The full study discusses sixteen important findings encompassing a full range of issues surrounding farmers markets in Douglas County. These issues are complex, and most are interconnected in a variety of ways. Here are highlights of six key findings, along with corresponding recommendations for action.

Finding 1

Lawrence and Douglas County have a well-developed local foods system, including:

- several Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs
- the Merc Co-op, which buys heavily from local farmers
- a number of supermarkets that purchase locally
- an emerging farm to school effort
- increasing use of SNAP and Double Up Food Bucks to buy local foods, and
- farmers markets operating five out of seven days of the week for about half the year.

The success of these efforts has made healthy local food much more widely available in Douglas County. It has also created new challenges for farmers and for farmers markets, as the overall demand from dedicated local food shoppers – ‘locavores’ – appears to have plateaued.

Increasing demand will require, in part, reaching a new and broader group of consumers.

RECOMMENDATION FOR ACTION

Convene a meeting of the market leaders from all six markets with the goal of developing strategies to strengthen the county’s farmers markets. Building from that meeting, plan and launch a county-wide initiative to substantially broaden the base of ‘local foods shoppers’, with a particular focus on farmers markets. This will require a sustained, multi-faceted effort over several years, involving a range of strategies, such as:

This publication provides a very brief look at some of the core findings and key recommendations that resulted from the 10-month research process. The 16 findings and 12 recommendations of the full report address the following topics:

- Promotion, marketing and expanding the customer base
- Vendors, vendor needs and challenges
- The location, frequency and logistical challenges of markets
- Market management and governance
- City, county and state policies and regulations pertinent to farmers markets

Access the full report and market-specific profiles at:

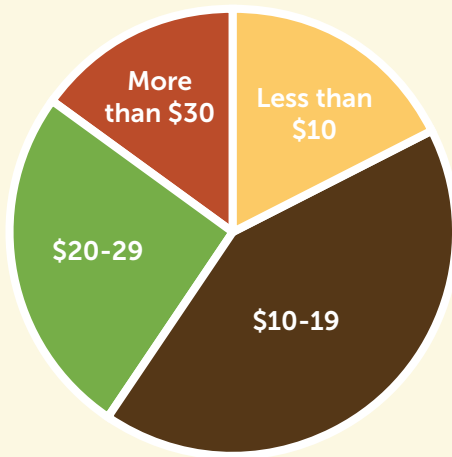
www.douglascountyks.org/fpc/reports-and-resources



- Training and enabling ‘market champions’ who spread the word about farmer markets and reach out to a broad group of organizations, associations and new potential customers
- Developing a concise, compelling presentation for use by market leaders and market champions
- Targeted investment by the City of Lawrence and Douglas County in critical market infrastructure
- More comprehensive communication, marketing and promotional efforts, undertaken both at the market level and across the city and county
- Customized outreach and communications efforts to a wider portion of the community than just foodies and locavores



HOW MUCH DO YOU SPEND AT THE FARMERS MARKET? (ALL MARKETS' CUSTOMERS, 402 RESIDENTS)



In one-on-one interviews, only one out of ten shoppers indicated that they view the farmers market as a “primary grocery” shopping destination, the other nine stating that they shopped for a limited, specific set of items and did the bulk of their grocery shopping elsewhere.

Finding 2

From both in-person interviews and focus groups, it is clear that the vast majority of regular farmers market shoppers do not view farmers markets as a primary source of groceries, but see them more as a source for seasonal or specialty items, or for a narrow range of specific foods. Getting some of these shoppers to purchase a higher portion of their groceries at farmers markets could be one of the most cost-effective ways to build the demand. This will require a number of steps, one of which is an overall improvement in the diversity and consistency of products offered by vendors at the markets.

RECOMMENDATION FOR ACTION

Significantly increase the average purchases existing customers make at farmers markets in the county through a number of strategies, including:

- Improving the overall quantity, quality, consistency and presentation of vendors, providing training and assistance as needed to interested vendors
- Recruiting and assisting new farmers (new overall, or new to farmers markets) with a focus on ‘filling gaps’ in products at market
- Launching a countywide campaign to “Make the market your grocery store!”

Finding 3

Vendor sales at markets vary considerably, but in our assessment, need to be stronger at all markets, including the Lawrence Farmers Market held on Saturdays, in order to attract and retain a diversity of high quality vendors. Recruiting and supporting new vendors, or enabling existing farmers to expand production should be a priority for Douglas County farmers markets, but will only be possible if potential sales and profitability are also increased.

RECOMMENDATION FOR ACTION

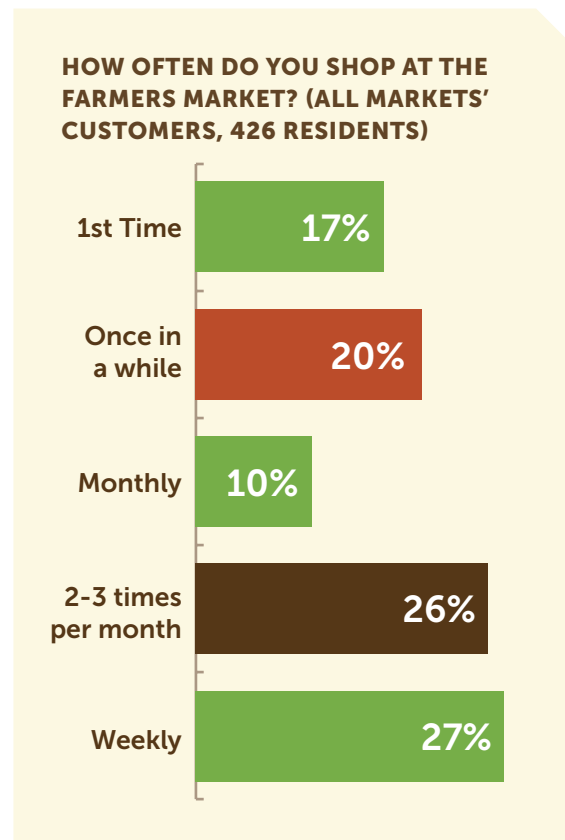
Develop and implement a plan for off-season outreach to the community, including media, social media, joint events with chefs and restaurants, and targeted outreach to 20–30 businesses, civic groups, and informal associations of people who are likely to be concerned about health, food, cooking and related areas. As one part of an overall marketing and promotional effort, this outreach should help broaden the customer base and increase shoppers' anticipation of the market season. It will need to be accompanied by diversifying and strengthening the product offerings of vendors. Improving vendor displays and product presentation will also be critical to increasing sales and viability.

Finding 4

While most of the farmers markets attempt to advertise and promote themselves, the vast majority of both current shoppers and those who are not regular farmers market customers are not being reached by these efforts. Expanding the base of farmers market shoppers and making farmers markets the 'first grocer' of choice will require coordinated and sustained outreach, education and promotional efforts involving all of the markets and other partners in Douglas County. With less than 1.5% of county residents currently shopping at farmers markets, the potential to increase the customer base is substantial.

RECOMMENDATION FOR ACTION

Work with market leadership, key vendors and committed customers to develop improved communications between markets and their customers. This might include concise weekly or biweekly newsletters that highlight new items at the market, list items available that week, describe upcoming events and special activities, and provide compelling stories, satisfied customer quotes, or data points that help make the case for shopping at markets (related to nutrition, food miles, superior flavor, etc). Strengthening and streamlining the mid-week markets, and greatly improving public awareness of market times, locations and unique features will also be essential here.



Finding 5

Most people want the Saturday market to remain downtown. At the same time, an increasing number of vendors, and particularly shoppers, believe that the New Hampshire Street location is untenable, as encroaching development is negatively impacting both aesthetic and practical considerations. A new downtown



location, preferably including the mid-week market as well, would be a very worthwhile investment for the overall benefit of Lawrence and Douglas County. Surveys and previous research both indicate that downtown markets bring people to town, and can generate substantial additional sales for nearby businesses.

RECOMMENDATION FOR ACTION

Create a working group to definitively deal with the “location issue” for the downtown market within the next two to three years, involving market leaders, vendors, committed customers and key city and county staff. The first steps in this process will be to agree to the essential features and components that the market should have, some of which are suggested in the full report. Since substantial funding will be needed, local officials should begin now to look for funding opportunities within their own budgets, along with state, federal and private financing opportunities.

Finding 6

The policy and regulatory context at the city and county level is not having a substantial impact on farmers markets at this point, but efforts are underway to create a more supportive and consistent framework for local foods and local food entrepreneurship. At the state level, the Kansas Department of Agriculture’s food safety and food sampling rules have become more amenable to small farmers and farmers markets, while the state’s high sales tax on food continues to create challenges for vendors and customers alike.

RECOMMENDATION FOR ACTION

Develop a policy agenda, including both state and local policies and regulations, which promotes local food consumption, and specifically, enables farmers markets and vendors to compete more effectively with more traditional market venues. One place to begin is by clarifying and communicating rules regarding product sampling at markets, followed by assistance to markets to develop the needed infrastructure for sampling.

To read the full assessment and recommendations, along with market-specific profiles, visit <https://www.douglascountyks.org/fpc/reports-and-resources>

“As the number of markets grows, there is greater likelihood of any given market overlapping with other markets in reaching out to potential customers and vendors. Greater potential competition among markets for vendors and customers presents both opportunities and challenges for market managers, planners and policy makers. Failure to take account of the potential competition for vendors and customers can be a serious problem for many farmers markets.”



From “Mapping Competition Zones for Vendors and Customers in US FarmersMarkets”, USDA ERS, September, 2011

Douglas County Farmers Markets at a Glance

DOUGLAS COUNTY FARMERS MARKET	WHEN	WHERE	VENDORS	SHOPPERS	MANAGEMENT
Lawrence Farmers Market	Saturday mornings, 7-11am (April to August); 8am-noon (September to November)	Public parking lot on New Hampshire St., between 8th and 9th, Lawrence	50-55	1,850	Paid (part-time)
	Tuesday, 4-6:30pm	Lawrence Public Library parking garage and adjacent green space	7-10	120	Paid (part-time)
Cottin’s Farmers Market	Thursdays, 4-6:30pm (Year-round)	1837 Massachusetts St., Lawrence	18-22	200	Volunteer (business host)
Clinton Parkway Farmers Market	Wednesdays, 4:30-6:30pm	Clinton Parkway Nursery parking lot, 4900 Clinton Parkway, Lawrence	5-6	150-175	Volunteer (business host)
Eudora Farmers Market	Tuesday, 4:30-6:30pm	Gene’s Heartland Foods parking lot, 1402 Church St., Eudora	8-12	35	Volunteer (vendor)
Perry-Lecompton Farmers Market	Fridays, 4-6:30 pm	Fast Trax parking lot, Hwy 24 & Ferguson Rd., Perry	8-12	40-80	Volunteer (vendor)

Farmers Market

Douglas County, Kan

OPSIS OF FINDINGS & RECOMMENDA

