

Regional Farmers Market Collaborative

Addendum to the Wisconsin Rapids Interim Report

The Regional Farmers Market Collaborative convened a Community Stakeholder Meeting at the River Walk (at Centralia Center/Rapids Mall) on Wednesday, November 1, 2017 to discuss strategies and recommendations related to the local farmers' market. The six recommendations discussed were determined based on feedback that the Collaborative received from its summer outreach to various stakeholder groups. Over 50 community members attended the meeting and provided more detailed input on the findings of the Collaborative. Vendors (and market management), local government and health department representatives, nonprofit employees, business owners and customers were present. The Collaborative solicited comments from all community members on the market's location and what types of attributes a facility/structure could include. Attendees then selected one additional topic to discuss with others in a small group before reporting important points back to everyone. This Addendum to the Interim Report serves as the Final Report of the Regional Farmers Market Collaborative's information gathering project. Each section details the discussions of community members in attendance. Key ideas and takeaways included:

- 1) Support for a permanent, covered farmers' market structure or building
- 2) Collaboration with other organizations to increase activities and entertainment at the market
- 3) Extending current hours and/or adding another market day with evening hours
- 4) Increased promotion of FoodShare use at farmers' markets and exploration of other models for administration of those benefits at markets
- 5) Clearly defined and understood management structure and responsibilities
- 6) Collaboration to reach new networks and increase awareness of the market

1) FARMERS' MARKET FACILITY/STRUCTURE/BUILDING AND LOCATION

The Collaborative asked all attendees for their opinions regarding the: 1) location of the market, 2) preferred structure designs, and 3) desired facility features. During each small group's report back to the larger audience, the Collaborative discovered several common themes.

- Participants wanted a covered, open-air structure. They preferred a design that included garage-style doors that could open or close depending on the weather. (Expressed at 6 out of 7 tables.)
- Attendees emphasized the importance of seating for customers. (Expressed at 6 out of 7 tables.)
- Community members cited that they liked the current location and/or that the market should stay on the West Side near Downtown. (Expressed at 5 out of 7 tables.)
- Participants discussed the importance of accessibility. This included easy parking and loading/unloading for customers and vendors. (Expressed at 5 out of 7 tables.)
- Stakeholders communicated the need for nearby bathroom facilities. (Expressed at 4 out of 7 tables.)
- Attendees said that any new structure should include electricity. (Expressed at 3 out of 7 tables.)
- Community members noted the importance of a safe atmosphere. (Expressed at 2 out of 7 tables.)

In addition, participants at all 7 tables supported the use of a permanent farmers' market facility for other community activities too. Some of these ideas included kids' activities, music, chef demos and incorporating or coordinating with other community events. Attendees also emphasized that the size of the structure should allow for expansion and growth of the market.

2) INCREASED FOOT TRAFFIC: ADVERTISING AND KIDS' ACTIVITIES

Participants at this table discussed specific ideas for kids' activities and advertising in order to bring more visitors to the farmers' market. They expressed creating a fun atmosphere for kids. Specific suggestions included partnering with the library for a book giveaway, incorporating Boys and Girls Club activities on site and having green space and playground equipment. People in this group also liked the idea of chef demos and music but said that these types of activities would need to be in the evening or on the weekend versus during an afternoon market. In regards to advertising, attendees suggested placing bulletin boards at City entrances/exits and running TV and/or radio commercials. They thought the market should have a larger digital footprint on social media platforms.

3) APPROPRIATE HOURS: NIGHT MARKET

Other community members chose to discuss the possibility of an evening market. Participants in this group liked the idea of adding a third market day each week on Tuesday evening. They thought it would be best to have just one night market per week. Possible schedules included 2:00 -7:00 pm or 11:00 am - 7:00 pm. Community members thought it would be nice to extend the Saturday morning market hours so that it could be open until 2:00 pm. They also discussed ideas for additional attractions and features. Music and chef demos were discussed again among this group, as well as thoughts of including dietitians, food preparation tips and food trucks (as a way of providing more diverse prepared food options). Attendees mentioned having highlights on local businesses and farmers market vendors.

4) FOODSHARE/EBT (ELECTRONIC BENEFIT TRANSFER): PROMOTION AND STRUCTURE

Another discussion topic concerned the administration of FoodShare (federally known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formally 'food stamps') benefits at the farmers' market, as well as strategies for increasing the number of people using their benefits at the market. Central Rivers Farmshed has administered the token system for accepting FoodShare at the market for the past 6 years but cannot continue operating the program. The organization is working on strategies to transition the program. It hopes to help vendors obtain their own equipment for accepting FoodShare so that farmers can swipe customers' cards directly at their own booths.

FoodShare customers present at the stakeholder meeting thought that some FoodShare users would still shop at the market, even if it stopped accepting program benefits. Vendors acknowledged that they do not earn much revenue from EBT sales but do think accepting it is important for the community. Attendees noted that one drawback of requiring farmers to have their own machines is that it may exclude some farmers. However, an advantage is that they could then accept debit and credit cards. They noted that this could be helpful since sometimes customers run out of cash or need to make an extra stop at the ATM before visiting the market.

On the part of promotion of the farmers' market to FoodShare users, meeting participants commented that radio, word of mouth and more prominent signage at the EBT booth were important advertising strategies. They also thought that the State of Wisconsin should include information about using FoodShare at farmers' markets when they send other program materials. (Editor Note: There is some discussion currently occurring at the state level about sending farmers' market information to all FoodShare users when they receive their benefits.)

Some participants also said that they would like to see FoodShare collaborate more with the WIC (Women, Infants and Children) program. WIC provides supplemental food assistance and nutritional education for low-income pregnant, breastfeeding and non-breastfeeding postpartum women, and to infants and children up to age five. Program participants often receive fruit and vegetable vouchers to use at authorized farmers' markets. Collaboration could include side by side booth information, cross promotion of programs and finding a way to issue benefits "where people are at".

5) MANAGEMENT: POSITION DESCRIPTIONS

Market management shared a list of its current duties and responsibilities. Then table participants started outlining what a market manager job description could look like. This soon became a greater process than originally expected. The group identified some possible responsibilities such as advertising, communication, event coordination, upholding bylaws/rules, ensuring cross cultural communication and overseeing additional staff, interns and/or volunteers. Table conversation then turned to more general management topics by participants. They also mentioned revisiting the vendor fee structure to make sure it is cost effective. The topic of management will need much more time and consideration among all stakeholders in order to dig into the details of what it could look like in the future.

6) EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY BUILDING: INFO SHEETS AND NEWSLETTER

The discussion at this table centered on how to get information about the farmers' market out to the community rather than focusing on the specific content that could be included in these types of communication materials. Participants thought that it was most important to first focus on increasing awareness of the market in general. They emphasized the importance of collaborating with other organizations and using their networks to spread the word about the market. A couple of groups mentioned by name included FoodWise (Yuck to Yum classes), the School at Altenburg and AmeriCorps Farm to School. When it comes time to provide educational information, some ideas for specific topics included food preparation skills and product seasonality. Materials could also compare the price of Central Wisconsin farmers' market items to grocery store products as well as account for factors such as transportation.

ONLINE SURVEY

Farmshed also made an online survey available for participants who were unable to attend the meeting or who wanted to provide additional comments. 10 community members provided responses on the Wood County (Rapids Mall) Farmers' Market. Areas of top concern for improvement to this group included:

- 1) Entertainment/community events - chef demos, music etc.
- 2) A place to sit/hang out
- 3) Activities for kids
- 4) Clear signage for "locally grown" vendors vs resellers



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**Farmshed has a presence at the Stevens Point and Wisconsin Rapids (Rapids Mall) Farmers' Markets*
For more information about this project please contact Farmshed at 715-544-6154 or info@farmshed.org

THIS PROJECT MADE POSSIBLE BY: **incourage**