

Extension conducts Farmer's Market analysis to help guide future growth

The Situation

The number of Farmer's Markets through-out the country, including the state of Idaho, continues to increase annually. In 2010, the U.S. reported a 16% growth in the number of farmer's markets over 2009 numbers, totaling 6,132 operational markets. Idaho was among the top 10 states reporting growth with a 60% increase in the number of markets. It appears as the public achieves a greater understanding of the social, economic, and environmental contributions local food systems can have on their communities, direct marketing avenues such as farmer's markets are gaining even greater momentum.

While the number of new markets is increasing, there are a number that fail to reopen the following year. While in Idaho the actual number failing to reopen annually is not known, based on Oregon State estimates, figures could be as high as 25%. One major factor contributing to market failure is most markets and managers lack the information necessary to make effective changes and improvements.

Our Response

University of Idaho Extension Educators worked closely with the Beautiful Downtown Lewiston Association to further strengthen the Lewiston Farmer's Market for strategic growth and development by providing shopper feedback critical to market improvement. In August 2009 and September 2010 Extension spearheaded the completion of one-day assessments of the market's strengths and weaknesses. This was accomplished by using efficient, basic assessment techniques designed at Oregon State University; two quantitative (attendance count and Dot Survey) and one qualitative assessment (constructive comments and observation reports) collectively referred to as a "Rapid Market Assessment."



Lewiston Farmer's Market Vendors 2010. Photo by Lydia Clayton.

Program Outcomes

To provide guidance for Lewiston Farmer's Market growth and development, market shoppers were asked to answer the following questions using the Dot Survey:

- Would the addition of shade result in you doing more shopping or eating at the farmers' market today? (2009)
- Has shopping at this market resulted in your shopping or eating in downtown? (2009)
- How do you usually get to the market? (2010)
- How did you hear about the market? (2010)
- What other amenity would you most like to see more of at the market? (2009 and 2010)
- Where do you live? (2009 and 2010)

- Approximately, how much have/will you spend at the market today? (2009 and 2010)

Quantitative assessment techniques estimated the average number of weekly market shoppers to be 250, with equal shoppers attending from Nez Perce, Idaho, and Asotin, Washington, counties, indicating it functions as a regional market. The majority of shoppers reported they became aware of the market through 'drive by' sightings. Shopping groups (defined as two adults spending from one wallet) spent an average of \$10.31 in 2009 and \$7.14 in 2010 per market visit, with estimated daily total market sales of \$1,030 and \$750 in 2009 and 2010, respectively.

In both years, when asked the amenities they would like to see more of, participants responded additional selections of fresh fruits and vegetables were most desired. This highlights the need for more produce vendors at the market, even though they are currently the majority.

The future

The Rapid Market Assessment will continue to be implemented as an effective evaluation tool to assess long-term market change and as a data collection tool for informed year-to-year decision-making. The Lewiston Farmers' Market is now better positioned and prepared to make strategic management decisions that encourage and guide market growth.

References

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