

What Do Market Managers Mean by Market Success?



Key Findings

- Most farmers market organizations think about success in terms of vendor outcomes and community engagement. However, organizations also prioritize food access, their own longevity and stability, and customer satisfaction. This suggests that there is no “one size fits all” way that farmers markets define success.
- Rather than expanding to new market locations or longer market hours, managers prefer to grow their markets by increasing customer attendance or redeeming more nutrition assistance dollars.
- Evaluations of the farmers market sector should employ these kinds of diverse metrics to best capture the milestones prioritized by market staff—and make farmers markets’ multiple positive impacts clear to a wide range of audiences.



Study Purpose

The goal of the “Analyzing the Diversity and Impacts of Farmers Markets Managed by Organizations” cooperative research agreement was to increase the general public’s understanding of the diverse forms that farmers markets in the United States take and the breadth of their activities. The project was conducted over two years (October 2022 to September 2024) and used mixed methods (an online environmental scan, listening sessions, focus groups, and semi-structured interviews) to explore the structures, activities, impacts and trends shaping farmers market organizations.

How Market Managers Define Success

During four focus groups in early 2024, 38 market staff members were asked to respond to the question, “How do you define ‘success’ in the context of your farmers market?” Many people listed multiple answers, leading to 157 total responses.

The most frequent answers (24.8%) referred to a market’s vendors (a category that included, for example, vendor sales, vendor happiness, or vendor retention). Illustrating the diversity of opinions, the second most common category of responses fell into the Other category because they were so dissimilar—ranging from “food focused” to “living wages” to “more visible location.” Community and Customer success also ranked highly among market staff. Very few managers expressed System level goals (such as “decentralization of the food system”) as indicators of success for their own markets. Figure 1 shows the buckets into which market manager’s answers fell.

METHODS AT A GLANCE

4

Focus Group Discussions

38

Market Managers

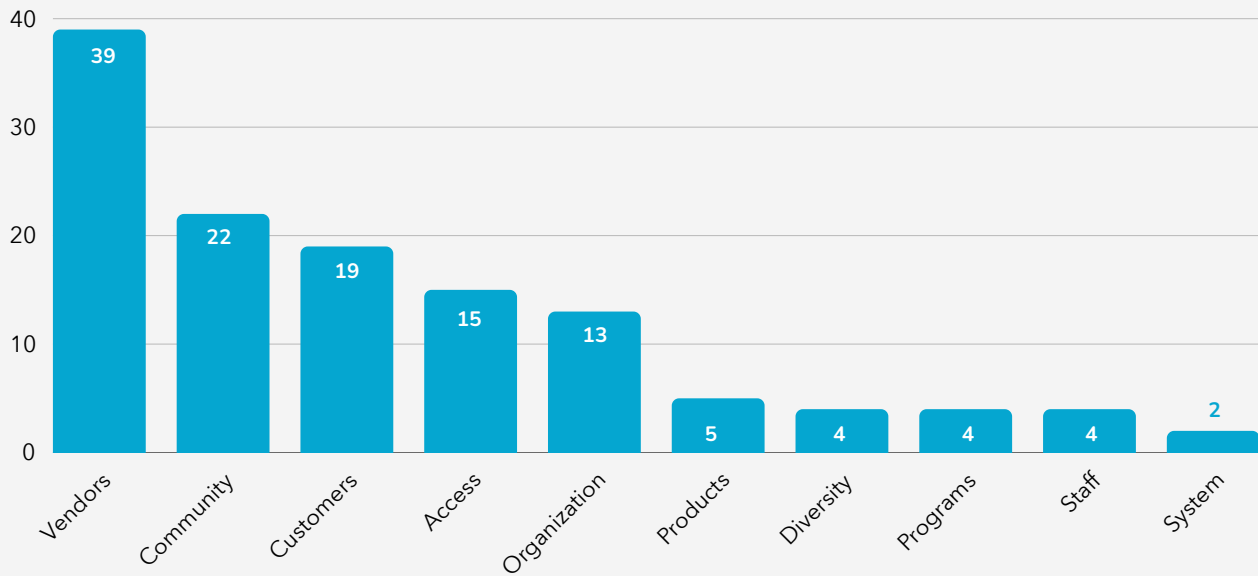
157

Total Responses

¹ Due to its variability, the “other” category is not included on the graph. Though it was the second largest grouping, the diversity of answers did not reflect a coherent category.



Figure 1. Categories and frequency of responses for market managers answers to: "How would you define 'success' in the context of your farmers market?"



In the Vendors category, answers included vendor sales, vendor happiness, or vendor retention, etc. The Community category included answers like community engagement, feedback, or support, etc., while Customers included answers like customer attendance or satisfaction. For more information, see the full final report.

Market Managers Want to Grow Markets in Different Ways

Market managers expressed many ideas on how they would like to expand their markets. This expansion, however, rarely meant external growth like opening more locations or extending market hours or season length. In the focus groups, participants ranked actions that they would prefer to take to help grow their markets.

The top five areas for preferred expansion were:

- 1 redemption rates from food access programs;
- 2 customer attendance;
- 3 overall vendor sales;
- 4 attracting more diverse customers;
- 5 and increasing support for market staff.

Expanding market hours and adding new market locations were the least popular options. Notably, each of these areas require staff time and expertise to execute. Future sector priorities should include internal capacity building for organizations to help markets achieve their diverse and important goals.



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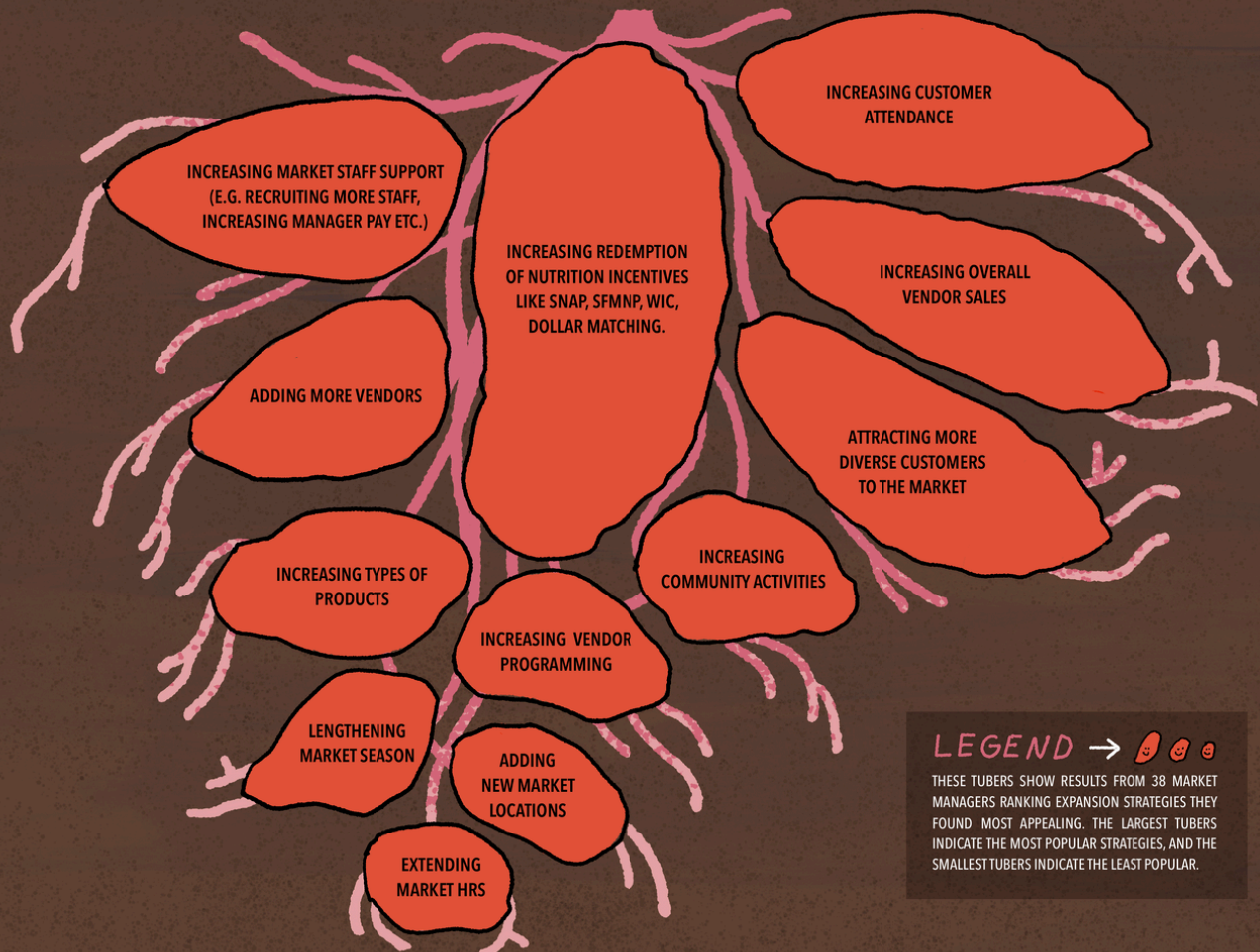
ROOTING GROWTH

FARMERS MARKETS CAN GROW IN MANY WAYS



GROWTH IN THE NUMBER OF MARKETS IS ONLY ONE WAY TO MEASURE FARMERS MARKET EXPANSION. SINCE 2019, GROWTH IN THE NUMBER OF FARMERS MARKETS HAS SLOWED.[1] HOWEVER, MARKET OPERATORS NURTURE MARKET GROWTH ACROSS VARIED DIMENSIONS. IN 2024, RESEARCHERS ASKED FOUR GROUPS OF FARMERS MARKET MANAGERS TO RANK THE STRATEGIES THEY PREFER TO USE TO GROW THEIR MARKETS. ADDING MARKET LOCATIONS OR HOURS OF OPERATION WERE THE LEAST POPULAR. MARKET OPERATORS PREFERRED STRATEGIES THAT DEEPEN ENGAGEMENT SELECTING GOALS LIKE

INCREASING REDEMPTION OF NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS, INCREASING ATTENDANCE, ATTRACTING MORE DIVERSE CUSTOMERS, UPPING VENDOR SALES AND BUILDING STAFF CAPACITY. THOUGH LESS VISIBLE THAN ADDING MARKETS, ALL OF THESE ACTIVITIES GROW THE FARMERS MARKET MOVEMENT. THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO EXPAND FARMERS MARKETS BESIDES OPENING NEW LOCATIONS. CELEBRATING MANY MEASURES OF GROWTH BETTER REFLECTS THE DIVERSE STRATEGIES THAT MARKET OPERATORS USE TO ROOT FARMERS MARKETS AS ROBUST ANCHORS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEMS.



LEGEND → THESE TUBERS SHOW RESULTS FROM 38 MARKET MANAGERS RANKING EXPANSION STRATEGIES THEY FOUND MOST APPEALING. THE LARGEST TUBERS INDICATE THE MOST POPULAR STRATEGIES, AND THE SMALLEST TUBERS INDICATE THE LEAST POPULAR.

¹ USDA Economic Research Service. "Growth in the number of U.S. farmers markets slows in recent years." Accessed September 23, 2024.

DRAWN BY NAFISA FERDOUS