

Rapid Market Assessment provides needed information for farmers' markets

The Situation

Orofino community leaders expressed a strong interest in developing a farmers' market. Extension responded by organizing and managing a farmers' market beginning in the summer of 2009. The market had a successful first season, and a Rapid Market Assessment (RMA) was conducted by Extension that September, which recorded 26 vendors participating, 222 market visitors, and an estimated \$1,800 in sales. RMA is a technique developed by Oregon State University Extension for gaining valuable information on the performance of farmers' markets (Lev et al. 2004).

While the market has been in continuous operation during the summer months for the last four years, market management has gone through some major transitions, there is a concern with a perceived decline in market participation, and there has been no assessment of the market since its first year. The Orofino Farmers' Market Board of Directors approached Extension with the desire to conduct an RMA in 2012, to gain current information about the market, including vendor and client preferences and concerns, in order to help the board improve their management of the market, and make any changes to market governance that might help the market grow.

Our Response

As a result of the board request for an RMA, Clearwater County and Nez Perce County Extension personnel planned and executed an RMA of the Orofino Farmers' Market on September 25 of 2012. Extension staff were assisted with data collection by Orofino Farmers' Market board members and volunteers as well as by the market manager of the Lewiston, Idaho farmers' market. Other volunteers from the local community assisted with market surveys.



Debi Bordoni chats with customers at her Orofino Farmers Market booth.

Extension staff analyzed the data and produced a report of the assessment that was distributed to members of the Orofino Farmers' Market Board of Directors and others interested in the market.

Program Outcomes

The assessment found that 120 people visited the market on the day of the assessment spending an estimated \$1,452, with 93% of market visitors spending \$20.00 or less. Approximately 45% of market visitors said that the market prompted them to visit other Orofino businesses that day, indicating a positive impact of the market on other Orofino businesses. Most respondents to the market visitor survey indicated that the prices were about right, but wanted to see more fresh produce and entertainment/events at the market. Over 80% of market visitors were local (Orofino, Clearwater County, or Peck).

Vendor surveys and market observer surveys indicated positive views about the market location, atmosphere, and quality of products, but also expressed concerns about market layout, need for better vendor signage and parking, as well as a desire for more events, advertising, and publicity to draw more customers. Vendors expressed satisfaction with current market policies and fee structure.

Comparisons between the 2009 and 2012 assessments indicate the market has lost vendors and visitors, and the average amount spent by market visitors has declined from \$16.25 to \$12.10. While some of these changes could be explained in part by the slow recovery from the economic recession, other factors that are discussed in the RMA report may require the attention of the market board.

The Orofino Farmers Market Association and Board of Directors now have current information by which to make decisions regarding market governance and promote initiatives to improve and grow the market in 2013 and beyond.

Literature Cited

Lev, Larry, Linda Brewer, and Gary Stephenson. 2004. Oregon Small Farms Technical Report: Tools for Rapid Market Assessments. Report No. 6. Oregon State University Extension Service.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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