Creating a Farmers Market Living Lab:

Unconference: How to Use Your Farmers Market as a “Living Lab”

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Founded in 2005 by volunteers (Currently 100+ volunteers)

Non-Profit

Manages two producer only markets (Wed & Sat open May thru Nov)

$700,000 in sales annually (35+ farmer/producers)

45,000 customer visits annually

We are a community based, mission driven team working to support local sustainable agriculture and small businesses, protect the environment, and educate our children about food and the land.
We began collecting data for operational use

- total attendance and by gate
- total sales and by market stand
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- number of children at story time
- $ value of food donated to charities
- $ scholarships and grants to farmers
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- number of new SNAP customers
- total SNAP $ issued & $ redeemed
- total SNAP match $ issued
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- farmer distance traveled
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- number of SNAP customers
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- total SNAP $ issued & $ redeemed
- total SNAP match $ issued
- total SNAP match $ redeemed
- farmer acres
- farmer distance traveled
- weather on day of market
- special events in town / holidays
We calculate additional measures

- total attendance and by gate
- total sales and by market stand
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- $ value of food donated to charities
- $ scholarships and grants to farmers
- number of SNAP customers
- number of new SNAP customers
- total SNAP $ issued & $ redeemed
- total SNAP match $ issued
- total SNAP match $ redeemed
- farmer acres
- farmer distance traveled
- weather on day of market
- special events in town / holidays

We were able to calculate other measures:
  - $ spend per customer
  - $ spend per SNAP customer
Logistics of Collecting Measures

- What measures will you collect?
  - How do plan on using the data
- Who will collect the data?
  - Volunteers?
  - Paid Staff?
  - Vendors?
- How will they collect it?
  - Clarity and consistency of approach

- How and where will it be stored?
  - Paper, electronic, who retains copies?
- Who has access to the data?
  - Restrictions on access and use?
  - Privacy issues considered?
- How will you analyze it?
- What will you report and how?
  - Ensure that the data is useful & used
Share our experience:
✓ Making our market a ‘Living Lab’

Hear from you:
✓ Have you experimented at your market? How?
✓ What are the barriers to more experimentation at markets?
✓ What measures do you collect? How do you use them?
✓ How can we share lessons learned?

Record to share:
✓ Resources
✓ Barriers
✓ Solutions
We began with a question...

What can we do to increase sales and attendance at our market?

Our question led us to look at 4 main issues...

- Increasing sales
- Increasing attendance
- Increasing the amount of SNAP dollars issued
- Increasing the number of new SNAP customers.
And found:

- Lots of opinions -> often conflicting
- A few surveys -> mostly counts
- Lots of research on retail store settings
- Little research on farmers markets

We looked for answers to our questions

We decided to use our market as a “living lab” in which to conduct research at our market to answer the questions
Why we decided to use our market as a “living lab”
What is a “living lab”? 

**Key concepts:**

- Experimentation and evaluation of ideas in real life situations (our markets)
- User-centered design of ideas to be tested
- Uses a co-creation approach integrating research and continuous innovation/improvement processes
How we made our market a “living lab”
6 steps to make your market a Living Lab

1. Decide what question(s) to answer and measures to use
2. Decide what ideas/interventions to test
3. Establish a baseline and prepare to collect pre, post, and during test data
4. Design and implement the intervention
5. Analyze results
6. Repeat experiments
We used several approaches to develop ideas to test

Asked our farmers, our Board of Directors and our volunteers for ideas

Conducted an observational survey of our market

Consulted the literature and research on improving sales and attracting customers
What is an experiment?

Week 1:
Normal Operation (no intervention)

Week 2:
Test Intervention

Week 3:
Normal Operation (no intervention)

Collect measurement

Yr. 1:
Normal Operation (previous year)

Yr. 2:


We conducted a series of experiments at:

the market level & the stall level
Examples of Our Findings

Access Full Report at:

www.historiclewesfarmersmarket.org
info@historiclewesfarmersmarket.org
People buy more what they can see

Photos on coolers increased sales products sold out 25% more quickly than without photos.
Recipe cards are often used at markets. Our initial experiments with recipe cards/sheets did not show consistent increases in sales.

Recipe cards are effective when:

- Used to with unusual or unfamiliar products
- Used as a customer engagement opportunity
- Incorporated cute or clever titles

Recipe card advice:

- Focus on a few recipes
- Make the recipes simple
- Use recipes to reinforce your brand
- Position the recipe display for impact

People buy more of what they know how to use.
We questioned which advertising channels were the most effective

- Announced a raffle through our newsletter and in print advertisements – listing a different “secret phrase” which, if mentioned, entitled the customer to 2 raffle entries.

- Twice as many entrants mentioned the print ad secret phrase than the online secret phrase
Discussion

Discussion Guidelines
- Introduce yourself
- One discussion
- Respect the opinions of others
- We want to hear from everyone
Discussion

Questions

✓ Have you experimented at your market? How? Findings?

✓ What are the barriers to more experimentation at public markets?

✓ What measures do you collect on your markets? How do you use these measures?

✓ How can we share lessons learned amongst markets?

✓ What other questions should we discuss?

Flip Charts

• Resources
• Challenges
• Solutions
Discussion

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Acknowledgements

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Heartfelt thanks also go to the City of Lewes for permitting our Saturday Market to operate and welcome the community at George H. P. Smith Park, and to the Crooked Hammock Brewery for permitting our Wednesday Market to welcome the community on their lot.

We consulted many resources in conducting our work and highlight here two that we relied on the most:

usda.com
Provides access to a wide variety of reports and data sources.

https://farmersmarketcoalition.org
Maintains a Resource Library with a large number of reports relevant to farmers markets.
Seeing, tasting and talking

A combination of seeing, tasting and talking about the food is most effective. We experimented with a Market Pairing Demo. Demos boosted sales of products used by an average of 20%.
Seeing, tasting and talking

Chef Demo
- Professional chef
- Many ingredients
- Not all ingredients available at the market
- Usually takes 1 hour or more to make
- Sign listing chef
- Complex

Market Pairing Demo
- Amateur Cook
- Few ingredients
- Everything available at the market
- Can be made in 30 minutes or less
- Sign listing where to buy ingredients
- Simple
People want to “know their farmer”

We use Farmer Profiles, name tags, and smile reminders but wanted to test some additional approaches…
People want to “know their farmer”

Meet the Farmer
Sales increased an average of 41% the week following a Meet the Farmer presentation.
People want to “know their farmer”

Customer Loyalty Program
Sales were up 39% in one test and down 12% in another.
Lessons learned for market managers

Special Events can drive up sales and attendance:

**Father’s Day:**
5% increase in sales vs prior year with no special activities

Meat producers featured in Father’s Day grilling demo saw their sales increase by between 15-30% (25% average) that day.

**Customer Appreciation Day**
Sales of producers who provided snacks for the day went up 7-8% that day.

**Kids Day:**
3% increase in sales vs same market prior year

Sales of farmers who donated a snack for the kids increased 6-27% that day.
We questioned which advertising channels were the most effective

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SNAP engagement

We took a multipronged approach to attracting more SNAP customers:

- Bilingual promotion cards
- Staff person who met with community organizations to explain SNAP match program
- $5 in free tokens to kids accompanying an adult with an EBT card on Kids Day
- Started a new Wednesday Market in a location closer to public transportation
Results:

- 57% growth in new SNAP customers the first year, maintained in the second year
- 24% growth in total SNAP customers
- 31% growth in SNAP dollars issued
Some of the challenges we faced
Challenges – the amount available to sell limits total sales
Challenges – How you implement an idea is very important
Customer Loyalty Program

Sales were up 39% in one test and down 12% in another.
6 steps to make your market a Living Lab

1. Decide what question(s) to answer and measures to use
   - State your question & measure
     - How can I grow sales?
     - How can I retain CSA customers year to year?

2. Decide what ideas/interventions to test
   - Describe the idea you want to test
     - Provide recipe cards.
     - Offer a repeat customer discount

3. Establish a baseline and prepare to collect pre, post, and during test data
   - How you will collect pre-, post and during data?
     - Total sales.
     - Number of repeat customers
6 steps to make your market a Living Lab

4. Design and implement the intervention
   - Design the comparison
     - What specific idea for growing sales will I test?
     - What size of a CSA repeat discount will you offer?

5. Analyze results
   - Calculate the impact
     - How do sales during the test compare to sales before or after the test?
     - How many more CSA customers were retained?

6. Repeat experiments
   - Is the impact consistent? Tweaks needed?
     - Do you see the same impact when you repeat it?
     - Repeat with different CSA advertising?