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# NATIONAL FARMERS MARKET SUMMIT

## PROCEEDINGS REPORT

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), in partnership with the Farmers Market Consortium<sup>1</sup>, hosted the National Farmers Market Summit November 7–9, 2007, in Baltimore, MD. The Summit assembled key stakeholders from the farmers market community to convene a national conversation on issues and challenges facing today's farmers markets. The National Farmers Market Summit had three broad objectives:

- Identify farmers market needs and existing gaps in assistance.
- Prioritize future research and technical assistance initiatives.
- Provide guidance to policymakers on how best to allocate available resources.

The Summit was attended by 75 participants who represented a diverse range of farmers market stakeholders, including national resource providers, farmers market representatives, and community partners.<sup>2</sup> Invitations were sent to farmers market stakeholders with diverse interests, expertise, and geographic location. Participants included representatives from 31 States and the District of Columbia.<sup>3</sup> The Summit also included 12 staff members of AMS's Marketing Services Division (MSD), the lead organizer of the Summit, and Dr. Kenneth C. Clayton, the Associate Administrator of AMS and chair of the Farmers Market Consortium.

In order to develop a national consensus agenda of farmers market priorities, it was critical for the Summit design process to promote a high level of attendee participation and create a forum of engaging dialogue. The process through which consensus was developed in so large a group was done by combining lightly structured, facilitated discussions in small groups, with subsequent report-outs, plenary discussions and agreement-reaching in the large group. Specifically, the Summit process design consisted of four facilitated working group sessions, each session building off the previous one.<sup>4</sup> The sessions included: (1) World Café-formatted Brainstorming Session on Major Challenges and Opportunities for Farmers Markets; (2) Reaching Consensus on Farmers Market Priorities; (3) Recommending Strategies for Addressing Consensus Priorities Issues; and (4) Opportunities for Collaboration (Role-Alike Groups).

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<sup>1</sup> See p. 9 for background information on the Farmers Market Consortium

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A for a breakdown of participants by major stakeholder groups

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix B for a map showing the geographic representation of Summit participants

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix C for a full description of the Summit facilitation process design

## SUMMIT OUTCOMES

### *Reaching Consensus on Farmers Market Priorities*

Using the brainstorming and consensus priority exercises, participants at the National Farmers Market Summit identified 12 key issues that they believe deserve attention from policymakers, funders, and other market assistance providers. These included:

- ❖ "Growing" Farmers
- ❖ Policy/Regulation
- ❖ Professional Development
- ❖ Partnerships
- ❖ Message Related to Farmers Market Promotion
- ❖ Research
- ❖ Funding/Resources
- ❖ Farmers Markets as Center of Community
- ❖ Public Health
- ❖ Low Income Access
- ❖ Local Food Systems
- ❖ Economic Sustainability

### *Recommending Strategies for Addressing Consensus Priorities Issues*

To explore possible approaches and solutions for addressing each consensus priority, Summit attendees were invited to engage in one of 12 issue-specific discussions, based on their level of interest in the given discussion topic.

Although each of the 12 key issues has a distinctive scope and set of associated characteristics, they primarily fall into the following three broadly defined categories of activity: (1) Policy and Advocacy-based Initiatives; (2) Education and Training Initiatives; and (3) Community-based Initiatives.

**I. Policy and advocacy-based initiatives** aimed at championing the importance of farmers markets and facilitating their continued growth. As defined by Summit participants, specific priorities to be addressed within the framework of policy-based initiatives included:

- Policy/Regulatory Barriers
- Message Related to Farmers Market Promotion
- Funding/Resources

One of the common themes that surfaced repeatedly during discussions of all three priority issues related to policy and advocacy was the notion of creating a *single national trade organization for farmers market stakeholders* (perhaps similar to the newly reorganized Farmers Market Coalition) to speak with a unified voice to policymakers and be a centralized point of contact for disseminating information about available funding and technical assistance to community members. Other strategies

that appeared to share wide support were the *development of a professional training curriculum* aimed at enhancing and creating greater consistency in the expertise and knowledge base of farmers market managers (a theme that also emerged repeatedly during the “education and training” related priority discussions), and the *development of a national farmers market promotional campaign* aimed at informing policymakers and the public about the economic, community, and health benefits of farmers markets. All three discussions touched on the difficulty of preserving some degree of local autonomy while centralizing authority.

**II. Education and training initiatives**, especially those targeted at enhancing the technical skills of farmers-market practitioners. As defined by Summit participants, specific priorities to be addressed include:

- “Growing” Farmers
- Professional Development
- Economic Sustainability
- Research

One common theme that surfaced repeatedly throughout each of the priority discussions related to education and training was the importance of establishing a *minimum standard of technical experience in business planning and marketing* for farmers market participants, whether through the development of a formal curriculum or the provision of other relevant continuing educational opportunities. The ability to properly gauge production costs and prices, and gain ongoing exposure to such rapidly changing issues as emerging consumer trends, new product varieties, and improved season extension techniques, were seen as essential tools in enhancing the profitability and long-term economic viability of farmers market vendors and suppliers. With respect to farmers market managers and members of market boards/management organizations, who often serve as a market’s primary point of contact with community members and policymakers, it was recommended that *workshops or courses be developed* that help such individuals learn how to:

- Develop effective community partnerships (especially by examining the lessons learned from successful partnership models).
- Augment the reach and impact of existing partnerships by exploring the possibility of relationships with nontraditional organizations.
- Locate available resources from Federal, State, and local sources.
- Train market managers and other advocates on how to best capture, document, and report information that measures a market’s impact on the local economy/community.

**III. Community-based initiatives** aimed at establishing farmers markets as vital cornerstones of their community’s quality of life. As defined by Summit participants, priorities included:

- Partnerships
- Farmers Markets as Center of the Community
- Public Health
- Low-Income Access
- Local Food Systems

Probably the most common conversational thread that appeared in all of these independent discussions was the emphasis given to *the importance of establishing innovative—and possibly untraditional—partnerships* in order to achieve desired community goals. Lack of public awareness about the opportunities and benefits offered by farmers markets was a pervasive complaint throughout many of the discussions, whether the members of the public in question involved household consumers, local farmers, elected officials, or Federal policymakers, and improvement in outreach to potential allies was considered essential to obtain the level of attention necessary to change consumer behavior and/or public policy. Discussion participants also expressed the general opinion that current levels of *communication and collaboration with relevant farmers market stakeholders* was less than optimal and could easily be improved if greater attention were paid to the issue. This phenomenon appeared to hold true whether or not such discussions were occurring at a local, regional, or national level, suggesting that geographical proximity alone did not ensure that proper lines of communication were established and maintained.

### ***Opportunities for Collaboration (Role-Alike Groups)***

The final session of the Summit brought together participants from similar professions to discuss actions they could take individually or collectively in their organizations, as well as opportunities for inter-organizational collaboration on the priorities. The role-alike groups included: Federal agencies, State Departments of Agriculture, local and regional representatives, State farmers market associations, university researchers, farmers and farmers market managers, health representatives, private foundations, and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs). A common theme emerging from these discussions was *the need to improve communication channels among major stakeholder groups*. Enhanced communications can be expected to strengthen existing partnerships and help build new partnerships—both of which will be necessary to tackle most, if not all, of the Summit priorities. Toward this end, one recommendation that several groups mentioned was the *establishment of an open-source online site to facilitate more effective communication* among farmers market vendors, managers, community development practitioners, researchers, funders, and other stakeholders, which could be used as a means to share pertinent resources (e.g., best practices, lessons learned, current research findings, training and funding opportunities, upcoming events, etc.).

## ***Participant Feedback and Actions Initiated***

In an effort to make the proceedings report as inclusive as possible, a draft of the report was sent to all Summit attendees. Participants were asked to provide feedback in a number of ways, including: (a) points of clarification and any further detail on the content of the sessions they participated in; (b) further reflections on the format and outcomes of the Summit, and (c) actions initiated by participants, or ideas they hope to carry forward, to address the major priorities since the conclusion of the Summit.

This final Summit proceedings report has taken into account and incorporated the feedback from participants on content and clarity issues, and highlighted a number of actions initiated by participants and their respective organizations as a means to start addressing the Summit priorities. Some of the examples of actions initiated by Summit participants and priority areas addressed include:

- *Public Health*—A representative from Kaiser Permanente learned the concept of creating a “Best of Market” program at the Summit, and plans to pilot test it at two hospitals. The scheme works by having the farmers market manager identify an assortment of “best of the market” items each week, and charge around \$20 for each package. A “designated shopper” from each department surveys the staff to see who wants a package and goes down to the market on behalf of their fellow workers. If executed correctly, such programs have been known to help farmers double their market day revenue. If the pilot project goes well, Kaiser hopes to expand the program to their other medical facilities where farmers markets have been established.
- *Professional Development and Growing Farmers*—An extension professor from Mississippi State University is in the preliminary stages of establishing a model farm with a variety of crops using techniques and technology intended to maximize yields and extend growing seasons. Over time, it is hoped that the model farm will be part of a “Farmers Market University,” which would provide a dynamic setting for growers and other stakeholders to share best practices and lessons learned on developing viable local food systems. USDA Agricultural Research Service is supporting this effort with a supplementary grant of \$75,000 to help establish high-tunnel demonstration farms in Mississippi.
- *Farmers Market Promotion*—A representative from the American Farmland Trust (AFT) is actively engaging farmers markets to help cultivate customer loyalty through AFT’s promotion of “No Farms No Food” bumper stickers. AFT is also beginning work on local farm policy initiatives that includes farmers markets, including one project that is examining the San Francisco “foodshed.”

- *Partnerships and Professional Development*—For their annual Partners' Meeting in August, the USDA Office of Outreach will include two workshops that will address farmers markets and direct-marketing opportunities for small-scale and limited resource farmers. MSD will be conducting these workshops, offering one workshop on planning and management considerations for start-up farmers markets and a second workshop on how to access alternative marketing channels (i.e., institutions, grocery stores, restaurants, etc.) and thereby mitigate risk.

Further examples of actions initiated by Summit participants can be found in the main body of the report. For our part, AMS has already formulated several ways of addressing Summit priorities in our programmatic activities. As an initial step, we have incorporated several of the priorities that emerged at the Summit in the guidelines for the 2008 Farmers Market Promotion Program. We encouraged applicants to incorporate three subject areas corresponding with Summit priorities in their grant application attention: *Growing Farmers, Innovative Partnerships and Networking, and Professional Development*. We believe that all three issues play essential roles in promoting the future growth and success of farmers markets.

AMS also recognizes that one of the areas with broad Summit consensus involved the creation of a national organization that could effectively advocate on behalf of the nation's farmers markets. Toward this end, we are presently working with the Farmers Market Coalition to identify ways to strengthen the organization and enable it to meet its stated mission and goals. Furthermore, we see our role as leading organizer and member of the Farmers Market Consortium as an effective instrument to coordinate and strengthen inter-government agency and industry-wide efforts to develop innovative partnerships, another one of the top priorities identified at the Summit. In future Consortium meetings, we will work with the other members to set agendas that incorporates Summit priorities, with the goal of establishing actionable items that the Consortium can carry forward.

These initial efforts by AMS and other Summit participants provide just a few examples of how to carry forward some of key farmers market priorities. We will continue to engage Summit participants, as well as the wider farmers-market community, to learn more about innovative ways to address these priorities, as part of a larger effort to promote promising models for successful and sustainable farmers market expansion.

# INTRODUCTION

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In order to develop a national consensus agenda of farmers market priorities, it was critical for the Summit design process to promote a high level of attendee participation and create a forum of engaging dialogue. The process through which consensus was developed in so large a group was done by combining lightly structured, facilitated discussions in small groups, with subsequent report-outs, plenary discussions and agreement-reaching in the large group. Specifically, the Summit process design consisted of four facilitated working group sessions, each session building off the previous one.<sup>8</sup> The first session utilized the "World Café" format which consists of three rounds of brainstorming in small groups, with the composition of the groups changing each round. In the first two rounds, participants identified the major challenges facing farmers markets. In the third round they focused on the opportunities for farmers market growth and success. The World Café session was followed by a consensus

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<sup>5</sup> Led by AMS, this public/private partnership was created in November 2005 to facilitate the exchange of information and dialogue on emerging issues in the farmers market community. Since its inception, the Consortium has grown to include seven agencies within USDA, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, agricultural marketing associations, non-governmental organizations, private foundations, and other key industry stakeholders. By utilizing the collective and diverse expertise of Consortium members, a key objective of the partnership is to provide guidance to policymakers on appropriate uses of resources, in order to promote the development of innovative and promising models for successful and sustainable market expansion.

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix A for a breakdown of participants by major stakeholder groups

<sup>7</sup> See Appendix B for a map showing the geographic representation of Summit participants

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix C for full description of the Summit facilitation process design

priority session, in which participants were asked to reflect on the previous exercise and list their top five priorities for farmers markets. In the third session, participants again worked in small facilitated groups to develop a further synthesized list of priorities, and then were assigned to new breakout groups to develop strategies for addressing each of the priorities. The final session of the Summit brought together participants from similar professions to discuss actions they could take individually or collectively with their organizations, and provided an opportunity for inter-organizational collaboration on the priorities.

This report relates discussions, organized by session: Reaching Consensus on Farmers Market Priorities, Recommending Strategies for Addressing Consensus Priorities Issues, and Opportunities for Collaboration (Role-Alike Groups). Much of the information was captured on flipcharts by the facilitators. This current document should not be construed as a comprehensive overview of the discussions, but more as a snapshot of the major ideas that emerged from the Summit. The first section begins with the outcomes of the consensus priorities session, including a discussion of the 12 priorities identified, followed by a synthesis of the strategy session, with particular attention paid to highlighting cross-cutting themes that emerged from multiple groups. The report continues with a summary of the discussions during the role-alike collaborations session, and concludes with participant evaluations and reflections on the Summit process, including actions initiated by participants since the conclusion of the Summit.

# REACHING CONSENSUS ON FARMERS MARKET PRIORITIES

The Consensus Priorities session was built on the results of the World Café brainstorming session, where mixed groups of participants discussed major farmers market challenges and opportunities. Reflecting on the issues raised in the brainstorming session, each participant was asked to write down the top five priorities for farmers markets over the next few years.<sup>9</sup> The participants then assembled into groups to reach consensus on five or so priorities. When consensus was reached, each group presented their top priorities to the other groups. After listening to each group's priorities, the whole group reached consensus on the most important priorities for farmers markets in the coming years. The final list of farmers market priorities fall into 12 broad categories:

- ❖ "Growing" Farmers
- ❖ Policy/Regulation
- ❖ Professional Development
- ❖ Partnerships
- ❖ Message Related to Farmers Market Promotion
- ❖ Research
- ❖ Funding/Resources
- ❖ Farmers Markets as Center of Community
- ❖ Public Health
- ❖ Low Income Access
- ❖ Local Food Systems
- ❖ Economic Sustainability

The following section discusses each priority and presents summaries of discussions from the consensus priority groups. More details on each priority are also discussed under the Strategies for Addressing the Priorities section of this report.

## **"GROWING" FARMERS**

This priority focused on the need to expand the number of farmers and producers selling at farmers markets. There is no better way to recruit farmers than showing new entrants the profit potential of farmers markets, which can be enhanced when farmers and farmers market managers get appropriate training. More discussion of growing farmers will be found under the Professional Development and Economic Sustainability section.

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<sup>9</sup> See Appendix D for a ranking of individual participants' top priorities

## **POLICY/REGULATION**

Much of the discussion of policy concerned having a single voice to advocate for farmers markets and enabling farmers market leaders to be part of the policy-making process (e.g., in funding priorities, regulatory issues relating to food safety and health, use of public/private space, insurance, etc.) at all governmental levels. There seems to be a disconnect between grassroots and governmental solutions that can best be remedied by a unified effort on the part of farmers markets. It was also mentioned that policies should legitimize farmers markets as viable businesses and recognize the key role they play in local economic development.

## **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Much of this priority focused on the need for training for farmers and producers (i.e., new and existing farmers market vendors) and farmers market managers. For new and existing vendors, the types of needed training include production practices (e.g., seasonal extension, sustainable practices, etc.), small business development, and direct marketing. Training needed for farmers market managers includes establishing and promoting farmers markets, business and organizational management, strategic planning, fundraising (including grant-writing), and career development. It was also recommended that a farmers market “university” curriculum be developed to help producers, managers, community planners, health advocates, and other stakeholders acquire professional skills.

## **PARTNERSHIPS**

To be more successful, farmers markets must form partnerships and coalitions with a diverse range of stakeholders—regulators, health advocates, chefs, schools, etc. Partnerships should be built to engage policymakers at both the local and national levels. Toward that end, one group suggested the establishment of a national farmers market organization that would be structured like a trade association to help coordinate resource sharing of professional development/training, resource advocacy, market promotion, and setting standards/certification for farmers market managers. The organization would also be an information clearinghouse for best practices on farmer recruitment, business management, marketing, technical assistance, and insurance.

## **MESSAGE RELATED TO FARMERS MARKET PROMOTION**

Farmers markets need a national unified message directed to both consumers and policymakers. The message should communicate the advantages and benefits of farmers markets to consumers, including:

- Emphasizing the relationship between direct farm purchases and food quality and safety (e.g., knowing where one's food comes from, awareness and respect for food).

- Connecting farmers markets to other national promotional activities (e.g., health and wellness, community development, supporting small farmers, saving “green space” and farmland, food safety, buying local).
- Promoting the health and nutritional benefits of farmers markets.
- Educating consumers about:
  - Benefits of farmers markets to producers, consumers, and the local community.
  - Ability of farmers markets to respond to consumer food trends and needs.
  - Economic development impacts of farmers markets.

The message should also educate policymakers about the need to communicate priority items, thereby making resources available for farmers market promotion.

## **RESEARCH**

Research should assess the economic, social, health, and environmental impacts of farmers markets. Other research areas mentioned by the groups include:

- Documenting successful farmers markets (particularly farmers markets serving low income areas).
- Collecting local, regional, and national data on consumer and market trends.
- Conducting studies of the effectiveness of farmers market advertising and promotion.

Applied research is needed to develop practical tools, such as business management programs and professional development training programs. Research institutes can also play a key role in setting up accessible, user-friendly, online clearinghouses of farmers market data, tools, and best practices, as well as arming farmers market advocates with the kind of information needed to push for policy and regulatory reforms.

## **FUNDING/RESOURCES**

Farmers markets need to secure funding and resources from local, State, and Federal governments. All the priorities identified at this Summit require either financial or technical assistance to establish, maintain, and grow farmers markets. This is not only a call for funding reallocations from the different levels of government, but also the leveraging of public and private partnerships so that they better meet the resource needs of farmers markets. Specific priorities for funding include: research to assess the economic impacts of farmers markets on vendors and community, infrastructural and operational improvements to farmers markets, expanded grant programs, technical assistance, training and “How To” guides for farmers market vendors and managers, health education and other promotional programs, and establishing farmers markets in low income areas.

## **FARMERS MARKETS AS CENTER OF COMMUNITY**

Several groups discussed the need to position farmers markets as "community cornerstones." Farmers markets are not just a place where farm products are sold; they are also places that bring diverse people together to share ideas and values, where a sense of community is built, and where important educational information can be disseminated. Farmers markets can also play an important part in developing and connecting local economies. This point is discussed further under the "Economic Sustainability" and "Local Food Systems" priorities.

## **PUBLIC HEALTH**

As a community meeting space where people can buy fresh, nutritious, and wholesome foods, farmers markets are well positioned to promote public health messages. They should incorporate nutrition and wellness education programs and services. The topic of public health as a farmers market priority often dovetailed into the topic of food access and equity. Farmers markets need to serve the entire community so they can address pressing community issues. As one group mentioned, many farmers markets fail to reach all segments of the population, and may especially fail to reach those who would benefit most in terms of enhanced health and wellness from fresh fruits and vegetables.

## **LOW INCOME ACCESS**

Farmers markets must increase consumer access in low-income areas. They must especially set up incentive structures that will attract farmers markets to low-income areas, as well as attract low-income residents to farmers markets. The incentives can come from several farmers market stakeholders:

- Federal government programs, such as food stamp and WIC coupons redeemable at farmers markets.
- Local government subsidizing transportation costs.
- Several privately led initiatives.

With a greater urgency to increase access to healthy foods there comes a greater need for research to document and disseminate successful models of farmers markets in low-income areas. The importance of consistent information about the use of new technologies, such as Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT), to enhance access to farmers markets was also mentioned.

## **LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS**

Most of the discussion under this priority focused on farmers markets as the focal point of local food systems. As a place that brings farmers, consumers, and the community together, farmers markets have the potential to be the catalyst—or even the core—of a local food system. Farmers markets are often the most visible form of local food systems and provide excellent entry points for local

small-scale growers. They are ideal incubators for local growers to gain experience and expertise in direct-to-consumer marketing, which can also lead to other direct marketing opportunities in their communities.

### **ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY**

At the core of the discussion on economic sustainability is the fact that farmers need to make a profit. If farmers are not profitable, farmers markets will not be able to sustain their operations. While farmer profitability is a necessary condition, it is by no means sufficient on its own for farmers markets to sustain their operations. For example, in order to operate successfully, steps must be taken to reduce farmers market manager turnover, which can only happen when managing farmers markets is seen as a viable career path (i.e., livable wages and benefits). This can start to be addressed by increasing the availability of appropriate capacity-building trainings for vendors and managers, as pointed out under the “Professional Development” priority. This includes the capacity to engage in financial and strategic planning, such as deciding whether to open farmers market seasonally or year round, when to adopt certain technologies (e.g., credit/debit and EBT), or when to make infrastructural improvements. Policies and regulatory structures (e.g., food safety regulations, zoning permits, grower insurance, etc.) that are conducive to growth and that reduce market entry barriers for small-scale growers are also required.

# RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING CONSENSUS PRIORITY ISSUES

Using the consensus priority exercise, participants at the National Farmers Market Summit identified 12 key issues that they believe deserve attention from policymakers, funders, and other market assistance providers. Although each of the 12 key issues has a distinctive scope and set of associated characteristics, as the subsequent examination of group strategy discussions will reveal, they primarily fall into the following three broadly defined categories of activity:

- **Policy and advocacy-based initiatives** aimed at championing the importance of farmers markets and facilitating their continued growth. As defined by Summit participants, specific priorities to be addressed within the framework of policy-based initiatives included:
  - Policy/Regulatory Barriers
  - Funding/Resources
  - Message Related to Farmers Market Promotion
- **Education and training initiatives**, especially those targeted at enhancing the technical skills of farmers market practitioners. As defined by Summit participants, specific priorities to be addressed include:
  - Professional Development
  - "Growing" Farmers
  - Economic Sustainability
  - Research
- **Community-based initiatives** aimed at establishing farmers markets as vital cornerstones of their community's quality of life. As defined by Summit participants, priorities included:
  - Partnerships
  - Public Health
  - Low-Income Access
  - Local Food Systems
  - Farmers Markets as Center of the Community

To explore possible approaches and solutions for each priority issue, Summit attendees were invited to engage in one of 12 issue-specific discussions, based on their level of interest in the given discussion topic. Members of each self-selected group were then asked to complete the following assignments:

- Define the selected priority issue in a manner that is at least minimally acceptable to all members of the discussion group.
- Envision the desired outcomes that could be achieved if the priority issue was addressed correctly.
- Identify the barriers that prevent desired outcomes from being achieved.
- Develop a set of strategies to overcome current barriers to success.
- Identify potential resources to support the strategies, and discuss the roles that the resource providers would play in contributing to a successful outcome.

The following narrative summarizes the most important and distinctive elements of each of the 12 strategy discussions, grouped within the broad umbrellas of policy, education, and community-based activities. Each section highlights cross-cutting themes to emphasize recommendations that enjoy wide support.

## **I. POLICY AND ADVOCACY-BASED INITIATIVES**

This grouping of initiatives incorporated the following three priority issues:

- Policy/Regulatory Barriers
- Funding/Resources, and
- Message Related to Farmers Market Promotion

### **Discussion Highlights:**

One of the common themes that surfaced repeatedly during discussions of all three priority issues related to policy and advocacy was the notion of creating a single national trade organization for farmers market stakeholders (perhaps similar to the Farmers Market Coalition) to speak with a unified voice to policymakers and be a centralized point of contact for disseminating information about available funding and technical assistance to community members. Other strategies that appeared to share wide support were the development of a professional training curriculum aimed at enhancing and creating greater consistency in the expertise and knowledge base of farmers market managers (a theme that also emerged repeatedly during the “education and training” related priority discussions), and the development of a national farmers market promotional campaign aimed at informing policymakers and the public about the economic, community, and health benefits of farmers markets. All three discussions touched on the difficulty of preserving some degree of local autonomy while centralizing authority.

## **POLICY AND REGULATORY BARRIERS**

### **Consensus Definition of Issue:**

The policy and regulatory barrier issue was seen as incorporating three primary aspects:

- Improving access to farmers market nutrition benefits through an expansion of EBT access, more efficient processing of vendor applications to participate in Women, Infants and Children (WIC) coupon redemption, and better/more uniform policy coordination between national USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) and regional/local WIC offices.
- Enhancing uniformity in food safety and processing regulations that affect direct farm marketing activities across State, county, and municipal boundaries, especially in relation to on-farm production and post-harvest handling practices
- Greater clarity about the business permit process; in particular, an understanding of how local zoning considerations and business permit requirements intersect.

### **Desired Outcomes:**

In the food safety/processing arena, group members agreed that there was a pressing need for:

- Clear rules and a single source of information. Right now, confusion over which agency has jurisdiction in a particular area—as well as inconsistencies in regulatory scope across State, county, and municipal lines—makes it difficult for growers to determine which regulations apply to their situation, who is responsible for developing and enforcing these regulations, and who can give them the correct policy guidance. Even in situations where the lines of authority are fairly clear, it is not always obvious if direct farm sales are exempt from existing food safety and processing regulations. Furthermore, some so-called “voluntary” food safety and processing regulations are not always interpreted as such by the enforcing authorities.
- Establishing food safety and processing regulations that take scale into consideration. Many existing regulations are designed to apply to large-scale commercial operations, and may be inappropriate or cost-prohibitive for smaller producers.
- Increasing producer access to technical training and risk management tools. Producers need to be better educated about appropriate production and postharvest practices, good agricultural practices (GAP) certification, and liability insurance in order to meet buyer or farmers market requirements and expand their access to customers.

### **Perceived Barriers:**

- Lack of sufficient coordination between the various Federal, regional, and local entities responsible for administering, funding, and accepting vendor

applications to participate in the WIC farmers market nutrition program. Even though the administration of the program is managed by a Federal agency (FNS), individual States provide different levels of funding for the program and apply different standards for vendor participation.

- Inappropriate design of the electronic redemption system. The medium used to offer farmers market nutrition benefits to low-income consumers— “smart cards” and wireless EBT technology—is not suitable for farmers market sites. The delivery system was designed to meet the logistical requirements of large supermarkets with greater technological capabilities and labor resources than farmers markets. Coupled with heavy start-up and maintenance fees, the infrastructure and labor required to carry out transactions have inhibited the adoption of wireless EBT at farmers markets making farmers markets less accessible to lower-income consumers than other outlets.
- Insufficient and unclear lines of communication across agency/organizational boundaries, which impede the flow of information between State agencies, between State and Federal (USDA) agencies, and between grassroots organizations and government entities.

### **Recommended Strategies:**

- Creation of a national advocacy organization that can represent the U.S. farmers market community with a single voice and lobby for additional support from policymakers.
- Development of/access to a curriculum that would standardize the educational credentials and enhance the professional expertise of farmers market managers and vendors.
- Development of educational outreach programs to expand awareness of farmers market impacts to stakeholder groups, such as State legislatures and agriculture and health departments, local government officials, prospective and current market managers, and vendors.
- Greater clarification of USDA’s jurisdiction with respect to farmers markets activities.
- Establishment of a State-level USDA presence that could serve as a point of contact on national farmers market policy issues and improve channels of communication.
- Creation of a “reverse” farmers market resource guide by the USDA Farmers Market Consortium, which would give guidance on interacting with USDA representatives and disseminating national policy issues back to grassroots organizations for the broadest impact.

### **Potential Resources and Roles for Strategy Implementation:**

- Farmers market organizations, State governments, USDA, and the Farmers Market Coalition were viewed by group members as vital resources for implementing recommended advocacy, educational, and/or outreach strategies.
- Aside from the stakeholders mentioned above, group members also identified a variety of non-profit organizations, both national and regional,

that might be valuable allies in providing advocacy and educational support to the farmers market community. Such organizations included:

- State food policy councils
- National Association of Farmers Market Nutrition Programs
- Community Food Security Coalition
- Center for Rural Affairs
- National Association of State Departments of Agriculture
- National Association of State Legislatures
- Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
- Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
- When establishing strategic partnerships, group members cautioned that it was important to acknowledge the particular (and sometimes competing) agendas of partner organizations, and take steps to ensure that diverse perspectives are represented "at the table" when potential action steps are being hammered out.
- Group members identified several potential sources of funding to carry out recommended advocacy, educational and outreach strategies, including:
  - Start-up capital from private funders.
  - Membership fees.
  - Fees for using farmers market resources
  - Grants from USDA, foundation, and corporate sources (these may require a reevaluation/redefinition of one's organizational tax status).
  - Consulting charges.
  - Photograph licensing fees.
  - Tuition fees for training.
  - Conference registration fees.

## **FUNDING/RESOURCES**

### **Consensus Definition of Issue:**

Educate potential funders and resource providers about the benefits of farmers markets.

### **Desired Outcomes:**

The provision of financial grants or stipends that would enable the following tasks to be carried out at no or little cost to farmers market stakeholders:

- Consumer education about the health benefits of sustainably produced food (local and organic).
- Reimbursement of transportation expenses for farmers who participate in farmers markets serving lower-income neighborhoods, so that economically disadvantaged consumers would have greater access to fresh fruits and vegetables. Other possible incentive structures could include subsidizing consumers with EBT/WIC to make purchases, or having farmers partner with

community members to run stalls so that they can do multiple markets on the same day.

- Implementation of purchasing technology at farmers markets to permit on-site credit/debit transactions, EBT, and redemption of FMNP (Farmers Market Nutrition Program) and SFMNP (Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program) benefits.
- Improvement of business operations at farmers market sites and at the farms of participating vendors, to include:
  - Professional training and curriculum development for farmers market managers.
  - Upgrades in market infrastructure.
  - Organizational development.
  - Research and development of appropriate season extension technology for small-scale growers that supply farmers markets.
  - Installation of efficient irrigation systems that decrease water consumption on farms that supply products to farmers markets.
  - Administration of mini-grants within specific States/regions that could be used for farmers market promotion and advertising activities.
  - Development of affordable liability insurance instruments for farmers market vendors and managers. (USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) might be able to assist in this effort.)
- Establishment of pilot demonstration projects that would enable a greater number of small-scale farmers to sell products to community and institutional food service providers.

#### **Perceived Barriers:**

- Intense competition for limited quantity of funds.
- Lack of awareness about the plight of farmers markets among potential funders and resource providers.
- Lack of understanding about the diverse needs of farmers markets, some of which could potentially be served by nontraditional entities that aren't currently involved in farmers market assistance.
- Unfamiliarity of farmers market managers with available funding/resources, and how one might locate such resources on the Federal, State, and local level.
- Absence of a national agenda for farmers markets.
- Lack of uniformity among USDA/Federal grant programs in application requirements and procedures.
- Often farmers markets and farmers market managers do not qualify as potential applicants for funding because they are not viewed as part of agriculture.

#### **Recommended Strategies:**

- Identify potential resource providers for farmers markets at all levels (local, State, national).

- Create a network among farmers market organizations to share relevant information on resources and funding.
- Develop a national coalition between existing organizational networks (possibly the Farmers Market Coalition) to work on common needs/interests and give voice to a national farmers market agenda.

### **Potential Resources and Roles for Strategy Implementation:**

Current and potential sources of farmers market funding identified by the group included:

- USDA (AMS, RMS, CSREES, ARS, FNS, possibly NASS)
- Henry A. Wallace Center at Winrock International
- Ford Foundation
- W.K. Kellogg Foundation
- Project for Public Spaces
- Other private foundations
- State/city governments
- Churches
- Community service organizations

Other identified sources of non-financial assistance include:

- USDA's Farmers Market Consortium, which could resolve existing differences in program rules/paperwork requirements across USDA grant programs in the farmers market arena.
- Farmers Market Coalition, which could help identify available and prospective resources for farmers markets, and make this information available on a national level to community stakeholders. (It should be noted that several of the current officers of the Farmers Market Coalition participated in this particular discussion, and therefore, much of the content of the discussion focused on the specific roles that the Coalition could potentially play in responding to national farmers market concerns.)
- USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), which could play a more significant role in collecting and disseminating statistical data on farmers market activities. (It was strongly recommended that NASS representatives should be invited to the USDA Farmers Market Consortium meetings if they haven't been already.)
- State agencies, who play an important role in the administration of Federal nutrition programs (FMNP/SFMNP).

### **MESSAGE RELATED TO PROMOTING FARMERS MARKETS**

#### **Consensus Definition of Issue:**

Creation of a national advertising/promotional campaign about farmers markets, including the development of a branded logo that attempts to cultivate customer loyalty by incorporating the following messages:

- Small family farms derive significant economic benefit from farmers markets.
- Markets support local commerce and keep revenue in the community.
- Markets provide a venue for fresh food sold directly to consumers, which increases neighborhood access to high quality food products.
- Markets provide a social “experience” which helps build community; they aren’t just another place to shop for food.

**Desired Outcome:**

- Making efficient use of marketing dollars by creating a common national message about farmers markets, and persuading a large number of household consumers that the quality of food they can find in farmers markets is superior to that found in supermarket chains.
- Conveying to consumers a clear message of what local means, a definition that varies from region to region.

**Perceived Barriers:**

- A national promotional campaign would be very costly.
- Agreeing on a common national message might be very challenging, given the diversity in farmers markets across the country. Some individual markets/regional associations might be unwilling to relinquish local control over the marketing message (though not all in the discussion group thought this was an obstacle).
- Identifying the group(s) that would spearhead this campaign

Group members spent an extensive amount of time discussing the numerous challenges involved in creating and delivering a national farmers market message. One of the primary challenges noted by the group was the difficulty of crafting a message that would be generic enough to enjoy wide support from all segments of the farmers market community and yet targeted enough to exert a measurable influence on consumer behavior. In order to be effective, and make “farmers markets” a household word, the proposed advertising campaign needs to develop an image of farmers markets that has strong positive associations among a broad swath of the consumer population. However, it is tricky to develop a basic promotional concept that can be perceived as “wholesome, warm, and fuzzy” by most consumers, but still contains enough detailed information to make the case for farmers markets and the benefits (health, social, economic) they confer on local communities. Many group members expressed concern that large numbers of consumers have only a vague idea of why farmers markets are important. Consequently, in order to motivate significant numbers of people to begin shopping (or shopping more often) at farmers markets, they will need to be convinced that they are able to purchase better quality food at farmers markets, and that it is worth their while to pay a premium for high quality food when necessary.

Another challenge raised by the group was the difficulty of deciding where the leadership of such a campaign should be housed. There was some initial discussion that it might be appropriate to create a government-sponsored generic promotion campaign for farmers markets akin to the AMS-administered "Got Milk" campaign for dairy products (though without the check-off component). However, group members acknowledged that the concept of a government-sponsored national promotional campaign would be a hard sell politically to the farmers market community; it would be much easier to persuade them to buy into the idea of a national organization (such as the Farmers Market Coalition) coordinating the campaign with the help of dollars from government or private foundations (e.g., W.K. Kellogg). The notion that USDA might dedicate a significant portion of Farmers Market Promotional Program (FMPP) funds to finance promotional activities was also bandied about by the group. Assuming that FMPP is funded at a much higher level in the next Farm Bill (in the \$5 million per year range), it was suggested that AMS might consider developing a 5-year strategic plan or annual program priorities that incorporate the development of a unified promotional message for farmers markets and the implementation of a national campaign to disseminate this message.

Group members were also divided as to the appropriateness of allowing a central organization to oversee and carry out a national promotional campaign for farmers markets. Some members endorsed the idea of having a centrally run promotional campaign, while others endorsed the idea of creating a simple branding logo and unified message that could be tweaked by regional/State/grassroots partners as needed for local conditions. These partners would then produce their promotional/advertising materials (using elements of the national logo/branded message as desired) to convey a tailored message to local consumers.

#### **Recommended Strategies:**

- Implement a national promotional campaign for farmers markets around a unified message, preferably a proactive message that will be "ahead of the curve."
- Use the Farmers Market Coalition as the national organizer of the campaign.
- Convince USDA that it would be worthwhile to use a portion of available FMPP funding to support a national promotional campaign for farmers markets.
- Spend part of available resources to create a unified promotional message.
- Create partnerships between the Farmers Market Coalition, State farmers market associations, and other regional/municipal/grassroots organizations to extend organizational capacity and carry the promotional message forward at the local level.
- Support efforts by individual farmers markets or farmers market groups to publicize their activities independently, while using the artwork and messages developed as part of the national promotional campaign.

- Promote farmers markets by leveraging online social marketing and web 2.0 tools. Using these methods would allow the campaign to not be solely dependent on traditional communication tools (e.g., print) and allow the message to be flexible, viral, and customized to address the concern about gaining wide support from different segments of the farmers market community.

**Potential Resources and Roles for Strategy Implementation:**

- AMS could be a major financial backer of this initiative, and work with the Farmers Market Consortium to create organizational networks and build capacity across the farmers market community for effective promotional efforts. (Group members perceived it as critical to the success of the promotional campaign to finding the right organization(s) to take on the project and nurture it.)
- Private foundations that work on food and agriculture issues; e.g., Kellogg, Gates, could be approached about their potential financial assistance of this promotional campaign.
- A “Madison Avenue” type advertising agency could be enlisted to help create an effective message and visual image for the farmers market community.
- Celebrities, such as Paul Newman and the Newman’s Own food company, could be recruited to help broadcast the farmers market message to a wider audience.

## **II. EDUCATION AND TRAINING INITIATIVES**

This grouping of initiatives incorporated the following four priority issues:

- Professional Development
- “Growing” Farmers
- Economic Sustainability
- Research

**Discussion Highlights:**

One common theme that surfaced repeatedly throughout each of the education and training priority discussions was the importance of establishing a minimum standard of technical experience in business planning and marketing for farmers market participants, whether through the development of a formal curriculum or the provision of other relevant continuing educational opportunities. The ability to properly gauge production costs and prices, and gain ongoing exposure to such rapidly changing issues as emerging consumer trends, new product varieties, and improved season extension techniques, were seen as essential tools in enhancing the profitability and long-term economic viability of farmers market vendors and suppliers. With respect to farmers market

managers and members of market boards/management organizations, who often serve as a market's primary point of contact with community members and policymakers, it was recommended that workshops or courses be developed that help such individuals learn how to:

- Develop effective community partnerships (especially by examining the lessons learned from successful partnership models).
- Augment the reach and impact of existing partnerships by exploring the possibility of relationships with nontraditional organizations.
- Locate available resources from Federal, State, and local sources.
- Train market managers and other advocates on how to best capture, document, and report information that measures a market's impact on the local economy/community.

## **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **Consensus Definition of Issue:**

Professional development activities for farmers market managers, vendors/suppliers, and board/management organization members, to include education, training, networking, and sharing of knowledge/experience.

### **Desired Outcome:**

- Development of a national steering committee of committed professionals in the farmers market industry (such as the existing Farmers Market Coalition) to serve as an informational clearinghouse/unified voice for the farmers market community.
- Increased access to education/training/technical assistance for market managers, vendors/suppliers and board/management organization members, to include:
  - Accreditation programs for market managers.
  - Enhanced workshop offerings/training opportunities for all farmers market participants at existing farmers market/direct marketing conferences.
- Improvements in the long-term economic sustainability of markets.

### **Perceived Barriers:**

- Insufficient funding to cover anticipated expenses.
- Absence of well established organizational presence on a national level that could assist the farmers market community with needed support. (The newly reorganized Farmers Market Coalition, which now has 501c3 status, remains in a fledgling state.)
- Lack of clarity about how a national farmers market organization will be able to effectively cooperate and reach out to existing farmers market organizations at the State and local level.

- Lack of common agreement on the definition of farmers markets (versus, say, public markets) among farmers market stakeholders, which makes it difficult to neatly identify which specific entities should be the beneficiaries of assistance.

### **Recommended Strategies:**

Group members devoted considerable attention to identifying a specific set of professional skills that appears to be associated with long-term market success, and should be addressed in future educational and training activities. (This skill set would also comprise the core educational components of any future accreditation programs developed for farmers market participants.)

For **managers** of farmers markets, the combination of skills and expertise thought to contribute most to effective job performance were:

- Market promotion and advertising
- Building and leveraging community partnerships
- How to use EBT technology at market sites
- How to redeem farmers market nutrition program benefits at market sites
- Conflict resolution
- How to document and report a market's economic impact
- How to develop a "fair" fee structure in order to produce sustainability for the market and vendors, and engenders community support and access for low income patrons

For farmers market **vendors/suppliers**, the combination of skills and expertise thought to contribute most to individual long-term success were:

- Season extension techniques
- Development of pricing plans that account for personal profit and labor
- Long-term business plan development (including plans that account for product line expansion)
- Merchandising and display techniques

For **members** of farmers market boards/management organizations, the combination of skills and expertise thought to contribute most to effective job performance were:

- Knowledge of government policy
- Familiarity with available government resources
- Background in budgeting and accounting principles
- An understanding of the benefits, models, and processes for creating successful community partnerships
- Familiarity with the basic steps involved in starting a farmers market enterprise (including considerations for hiring a market manager)

- Effective governance skills, with the ability to create by-laws, and an understanding of the relative merits of different organizational structures (501c3, 501c5, for-profit business, or part of city/county government)

### **Potential Resources and Roles for Strategy Implementation:**

#### General Assistance

- The Farmers Market Consortium or the national Farmers Market Coalition might be able to offer funding/resources to support the creation/maintenance of a national steering committee for the farmers market industry that would provide a centralized archive of technical assistance and information.
- Beyond the Consortium or Coalition, other non-profit organizations and private foundations might be able to be tapped to support needed professional development activities in the farmers market sector.
- Farmers market stakeholders should make an effort to strengthen or expand their current ties and partnerships with relevant personnel at land-grant universities, extension departments, State and regional sustainable agriculture organizations, and regional economic development organizations.

#### Assistance for Market Managers

- Existing distance education/training mechanisms should be used to create and provide a virtual “farmers market university” curriculum for market managers, especially for those managers operating markets in remote locations.
- Continuing education opportunities for market managers could be offered on a distance learning basis via webinars and/or virtual workshops.
- More extensive use should be made of existing electronic communication networks in the farmers market and direct marketing sectors, such as newsletters and electronic mailing lists.
- National and regional conferences could include additional educational components aimed at shoring up perceived gaps in professional skills and credentials among farmers market managers.
- The proposed national steering committee of farmers market industry members could facilitate the exchange of information and lessons learned among market managers by maintaining a “member-only” information clearinghouse, where members could ask questions and provide technical advice.
- Ties between the farmers market community and the AmeriCorps organization should be strengthened, so that current and prospective farmers market managers would have the opportunity to learn about the successes and challenges experienced by the scores of VISTA volunteers who have managed farmers markets as part of their work assignments.
- Materials that feature community partnership “success stories” should be developed so that market managers across the country could learn from promising models.

- Additional resources should be devoted to creating market “start-up” kits (such as the “Getting Started with Farmers Markets” brochure developed by Winrock International’s Wallace Center and circulated at the Summit), in order to give practical technical guidance to individuals who may be interested in planning and operating farmers markets, but have little experience in the area

#### Assistance for Market Vendors/Suppliers

- Some regions are beginning to experiment with “farmers market toolboxes” that enable vendors/suppliers to locate potential direct marketing outlets and evaluate the feasibility of using these outlets to sell their products. (See the site created by Michigan Integrated Food and Farming Systems, part of Michigan State University, at <http://www.miffsmarketline.org/intro-mrkts.html>).
- Training materials, such as a recent video produced by the Cooperative Extension department of Madison County, NY with FMPP funds, could be used to train market vendors/suppliers about appropriate merchandising and display techniques.
- Existing small farm/farm marketing conferences offer a variety of courses and training sessions that would be directly applicable to the needs of vendors/suppliers.

#### Assistance for Members of Market Boards/Management Organizations

- The proposed national steering committee of farmers market industry members (perhaps the existing Farmers Market Coalition) could serve as a central resource for providing facilitation services to local farmers market planners who wish to clarify their market’s mission, vision, and goals and develop appropriate community partnership to realize these goals.
- Board/management organization members should take greater advantage of existing professional electronic mailing lists and newsletters to keep up with industry trends and post their own job announcements, so that individuals with previous farmers market management experience are alerted to employment opportunities.
- Many of the recommendations already addressed under “Assistance for Market Vendors/Suppliers,” such as enhanced distance learning opportunities, access to a national information clearinghouse, and closer relationships with AmeriCorps, would be equally applicable to members of market boards/management organizations.

## **“GROWING” FARMERS**

#### **Consensus Definition of Issue/Desired Outcome:**

Activities that help transition current and beginning farmers into direct farm marketing, encourage the next generation of farmers to pursue agriculture as a profession, and provide opportunities for immigrants, minorities, youth, and

new/returning farmers to make a viable living from direct farm marketing activities.

### **Perceived Barriers:**

- Limited access to land
- Poorly developed relationships between community stakeholders
- Insufficient financial and technical resources
- Financial and technical resources directed in a manner that fails to maximize their impact on farmer recruitment/retention
- Outreach to underserved populations (e.g., minorities, women, youth, immigrants) that lags well behind the need for such services

### **Recommended Strategies:**

Group members emphasized the importance of adopting a creative approach to problem solving, and developing nontraditional/innovative partnerships as a way of accomplishing desired goals. Specific objectives identified by the group that could be pursued effectively through the development of community partnerships—especially partnerships with nontraditional stakeholders—included:

- Identifying recent and ongoing programs that offer valuable transferable lessons to the farmers market community.
- Enlisting the support and participation of organizations that focus on women, minorities, immigrants, and youth in farmers market planning discussions.
- Identifying parcels of land that are either available for commercial sale or rent, or might be made available for agricultural use through charitable donations/conservation easements.
- Encourage local, regional, and State decision makers to plan for protecting/supporting local farms that supply farmers markets but are threatened by development pressures and sprawl
- Developing social networks between existing and new farmers in a given community with the intention of enhancing access to land among newer/transitioning farmers, and creating effective mentoring relationships.
- Creating a fully participatory process for farmers market planning and development that takes stock of community resources and expertise, so that the interests of the local community can be addressed most effectively.
- Addressing any language and cultural barriers facing immigrant farmers and their customers to ensure that they have full access to financial and technical resources, and that the potential for marketing success is maximized.
- Establishing a system of targeted micro-grants that could be used by local authorities to fund State or local programs related to land access, community partnerships, and/or mentoring programs.

On a more global scale, the group advocated changes in current Federal/USDA policy that interfere with access to land, and additional funding for farmers market advertising and promotion.

## **ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY**

### **Consensus Definition of Issue:**

The combination of business education, planning, communication, and coordination activities needed to promote active community support and participation in sustaining the long-term viability of farmers markets.

### **Desired Outcome:**

- Solid initial business plans
- Commitment to continuous planning/reinvention
- Consistent, constant communication across all relevant stakeholder groups
- Informed, educated vendors and management
- Successful, vibrant market over long term
- Shared buy-in and cooperation among market stakeholders

Group members stressed the importance of developing a two-pronged approach when implementing business planning and educational/training activities—one focused specifically on vendor needs and one focused on the needs of market managers.

### **Vendor Needs**

In order to operate from a solid foundation, market vendors should be required to undertake the development of a business plan for the portion of their business conducted at farmers markets, which would include an analysis of their individual risk profile and a calculation of their production costs and their relationship to market pricing. Meanwhile, such planning would optimally be accompanied by training on the following topics:

- Local food safety requirements
- How supplying direct farm marketing channels differs from supplying other retail/wholesale food marketing outlets
- Customer service tips
- Financial management issues, to include:
  - Business planning, and how the farmers market side of their business fits into an overall business plan
  - Understanding costs and pricing
  - Understanding labor requirements
- Product quality/post harvest handling issues
- Consumer food trends
- Product display/merchandising techniques
- Media/press relations

## Management Needs

Before launching a new farmers market or embarking on a major market development project, managers should develop a business plan that considers the implications of the following issues on market activity:

- Financial/budgetary realities, including:
  - Anticipated expenses for constructing/developing/maintaining market facility and physical infrastructure
  - Budget for market promotion and advertising expenses
- Economic/market assessment, including:
  - Product mix
  - Vendor mix
  - Customer demographic trends
  - Location/traffic and its impact on future opportunities for market growth/expansion

To build community support for proposed initiatives, local stakeholder involvement in the planning process should be as comprehensive as possible, and efforts should be made to include the broadest possible array of interested parties, including:

- Potential market sponsors (service organizations, buy-local initiatives, chefs/restaurant owners)
- Vendors
- Consumers
- Economic development organizations
- Members of local business community
- State and local government officials, including pertinent regulatory authorities (Health, DOT, etc.)
- Health and nutrition professionals
- Educators, including agricultural extension personnel
- Members of the local arts community

Under optimal conditions, market managers engaged in these planning activities would also be trained in the following subject areas:

- Coordinating product availability from suppliers
- Communicating with vendors about:
  - Consumer trends
  - Agricultural practices/new technology
  - Expectations/opportunities for future market development
- Communicating with local officials and general public about the role/importance of the farmers market, including:
  - What's available at the market
  - Selling the concept of supporting local community/keeping dollars in community
- Food safety/handling, including local regulations

- Information on how to arrange for needed approvals (e.g., permits)
- Program/special events development
- How to research available sources of market funding/technical assistance

**Perceived Barriers:**

- Lack of resources (money, time, talent)
- Vendor reluctance to give up control and look beyond own needs
- Lack of long-term vision and commitment
- Vendor confusion about roles and responsibilities of market participants, and message and mission of market
- Health regulations/permits (economic burdens, inconsistencies in enforcement, constant changes, inability to find accurate information easily)
- Lack of business acumen
- Consumer desire for convenience

**Recommended Strategies:**

- Market management should conduct analyses/surveys (of consumers, vendors) on an ongoing basis to detect changes and tweak practices as needed.
- Resources for funding and technical assistance should be researched and made available to market stakeholders.
- Planning processes should be designed to yield a clear ranking of planning priorities.
- Current and potential vendors should be educated about the economic potential of farmers market participation.
- The roles and responsibilities of each market participant (e.g., vendor, manager, board member) should be clearly defined in the market's by-laws, and this message should be reinforced through constant communication.
- To reduce market expenses and enhance community engagement, volunteers should be recruited from the community (perhaps from allied/sympathetic organizations) to help carry out market outreach and assessment activities (e.g., distributing surveys to market visitors, circulating flyers at nearby businesses and community institutions).
- Market vendors and managers should receive targeted training in business plan development.
- Participating farmers market growers should be given the opportunity to learn about new product varieties, emerging farm technology, and season extension techniques from local extension representatives or university personnel.
- The concept that farmers markets MUST have strategic and communications plans in place should become a standard expectation.
- Examples of successful farmers markets should be shared widely.
- Market managers should "go drinking with the health department" to find out who the regulatory decision makers are, and where one needs to go for the correct information.

- All relevant stakeholders should be brought into the planning process from the beginning and should be kept informed about pertinent regulations/changes in regulations.

### **Potential Resources and Roles for Strategy Implementation:**

- Microenterprise development organizations, for business plan development training
- Agricultural extension/land-grant universities, for farm/production technique training and farm-level business plan development training
- Market management, staff, and volunteers, for capturing and recording customer/vendor feedback
- USDA/State Departments of Agriculture, for technical assistance and research on farmers market development and practices, information on funding sources, and information on pertinent food safety issues
- State and national farmers market associations, for examples of successful farmers market operations and sources of answers to thorny market management questions
- RC&D Councils, for building grassroots support for farmers market development projects and disseminating information about local farmers markets and their economic impact to the wider community
- Foundations, for potential sources of funding

## **RESEARCH**

### **Consensus Definition of Issue:**

To document the diverse contributions of farmers markets and enhance their performance by developing effective, innovative, low cost, and fun research methods.

### **Desired Outcome:**

- Location considerations for markets
- Customer mix
- Management organizational structures—highlighting examples of the more successful models
- Direct economic benefits of farmers markets
- Indirect economic benefits to local businesses
- Influence of farmers markets on public health and community food security indicators
- Social benefits of farmers markets to a community's quality of life

In determining a range of desired research products on farmers markets, group members thought it important to make a distinction between research that

focused on operational issues and research that examined the larger effects of farmers markets on community-level concerns.

#### **Perceived Barriers:**

- The importance of farmers markets is not yet fully appreciated or understood in North American culture.
- The lack of dedicated funding in the subject area has led to a shortage of research capacity (e.g., availability of researchers).
- There is no clear consensus on/definition of what comprises a "successful" farmers market in the research community, which may undermine efforts to concentrate available resources on any individual research question or set of questions.

#### **Recommended Strategies:**

- Data should be collected about individual farmers markets on a regular basis.
- Data should also be collected and compiled regularly about farmers markets on a State and national level.
- The economic, social, environmental, and health benefits of farmers markets need to be better documented through research and analysis.
- Related to the above point, "science-based" theories, practices, and procedures about farmers markets, derived from empirical observations, tests, experiments, and measureable evidence, should be developed that:
  - Convey practical information to vendors and market managers.
  - Are accessible, user-friendly concepts that can be used to persuade decision makers about farmers market policies.
- Baseline data should be developed for all important quantitative measures.
- Potential funding sources for farmers market research activity should be identified.
- The possibility of creating research partnerships with nontraditional organizations who may share mutual areas of interest related to farmers markets, local foods, and sustainable agriculture and community food security should be explored. Organizations that stand out as immediate prospects for new research partnerships are the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, military branches, the National Science Foundation, and various community-based organizations that may not typically work in the agricultural arena.

#### **Potential Resources and Roles for Strategy Implementation:**

- Existing government institutions, such as USDA (especially CSREES National Research Initiative) and State departments of agriculture, may be able to reallocate portions of their existing budgets and resources to focus greater attention on farmers market issues. In particular, USDA might be able to provide some new financial incentives in its grant programs to encourage external researchers to undertake additional work in the farmers market arena, as well as take steps to direct some of its research-oriented agencies,

notably AMS, ERS and NASS, to devote greater resources to farmers market data collection and analysis.

- Land-grant universities might also be able to reallocate portions of their existing budgets and resources to farmers market issues, and examine how some of their current educational offerings, such as master gardener programs, might be modified or reshaped to better serve the interests of the farmers market community.
- The Farmers Market Consortium could serve a vital role by offering a centralized forum in which:
  - Grassroots organizations can share their farmers market experiences with prospective public and private funders.
  - Farmers market research priorities can be defined and communicated to interested government, foundation, and non-profit organization representatives.
  - Human capital requirements needed to develop viable marketing networks can be identified.
- Foundations and research think tanks were cited as potential sources of funding, research ideas, and research leadership, as well as good sources of "best practices" information developed as a result of sponsored technical assistance activity. It was also noted that such organizations may enjoy an enhanced level of credibility among farmers market stakeholders compared to many government and academic institutions, which could increase the potential for widespread support of any planned initiative.
- Economic development agencies and AmeriCorps were also mentioned as potential sources of useful farmers market experience and "lessons learned" material.

### **III. COMMUNITY-BASED INITIATIVES**

This grouping of initiatives incorporated the following five priority issues:

- Partnerships
- Public Health
- Low-Income Access
- Local Food Systems
- Farmers Markets as Center of the Community

#### **Discussion Highlights:**

Probably the most common conversational thread that appeared in all of these independent discussions was the emphasis given to the importance of establishing innovative—and possibly untraditional—partnerships in order to achieve desired community goals. Lack of public awareness about the opportunities and benefits offered by farmers markets was a pervasive complaint throughout many of the discussions, whether the members of the public in question involved household consumers, local farmers, elected officials, or

Federal policymakers, and improvement in outreach to potential allies was considered essential to obtain the level of attention necessary to change consumer behavior and/or public policy. Discussion participants also expressed the general opinion that current levels of communication and collaboration on farmers market issues with relevant stakeholders was far from optimal and could easily be improved if greater attention were paid to the issue. This phenomenon appeared to hold true whether or not such discussions were occurring at a local, regional, or national level, suggesting that geographical proximity alone did not ensure that proper lines of communication were established and maintained.

## **PARTNERSHIPS**

### **Consensus Description of Issue:**

The development of a formally structured national association for farmers markets, comprised of State associations and other established organizations with farmers market interests, that has access to start-up funds, grants, and corporate support, and has the capacity to provide a single, unified voice for the farmers market community in advocacy, training, and communication. The association would provide a central point of connection for a broad coalition of farmers market stakeholders, who would work together to achieve common goals in farmers market legislation, support the growth and development of State farmers market associations, and host regional policy and educational meetings.

### **Desired Outcome:**

- Creation of a national farmers market association with a targeted strategic mission focus, which embraces:
  - An organizational structure that draws its leadership from diverse geographic regions.
  - Broad diversity of membership at the State and local level (in terms of market types, geographic scope of activity, and organizational mission).
  - Transparent decision-making processes.
  - Inclusive, open membership policies.
  - Forms of advocacy/representation that incorporate a national focus for Federal policy, yet retain a regional focus for State or local policy.

### **Perceived Barriers:**

Group discussions of the factors that might present a challenge to the creation of a "dream" national farmers market association seemed to revolve around three primary issues: questions about membership composition, sources of financial support, and competing agendas.

### Membership Issues

- One of the more challenging issues addressed by the group was the question of whether or not farmers market vendors should be allowed to be members of the proposed national farmers market association, or members of the association's board of officers.
  - Some group members believed that the association's membership should be restricted to market managers, regional/statewide associations, organizations that support managers, and State departments of agriculture. They would prefer to see farmer participation in issue-based committees sponsored by the association rather than in the core membership or leadership structure of the association, based on a conviction that more widespread participation by farmers would spread farmers too thin and undermine their ability to market effectively.
  - Other participants supported the inclusion of farmers as national association members and officers because the association might benefit greatly from the insights of successful direct farm marketers who have valuable experiences and marketing strategies to share with a broader audience.
  - There appeared to be little disagreement, however, on allowing a broad range of direct farmers market stakeholders (e.g., NGOs, State associations, individual markets, State departments of agriculture) or other interested organizations (downtown development organizations, city governments, chambers of commerce, and health-related organizations) to be part of the association, even if some of these entities do not directly manage markets at present.
- Concern was expressed that the limited number of active and well organized State farmers market associations may inhibit the ability of the association to recruit representative numbers of members from all parts of the country
- It was unclear to many of the discussion participants whether the prospective members of the national association would have sufficient political "clout" to accomplish the organization's goals and move the farmers market agenda forward.

### Financial Support

- Group members identified several possible sources of financial support for the association, but many questions remained about the viability of these potential income streams and the likelihood of these income sources to cover anticipated expenses. Specific questions raised by discussion participants were:
  - Would the association be in a position to charge membership fees, or would the imposition of membership fees adversely affect membership recruitment and the association's ability to attract a diverse membership base?

- Would the association be able to qualify for Federal/private foundation grants or corporate sponsorship, perhaps from financial institution partners involved in EBT transactions, such as JPMorgan Chase? If so, what degree of funding would be available and over what period of time?
- Would the association be in a position to charge for services rendered, such as training, consulting, and conferences, or would members expect these services to be offered as part of their standard membership fee?

### Competing Agendas

- Given the broad mandate and geographical reach of the proposed national farmers market association, group members noted the potential of the organization to lose focus on its core mission (perceived as serving the interests of farmers market managers). There was abundant discussion about the difficulty of reconciling the interests of a “big tent” of farmers market stakeholders, while maintaining organizational cohesion and relevance.
- Another issue that threatens to interfere with the ability of the association to address key regional issues is a lack of clarity about the word “region” and how this concept would be applied when developing the association’s prospective leadership structure and recruitment efforts. In the words of one of the participants, “region is a tricky word ... does it mean western North Carolina or the entire Southwest?” The ways in which regional boundaries are eventually defined could greatly influence the development of specific policy agendas and their direct applicability to specific localities.

### **Recommended Strategies:**

To facilitate the creation of a national farmers market association, group members recommended:

- Looking at established organizational models, and identifying an appropriate organizational structure.
- Crafting a mission statement.
- Appointing a board of directors.
- Clarifying the tax status of the association (e.g., 501c3).
- Determining membership fees, if any.
- Establishing issue-based committees.

### **Potential Resources and Roles for Strategy Implementation:**

The resources that would be provided to association members as a result of the association’s broad network of contacts and subject matter experts include:

- Professional education opportunities and access to technical assistance through conferences and meetings.

- Involvement in issue-based committees, related to key topics such as training needs, marketing techniques and strategies, policy and regulatory developments, and communication.
- Access to a variety of informational and reference materials, including website resources, on-line discussion forums, and a State contact database.
  - Website—online resources, forums, State contact database.
  - Events—conferences, conventions.
- Guidance and leadership from the association's board of directors.

## **PUBLIC HEALTH**

### **Consensus Definition of Issue:**

Make farmers markets a contributing partner to health and wellness in communities.

### **Desired Outcome:**

Improved consumer access to nutritional education and other pertinent information through the help of grassroots collaborators, with the intention of:

- Improving consumers' "food literacy" (understanding what to eat and why), in order to encourage consumers to make healthier food choices.
- Providing greater opportunities for farmers markets to be fully integrated into community life, which can be expected to yield enhancements in:
  - Community social capital.
  - Nutrition for farmers market patrons and neighborhood residents.
  - Improvements in health and wellness among neighborhood residents.
  - Improvements in farmer livelihood (holistic, physical, mental, and economic).

### **Perceived Barriers:**

- Limited grassroots organizational capacity.
- Poor access to health care.
- Current Federal food policy, which subsidizes the production of grains rather than produce.
- Poor access to fresh produce in lower-income neighborhoods.
- Cultural preferences for less-healthy foods.

### **Recommended Strategies:**

- Educate students and school educators about the important role of farmers markets in improving health. Ways of incorporating farmers market issues in a school-based environment might include:
  - Food and health curriculum in schools.
  - Tours/field trips.

- Farmers visiting classrooms.
  - Youth urban-based agriculture projects.
  - Connecting school food services to farmers markets.
- Encourage major community partners to use farmers markets as entry points for reaching out to families and children.
- Educate and involve USDA Food and Nutrition Service personnel and other providers of social services to low-income clients on ways to improve access to nutrition benefits (e.g., access to EBT terminals, acceptance of WIC and/or Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program coupons). Such initiatives might include:
  - Addressing market transportation access issues.
  - Developing more accessible regulations and procedures for obtaining and using benefits.
  - Promoting the installation of EBT terminals or kiosks at markets.
  - Using farmers markets as distribution centers for nutritional benefits.
  - Identifying new or nontraditional organizations that could facilitate an improvement in access to benefits.
  - Promoting environmental justice through broader based community education

#### **Potential Resources and Roles for Strategy Implementation:**

- Discussion participants stressed the importance of identifying additional sources of financial assistance from local sponsors (e.g., hospitals), non-governmental organizations, private foundations, and/or Federal government sources (e.g., DHHS, CDC, USDA) to carry out the following purposes:
  - Developing management support.
  - Better disseminating resource information.
  - Preparing a resource guide related to health and farmers markets.
  - Better documenting existing programs.
  - Tying capacity-building to grants.
  - Developing a strategic community plan based on community assessment.
  - Educating and involving local and State governments in the provision of health-related resources.
- Group members envisioned some important roles for the Farmers Market Consortium in carrying out desired initiatives; specifically:
  - The Consortium should look at how Federal funds might be able to be reallocated in order to support farmers market projects pertaining to health and wellness.
  - Consortium members should identify sources of support for, and contribute to the development of, a model core curriculum for educating elementary schoolchildren about “food literacy,” which would draw examples of “best practices” from the existing research

literature. The Consortium could also recruit a diverse group of stakeholders (social and philanthropic) to take part in this project as sponsors and educators.

## **LOW INCOME ACCESS**

### **Consensus Definition of Issue:**

- Ensuring access to healthful fresh foods through sustainable farmers markets located in lower-income communities, which would confer the following advantages:
  - Widespread access to high quality, locally grown and produced foods offered at an affordable price in a convenient neighborhood location.
  - The ability to change consumers' perspectives—and possibly their dietary habits—by educating them about the value of products sold at farmers markets compared to other retail outlets, and giving them the opportunity to sample such products.
  - Enhanced availability of culturally appropriate foods that correspond to local preferences.
  - Greater opportunities for local farmers to make money and keep more of the proceeds in the local community.

### **Perceived Barriers:**

#### *From the farmer standpoint:*

- Farmers may not see viable business opportunities in lower-income areas, especially compared to the customer traffic and sales potential offered by farmers markets in more affluent neighborhoods.
- Vendor reluctance to sell merchandise at farmers markets located in lower-income neighborhoods (especially inner-city neighborhoods) is often magnified by fears that such neighborhoods are unsafe, are difficult to drive to, and have limited space available for parking large vehicles/trucks.

#### *From the local consumer standpoint:*

- Shoppers from lower-income households may resist purchasing products at farmers markets because they perceive that:
  - Food items are not safe or not high-quality unless they're branded or packaged.
  - Farmers markets are expensive and don't offer good value compared to other retail outlets (such as discount grocery or mass-merchandise stores).

- The limited operating hours of the market aren't convenient for shopping.
- Transportation to and from the market is expensive or difficult to obtain.
- Fresh foods are difficult to cook/prepare (reflecting a growing dearth of knowledge about food preparation among younger consumers).
- Lack of spending power has led many lower-income consumers to spend limited food dollars on comparatively inexpensive, calorie-dense, processed foods rather than fresh foods (a problem exacerbated by current Federal food policy).

*From an administrative standpoint:*

- Poor cooperation between Federal, State, and local government agencies responsible for administering food and nutrition-related programs has undermined the ability of public institutions to communicate effectively to lower-income consumers about the availability of nutritional benefits at farmers markets.
- Farmers markets projects in lower-income neighborhoods lack funding to support initial start-up costs; operational, maintenance, and staffing budgets; and professional development opportunities for staff.
- Government personnel on the Federal, State, and local level often don't know enough about existing farmers market programs in lower-income neighborhoods to offer appropriate assistance or guidance.

### **Recommended Strategies:**

*From a community and market management level:*

- Engage new community partners to support market activities.
- Set up a neighborhood advisory council on local markets.
- Investigate the possibility of creating coupons for frequent farmers market customers.
- Explore the possibility of closer coordination among vendors in transporting products to the market, so that their individual financial burden could be reduced.
- Develop an appropriate promotional campaign for the market, based on lessons learned in other similar communities.
- Support vendor diversity and take advantage of vendor diversity to learn about culturally appropriate foods that would likely appeal to local customers.
- Conduct research to identify which food items sell best at the market—and why.

- Examine new options for marketing fresh foods more conveniently to consumers in lower-income households, through such alternative distribution channels as mobile markets and neighborhood CSA delivery points.

*From an administrative and programmatic level:*

- Increase funding for EBT terminal installations to provide initial technical support and ongoing maintenance.
- Provide financial incentives to farmers to supply markets in lower-income neighborhoods (perhaps through collective negotiation).
- Establish better channels for interagency communication on farmers market issues, via mechanisms such as food policy councils.

*In terms of policy/legislation:*

- More money for FMPP.
- Increase funding for the WIC and FNMP.
- Ensure the new WIC package is designed to accommodate purchases of fresh fruits and vegetables at farmers markets.
- Support urban agriculture and urban fringe farming.
- Reorganize priorities in the Farm Bill to shift from commodities to specialty crops.

#### **Potential Resources and Roles for Strategy Implementation:**

- Hospitals could serve as:
  - Purchasers of local foods
  - Funders and/or hosts of on-site farmers markets
  - Providers of health screening services for neighborhood residents
  - Promoters of farmers market concept
- Neighborhood residents could serve as:
  - Vendors (through urban agriculture initiatives)
  - Donors/volunteers
  - Managers
  - Customers
  - Members of local neighborhood advisory council
  - Teachers/trainers for on-site demonstrations (of nutrition, cooking, etc.)
  - Market promoters
- Local officials could help promote the establishment and longevity of farmers markets in lower-income neighborhoods by:
  - Navigating rules and regulations that threaten to interfere with successful farmers market commerce.
  - Providing a permanent site of operation for farmers markets.
  - Funding farmers markets.
  - Maintaining a presence at markets.

- Proposing, promoting, and adopting new policy and legislation that is friendly to farmers markets.
- Community leaders, such as clergy or other trusted community elders, could support local farmers markets by encouraging their congregants/neighbors to patronize markets and extolling their benefits.
- Farmers, vendors, and food producers could:
  - Bring high quality, locally produced food to the market.
  - Participate in nutrition benefit programs.
  - Be willing to try new products and cater to neighborhood preferences.
  - Serve as communicators and educators about the benefits of farmers markets and local foods.
- State, non-government and community-based organizations could:
  - Advocate for farmer's market issues.
  - Provide nutrition education, health services, and other related programs
  - Host (place the market in or near their area) and fund projects via re-granting or community fundraising.
  - Provide land access for farmers.
- Members of the Farmers Market Consortium could:
  - Work together towards the achievement of practical, obtainable goals in supporting farmers markets in lower-income neighborhoods.
  - Take additional steps to identify and include participation from relevant agencies and organizations beyond USDA (such as DHHS). Even though some of these agencies may not immediately come to mind when one thinks "farmers markets," their constituents may be important farmers market stakeholders, and they may have important perspectives to share.
- Federal agencies could:
  - Prioritize food as a national security issue.
  - Provide adequate funding for operation of nutrition programs.
- Market managers were perceived as the linchpin of market success, providing a vital link between the local farm community, market participants, neighborhood residents and policymakers; they were said by group members to be the people who "put all of the pieces together." The multiple roles that market managers play in facilitating market cohesion and success were described as follows:
  - Recruiting farmers.
  - Managing vendor and product mix.
  - Maintaining morale at the market.

- Building partnerships with local community representatives, other farmers markets, producer groups, and various interested local stakeholders.
- Taking proactive steps to educate policymakers about the economic, social and environmental impact of farmers markets.
- Facilitating access to Federal, State, and local grant programs.
- Organizing promotions and market publicity.
- Raising funds.
- Educating farmers about market requirements and opportunities.
- Supporting farmer innovation.
- Implementing new programs and strategies.
- Educating customers about the importance of farmers markets and the types of foods offered at farmers markets.
- Other important current and potential resources cited by the group included:
  - Successful market models from farmers market associations and community groups.
  - Financial resources from all branches of government (Federal, State, and local), especially if current budget allocations could be readjusted to favor greater emphasis on local food systems development.
  - Foundations, big and small.
  - Schools.
  - Social service providers.
  - Food banks.
  - Farmer and agricultural marketing organizations.
  - County/local media.
  - Agricultural extension personnel, who could offer crucial technical assistance.
  - Local businesses.

## **LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS**

### **Consensus Description of Issue:**

The production, harvesting, collection, distribution, and marketing of farm products from a defined region or community, and using a farmers market to recreate/rebuild a local food system which is community-driven and has social, health, and economic benefits and aspects.

### **Desired Outcome:**

- The volume of locally produced, nutritious, and safe food available to local consumers and consumed by community members increases substantially.
- The majority of consumers have access to locally produced nutritious and safe food.

- Farmers markets become vital links in a local/community-based food system and act as a catalyst for local food system development.
- Participating vendors at farmers markets make a profit.
- Farm suppliers have increased market access to a variety of other direct distribution channels such as CSAs, and direct sales to institutions, retailers, and restaurants.

#### **Perceived Barriers:**

- Not enough farmers are interested in direct marketing.
- Consumer and community awareness about the benefits of buying local is limited, making it difficult to expand the market for local food.
- Potential farmers market patrons are constrained by limited access to transportation, inconvenient market locations, and time constraints.
- Farmers lack marketing skills.
- Regulatory and policy barriers interfere with the ability of growers to market food directly to consumers.

#### **Recommended Strategies:**

To address the myriad challenges to local food system development outlined above, group members suggested that the following strategies be adopted:

##### *Farmer scarcity*

- Find out about marketing needs/interests of existing farmers that currently sell through retail marketing channels.
- Document emerging market opportunities and sales data.
- Provide training for beginning farmers.

##### *Limited consumer awareness*

- Carry out promotional activities to engage community members.
- Engage public and private stakeholders (e.g., health systems, go green movements).
- Educate consumers about benefits of local foods.

##### *Convenience factors*

- Address barriers in transportation, location, and operating days/hours.
- Explore alternative approaches to distribution/delivery.

##### *Deficiencies in farmer marketing skills*

- Provide appropriate infrastructure to facilitate product innovation by growers.
- Research and understand consumer/buyer needs.
- Gather and disseminate best practices and success stories.
- Create "peer to peer" networking and mentoring opportunities.

### Lack of community support

- Organize community members to speak out in favor of local food.
- Conduct community food assessments to identify benefits of farmers markets in addressing household access to nutritious and affordable food.
- Leverage documented benefits of farmers markets beyond food to gain support from policymakers and build political capital.

### Regulatory/policy barriers

- Identify and understand the impact of existing regulatory and policy barriers.
- Educate regulators about the (unintended) consequences of current and proposed policies.
- Construct and propose realistic alternatives to current regulations.
- Explore opportunities for creating tiered solutions that take issues of operational scale into account, so that small-scale farmers and food processors do not assume an undue financial burden.

## **FARMERS MARKETS AS CENTER OF THE COMMUNITY**

### **Consensus Definition of Issue:**

Farmers markets can become the catalyst for—and nexus of—a broad network of community connections, with the potential to create and expand partnerships in a multitude of directions beyond agriculture-related issues. Areas of community engagement and interest potentially influenced by farmers markets include:

- Community health
- Education
- Political involvement
- Social and cultural activities
- Business entrepreneurship
- Provision of social services

Farmers markets were seen by group members as providing a central hub for community activities and social interaction, through their potential role in creating a:

- Demonstration site and information clearinghouse for health and nutrition education.
- Performance and exhibit space for cultural and artistic activities.
- Incubator for job and entrepreneurial development.
- Venue for promoting local businesses and creating economic opportunities (possibly through local “timebank” bartering arrangements).
- Forum for political discourse.

### **Desired Outcome:**

- Greater farmer/small business profitability; “more producers selling more products”
- Increased circulation of dollars in the local economy
- Development of more environmentally sustainable communities
- Creation of gathering places to facilitate social/community interaction
- Increased diversity in local businesses
- Healthier people and communities
- Safer/revitalized communities
- Enhanced real estate values
- Increased preservation of farmland
- Identification of additional funding opportunities from multiple/diverse sources

### **Perceived Barriers:**

- Cost of transporting food from farms to markets
- Cost to consumer of traveling to market
- Inaccessibility of markets to public transportation
- Regulations
- Members of farmers market boards don’t always understand the community development potential of markets
- Lack of access to land
- Lack of proper market infrastructure
- Lack of time, expertise, and financial resources

### **Recommended Strategies:**

Strategies recommended by the group that could be expected to facilitate a major paradigm shift in acknowledging the central role of farmers markets in community development include:

- Incorporating community development perspectives in policy discussions and decisions related to farmers markets, such as:
  - Expanding the scope of farmers market board membership by including an advisory council with representation from community development organizations.
  - Ensuring that “demonstrated community involvement” remains an important component of farmers market grant decisions, a la the FMPP application requirement.
  - Creating a role for community development organizations, such as Project for Public Spaces, to evaluate grantee program data in partnership with USDA.
- Documenting and sharing information on successful community development models anchored by farmers markets.

- Creating regional collaborative technical assistance programs to address:
  - Education and training needs (e.g., the national Farmers Market Coalition).
  - Local and national regulatory changes.
  - Infrastructure requirements and improvements (may require State match).
  - Partnership/resource development strategies.

### **Potential Resources and Roles for Strategy Implementation:**

USDA could:

- Fund the research, data collection, and distribution of valuable case studies (through the AMS Transportation and Marketing Program/FMPP).
- Corral resources to enhance interagency/interdepartmental collaboration and awareness of pertinent farmers market issues.
- Establish regional peer-based technical assistance teams composed of farmers market industry stakeholders.
- Force States to invest in farmers markets (similar to the Interstate highway system).

The Farmers Market Consortium could:

- Promote the concept of farmer markets as community builders.
- Host a follow-up meeting to National Farmers Market Summit that includes some additional players:
  - National representatives of community development bodies such as downtown associations.
  - Trust for Public Land/other land trusts.
  - AmeriCorps.
  - Hospitality/healthcare venues for farmer markets.
  - Local, State, and national policymakers.

Additional collaborators that could provide support for case study research, training, and information distribution include:

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- Municipalities (who could perhaps use tax revenues to fund activities).
- Chambers of Commerce (who might be able to arrange funding through local business associations).
- Community health organizations.
- Universities and colleges, especially extension departments.
- Urban/regional/rural planning organizations.
- Foundations/funders—including downtown/“Main Street” associations.
- Faith-based organizations.

# OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION

## – ROLE-ALIKE GROUPS –

The final session of the Summit brought together participants from similar professions to discuss actions they could take individually or collectively in their organizations, as well as opportunities for inter-organizational collaboration on the priorities. The role-alike groups included the following: Federal agencies; State departments of agriculture, local and regional representatives, State farmers market associations, university researchers, farmers and farmers market managers, health representatives, and private foundations and national NGOs. Each group was given the following questions to guide discussion:

1. What can we and others like us do to address the priorities identified in this Summit?
2. What collaborations, partnerships, alliances exist that can be mobilized or strengthened to help achieve these priorities?
3. What new collaborations, partnerships, alliances should be developed to help achieve these priorities?
4. What resources (financial and non-financial) can be drawn upon to support existing or developing collaborations?
5. Any other ideas to share with the rest of the group about follow up to the Summit?

The following sections provide a synthesis of the discussion outcomes from each role-alike group.

### **FEDERAL AGENCIES**

#### **Addressing the Priorities**

Two groups of Federal agency representatives participated in the opportunities for collaboration session. These groups identified two key farmers market priority areas— funding and information development and dissemination.

A great deal of discussion under the funding priority focused on different features of the grant process. This included the need for Federal agencies to increase awareness on grants and other funding opportunities that could be utilized by the farmers market community. Other points brought up in this session where Federal agencies can play an active role included:

- Explain grants process—it was noted that although the grants.gov website explained the grant process, it was discounted as not helpful to those unfamiliar with the process.
- Sponsor grant writing workshops.
- Provide feedback on strengths and weaknesses of submitted proposals.

- Create awareness of demands for funds versus funding availability under previous competitive announcements.
- Document performance of funded projects.
- Educate on application and performance process.
- Establish a task force on standardization of regulations and application process.
- Promote success stories, especially across agency lines.
- Involve foundations in planning and gathering information and sharing credit.

The groups also discussed several ways to develop and disseminate information, which included:

- Gather more information on resources by interviewing office/agency/taskforces that can provide potential support for farmers markets and related activities.
- Attend meetings/conferences to promote information exchange on funding resources.
- Disseminate information on Federal definitions, guidelines, and resources through local, State, regional, and national meetings of public and private stakeholders.
- Promote more effective understanding and use of grants.gov.
- Notify potential grantees of the availability of Federal facilities for farmers markets. (It was noted by one of the participants who works for the General Services Administration (GSA) that they are very interested in setting up farmers markets at Federal building locations. This was presented as being comparable to setting up markets at hospitals. GSA is developing guidelines on how to make farmers markets work in Federal facilities.)

### **Collaborations/Partnerships**

The groups came up with several ideas for possible and future collaborations. These included:

- Establish formal links among agencies that have farmers markets as focal point.
- Promote and reward partnerships (local, State).
- Promote MOUs that support farmers market viability.
- Improve the process for getting feedback to Federal funders and administering entities (e.g., commodity groups and associations).

### **Follow-Up Items**

The groups came up with two general follow-up items, as well several actionable items for specific USDA agencies. The general follow-up items included establishing a process for gathering information from other Federal and private agencies on potential ways of supporting the viability of farmers markets and

promoting the purchase of fresh produce in the cafeterias of Federal buildings. As far as specific tasks by USDA agencies, the following were mentioned:

- *Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Services (CSREES)* in regard to the Community Food Project grant, the new RFA will include language that identifies farmers markets more specifically.
- *Agricultural Research Service (ARS)* will encourage/foster production of farmers market products through new research initiatives, and will include small farmers in developing food safety guidelines.
- *Food and Nutrition Service (FNS)* will share information resources (tool kits) developed by Food Stamp Program; and will ensure consistency in response to EBT-related questions.
- *Office of Outreach* will invite presentations on farmers market activities/opportunities at the February and August 2008 Annual Partners Meetings.
- *Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)* will incorporate Summit priorities into this year's Farmer Market Promotion Program.

## **STATE DEPARTMENTS OF AGRICULTURE**

### **Addressing the Priorities**

The group suggested several ways State departments of agriculture could address some of the priorities identified in the Summit, which included the following points:

- Better coordinate communications with Congress (e.g., advocate for more Federal resources in the farm bill for WIC, direct marketing initiatives, etc.).
- Share resources, success stories, and strategies among States.
- Facilitate formation of State farmers market associations and "buy local" campaigns.
- Break down some of the obstacles that come from legislation. (An example was how to transfer oversight responsibility for farmers markets from health departments to agriculture departments.)
- Have a greater role in shaping State policy regarding farmers markets (e.g., regulatory changes, revisions, exemptions to accommodate farmers markets without sacrificing food safety).

### **Collaborations/Partnerships**

A number of existing organizations were mentioned as possible partners toward achieving the priorities. This included: agricultural extension; non-profits, small business and community development corporations, tourism bureaus, and other State-level government agencies.

The group also felt that there was a need to forge stronger connections between the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) and the

North American Agricultural Marketing Officials (NAAMO) with NAAMO playing a potentially greater role in:

- Advocating policy positions with NASDA.
- Sharing information on farmers markets (strategies, what works/doesn't work).
- Becoming a clearinghouse/resource for models, prototypes, guidelines on farmers markets.

### **Follow-Up Items**

The group suggested several follow-up items including:

- Present the Farmers Market Summit findings at NAAMO. Explore role, if any, for NAAMO regional groups (e.g., develop regional models, resources, etc.).
- Develop a model code for farmers market food safety that could be used by all States.
- Have annual Farmers Market Summit follow-up meetings, and at each develop an action plan to address next steps, and define who is doing what.

## **LOCAL AND REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVES**

### **Addressing the Priorities**

A great deal of the discussion in the group focused on closing the information gap between local representatives of farmers markets and Federal agencies. Specifically, local representatives do not know the resources and services available from AMS. One way to close this gap is for AMS to do outreach through a newsletter. It was suggested that local Resource and Development (RC&D) programs could play a key role in distributing this information. This would play one part in enhancing communication between USDA Federal offices and local USDA representatives. Other priorities identified from the group included:

- The need for agricultural extension to get farmers market development training, with the suggestion that small business development centers and universities could provide support in this endeavor.
- The need for farmers markets to tap into the resources (loans and training) available from micro-enterprise development organizations, such as Business Loan Express (BLX) and the Association for Enterprise Opportunity (AEO).

## **Collaborations/Partnerships**

Possible partnerships to achieve the priorities identified included:

- Schools and universities.
- Non-profit organizations (provide farmer training, translation services, business services).
- Government health agencies and hospitals.
- Micro-enterprise development organizations.
- Local media (for promotion and awareness of farmers market issues).

## **Follow-up Items**

Future items that the group would like to see accomplished included:

- Know the USDA action plan and be able to review it after a year to see what was accomplished.
- Put non-USDA action items together.
- Consolidate the 12 priorities down to 6—this should be done on regional level through teleconferencing and face-to-face regional meetings.
- Increase information gathering to strengthen farmers market constituencies.
- Expand awareness of the Farmers Market Coalition.
- Promote and build awareness of the Farmer Market Coalition and Consortium activities by RC&D.

## **STATE FARMERS MARKET ASSOCIATIONS**

### **Addressing the Priorities**

The group identified strategies that the State associations could either pursue individually or work on as a group. Several strategies fall into the category of farmers market advocacy and promotion. These include:

- Be an advocate for grant programs—make sure people at the State level know what is available in their State/region.
- Share promotion ideas (e.g., refrigerator/vehicle magnets).
- Engage health care systems (and health insurance providers) to give back to the community (e.g., health insurance for family farms, association-based health care program, etc.).
- Find politically supportive members of Congress to advocate for the farmers market agenda.

Several other strategies deal with developing partnerships as a means of sharing existing resources or accessing new resources. These include:

- Continue to promote farmers markets as a professional association to receive benefits.
- Contact and join Farm Bureaus (in each State) to participate in Farm Bureau benefits.
- Share information among State farmers market associations. Communication is imperative (e.g., share notes on what other associations are doing).

Some of these partnerships include a capacity-building component, with the following strategies suggested: provide training programs for farmers market associations, develop a network to build market management skills (to teach them to operate a market), and the need for State associations to review the State/Federal grant application process in order to help simplify the process for applicants.

### **Follow-Up Items**

The group suggested several follow-up items:

- Make sure USDA provides a quick narrative about the Summit outcomes.
- Gather executives from State farmers market associations to meet on a national level (using a workshop format).
- The possibility of combining this workshop idea with the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE)—providing training for these executives.
- Solicit Farmers Market Summit participants and others for resources or suggestions (about State farmers market association activities).

### **Other Comments**

The group had a number of other points worth mentioning, including the following:

- Federal grant application process is too long, from submission to award announcement.
- Grant-funded State associations are not sustainable models.
- State associations need to spend time to understand what it takes to sustain farmers market associations, and to develop best practices.
- There should be State/regional farmers market grant programs (as well as other Federal grant programs).

The group also had a discussion about the type of activities that State farmers market associations do well. The group agreed that the following activities are well suited for State associations and should be considered by them when deciding on activities to pursue:

- Provide answers to farmers market questions.
- Provide fact sheets on the web and through other media.
- Provide training tools to market managers/farmers/vendors.

- Convene annual workshops.
- Find markets for farmers/vendors.
- Find insurance providers.

## **UNIVERSITY RESEARCHERS**

### **Addressing the Priorities**

The group saw their involvement in addressing the priorities in three interrelated areas: research, professional development, and enterprise sustainability.

#### **Research**

- Season extension techniques
- Bringing back old cultivars/product varieties
- Compiling data to make a case for the economic impacts of farmers markets

#### **Professional Development & Enterprise Sustainability**

- Business skill curriculum development and education
- Items listed under research

### **Existing Collaborations/Partnerships**

The group identified the following existing collaborations/partnerships that can be mobilized or strengthened to help achieve the Summit priorities, particularly as it pertains to research and funding/resources.

- USDA/AMS specialty crop money.
- USDA/CSREES National Research Initiative small/mid-size farms grant program.
- AMS starting to collect limited amount of organic price data with USDA/RMA money.
- Some university collaboration with NASS State statisticians; in Michigan, they have incorporated new direct marketing questions in State surveys.
- Mounting evidence of consumer interest (in farmers markets, local foods) from collected data/research.
- Some universities are starting to shift their attitude toward alternative marketing channels.
- Lots of opportunities for networking at conferences:
  - Conferences sponsored by environmental NGOs.
  - Agriculture, Food, and Human Values (New Orleans, June 2008).
  - Food Distribution Research Society (Columbus, October 2008).
  - Extension marketing committees—to the extent they still exist.
  - Rural Sociological Society.
  - USDA/CSREES Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education national meetings.

- Regional sustainable agriculture working group meetings (e.g., Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (SAWG), Louisville, KY, January 2008).
- Community Food Security Coalition meetings.
- Other informational resources:
  - National Agricultural Law Center, Drake University, Des Moines, IA.
  - Harrison Institute, Georgetown Law Center, Washington, DC.

### **New Collaborations/Partnerships**

The group discussed the need for the development of new collaborations and partnerships that could yield new data and shifts in attitude about the importance of small-scale producers and the role of farmers markets. The following points were mentioned:

- Need more cross-disciplinary exchange (economists, environmentalists, rural sociologists, statisticians, etc.).
- Need to get National Chamber of Commerce involved in farmers market issues.
- Need shift in mentality at agricultural experiment stations—existing resources typically go to big science projects.
- Need a lot more local-level price/production data on sustainably produced/locally grown foods.
- Could data on farmers markets and CSAs be added to AMS' existing collection of organic data? (NASS unwilling to date to expand 5-year Census of Agriculture to include additional direct marketing questions.)
- Could the Farmers Market Coalition lobby to have more data collected by NASS?
- Revive dormant extension marketing committees.
- Need to provide professional training to park and recreation department personnel—source of many farmers market managers.

### **Other Possible Collaboration**

Some participants in the conversation also recommended closer collaboration with the Main Street program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and regional and local planning/zoning organizations. There was some concern, however, that this collaboration may give too much weight to the community planning side of issues, and neglect the issues of farmer involvement/profitability. Similarly, several participants recommended closer collaboration with representatives of the foodservice industry (to support volume purchases of local foods), but there was also concern that the foodservice industry might eventually undermine the strength of farmers markets.

## Barriers to Collaboration

A few barriers to collaboration were highlighted and focused on the funding proposal process. Requests for proposals/priorities do not necessarily fit the needs of the marketplace, e.g., Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) grants. Access to FSMIP resources by university personnel varies widely from State to State because of State department of agriculture's role. The group would appreciate clarification of how much a State's endorsement of FSMIP proposals influences the review process.

## Strategies

Several potential strategies were mentioned to strengthen the impact of university research on the farmers market sector:

- Need to get alternative marketing channels on the agenda of agricultural experiment stations (by bringing issues to the attention of deans/decision makers).
- Training courses on farmers market management could be offered to park/recreation department personnel (often source of farmers market workforce).
- 'Master' courses on farmers market management could be developed and held (idea currently being explored at Colorado State).
- Courses on farmers markets could be required in various curricula.
- CSREES higher education challenge grants could potentially be used to pay for development of farmers market distance learning courses. (It was noted that sustainability is part of the challenge grant mission.)
- Some universities (e.g., Cornell) are beginning to develop marketing cost models for specific alternative distribution channels.
- A direct marketing subsection of Eorganics (an extension professionals organization) could be created.
- Examine consumer demographics in individual communities, and evaluate what makes community food systems successful in specific locations.
- Educate local suppliers about various buyer profiles (their specific needs and requirements).
- Develop some basic templates for research through collaboration.
- Colorado State will be hosting the Food Distribution Research Society meeting in 2 years (2009). There is an opportunity to focus on these issues at the conference.

The group also identified a number of resources that could support the recommended strategies. These included:

- Documenting economic impact of farmers markets—FSMIP program.
- Marketing costs/prices by distribution channel—Cornell starting in produce, Colorado State starting in meat. Could SARE fund this type of activity?

- Buyer profiles—some work has already been done by AMS and agricultural extension. FSMIP and SARE might provide potential future resources.
- Farmers market professional development—potential resources include RMA, FMPP, and SARE.

## **FARMERS AND FARMERS MARKET MANAGERS**

### **Addressing the Priorities**

The group felt the one effective way of addressing some of the Summit priorities was to establish an open source online site to facilitate more effective communication among farmers market vendors, managers, and other stakeholders, and as a means to share resources (e.g., best practices, learn about training and funding opportunities, upcoming events, etc.). The group also mentioned that there needs to be special focus on producers presently not involved in farmers markets. Such an open source site should be able to provide information for producers to learn how farmers markets can be a viable and profitable marketing outlet, as well as the appropriate farmers market contacts to learn how best to get involved. An initial step toward accomplishing this would be to convene State and regional meetings that bring farmers market vendors and managers together to build up a database of best practices.

### **Collaborations/Partnerships**

A number of existing collaborations/partnerships can be mobilized to achieve this objective, which include: Agricultural Extension; State departments of agriculture, USDA/AMS; State farmers market associations; universities, Project for Public Spaces, and the Farmers Market Coalition. One of the key collaborations specified by the group was State farmers market associations. Every effort should be made to have such an association in every State that can be an effective conduit for resources, which includes playing a mentoring role for newly established associations. The group also suggested that one new collaboration could be the establishment of an association of farmers market managers.

The group identified a number of key areas in which these collaborations should be involved. These included:

- Collect data on farmers market activities on the local, State, and regional level.
- Identify funding and other resources that can be utilized by farmers markets.
- Identify best practices and promote the sharing of ideas.
- Promote farmer incubators and internships.
- Sustain the involvement of youth in farmers markets (e.g., internships, mentoring).

## Follow-Up Items

The group recommended that there should be follow-up meetings to build on the momentum of this Summit. The group recognized that each of the identified priorities deserves its own "Summit" but they also felt that an important first step would be to convene regional meetings that could focus on farmers market best practices. They would like to see USDA play a supportive role in convening these meetings. Additionally, the group felt that these meetings should not be exclusive, but instead encourage diverse representation. Further suggestions on different aspects of these meeting were to:

- Include field trips as part of the meeting.
- Have the meetings at farmers market sites.
- Utilize visual sharing (documenting best practices).
- Share venues with upcoming training events, meetings.
- Share best practices throughout the meeting, or
- Have everybody write down in three sentences their best practices, and have it compiled at the end of the conference.
- Use objective facilitators to run sessions.

## HEALTH REPRESENTATIVES

### Addressing the Priorities

The group focused much of their discussion on using farmers markets as way to change the eating behavior of children. Given the epidemic of childhood obesity, especially in low-income minority communities, there is urgent need to use multi-pronged approaches to addressing these health-related issues. The group felt that the many of the priorities could be addressed by the sharing and generating of best practices on health and wellness programs. Sharing best practices and linking stakeholders are critical to optimizing resource use and not duplicating efforts. The group suggested one way to generate best practices would be to apply for funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) or the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to investigate health and wellness issues as they relate to farmers markets.

One specific idea was to get donor agencies to fund a study looking at the impacts of workplace farmers markets on employee nutrition and health, with Kaiser Permanente, a large health maintenance organization, being an ideal organization to study. They have 40 workplace farmers markets at different facilities around the country. They have 160,000 employees, with 99 percent of them enrolled in Kaiser's medical plan for their personal health insurance. A study could be designed to study how the presence of farmers markets at Kaiser facilities impacts food intake, and in turn measure health indicators such as obesity, cholesterol, incidence of diabetes, high blood pressure, etc., comparing Kaiser employees who work at a site with and without a farmers market.

Other suggestions for addressing the priorities included:

- Study health and nutrition impacts of farmers markets generally. There is a lack of local detail on changes in fresh produce consumption wrought by farmers markets.
- Link farmers markets with healthy and active living.
- Incorporate farmers markets in plans for walkable cities.
- Link existing resource providers to find common goals and maximize resource uses.
- Explore what kinds of incentives exist for health plan members to shop at farmers markets.
- Create a list of electronic mailing lists related to health, wellness, and nutrition.

### **Collaborations/Partnerships**

The group mentioned a number of organizations working on health, wellness, and nutrition that could be possible collaborators, including: Shaping America's Youth, Healthy Kids Network, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. In addition to this, Kaiser Permanente is not only placing farmers markets at existing facilities, but is also designing new facilities with farmers market plazas to ensure maximum visibility for the markets upon completion of the buildings.

Several strategies for developing new collaboration/partnership were also mentioned:

- Link workplace wellness and exercise promotion programs with farmers markets.
- Connect with local public health networks, chefs, schools, agricultural extension, and CSREES' Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) to promote farmers markets.
- Create a network of anti-obesity agencies/organizations and farmers markets.
- Look for turnkey programs dealing with community farmers market-doctor connections around issues of obesity, health, and youth.

### **Other Comments**

- The group discussed making pedicabs available at farmers markets for customers to take purchases to their car/office/home. The group also discussed how the precise location of a farmers market in relation to parking could facilitate both easy access and a little exercise at the same time.
- The group agreed to send a list of health and wellness related partners and programs to each other following the Summit that could connect to farmers markets. A question was also raised on what would be the best information clearinghouse for health and wellness issues as they pertain to farmers markets.

## **PRIVATE FOUNDATIONS AND NATIONAL NGOs**

### **Addressing the Priorities**

The group felt that an important strategy for addressing the identified priorities was the development of "How To" answers that could meet the present demands of the larger farmers market community. For example, farmers markets need specific information on how to effectively implement EBT, or to increase the redemption rate of WIC coupons. Similarly, farmers markets need to know how they can build relationships with other stakeholders that can maximize their existing resources as well as to access new resources. As a group of national NGOs and private foundations, the group saw themselves in an advantageous position to not only raise awareness of possible resources available to farmers markets, but also provide some of these "How To" answers or resources.

### **Collaboration/Partnerships**

The participants in this session struggled with how they could work collectively to support or advance a common farmers market agenda. At least in the case of the national NGOs, part of this struggle stems from the fact that they often secure funding to serve different sets of constituents with specific needs, which ultimately makes collaborating across NGO programs a difficult task. One way to breach this impasse is for national NGOs and private foundations to develop a common communication strategy that can serve a broad farmers market audience but could also be customized or adapted to fit their specific constituent needs. The group came up with several suggestions on how they could work together to manage a common communication strategy:

- *Defining Audiences:* Organizations working collectively need to be clear on who their main audience or constituents are in order to find common goals that they can all work toward.
- *Linking Resources:* If a group of non-profits and private foundations can find common ground around a set of farmers market priorities, there are a number of ways that resources can be linked to maximize positive outcomes. This can be done on a programmatic level but also on a communication level, such as linking their websites together and directing web traffic to the most relevant sites.
- *Bring in Existing State and Other Associations:* Non-profits and private foundations are well positioned to link varying State associations (e.g., National Association of State Departments of Agriculture, National Association of Health Directors, National Council on State Legislators, etc.) and assist such associations achieve not only their specific goals but also the objectives of other participating associations.
- *Get Behind One Organization:* One of the most effective ways for non-profits and private foundations to work together is to find an organization that they can all support. The group felt the most likely candidate would be the Farmers Market Coalition.

## Other Comments

The group concluded the session by raising a number of questions that non-profits and private foundations should consider when trying to work collectively to address certain farmers market priorities:

- How do we address communication strategies across groups when each group has its own communication issues?
- Where are we now? Organizations presently working on farmers markets issues are all working on a piece of the puzzle in the absence of a strong, single entity. The current state is that many organizations are working on farmers markets, partly to fill in gaps in reaching stakeholders.
- Where do we want to be?
- What is the transition strategy? If organizations want to support a single farmers market entity, how would the existing organizations transition their work to that single entity? Would they want to? Is there a mechanism or census-building model which could allow that, if that is the desired goal?
- What steps should we take to act more collectively?
- Are the existing coalitions we are working with broad enough to achieve the outcome desired, or do we need to be more inclusive to build momentum?

# PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK AND INITIATED ACTIONS

In an effort to make the proceedings report as inclusive as possible, a draft of the report was sent to all Summit attendees. We asked the participants to provide feedback in the following ways:

- *Points of clarification* and any further detail on the content of each of the sessions. Since most of the content of the report was captured from the flipcharts, we wanted to give participants the opportunity to provide further clarity and specificity where needed.
- *Further reflections* on the Summit. We received 36 evaluation sheets from participants at the conclusion of the Summit and we wanted to give them another opportunity to fill out an evaluation sheet. Outside of the evaluation sheet, we also encouraged participants to provide any other reflections they might have about the Summit.
- *Actionable Items*: To learn more about what participants have been doing since the conclusion of the Summit, we encouraged the participants to tell us about promising ideas, or actions already initiated, that address one or more of the key priorities emerging from the Summit.

The next section examines participant feedback in terms of specific reactions to and observations about the general effectiveness of the Summit in meeting-stated objectives. This is followed immediately by an overview of current and planned action steps by Summit participants that attempt to address the priority issues identified at the Summit, including some initiatives that were generated as a direct result of Summit discussions.

## PARTICIPANT SUMMIT EVALUATIONS

We received a total of 47 evaluation sheets (representing 63 percent of the 75 participants), which were either collected at the Summit or during follow-up correspondence with participants after the Summit. Participants were asked to comment on the following four questions:

1. To what extent have the objectives for this meeting been achieved?
2. If a similar meeting were to be held in the future, what do you think should definitely stay the same?
3. What do you think should be changed?
4. Any other feedback?

A summary of participant responses to each of these questions is provided below:

## ***Achieving the Objectives***

Almost all the participants who provided feedback indicated that the Summit basically succeeded in meeting its objectives; namely, to produce a national consensus agenda for the broader farmers markets community, including the identification of priority areas, workable strategies, and potential roles and responsibilities for specific stakeholder groups. In addition, several people noted that the opportunity to meet, network with, and obtain ideas from leaders in the farmers market field representing another significant achievement for the Summit. At the same time, some participants expressed concern about the lack of specifics that emerged from the Summit, and hoped that the momentum of the Summit could be carried forward in developing more targeted action items.

## ***What Should Stay the Same***

Participants expressed appreciation for the interactive focus of the Summit, particularly the World Café model. People mentioned the value of the discussions, ideas, and networking that the small groups made possible. Additional comments cited the importance of the facilitators to the interactive process. A number of people reported leaving with a lot of great ideas to implement back home.

## ***What Should be Done Differently***

The most frequently mentioned suggestions for change in a future Summit were:

- Combine input on best practices with opportunities for stakeholder interaction.
- Convene this or similar group again to do follow-up action planning.
- Convene regional meetings to work on follow-up.
- Invite more farmers, FM managers, and partners next time.
- Provide information/updates on whatever follow-up steps may be taken.

## ***Further Reflections***

Upon reviewing the draft of the proceedings document, several participants commented that the report was a useful resource for others interested in learning about the shared concerns of the U.S. farmers market community. While participants were satisfied that the proceedings document reflected the key priority areas that need to be addressed for the future growth and success of farmers markets, they noted that there is still difficult work ahead in turning these priorities into actionable items. Some suggestions for getting this process started included:

- Appoint working committees on highly ranked priorities to initiate follow up networking and progress.
- Break down, or narrow the breadth of, the priority issues into manageable topics for task force-like execution.

- Hold meetings at various levels (regional, State, local) across stakeholder groups and begin to address relevant or high ranking priorities.
- Have stakeholder-specific meetings (e.g., separate meetings for farmers market representatives, community partners, and national providers) to work out action plans of relevant priorities and reconvene a multi-stakeholder meetings to find commonalities and avoid duplication in action plan implementation.

Overall, there was general agreement from the participants that the Summit established the foundation for building multi-stakeholder platforms that could be used to address the major priorities of the U.S. farmers market community. In several cases, participants have already started this process, as elucidated in the next section.

### **ACTIONS INITIATED**

As part of the feedback process, we asked Summit participants to tell us about promising ideas or actions already initiated as a means to address some of the key priorities emerging from the Summit. Some of the actions that participants are already working on include the following:

- **Public Health**—A representative from Kaiser Permanente learned the concept of creating a “Best of Market” program at the Summit, and plans to pilot test it at two hospitals. Since many employees at a hospital—or any business for that matter—may not have the time during lunch or breaks to go to a farmers market, this scheme works by having the farmers market manager identify an assortment of “best of the market” items each week, and charge around \$20 for each package. To make this program work, a digital photo is taken and sent out as an e-mail to all employees on market day morning, and a “designated shopper” from each department surveys the staff to see who wants a package and goes down to the market on behalf of their fellow workers. If executed correctly, such programs have been known to help farmers double their market day revenue, even after deducting a certain percentage of the proceeds for the market association’s overhead expenses. If the pilot project goes well, Kaiser hopes to expand the program to their other medical facilities where farmers markets have been established.
- **Research and Local Food Systems**—An agricultural economics professor at Colorado State University is slated to participate in the Principal Papers session at the 2008 American Agricultural Economics Association, which will focus on farmers markets and direct marketing. A USDA Agricultural Marketing Service representative will be moderating the session. This same professor is also scheduled to host the 2009 Food Distribution Research Society annual meeting in Fort Collins, CO, and help organize a conference around the theme of local food systems and supply chains.

Furthermore, as part of a Northern Colorado group, the professor expects to bring together local farmers, small-scale food processors and restaurant/institutional buyers to explore how stronger linkages can be developed. One proposed idea that she and other local stakeholders are investigating is the possible establishment of a year-round market involving resources from county extension, along with the creation of a small business incubator site (featuring a community kitchen and some year-round retail kiosks), to expand local value-added marketing opportunities and foster the development of human capital.

- **Professional Development and Growing Farmers**—An extension professor from Mississippi State University is in the preliminary stages of establishing a model farm with a variety of crops using techniques and technology intended to maximize yields and extend growing seasons. It is expected that the farm will be operated by researchers, extension staff, economists, marketing specialists, community development practitioners, and any others who see ways of benefiting growers through their expertise. Over time, it is hoped that the model farm will be part of a "Farmers Market University," which would provide a dynamic setting for growers and other stakeholders to share best practices and lessons learned on developing viable local food systems.
- **Professional Development**—A professor at Michigan State University intends to use the draft of the proceedings document as the basis for a presentation at a "farmers market boot camp" hosted by the Michigan Farmers Market Association. He expects that this engagement will generate further ideas on how to turn the Summit priorities into actionable items.
- **Farmers Market Promotion**—A representative from the American Farmland Trust (AFT) spoke of the organization's current promotion activities that engage farmers markets to help cultivate customer loyalty through AFT's "No Farms No Food" bumper stickers. Dozens of market managers, farmers, state farmers market representatives, and others have ordered quantities of the bumper stickers to hand out at farmers markets across the country. AFT is also beginning work on local farm policy initiatives that includes farmers markets, including one project that is examining the San Francisco "foodshed."
- **Funding/Resources**—Based on the ideas generating at the Summit, the USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS) will encourage/foster the production of specialty crops sold at farmers markets through new research initiatives. Toward this end, ARS is presently providing supplementary funding of \$75,000 to the Mississippi Department of Agriculture to support the creation of high tunnel demonstration farms in Mississippi. ARS will also encourage research initiatives toward developing food safety guidelines that focus on the specific needs of small-scale farmers.

- **Low Income Access**—In order to ensure that low income households have appropriate access to farmers markets, the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) was a key contributor in the WIC Food Package Implementation Summit, held March 11, 2008 in Washington DC. FNS also shared information resources (toolkits) developed by the Food Stamp Program and ensured consistency in responding to EBT-related questions.
- **Partnerships and Professional Development**—For their annual Partners' Meeting in August, the USDA Office of Outreach will include two workshops that will address farmers markets and direct-marketing opportunities for small-scale and limited resource farmers. The Marketing Services Division of the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service will be conducting these workshops, offering one workshop on planning and management considerations for start-up farmers markets and a second workshop on how to access alternative marketing channels (i.e., institutions, grocery stores, restaurants, etc.) and thereby mitigate risk.

### ***Actions Initiated by the Agricultural Marketing Services***

For our part, AMS is already starting to formulate ways that we can take an active part in addressing the Summit priorities. As an initial step, we have incorporated several of the Summit priorities into the *Farmers Market Promotion Program*. For the 2008 grant, we have identified three priorities that deserve particular attention; these are: *Growing Farmers, Innovative Partnerships and Networking, and Professional Development*. We are encouraging applicants to incorporate these key priority areas because we believe all three play essential roles in the future growth and success of farmers markets.

We recognize that one of the areas that received broad Summit consensus was support for a national trade association representing the U.S. farmers market industry that could effectively advocate on behalf of the farmers market community with a unified voice. Toward this end, we are presently working with the *Farmers Market Coalition* to identify ways to strengthen the organization so it can meet its stated mission and goals and better fulfill its role as a national advocate for farmers market issues. Along with our continued support of the Coalition, we continue to work toward establishing innovative partnerships in our role as leading organizer and member of the *Farmers Market Consortium*. We see the Consortium as an effective forum for coordinating and strengthening the impact of interagency and industry-wide farmers market activities. During the next Consortium meeting, scheduled to take place on March 20, 2008, we will work with the other members to set an agenda that incorporates the Summit priorities with the goal of establishing actionable items that the Consortium can carry forward.

These initial efforts by AMS and other Summit participants, as mentioned above, provide just a few examples of how to carry forward some of the key farmers market priorities identified at the Summit. We will continue to engage Summit participants, as well as the wider farmers market community, to learn more

about innovative ways to address these priorities, as part of a larger effort to promote promising models for successful and sustainable farmers market expansion.

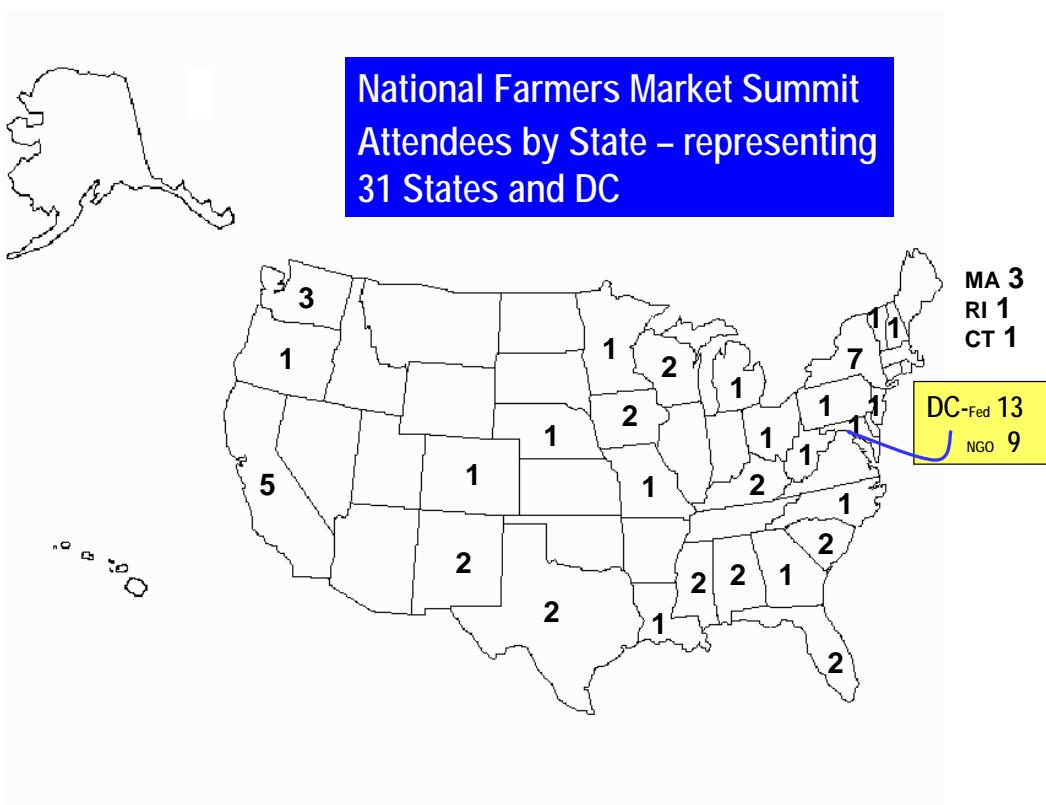
## APPENDIX A

### BREAKDOWN OF PARTICIPANTS BY MAJOR STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

<b>Farmers Market Representatives</b>	
State FM Associations	13
FM Managers & Farmers	12
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Community Partners</b>	
Local NGOs	6
State Departments of Agriculture	7
University & Extension	6
Com. Dev. / City Planning / Health	7
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>National Resource Providers</b>	
Federal Agencies	13
National NGOs	9
Private Foundations	2
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Total Participants</b>	<b>75</b>

## APPENDIX B

### GEOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATION OF SUMMIT PARTICIPANTS



## APPENDIX C

### NATIONAL FARMERS MARKET SUMMIT PROCESS DESIGN<sup>10</sup>

The overall process design for the Summit had these elements:

**Opening up the Task**—Through a series of three short brainstorming sessions, using the “World Café” round-robin model, participants identified the universe of issues and opportunities associated with farmers markets in the coming years.

**Focusing the Task**—Working in small groups, mixed by role, participants focused their discussions on identifying priorities for farmers markets from among the universe of possibilities. The small groups reported out their priorities to the whole group, and the whole group identified common themes among the reports. The priorities that were common to most or all of the small groups became the whole group’s consensus priorities for farmers markets over the next several years.

**Resolving the Task**—Working in new, still mixed, small groups, participants worked through a series of discussion points (a modified force-field analysis) to develop recommended strategies for addressing the consensus priorities. Each group discussed one priority, defined it, agreed on desired outcomes, identified obstacles, and proposed strategies, resources, and roles. As a second step in resolving the group’s task, role-alike small groups—farmers market managers, State government representatives, and so on—met to discuss the potential part each set of peers might have in the moving the national farmers market agenda forward.

#### **Managing the Process**

Managing the group process at the Summit was achieved with the help of ground rules, discussion guidance, and most importantly, facilitators.

#### **Ground Rules**

Ground rules were laid out at the start of the Summit to help participants understand what was expected of them, that is, behaviors and orientations that would make accomplishment of Summit objectives most likely:

- Be open—to new information and new ways of doing things.

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<sup>10</sup> This section was written by Elizabeth Vasquez, the lead facilitator for the Summit. Ms. Vasquez is a partner in the consulting firm, Management Consulting Associates, which is based out Bethesda, MD.

- Participate actively—in the discussions and group work in the course.
- Stayed involved—the process builds from the first to last session.
- Be creative—about ways to use the ideas brought up in this course.
- Decide by consensus—defined as a decision in which everyone participates and which everyone can support, and *not* voting, trading off, steamrolling, withdrawing, perfect agreement, or easy or fast.

### ***Discussion Group Guidance***

Written discussion guidance for each set of small group discussions was included in participants' packets. The guidance was comprised of a clear statement of purpose for the small group discussion, suggested discussion points, and the time allocated to the discussion. Before discussions got underway, the lead facilitator referred participants to the written guidance and reviewed the intended outcomes, discussion points, and timeframe. Please see Attachment 1: Discussion Group Guidance, below.

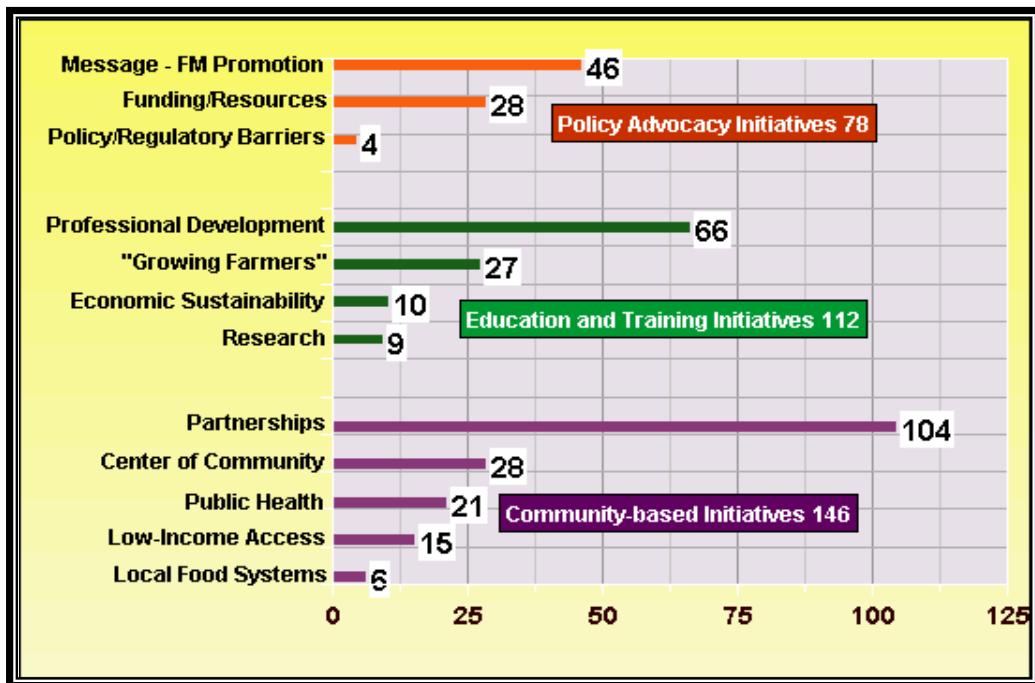
### ***Facilitators***

The ambitious process design of the Summit would not have been possible without a team of skilled group facilitators. The facilitators were drawn from MSD staff, from other parts of USDA, partner and stakeholder organizations, and from the consulting group supporting the Summit. A day of training was provided facilitators to help them prepare for the Summit, covering group process principles, group facilitation techniques, and the specific requirements of the Summit. During the Summit, facilitators worked in pairs, two facilitators for each small group, to introduce the discussion questions, record key discussion points on flipcharts, and help the group stay on task and on time.

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## APPENDIX D

### RANKING OF INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANTS' TOP SUMMIT PRIORITIES



Reflecting on the issues raised in the brainstorming session, each participant was asked to write down the top five priorities for farmers markets over the next few years. Following the consensus priority exercise, the sheets of the individual participants' top priorities were collected for later analysis. The graph provides a ranking of top priorities—grouped by the broader initiatives areas—as one method to "prioritize" the Summit priorities. Under each initiative area, there is a clear priority issue that was most frequently mentioned by Summit participants.

The "partnerships" priority was the most frequently mentioned issue not only under the community-based initiatives area but over all other Summit priorities. There was broad participant consensus that forming strategic and innovative partnerships with a diverse range of stakeholders is a critical component toward the future growth and success of farmers markets. Under the education and training initiatives area, the "professional development" priority issue was the most frequently mentioned, and reflects the growing and urgent need for vendors, market managers, boards, and others to get appropriate capacity-building training as a means to sustain and strengthen farmer market operations. The top priority issue emerging from the policy advocacy initiatives area dealt with the need for farmers markets to have a unified message, in the form of a national organization that could advocate on behalf of farmers markets, as well as a means to promote the benefits of farmers markets to the general public.

## **APPENDIX E**

### **NATIONAL FARMERS MARKET SUMMIT PARTICIPANTS - CONTACT INFORMATION -**

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