

Creating a Farmers Market Living Lab:

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

Nancy Staisey, PhD, DHL  
The Historic Lewes Farmers Market, Lewes, Delaware



**\*This work was supported by the U. S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service through grant 15FMPPDE0099. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the USDA.**



# HISTORIC LEWES FARMERS MARKET



Founded in 2005  
by volunteers  
(Currently 100+  
volunteers)



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



Non-Profit



45,000 customer visits  
annually



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

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





# We began collecting data for operational use

- ✓ total attendance and by gate
- ✓ total sales and by market stand
- ✓ number of children at story time
- ✓ \$ value of food donated to charities
- ✓ \$ scholarships and grants to farmers



# We began collecting data for operational use

- ✓ total attendance and by gate
- ✓ total sales and by market stand
- ✓ number of children at story time
- ✓ \$ 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





# We began collecting data for operational use

- ✓ total attendance and by gate
- ✓ total sales and by market stand
- ✓ number of children at story time
- ✓ \$ 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



# We began collecting data for operational use

- ✓ total attendance and by gate
- ✓ total sales and by market stand
- ✓ number of children at story time
- ✓ \$ 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 calculate additional measures

- ✓ total attendance and by gate
- ✓ total sales and by market stand
- ✓ number of children at story time
- ✓ \$ 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



# Overview

## 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.

# We looked for answers to our questions

## 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 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

---

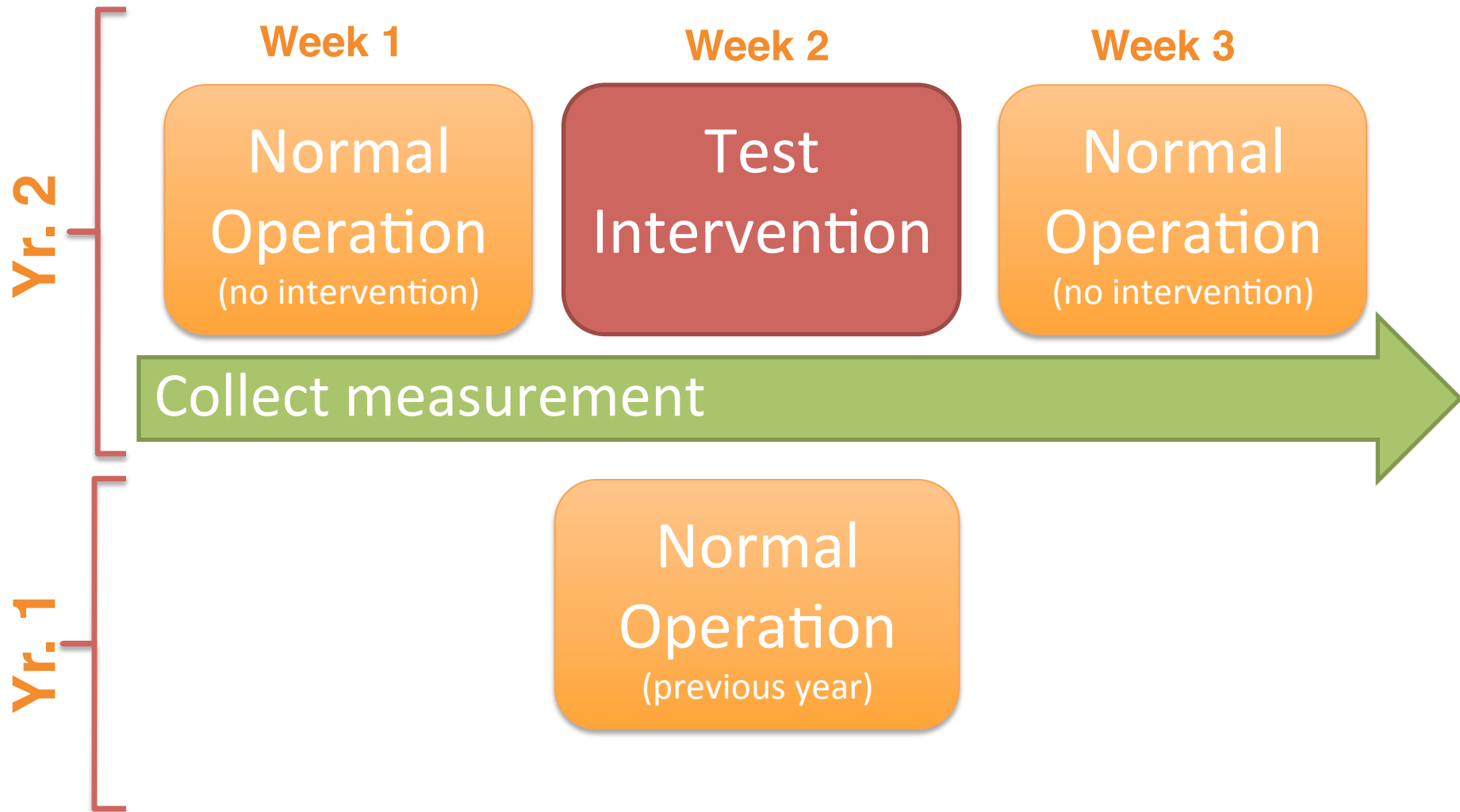
Conducted an observational  
survey of our market

---

Consulted the literature and  
research on improving sales  
and attracting customers



# What is an *experiment*?





# We conducted a series of experiments at:



**the market level**

**&**

**the stall level**

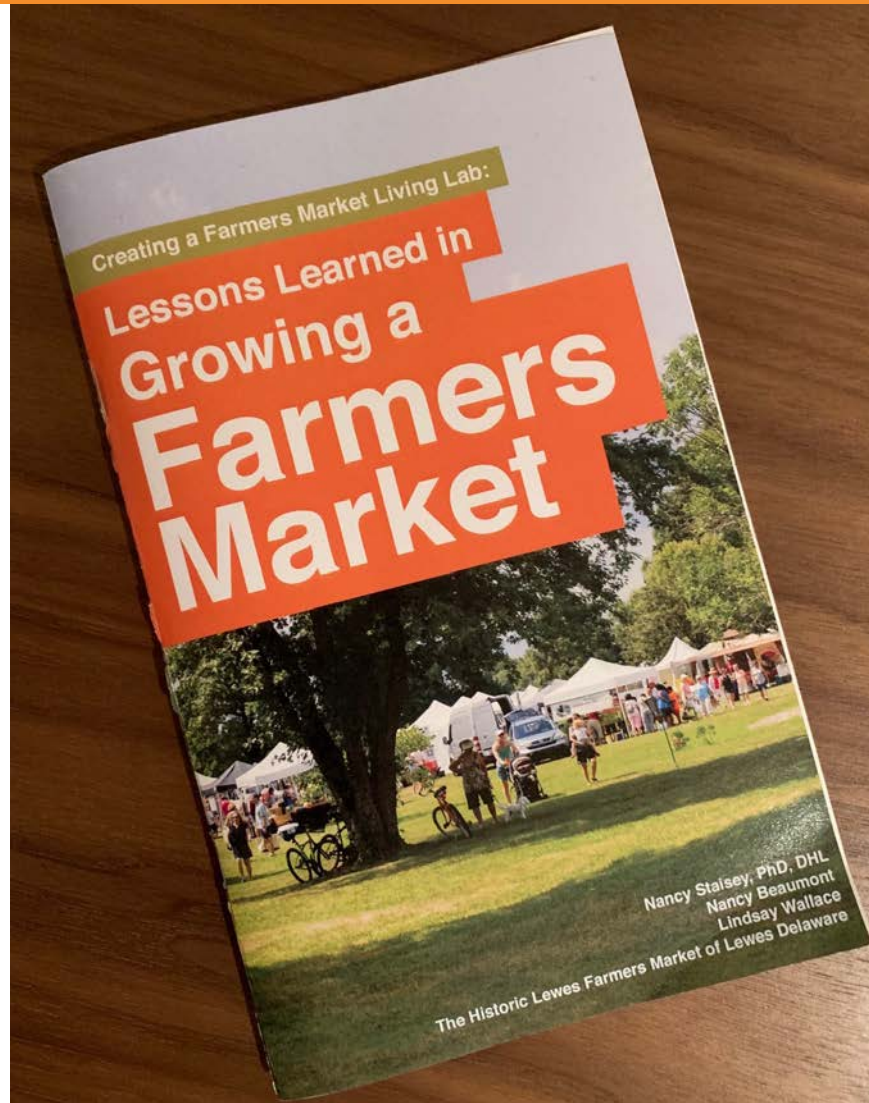




# Examples of Our Findings

**Access Full Report at:**

[www.historiclewesfarmersmarket.org](http://www.historiclewesfarmersmarket.org)  
[info@historiclewesfarmersmarket.org](mailto:info@historiclewesfarmersmarket.org)



# People buy more what they can see



## Photos on coolers increased sales

products sold out 25% more quickly than without photos.

# People buy more of what they know how to use



## 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



# Advertising tests

## 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

## 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?





# 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?



# 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?





# 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?





# What's next?



TWIN POST FARM  
Princess Anne, MD

Free Range  
Chicken Eggs  
Large... \$4.00  
Jumb... \$4.50  
Blue-Green... \$4.00  
1/2 Blue-Green 1/4 Brown \$4.00  
DUCK Eggs  
\$5.00



# Thank You

## Nancy Staisey



See our  
results  
and read  
our full  
report



[www.historiclewesfarmersmarket.org](http://www.historiclewesfarmersmarket.org)  
[info@historiclewesfarmersmarket.org](mailto:info@historiclewesfarmersmarket.org)

302-644-1436

# Acknowledgements

This work was conducted during the 2016 and 2017 market seasons and would not have been possible without our incredible group of volunteers, our wonderful farmers and producers, and our dedicated customers, all of whom support the Historic Lewes Farmers Market, come rain or shine! Thanks also go to our Board of Advisors who provide expert advice on a wide variety of topics. Thank you also to the members of our Board of Directors (2015-2018) who function as a working board and serve as Market Managers in the heat of summer and the storms of fall: **Helaine Harris, Abbey Feierstein, Sharon Dardine, Nancy Beaumont, Marie Mayor, Hattie Allen and Nancy Staisey.**

This publication was supported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service through grant 15FMPPDE0099. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the USDA.

A special thanks to the following individuals who helped create and conduct the experiments reported and/ or helped write this booklet: **Nancy Beaumont, Sharon Dardine, Bernadine Prince, Niamh Shortt, Nancy Staisey, and Lindsay Wallace.**

A special thanks also goes out to our photographers. Almost all of the photographs in this pamphlet were provided by **Brook Hedge**, who has been our volunteer photographer for many years. The meat photographs were taken by **Stan Divorski**, who also took the photographs used on coolers. The photos of the loyalty cards & Customer Appreciation Stickers were provided by **Nancy Beaumont.**

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



**Kalmar Farm**  
Fresh Seasonal Produce  
[www.KalmarFarm.com](http://www.KalmarFarm.com)



**The Eliason Family**  
Feeding Delaware for 5 generations!

4351 Canterbury Rd  
Harrington, Delaware 19952

302-222-0386  
302-335-5343  
[KalmarFarm@gmail.com](mailto:KalmarFarm@gmail.com)

Every 5 visits is a chance to win!

At Smith Park and Crooked Hammock

Write in your name and email!



# 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.



# Advertising tests

## 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

# 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





# SNAP engagement

## 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**





# Challenges – variability in results

## Customer Loyalty Program

Sales were up 39%  
in one test and down  
12% in another



**Kalmar Farm**  
Fresh Seasonal Produce  
[www.KalmarFarm.com](http://www.KalmarFarm.com)



**The Eliason Family**  
Feeding Delaware for 5 generations!

4351 Canterbury Rd  
Harrington, Delaware 19952

302-222-0386  
302-335-5343  
[KalmarFarm@gmail.com](mailto:KalmarFarm@gmail.com)

Every 5 visits is a chance to win!

At Smith Park and Crooked Hammock

Write in your name and email!



# 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?