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Case Study of Ohio Direct Marketing Farmers Selling at One or More Farmers Markets

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Through the support of USDA SARE Professional Development Program, the Ohio State University Extension’s Direct Marketing Program in collaboration with Farmers Market Coalition and Ohio Farmers Market Network, a case study of direct marketing farmers who sell at one or more farmers markets in Ohio was conducted. The study was conducted to help Ohio farmers market managers, extension educators, and other supporters of farmers market to better understand why direct marketers choose to sell at a particular farmers market. This report shares the results of the Case Study.



INTRODUCTION

Working with OFMN and searching online through websites, social media, and other platforms, a database of Ohio farmers markets was developed. This database was used to help identify 15 direct marketing farmers to participate in the Case Study. Each participant was asked 14 questions by the interviewer conducting the study. Participants were asked the question and responses were recorded in Qualtrics. Most of the questions were open-ended to allow for the direct marketers to share information in their own words. Once all 15 interviews were conducted, the information was compiled in a Word Cloud to help share the results.



Photos by Anna Adams

OVERVIEW OF RESPONSES

15 individual direct marketing farmers participated in the study. These individuals sell at 1 to 9 farmers markets with the average selling at 3 farmers markets per week. The responses ranged from:

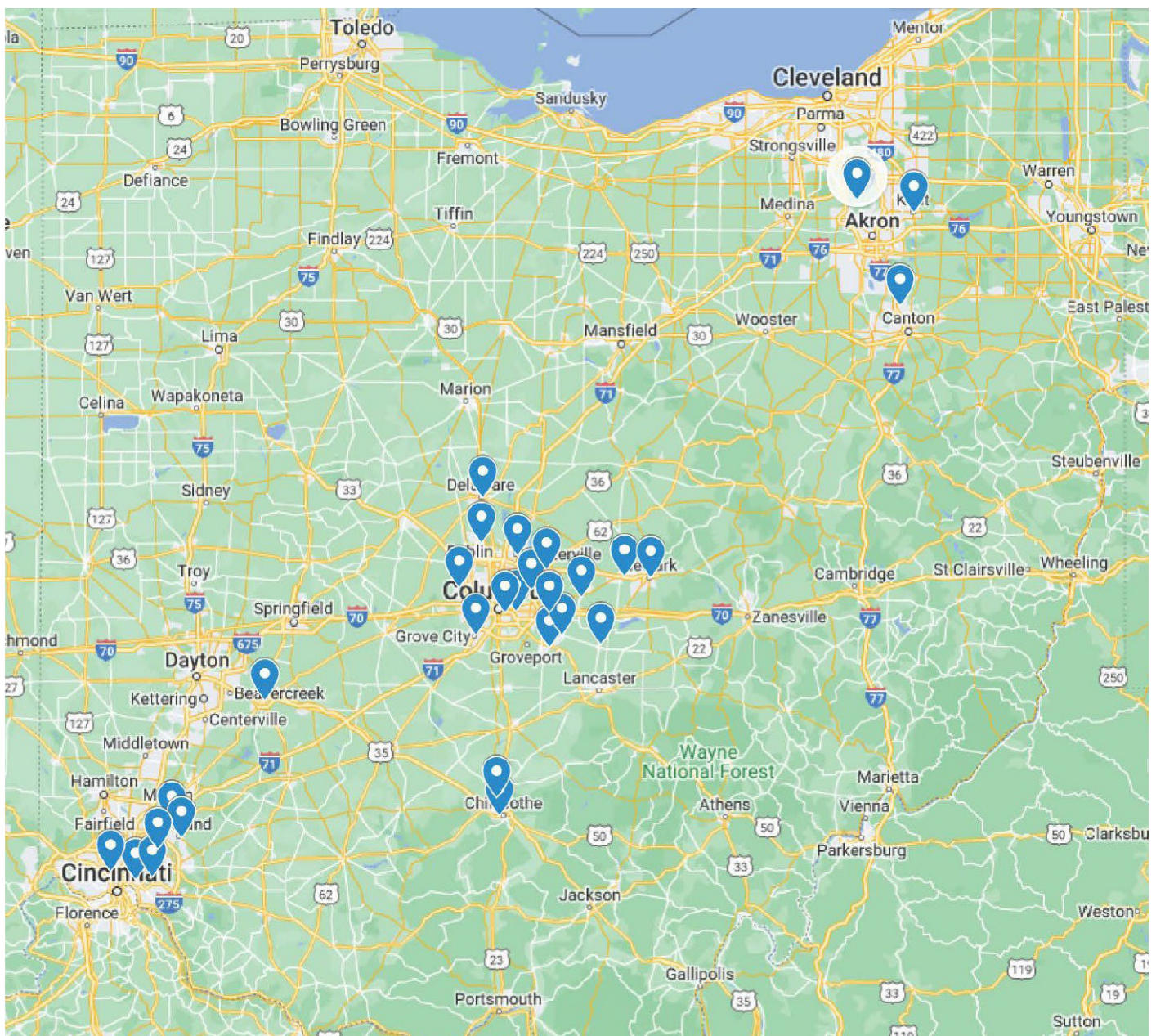
# direct marketing farmers	# of farmers markets at which they sell
2	1
3	2
9	3
1	4
1	9



The farmers markets at which the case study participants sell their products are:

- Athens Farmers Market
- Baltimore
- Bexley
- Canal Winchester
- Chillicothe
- Chillicothe Veterans Administration
- Cuyahoga National Park at Howell Meadow
- Deerfield
- Delaware
- Gahanna
- Granville
- Grove City
- Haymaker
- Hillard
- Hyde Park
- Loveland
- Mariemont
- Montgomery
- Nationwide Childrens
- New Albany
- Newark Canal Market
- North Canton
- Northside
- Pataskala
- Pickerington
- A Pop-Up Farmers Market
- Powell
- Reynoldsburg
- Westerville
- Xenia

Locations of the farmers market location at which the 15 direct marketing farmers participate.



The products the participants produce and/or sell includes:

Note: Some vendors sell more than one product type.

Produce	8
Meat, poultry	4
Eggs	3
Cottage foods	3
Value-added products	6
Maple Syrup	2
Honey and value-added honey items	3
Other which includes coffee, flowers, soap & lotions, and pet treats	12



Photo by Anna Adams

To help farmers markets supporters, managers, and educators better understand why a direct marketing farmer participates in a particular farmers market participants were asked, “How do you determine if a market is worth your time and energy?”

Responses included:

- Sales
- Sell Out
- CSA Pick Up
- Customers Suggest New Products
- Customers request they come to a specific market
- Market Location (close to producer)
- Cost of being at market compared to sales at market
- Profit margins
- Customer base of the market
- Number of regular customers at market
- Day of week
- Supportive Market Manager
- Competition at Market
- Customers pre-order and pick up



As the above image reflects, most respondents track sales and the number of regular customers when making their decision on whether a market is worth their time and energy. In addition, they indicated that customer requests for them to come to a market is also considered. However, it is crucial to note that this data is not always eagerly shared with their market partners; in many cases, market farmers report they do not want to share this business level data with their competitors at market. Therefore, this may be where Extension professionals can support markets: by collecting this data from farmers on behalf of the market organizer, they could then anonymize it in order to supply business impact data for market organizers to use for their program reporting and market day planning.

Respondents were asked what they measure to determine if they have had a successful day/season at a farmers market.

Responses included:

- Selling out of product
- Customer relations
- Communications with management and customers
- Sales
- Generate additional customers
- Sales year over year at that market
- Number of regular customers
- Relationships with customers, other vendors, manager
- Education
- Community service
- Market fees



Participants were asked how many years they have been selling at farmers markets. The number of years participants have been selling at farmers markets ranged from 1 to 28 with the average being 12.71 years.

# of Direct Marketing Farmers	# of Years Selling at Farmers Markets
2	<5
5	5-10
4	11-20
2	>20



Photo by Anna Adams

Part of the overall goal of this project has been to help farmers market stakeholders and supporters to better understand how to collect farmers market data and what to do with that data. This question was to try and understand what data if any the farmers markets at which the case study participants sell are currently collecting and using data.

Participants were asked if any of the farmers markets at which they sell ask them for information regarding their sales or number of customers on a given market day. Of the 28 markets at which the case study respondents participate, 10 markets ask for this information while the remaining 18 do not.

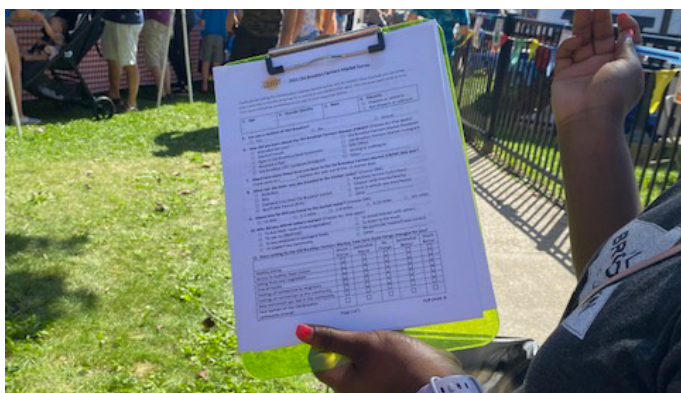


Photo by Darlene Wolnik/FMC

This provides an opportunity for extension educators to work with farmers market managers to help them understand why their vendors may be hesitant to share business data with them. This could provide an opportunity to provide education to both managers and vendors on why data collection can be a valuable tool for both management and vendors, clearly define what data is collected and why, and defining what is done with the information collected.

As a follow-up to this question, participants were asked if those markets that do request information from them supply any information back to them. Respondents indicated that 4 markets do provide information back but others do not. Responses to this question do not add up to the total number of markets represented. As many participants sell at more than one farmers market. Some of the responses were received from different vendors that sell at the same farmers market. Therefore, percentages do not necessarily translate to 100%. To better understand why vendors continue to participate in a market from year to year, they were asked how they decide whether or not to stay at a particular farmers market from year to year.

Photo by Anna Adams



Responses included:

- Location of the market
- Customer Counts
- The vendor feels welcome
- Costs to participate in the market
- Supportive management
- Sales
- Profitability
- Customer relationships
- Set start time
- Safe
- Fun
- Customer demographics
- Competition, how many similar vendors are at the market
- Number of New customers



Crocker Park Farmers Market. Photo by Darlene Wolnik/FMC

To gain understanding of how markets are managed, participants were asked whether or not they are involved in the governance of the farmers market. There is not sufficient information gathered from this case study to determine how vendor participating in market governance impacts the market. This could be an addition area of research to explore.

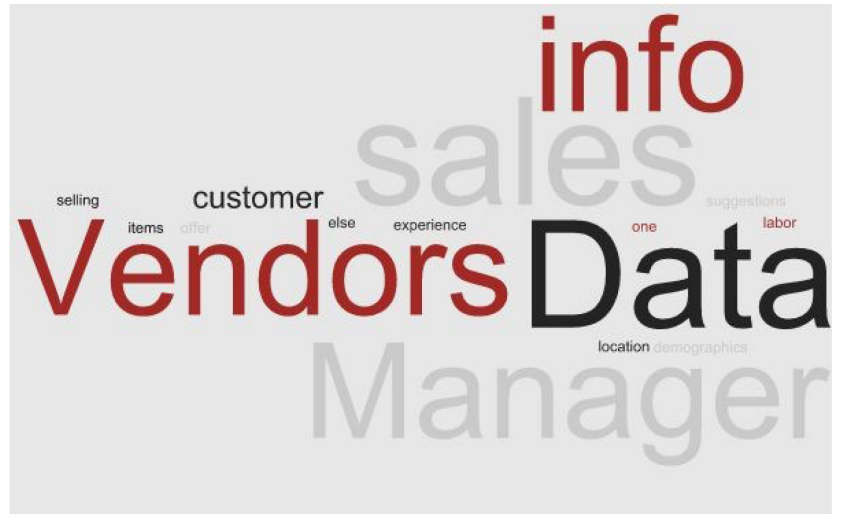
Responses included:

- Yes – 6, No – 9

To gather additional insight into the process by which vendors decide on which markets in which to participate, they were asked how they decide on the markets they attend and what products they sell.

Responses included:

- Track sales data 8 of the 15 respondents track sales as their first determinant of whether or not to sell at that market.



Additional information used to make the determination include:

- Get information from the market manager and/or other vendors
- Ask customers what they might like that isn't available
- Offer a couple of new products each season
- Demographics of market customers to determine if they fit the vendors target customer
- Ask customers for feedback/suggestions



Photo by Darlene Wolnik/FMC

To understand how important farmers markets are to the participating vendors, we asked what other market channels they are using? Responses were as follows:

Market Channel	# of Responses (Out of 15 total)
Farm Market	5
CSA (Community Supported Agriculture)	2
Local Grocery Store	3
Local Restaurant	5
Website/online store	6
Other: Craft show, health food store, Facebook Marketplace	3

To assist farmers market managers on how to best attract additional vendors for their markets, we asked participants what information they would like to receive from the market management to make decisions for their business?

Responses were broad including:

- Customer counts (How many customers regularly shop at the market)
- Number of Vendors (Including how many with similar products)
- Rules and regulations (both market and local and state)
- Events (How do they attract additional shoppers to the market)
- Nutrition Incentives (Are they accepted?)
- Who is shopping (Demographic information on shoppers)
- Customer location (Where do the customers come from)
- Year to Year Sales for the market as a whole
- Survey Customers (Do they gather feedback from customers)
- SNAP (Is SNAP accepted and how widely is it used)
- Vendor contacts
- Marketing (How does the farmers market promote itself)
- Budget (How are funds used to market the market)
- Vendor fees (How much does it cost to participate in the market)
- Number of Vendors (Average number over the season)
- Check list - does the market provide vendors a checklist of what is needed to sell at that market.



The responses to this question provide opportunity for farmers market managers, extension educators, and other stake holders to assist in gathering this information and compiling it into a useable form to share with potential farmers market vendors. The responses also provide information that could be used to develop educational programs for direct marketing farmers and food producers. This could be an opportunity for market managers and extension educators to collaborate to provide education specific to farmers market vendors.

Finally, we asked participants if there was any additional information you would like to share about selling at farmers markets?

Response included:

- Grant writing training
- Loans available
- Support community
- Healthy Eating Education
- More customers
- Customer education
- Hydroponic education
- Vendor highlights
- Enforce of existing market rules
- Long-term planning
- More Communication from Management
- Share Vendor feedback if it is collected
- Assigned spot each market day
- Balance types of vendors
- Food Safety Info



Farmers market in Kent, Ohio. Photo by Darlene Wolnik/FMC



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

Based on the feedback received from 15 direct marketing farmers who sell at one or more Ohio farmers markets, there are a few steps farmers market managers, extension educators, and other market supporters can take to help ensure the success of farmers markets across Ohio. And while this case study was limited to only 15 direct market farmers and are focused on markets along the I-71 corridor which includes the more populated areas of Ohio, some responses were consistent enough that we believe they may provide a fair representation of direct marketers that sell at farmers markets across the state. Based on the findings of this case study, the following recommendations are made:

- 1. Consider vendor sales:** Direct marketing farmers that sell at one or more farmers markets do so for the ability to generate sufficient sales during the farmers market. These regular sales lend to the overall success and profitability of the direct marketers' business. And like most small businesses that have limited time and resources, direct marketers will participate in those market channels where they have the greatest opportunity to profitably sell their products to consumers.
- 2. Ensure sufficient regular shoppers:** Markets should strive to have an adequate number of regular customers who shop at the farmers market. To do so, farmers markets need to be thoughtful about the vendors they have at their farmers market, have an effective marketing plan and budget to market the farmers market to attract and retain loyal shoppers, and should ensure that the market is welcoming not only to its customers but its vendors as well.
- 3. Improve communications with vendors:** Vendors are interested in all aspects of the farmers markets at which they sell. Information about what events are planned for the coming market day, what other vendors are planning to attend the market, and what marketing the farmers market is doing to attract customers are all information our participants indicated they would like to receive from the market management. This information can assist market vendors in planning what and how much product they will bring on any given day, assist with their ability to promote themselves and cross-promote the farmers market, and be prepared to meet customer expectations when a particular event is being held at the farmers market. Additionally, those respondents that indicated markets ask them for information would appreciate getting information back from the market. Information such as what was done with the information collected, does the information show the market is doing well or declining, and what customers are saying about the farmers market. In short, more communication helps the direct marketers feel welcome, valued, and that their success is important to the market management.
- 4. Gather customer feedback:** Respondents to the case study questions indicated the need for more information about who is shopping at the farmers market. Information that could be gathered includes demographic information, where the customers come from, and what products are not currently available at the farmers market that customers would like to purchase. And while farmers market managers also have limited time and resources, there are ways to collect data about the farmers market that do not have to be burdensome and time consuming. This information could help grow the businesses that sell at the farmers market which should lead to increased success for both the farmers market and the direct marketing farmers.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS:

Farmers markets are a critical market channel for many direct marketing farmers. The main criteria our participants use to determine which farmers markets they will participate in are sales and customer counts. Farmers markets looking to attract new vendors should keep this in mind and be prepared to share how they will accomplish attracting sufficient loyal shoppers to the farmers market.

Farmers markets should also research available resources to help collect and share information about the data that might be useful to their efforts. However, the amount of time and funding required to manage a data collection campaign is often beyond the capability of many low-staffing markets in Ohio. One strategy supported by this project is to engage Extension to assist with the collection and analysis of this data. Farmers Market Coalition has many tools and resources on their website to assist farmers markets and Extension in developing a strategy that would work for their situation. These resources include information on what data to collect, how to analyze the data, and infographic templates to assist in sharing the data with stakeholders.

In addition to these resources, Quick Guides have been developed to assist market managers with data collection and use. The quick guides can be found at farmersmarketmetrics.guide and soon at farmersmarketevaluation.org.



Countryside Howe Meadow. Photo by Darlene Wolnik/FMC

APPENDIX

Case Study of Ohio Direct Marketers Selling at one or more farmers' markets

Q1 At how many farmers markets do you sell your products?

Q2 Please provide the names of the farmers markets and the number of years you have participated in each.

Q3 What products do you sell?

- Produce (1)
- Meat, poultry (2)
- Eggs (3)
- Dairy (4)
- Cottage foods (5)
- Value-added products (6)
- Maple Syrup (7)
- Honey (8)
- Other (9) _____

Q4 How do you determine if the market is worth your time and energy?

- Make more money than at other markets (1)
- Routinely sell out of product (2)
- Offer CSA Pick up (3)
- Introduce new products per customer suggestions (4)
- Other (5) _____

Q5 What is a measure of success for you at the farmers market?

Q6 Number of years you have been selling at farmers markets.

Q7 Do any of them ask you for information or input regarding your sales or numbers of customers?

Q8 Do any of them supply you with summary information for the farmers market (customer counts, weather information, where customers come from, etc.)?

Q9 How do you decide which farmers markets at which you sell and whether or not you stay at that market from year to year?

Q10 Are you involved in the governance of the market? (i.e. – serve on board, volunteer, manager, committee, or related?)

Q11 How do you make decisions on farmers markets you attend and products you offer?

I collect sales and marketing information (1)

I get information from market manager, other vendors, or extension professionals (2)

Other (3) _____

Q12 Where else are you selling your products?

Farm Market (1)

CSA (2)

Local grocery stores (3)

Local restaurants (4)

Other (5) _____

Q13 What information would you like to receive from farmers markets in order to make decisions for your business?

Q14 Any additional information you wish to share?



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