

SUSTAINING FARMERS MARKETS IN LOW-INCOME, URBAN AREAS:  
EXPLORING FARMER PARTICIPATION AND MARKET DEVELOPMENT

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Horticulture  
Community, Agriculture, Recreation and Resource Studies

2012

## ABSTRACT

### SUSTAINING FARMERS MARKETS IN LOW-INCOME, URBAN AREAS: EXPLORING FARMER PARTICIPATION AND MARKET DEVELOPMENT

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Farmers markets are an important access point for fresh, nutritious foods. Regrettably, markets are especially vulnerable to failure in low-income areas where there is often limited access to healthy food options (Fisher, 1999; Markowitz, 2010; PPS 2003; Winne, 2008). To date, little is known about farmers' perspectives and experiences regarding participation in these markets or how these markets address challenges during their early years of establishment. The objective of this study is to explore three complementary research questions. First, what motivates farmers to participate in farmers markets in low-income, urban areas? Second, what is the process of development for small, early-stage farmers markets in these communities? Third, what are farmers' attitudes regarding Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) programs in place at these farmers markets?

A qualitative, case study approach was used. This study is grounded in an ethnographic approach and relies upon the methodology of participant observation. Using purposeful sampling (Maxwell, 2012; Patton, 2002), three cities were selected as low-income, urban areas. Within each city, two early-stage farmers markets were identified for a total of six case study markets. Market managers and 32 farmers from the selected markets were interviewed between October 2010 and April 2012. Interviews lasted between 45 and 150 minutes and were conducted using structured, open-ended interview guides (IRB# 10-495). Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. A coding system was developed to identify recurring themes using QSR NVivo 9. Data were summarized by theme into displays for systematic analysis.

Regarding the first research question, results indicate that farmers' decisions to participate in farmers markets located in low-income, urban areas differ based on their individual circumstances and motivations. What emerged, however, were patterns in how different types of farmers weigh their economic and lifestyle goals. Different types of farmers were identified based on their motivations for participating in these markets as their primary motivations influence the choices and commitments they make regarding market participation. Farmers who relied on farmers markets for their livelihood exhibited high rates (80%) of drop-out. Farmers with primarily lifestyle motivations, on the contrary, were more likely to sustain their participation in farmers markets in low-income, urban areas.

Next, this research explored farmers market development. Results suggest that the development of small, early-stage farmers markets in low-income, urban areas is distinct from that presented in the literature. These markets require complex forms of management to achieve a balanced and diverse product mix. Additionally, the development process requires a flexible and emergent approach that allows markets' policies to evolve in a way that supports a committed vendor mix.

Three main themes emerged regarding farmers' attitudes on EBT programs. First, farmers have a positive attitude regarding EBT. Second, farmers have a positive attitude about EBT programs in farmers markets because they are simple and convenient. Finally, farmers believe that when a farmers market accepts food assistance benefits it attracts new customers therefore expanding the market's customer base. Overall, this body of work provides insights into farmers' perspectives and market development that can be considered by food system scholars, state and federal policymakers, and market organizers interested in farmers markets in low-income, urban areas.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The publication of this dissertation and the process leading up to it would not have been possible without the incredible support I received from so many individuals and organizations. I would like to recognize and thank my committee: Drs. Kimberly Chung, Bridget Behe, Jim Bingen and Frank Fear. Kim, thank you for working alongside me as I developed a research project that has both scholarly and practical applications. I appreciate your willingness to embrace a project that overlapped with my work in the farmers market world and your ability to help me devise research questions that are important to me personally and professionally. I would not have made it to the end any other way. You had faith that I would be able to take real-life, on-the-ground problems, design a research study to explore them, and use our findings to advance the farmers market literature. We did. Bridget, thank you for believing in my ability to expand my horticulture background into an interdisciplinary program and research project. I appreciate your guidance in communicating my results to the horticulture industry and in finding a graduate path that worked for me. Jim, thank you sharing countless pieces of farmers market wisdom as we worked together to start a Michigan Farmers Market Association and then this research project. Frank, thank you for your insights and advice on organizing and writing the papers included in this dissertation. To all of you, thank you for dealing with the ups and downs that come with a nontraditional path. During this doctoral program, you allowed me to balance my graduate program with my full-time work at MIFMA, starting a farm, and raising a young family – and I am thankful for that.

I am grateful to the many others that helped me during this process. To the market managers and farmers that I interviewed as part of this research, I thank you for your time, your knowledge, your willingness to share, your candidness and your humor. To my fellow graduate

students who have read and commented on my drafts, especially Lindsay Way and Rebecca Mino, thank you. My sincere thanks goes to my MIFMA family who has supported my graduate experience from the very beginning. To our Board, our staff, our committee chairs and all of our volunteers, thank you for teaching me something new about farmers markets every single day and for your collaborative spirit as we strive to advance farmers market in Michigan. I am indebted to my family for their incredible support, for their encouragement, for their willingness to let me work early and late and on weekends. To Adam, thank you for your commitment to accomplishing our dreams together. I couldn't have done this without you. To Lydia and Alison, thank you for teaching me life lessons that a graduate program never could. I remember when I was a little girl. My mom told me that I could be whatever I wanted when I grew up, that I should follow my dreams. My dad showed me that I would need to work hard. You inspire me every day. To our parents, I appreciate you more and more every day. Thank you for every single thing you do for us and for helping out when we need it most.

Special thanks goes to the individuals and organizations that provided funding for my doctoral program and this research: Dr. Mike Hamm, Michigan State University (MSU) C.S. Mott Predoctoral Fellowship in Sustainable Agriculture; North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Graduate Student Grant; MSU Graduate School Dissertation Completion Fellowship; MSU College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (CANR) Office of Diversity and Pluralism; Dr. Kimberly Chung; Dr. Bridget Behe; MSU CANR Summer Research Fellowship; MSU Department of Community, Agriculture, Recreation and Resource Studies Graduate Office Fellowship; MSU Department of Horticulture Graduate Research Fellowship; MSU Graduate School Fellowship; MSU Council of Graduate Students Conference Grant.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

CSA - Community Supported Agriculture

EBT - Electronic Benefits Transfer

FMC - Farmers Market Coalition

FMNP - Farmers Market Nutrition Program

FNS - Food and Nutrition Service

IRB - Institutional Review Board

MIFMA - Michigan Farmers Market Association

POSD - Point of Sale Device

PPS - Project for Public Spaces

SNAP - Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

USDA - United States Department of Agriculture

WIC - Women, Infants, and Children

## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

A farmers market is a public and recurring assembly of farmers or their representatives who sell food or agricultural products they produce directly to consumers. In addition, farmers markets may include a variety of other vendors as determined by market management [Michigan Farmers Market Association (MIFMA), 2012a]. Farmers markets are credited with providing a range of benefits from promoting small and mid-sized farm viability to strengthening communities (Abel et al., 1999; Ross, 2006). Considering these benefits and the growing popularity of locally-grown foods (Keeling-Bond et al., 2009; Zepeda and Li, 2006), the increase in the number of farmers markets across the country is not surprising. Since 1994, the number of farmers markets in the United States increased more than 300 percent from 1,755 to 7,175 in 2011 [United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), 2012]. The trend is similar in Michigan with the number of farmers markets growing from 90 in 2001 to more than 300 in 2012 (MIFMA, 2012b).

Despite this growth, a number of farmers markets fail (Stephenson, 2008). Regrettably, farmers markets located in low-income areas are especially vulnerable to failure [Fisher, 1999; Markowitz, 2010; Project for Public Spaced (PPS), 2003; Winne, 2008]. These markets are often established by food security advocates who seek to improve access to affordable, fresh foods for low-income populations (Guthman et al., 2006; Markowitz, 2010). Unfortunately, the goal of offering affordable prices to market shoppers frequently conflicts with efforts to provide farmers with a fair price (Guthman et al., 2006; Markowitz, 2010; Winne, 2008). This tension can lead to serious challenges with respect to farmers' participation and commitments to these markets. In particular, farmers markets in low-income areas often struggle with high farmer and vendor turnover rates (Alkon, 2008; Fisher, 1999). Additionally, little is known specifically

about farmers market development in low-income, urban areas. The two current theories for market development suggest that vendor professionalism and market size signal market development (Lloyd et al., 1987; Stephenson, 2008); however, neither of these are specific to farmers markets located in low-income communities.

Therefore, this dissertation explores farmers' perspectives and experiences regarding participation in these markets and the development processes of these markets. Additionally, I explore one specific strategy for farmers markets in low-income areas, the implementation of Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) programs. The following research questions are addressed in three papers:

1. What motivates farmers to participate in farmers markets located in low-income, urban areas? Why do they choose these markets? What sustains farmers' interests in these markets?
2. What is the process of development for small, early-stage farmers markets in low-income, urban areas? What does this say about the theory of farmers market development for these markets?
3. What are farmers' attitudes regarding EBT programs in place at these farmers markets?

A qualitative, case study approach was used. Given my personal and professional involvement with farmers markets, this study is grounded in a methodology of participant observation. Using purposeful sampling (Maxwell, 2012; Patton, 2002), three cities were selected as low-income, urban areas. Within each city, two case study farmers markets were identified in early-stages of development (Andreatta and Wickliffe II, 2002; Lloyd et al., 1987) for a total of six case study markets. Market managers and 32 farmers were interviewed between October 2010 and April 2012. Interviews lasted between 45 and 150 minutes and were

conducted using structured, open-ended interview guides (approved by the Social Science/Behavioral/Education Institutional Review Board at Michigan State University; IRB# 10-495; see Appendix). Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. A coding system was developed to identify recurring themes. QSR NVivo 9 (QSR International, Doncaster, Australia), a qualitative analysis software, was used to manage the data. Data were summarized into displays for systematic analysis.

The first paper, *Farmers' Decision-making Regarding Farmers Market Participation in Low-income, Urban Areas* examines farmers' motivations, choices and interest in farmers markets located in low-income, urban areas. Both the sustainable agriculture and small business literatures suggest that farmers and small business owners' decisions differ based on either economic or lifestyle motivations. This paper, based on in-depth interviews with 32 farmers selling at the six case study farmers markets, indicates that farmers' decisions differ based on their individual circumstances and motivations. Different types of farmers were identified based on their motivations for participating in these markets. These primary motivations influence the choices and commitments farmers make regarding farmers market participation. Farmers who relied on farmers markets to support their livelihoods had financial expectations that led to high rates (80%) of drop-out. Farmers seeking business opportunities or with strong lifestyle motivations, in contrast, were more likely to sustain their participation in farmers markets in low-income, urban areas. Understanding farmers' primary motivations generated novel insights regarding farmers' decision-making and farmers market participation.

The second paper, *Development of Small, Early-stage Farmers Markets in Low-income, Urban Areas*, addresses the process of development that takes place in the six case study farmers markets. The literature on farmers market development suggests two theories for farmers market

development. Taken together, they suggest that increased size, in terms of vendor numbers and management complexity, and the professionalization of market vendors signal market development (Lloyd et al., 1987; Stephenson, 2008). In this paper, I argue that these theories are not appropriate for small, early-stage markets in low-income communities. Evidence from this study suggests that these markets can remain small and focus on achieving a mix of vendors who provide a diverse product offering. The results also suggest that these markets require management structures that are more complex than currently presented in the literature. Market leaders must customize the market's vendor base and allow policies to evolve through an emergent process of practice.

The third paper, *Using a Case Approach to Assess Farmers' Attitudes Regarding Central Terminal Model Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) Programs at Selected Michigan Farmers Markets*, investigates farmers' attitudes regarding EBT. Scholar practitioners who work with farmers markets in low-income areas recognize the importance of accepting food assistance programs via EBT. Farmers are an instrumental part of how well these programs work and as such their attitudes influence further expansion. Results from this portion of the study indicate that farmers have a positive attitude regarding EBT programs because they are simple and convenient. Additionally, farmers believe that when a farmers market accepts food assistance benefits it attracts new customers therefore expanding the market's customer base. The findings offer a foundation for future research on this topic as well as offer practical lessons for market managers.

Overall, the themes that emerged provide insights into farmers' perspectives and market development that can be of use to food system scholars, state and federal policymakers, and market organizers interested in farmers markets in low-income, urban areas.

## **Chapter 2. Farmers' Decision-making Regarding Farmers Market Participation in Low-income, Urban Areas**

### **Introduction**

Farmers markets throughout the United States face challenges associated with rapid growth in the industry. Since 1994, the number of farmers markets has increased dramatically from 1,755 to 7,175 in 2011 [United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), 2012]. Among the most pressing concerns with this growth are the recruitment and retention of farmers, the “backbone” of these markets (Fisher, 1999). Testament to the magnitude of this problem is the national Farmers Market Coalition’s (FMC) focus on “growing” new farmers.<sup>1</sup> Acknowledging that farmers are one of the “most limited resources” to farmers market growth, FMC has stressed the need for partners to find ways that markets can be successful “without poaching or infringing on other markets” or increasing pressures on current farmers (FMC, 2009).

The challenges that farmers markets face are even more pronounced in low-income, urban areas where markets are especially vulnerable to failure [Fisher, 1999; Markowitz, 2010; Project for Public Spaces (PPS), 2003]. Farmers markets in these areas are often established due to the work of food security advocates who seek to improve access to affordable fresh foods for low-income populations (Guthman et al., 2006; Markowitz, 2010). Unfortunately, the goal of offering affordable prices to market shoppers frequently conflicts with efforts to provide farmers with a fair price based on their real costs of production (Guthman et al., 2006; Markowitz, 2010; Winne, 2008). This tension can lead to serious challenges with respect to farmers’ participation and commitments to these markets. In particular, farmers markets in low-income areas often

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<sup>1</sup> “Growing Farmers” was identified as one of twelve priorities at the 2007 National Farmers Market Summit where 75 key farmers market stakeholders convened for a national interchange on the issues and challenges farmers markets faced (Tropp and Barham, 2008).

struggle with high farmer and vendor turnover rates (Alkon, 2008; Fisher, 1999). Fisher (1999), for example, cites a case in which a farmers market in a low-income area had 30 farmers on opening day and only three or four farmers 10 weeks later.

Farmer participation is, therefore, important to the survival and development of markets located in low-income areas. Yet, little is known about the farmers who choose to participate in these markets or what sustains their interest. This paper therefore explores the following research questions: Who are these farmers and what motivates them to participate in farmers markets located in low-income, urban areas? Why do they choose these markets? What sustains farmers' interests in these markets? To our knowledge, there have been no studies on this topic.

This work takes a qualitative approach. To understand farmer decision-making in the context of farmers market participation, this work relies on in-depth interviews with farmers as well as participant observation. The work highlights farmers' perspectives and aims to develop a practical theory on farmer participation that takes into account the complexity of farmer decision-making. The ultimate goal is to inform the farmers market literature as well as the practice of farmers market management.

## **Literature Review**

In general, the farmers market literature is diverse and fragmented. Within this literature, a limited number of peer-reviewed studies have specifically explored farmer and vendor participation in farmers markets. Topics focused on farmer and vendor participation include: surveys on vendor characteristics and experiences (Govindasamy et al., 1998; Griffin and Frongillo, 2003; Hughes and Mattson, 1992), farmer satisfaction regarding sales (Brown et al., 2007; Govindasamy et al., 2003), business and economic development opportunities (Feenstra et al., 2003; Lyson et al., 1995), farmers' goals and behaviors regarding environmental and social

justice (Alkon, 2008), and the nature of interactions between farmers and consumers (Andreatta and Wickliffe II, 2002; Baber and Frongillo, 2003; Hinrichs et al., 2004; Hunt, 2007). There are no studies, however, that focus entirely on the issue of how farmers make choices about farmers market participation. Consequently, there is little literature on the reasons, benefits or motivations that farmers and vendors associate with selling at farmers markets. In addition, the findings that do exist are usually in the form of isolated statistics or descriptive sidelights to studies that are focused on other aspects of farmers markets. These findings are highly fragmented and span many different dimensions and disciplines. They therefore do not provide a framework that helps to explain farmer decision-making in this context.

The literature does suggest that farmers involved in farmers markets are motivated by more than economic factors. Farmers markets are certainly an important source of income for farmers and some perceive them to offer opportunities for greater financial return than other outlets (Andreatta and Wickliffe II, 2002; Govindasamy et al., 1998; Griffin and Frongillo, 2003; Hughes and Mattson, 1992; Hunt, 2007; Lyson et al., 1995). Nonetheless, economic motivations are intimately linked to social motivations (Andreatta and Wickliffe II, 2002; Govindasamy et al., 2003; Griffin and Frongillo, 2003; Henneberry and Agustini, 2002; Hilchey et al., 1992; Hinrichs, 2001; Hughes and Mattson, 1992; Hunt, 2007; Lyson et al., 1995). For instance, Andreatta and Wickliffe II (2002) find that farmers selling at a farmers market did so because they could get a better price and because they valued the personal interaction with consumers. The importance of social interaction with market shoppers and fellow vendors is a common finding (Andreatta and Wickliffe II, 2002; Govindasamy et al., 1998; Griffin and Frongillo, 2003; Hughes and Mattson, 1992; Hunt, 2007; Lyson et al., 1995). Personally, farmers also identify psycho-social benefits such as feelings of personal satisfaction and fulfillment of selling



at farmers markets (Griffin and Frongillo, 2003). These findings are consistent with the larger literature on civic agriculture and illustrate the embeddedness of economic decision-making with farmers' social interests (Hinrichs, 2000; Lyson, 2004).

The farmers market literature does not yet explore the relative importance of the factors farmers consider when they make decisions about which farmers markets to attend, nor does it provide any theory to explain the underlying decision-making process. Therefore, we look to other related literatures. The sustainable agriculture literature explores farmers' motivations and decision-making regarding adoption of environmental conservation practices. In particular, researchers have developed typologies defined by farmers' underlying goals, values, or motivations to understand how farmers may respond to conservation policies.

While many farmer typologies exist, three categories of motivations, attitudes or values are commonly referenced in this literature: economic, conservation, and lifestyle. Economic motivations or goals are typically contrasted with lifestyle motivations (Maybery et al., 2005; Peterson et al., 2012). Typically, economic motivations are identified by a strong interest in optimizing financial returns. In contrast, lifestyle aspects of farming (Austin et al., 1996; Maybery et al., 2005) focus on the benefits of raising children in a farm setting or the peace and quiet of a rural environment. A third category is defined by their motivations or interests in conservation or stewardship practices (Maybery et al., 2005; Peterson et al., 2012). Lifestyle motivations and conservation motivations are nonfinancial aspects of farming that are often contrasted with economic motivations (Austin et al., 1996; Maybery et al., 2005, Petrzela et al. 1996, Peterson et al., 2012).

The typologies presented in the sustainable agriculture literature are important to this study for two reasons. First, they explore how farmers think about various goals and motivations

associated with farming. In particular, they provide empirical support for the idea that farmers distinguish between economic and lifestyle motivations to farm (Austin et al., 1996; Mayberry et al., 2005). Lifestyle and conservation motivations, however, are not as separable. Mayberry et al. (2005), for example, conducted a principle component analysis and found that lifestyle and conservation goals tend to load on the same component, while economic motivations tend to load onto a separate, orthogonal component. This finding suggests that conservation and lifestyle motivations co-vary among farmers, but they are distinct from economic motivations. While the authors found evidence for distinct sets of economic and lifestyle/conservation categories of values, they did not find empirical support for dividing farmers into mutually exclusive groups defined by these categories. These results support findings by Austin et al. (1996) and suggest that farmers distinguish between economic and lifestyle or conservation motivations, but are not defined by one set of motivations to the exclusion of the other. In short, farmers can hold multiple motivations.

Second, this work is consistent with other findings from the sustainable agriculture literature. Decision-making is a complex process during which individuals assess multiple factors (Ahnstrom et al., 2008; Chouinard et al., 2008; Cranfield et al., 2010; Danhofer et al., 2005; Gilg and Battershill, 1999; Hilimire, 2012; Kallas et al., 2010; Reimer et al., 2012; Schoon and Te Grotenhuis, 2000; Willock et al., 1999). Typologies developed in the sustainable agriculture literature, therefore, highlight the multi-dimensional nature of farmer motivations and behaviors (Barnes et al., 2011; Brodt et al., 2006; Emtage et al., 2006; Mayberry et al., 2005), but have not been useful for categorizing actual farmers. One possible explanation is that the typology work relies on a deductive development of farmer categories. Specifically, Mayberry et al. (2005) and Austin et al. (1996) rely on farmer responses to motivation and values statements

that were developed by researchers, rather than contextualized explanations of motivations provided by the farmers themselves. As a result, the practical weakness of the typologies underscores the need for a working theory that takes into account the complexity and authenticity of the farmer decision-making process.

Outside of the sustainable agriculture literature, the small business literature also acknowledges the complexity of decision-making, but draws on a tradition of case study research to allow for the uniqueness of individual motivations and constraints. Researchers regularly use qualitative methods to explore the particular process of decision-making within various cases. Doing so allows researchers to understand the process inductively, rather than trying to deductively determine categories of motivations through surveys and multidimensional statistical analysis. Motivations are cited as an important means to understanding decision-making and can often explain seemingly inconsistent behaviors by entrepreneurs (Wasserman, 2012). At the same time, the small business literature offers frameworks with concepts that are similar to the sustainable agriculture literature. This literature contrasts economic motivations with lifestyle motivations and offers explanations that can inform an exploration of how farmer-vendors make decisions.

The small business literature includes a framework that contrasts three types of owners: the classical owner who is motivated by financial return, the manager who is motivated by business growth and recognition of excellence, and the artisan who is motivated by personal satisfaction (Stanworth and Curran, 1976). Other classification structures offer slight modifications to this terminology such as the promotion, administrative and craft categories by Filley and Aldag's (1978) and the promoter, professional manager and craft categories by

Hornaday (1990). These typologies contrast businesses that are focused on profit maximization, organizational or business growth, and lifestyle goals.

More recently, Bridge et al. (2003) proposed three categories of firms termed comfort-zone, growth, and lifestyle, while Collins (2009) differentiated among salary-substitute, entrepreneurial, and lifestyle firms. Comfort-zone and salary-substitute firms are founded to provide owners with a satisfactory level of income. In the case of salary-substitute firms, the terminology refers to the founder's motivation to replace the income that would be earned if s/he worked for another employer. For example, a manager of a convenience store may decide to open his or her own convenience store for personal reasons such as working in closer proximity to home. This business is successful if the owner is able to make the salary s/he was accustomed to as a store manager (Lanivich, 2011). This contrasts with growth and entrepreneurial firms that would be characterized as successful if they produced a higher income or profits.<sup>2</sup>

Lifestyle firms allow owners to make a living while pursuing a profession that is closely aligned with their personal values, beliefs, interests or passions (Bridge et al., 2003; Collins, 2009; Henricks, 2002; Marcketti, 2006; Nelson et al., 2012). Lifestyle firms occur frequently in the arts or leisure sectors where owners are committed to pursuing their passion as a career rather than find a profession to support their livelihood (Bridge et al., 2003). A distinctive aspect of these lifestyle businesses is that there is a strong interaction between aspects of the business and all other domains of the owner's life (Bridge et al., 2003; Claire, 2012; Lewis, 2008; Nelson et al., 2012; Tregear, 2005). Owners need the business to be successful if they are to achieve a

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<sup>2</sup> In this classification, entrepreneurs are defined as business owners who identify missing needs or services, take on risk, and create demand or opportunity for their innovative products (Collins, 2009). However, the term "entrepreneur" has yet to be clearly defined in the small business literature (Burns, 2007). It has both narrow and broad definitions where some authors narrowly focus on potential for high growth and others broadly focus on creativity and innovation in the small business sector (Lowe and Marriott, 2006).

desired lifestyle, but they do not seek continued growth and market expansion. Across these different classification systems, the common conclusion is that businesses differ and business decisions differ according to the owners underlying motivations to start their business (Bridge et al., 2003; Hornaday, 1990). As such, different business motivations ultimately influence the way a business behaves.

In sum, little is known about why farmers choose to participate in farmers markets in low-income areas. The sustainable agriculture and small business literatures provide frameworks for decision-making that may be adopted to explore farmer decision-making. In particular, both indicate that motivations are important to decision-making and that these motivations may be used to explain farmers' ultimate decisions regarding market participation.

## **Methods**

Qualitative inquiry is suitable for areas of study in which theory is not yet well defined because it seeks rich data, characterized by depth and detail, as a means to develop an emergent theory informed by the perspectives of those involved in the study (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008; Maxwell, 2012; Patton, 2002). A case study approach was applicable as it took into account the context surrounding farmers' decisions (Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995). Using purposeful sampling techniques (Maxwell, 2012; Patton, 2002), three Michigan cities representing geographically distinct areas of the state with more than 20 percent of the population at or below the poverty level were included in this study. Within each city, two case study farmers markets were identified in early-stages of development (Andreatta and Wickliffe II, 2002; Lloyd et al., 1987) for a total of six case study markets. Each pair of markets is located in close proximity to a thriving, well-established farmers market in the low-income area and a short distance from farmers markets in more affluent areas. Proximity to established and successful markets was

important because it allowed farmers to discuss their relative interest in markets that were in low-income areas as well as more affluent communities.

### ***Data Collection***

In-depth interviews were conducted with 32 farmers who had experience with at least one of the six case study farmers markets. In-depth interviews were chosen because of their strength in providing descriptive and explanatory data based on first-hand knowledge, experience and perceptions pertaining to the research questions posed (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006). For the purposes of this research, farmers are defined as individuals or families who grow and sell edible crops for human consumption including, but not limited to, fruit, vegetables, meat, poultry, and dairy products. In small markets with less than 10 vendors, census sampling was used and interviews were requested with all farmers. In markets with more than 10 vendors, stratified random sampling (using a random number generator) was used to select participants with varying experiences including: (1) farmers that had been participating in the farmers market for two or more years, (2) farmers that were new to the market that season, and (3) farmers that had participated in the market at one time but no longer sold at that market.

Interviews were conducted between October 2010 and April 2012 using a structured, open-ended interview guide (approved by the Social Science/Behavioral/Education Institutional Review Board at Michigan State University; IRB# 10-495; see Appendix) to collect data on firsthand farming and farmers market experiences. The interview guide queried farmers about how they became involved in farming and farmers markets, the conditions that are most important to them when selling at farmers markets, and how they choose which farmers markets they will attend. Interviews lasted between 45 and 150 minutes yielding rich descriptions of their farming and market experience. With permission from participants, interviews were audio

recorded and transcribed verbatim. In exchange for participating in the study, farmers were provided with a \$25 cash honorarium.

### ***Data Analysis***

Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously as is recommended for inductive, qualitative work (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006; Miles and Huberman, 1994). Following each data collection, memos were written including details about the research participant, themes and concepts that emerged from the interview, and reflections on the process. A coding system was defined, and redefined, as themes and concepts emerged throughout the data collection process. These codes, or labels, were used to assign units of meaning to the descriptive text compiled during this study (Miles and Huberman, 1994). QSR NVivo 9.0 (QSR International, Doncaster, Australia), a qualitative research analysis software, was used for data management and retrieval throughout the analysis. Data were analyzed using the farm as the unit of analysis to take into account prior research that established the farm household as a decision-making unit (Ilbery et al., 1997).

Displays or matrices were formed around the research questions and emerging themes (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Initially, an informant-by-variable matrix was developed to allow for comparison between interviewees. A checklist matrix was then used to create a display that identified farms based on their motivations to participate in farmers markets. This matrix provided a basis for identifying patterns within groups of farmers characterized by different motivations. Finally, a conceptually clustered matrix was used to organize summaries on

farmers' motivations, decisions regarding market selection, and information on what sustains farmers' interest in farmers markets located in low-income, urban areas<sup>3</sup>.

## **Results and Discussion**

### ***Sample Overview***

The majority of farmers in this study have small agricultural operations. Seventy percent of the sample grow on less than 5 acres as prior research has shown is common for farmers market growers (Altman and Zube, 1989; Griffin and Frongillo, 2003; Larson and Gille, 1996). These farms represent different land ownership models including farmers that owned their land, farmers that rented or leased and farmers that both owned and rented.

Collectively, farmers' experiences cover a wide spectrum. They range in age from about 25 to 73 years old. The average number of years of agricultural experience across the sample is 20 years ranging from 5 to 70 years. All of the farmers with more than 100 acres in production have 10 or more years of agricultural experience. The average number of years of farmers market experience is 12 years ranging from one to 64 years. About half of those interviewed (48%) have 5 or fewer years of farmers market experience. Additionally, farmers exhibit a diversity of experience with the total number of farmers markets in which they participate ranging from one to 20 different markets. At the time of the study, farmers participated in an average of three farmers markets per week.

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<sup>3</sup> An informant-by-variable matrix is a simple matrix that captures a summary of responses for each respondent. This format allows for initial comparisons and preliminary sorting. A checklist-matrix is a partially ordered display in which data is analyzed based on a major variable of interest. A conceptually clustered matrix is a concept-oriented display that is organized around research questions (Miles and Huberman, 1994).



In addition to their farmers market experience, farmers were asked to describe their other marketing endeavors. While all of the farmers interviewed sell at or have sold at farmers markets, 78% of farms also sell through other retail or wholesale outlets which is consistent with prior research indicating farmers markets are often one part of a diversified sales strategy (Logozar and Schmit, 2009; Payne, 2002). Other retail or direct market outlets included Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), “work environment supported agriculture<sup>4</sup>,” on-farm sales, and u-pick. Some farmers also sell to restaurants, grocery stores, food cooperatives, or other farmers. Additionally, a number of farmers gave excess product away through either formal (e.g., food bank network) or informal (e.g., workplace giveaway) avenues. All farmers sell their own products and 41% also sell products from other farmers. Both produce and meat producers are included in this study, although the majority (89%) is vegetable and/or fruit growers.

During the course of interviews, farmers were not asked to disclose their farm or household income. However, farmers were asked about the role their farm plays in their livelihood strategy and if they rely on additional off-farm income to support themselves and their families. Three categories of strategies emerged from the data. Twenty-six percent depend on farming as their sole source of income. Seventy-four percent do not rely on farming as their sole source of income, of whom 37% rely on both farm and supplementary income and another 37% indicated that farm income is not critical to the household. Of those who indicated that farm income is not a critical economic contributor, 30% are non-profit organizations that use farming as an activity to support their mission but do not rely on agricultural sales to support their

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<sup>4</sup> One of the farms in this study developed a program for their employees. Their “work environment supported agriculture” program is similar in concept to a CSA, but the price of shares is reduced in order to account for employee labor. This program allows employees to share in the harvest.

programming. The 74% of farmers that do not rely on farming as their sole source of income had off-farm employment in addition to farming. This finding supports previous research indicating market growers usually have supplementary sources of employment (Griffin and Frongillo, 2003). A summary of farm characteristics is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Farm Characteristics (n=27)<sup>1</sup>

<b>Farm Characteristic</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>Acres in Production</b>		
One acre or less	9	33%
One to 5 acres	10	37%
6 to 50 acres	5	19%
More than 50 acres	3	11%
<b>Land Ownership</b>		
Own	16	59%
Rent/lease/borrow	3	11%
Combination of own/rent/lease/borrow	8	30%
<b>Products Produced</b>		
Fruits and vegetables (produce)	22	81%
Meat and/or poultry	3	11%
Produce and meats	2	8%
<b>Years of Farmers Market Experience</b>		
Less than five years	10	37%
Five to ten years	8	30%
More than ten years	9	33%
<b>Total Number of Farmers Markets Attended</b>		
Less than five farmers markets	15	56%
Five to ten farmers markets	9	33%
More than ten farmers markets	3	11%
<b>Sales Outlets</b>		
Farmers markets only	6	22%
Farmers markets and other retail or wholesale outlets	21	78%
<b>Sales Types</b>		
Producer-only, sell only what they produce	16	59%
Reseller, sell their products and other farmers	11	41%
<b>Dependence on Farming Operation</b>		
Farm fully supports their family and business	6	26%
Rely on off-farm income to support their family and business	11	37%
Farm income not critical	10	37%

<sup>1</sup>In-depth interviews with 32 farmers represented 27 farms.

### ***Who are the Farmers who Sell at Farmers Markets Located in Low-income, Urban Areas?***

To understand decision-making, farmers' narratives of how they came to participate in a farmers market in a low-income area were examined. In most cases this was not a simple answer, but in-depth interviewing allowed this explanation to come in a way that was connected to their experiences and in the context they make decisions regarding market participation. In particular, it allowed for understanding how farmers considered various competing interests and ultimately weighed those interests. Then, drawing on the concepts of economic and lifestyle motivations described in the sustainable agriculture and small business literatures, each farmer was categorized based on his/her primary or dominant motivation.

The data indicate that farmers have economic as well as lifestyle motivations for participating in these markets, as well as for farming in general. However, further analysis of the data also reveals patterns in how farmers weigh these economic and lifestyle goals. Four main categories emerged; two that are characterized by economic motivations and two that are characterized by lifestyle motivations. The four categories include farmers that: (1) farm as a livelihood strategy; (2) farm as a business opportunity; (3) farm for recreation and (4) farm for the public good. Each group differs in their primary motivations for farming, for selling at farmers markets in low-income, urban areas and in their overall commitment to these markets. Each is described below.

#### ***Farmers Motivated By Economic Interests***

These farmers displayed a strong interest in optimizing financial returns. Two distinct categories emerged.

### *Livelihood Strategy*

Farmers who farm as a livelihood strategy rely heavily on farm income to support their households. In this sample, these farmers were the minority; 5 of the farms interviewed were classified as pursuing a livelihood strategy. All of them farm full-time and for four of the 5 the farm is their sole source of household income.

When interviewed, farmers who farm as a livelihood strategy talked of finding farmers markets where they can “earn a living.” One farmer indicated that they were motivated to sell at the farmers market because it is a place where they can “actually earn more.” These farmers need to make enough to cover business costs and living expenses such as health insurance and costs associated with “putting the children through school.” However, during interviews these farmers stressed that they are not focused on “getting rich” but that they need to sell *enough* product at a market for it to be an economically viable option for them.

### *Business Opportunity*

By contrast, some farmers interviewed stated that they do not rely on farming income to support their household needs; selling at the farmers market is more of a business opportunity. These farmers still rely on off-farm income, or in a few cases they are able to rely on savings from prior careers to support their entry into farming. While these farmers do not rely on their farm to fully support their livelihood, this is a goal for approximately half of them. Thus, for some, these farmers markets are an entry point into farming as a livelihood strategy. This finding supports previous research that indicates agricultural enterprises often grow from a secondary business that provides minimal income to a main business that provides a primary source of income (McGehee, 2007).

More than half of these farmers who are motivated by a business opportunity share the common experience of a life transition. This transition was an impetus for farming. Most of these farmers discussed these transitional periods as they related a story about a change in occupation. They lost their job, quit their job, could not keep a job, or retired. For example, one farmer lost his job at the telephone company where he had been working for more than 28 years. He described his situation,

*I went into work one day at the phone company and they said they didn't need me no more. After twenty-eight and a half years, and I was escorted out...a human resources guy there gave me two cardboard boxes and that was it...in a way, I was kind of glad because it was getting uglier and uglier there...I guess today's environment it might be just like that. I mean you're asked to sleep with your pagers and your beepers, to be on call constantly. I was like, you know, I got a family too. So, I told my wife, I said, 'You know what? I'm going to pursue the farming a little bit more...so, the seed that was buried in me when I was a little boy started coming through, you know. And, we started back into farming.*

After losing his job, he was able to work part-time as a school bus driver which allowed him to do farm chores in between his school routes. While his circumstances are unique to his situation, the basis of his story was a common finding in this study. Farming and selling at farmers markets are business opportunities that also allow for flexibility around part-time, and even full-time, employment schedules.

In the small business literature, these transitional opportunities are explained as “triggers” that influence self-employment (Burns, 2007). There are “push” factors that are negative situations that act as a catalyst for self-employment such as disagreement with a superior, unemployment, or lack of employment options. For example, one farmer made his decision to farm after a falling out with his boss. He said,

*I wanted to farm, but I didn't have the time to establish it because I was working fulltime, more than fulltime. But, once that broke, I was in a position financially to go a couple of years on a sketchy income. I saved enough, and all that, and it seemed like a good pushing up point.*

There are also “pull” factors which are positive motivations including independence, the potential for personal achievement and development, and the opportunity for wealth. One farmer explained how she was seeking the security that she associated with owning land and farming it. She said, “The day after my profit sharing matured, I quit my job. It was right at that time that my uncle and aunt wanted to sell the farm. That was my down payment on the farm... It’s just a security thing for me.” Whether these farmers experienced a negative push or a positive pull, they all stressed that farming and selling at farmers markets is right for them because they find it personally satisfying. They contrasted farming to their prior work experiences and described it as meaningful, fulfilling and rewarding.

Although these farmers find farming personally satisfying, they are clear that the financial aspects need to be a priority in order for them to pursue it as a business opportunity. For these farmers, farmers market revenues need to support, at a minimum, business expenses and activities. Farmers indicated that even if they do not need the income to support themselves, they need to make enough money to reinvest to the point where it is an economically viable business venture. These findings complement other studies that indicate vendors identify farmers markets as important opportunities for business development as they provide a low-risk environment for starting or expanding a business (Feenstra et al., 2003). One of the main reasons farmer market vending is identified as low-risk is because it requires minimal capital investment.

#### *Farmers Motivated by Lifestyle Interests*

All farmers indicated that they consider multiple reasons for selling at these farmers markets. Yet, the relative importance of those interests or motivations is different among all farmers. For some farmers, financial returns are not their top priority. Rather, farming is closely

aligned with their personal or organizational interests or passions. In the study sample, there was evidence of two types of lifestyle farmers: those who farm for recreation and those who farm as public work.

#### *For Recreation*

For the individuals who farm for recreation, farm income is not critical. Instead, they identify pleasure, enjoyment and relaxation as their major motivation. On average, these farmers had less land in production and less market experience than others in the sample (Table 2). They all grow on less than one acre and self-identify as gardeners. They describe gardening as “relaxing,” “fun,” or an activity that they choose to do for enjoyment. This group of gardeners is most closely related to hobby farmers as described in the literature (Hughes and Mattson, 1992). These gardeners indicated during interviews that one of their challenges with vegetable gardening is the abundance of fresh vegetables they can raise on small plots of land. While these gardeners do produce food for their own consumption as well as enjoy giving food away, they feel a sense of “guilt” when fresh food they have harvested goes to waste. A farmers market therefore becomes an outlet for excess produce, a place where they can market their “overflow.” In addition, it gives gardeners who love the activity of growing things the “excuse” to grow more than they can consume without feeling guilty if it is wasted. One gardener explained,

*I think that the idea of selling at a farmers market gave me the excuse to go crazy and grow way more than I did before and that was double what I was growing...and to have someone that is actually going to eat that food instead of just wasting it...no matter how well I plan, I always grow way more than I can eat myself and I hate wasting it.*

#### *For Public Good*

The final group of farmer-vendors is motivated by civic intentions. They indicated that they use the activity of farming or gardening as a basis to accomplish other community-focused goals. All of these farms except one are organized as nonprofit organizations. In the remaining

Table 2. Comparison of Farm Characteristics for the Sample to Farmer-vendor Categories

Farm Characteristic	Livelihood Strategy (n=5)		Business Opportunity (n=13) <sup>5</sup>		Recreation (n=5)		Public Good (n=4)		Sample (n=27)	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Acres in Production</b>										
< 1 A	0	0%	3	23%	5	100%	1	25%	9	33%
1 to 5 A	1	20%	6	46%	0	0%	3	75%	10	37%
6 to 50 A	1	20%	4	31%	0	0%	0	0%	5	19%
> 50 A	3	60%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	3	11%
<b>Years of Farmers Market (FM) Experience</b>										
< 5 years	1	20%	4	31%	4	80%	1	25%	10	37%
5 to 10 years	0	0%	5	38%	1	20%	2	50%	8	30%
> 10 years	4	80%	4	31%	0	0%	1	25%	9	33%
<b>Total Number of FM Attended</b>										
< 5 FM	1	20%	7	54%	5	100%	3	75%	15	56%
5 to 10 FM	2	40%	6	46%	0	0%	1	25%	9	33%
> 10 FM	2	40%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	3	11%
<b>Sales Outlets</b>										
FM only	0	0%	1	8%	5	100%	0	0%	6	22%
FM and other	5	100%	12	92%	0	0%	4	100%	21	78%

<sup>5</sup> Additionally, all of these farmers own land. Sixty-nine percent (9) produce on land they own only, while 31% (4) have a combination of own/rent/lease/borrow. These farmers are about split evenly in terms of sales types with 54% (7) indicating they are producer-only and 46% (6) indicating they sell both their products and products from other farmers.



case, a gardener operates a community-based gardening program for youth in her neighborhood using her own residential garden, community gardens, and other vacant lots in her neighborhood. Her work and her programs, while lacking an official legal organizational structure, function very similarly to the other community-based, nonprofit organizations in this study. Largely, these individuals and organizations use agriculture to help them meet their broader, community-focused goals.

These civically-minded individuals and organizations highly value community development and three of the four have a strong focus on youth development. With the exception of one farm, they are located in one study city where there has been a tremendous focus on urban agriculture and local food system development. Thus, these urban agriculture programs work with youth using their gardens as teaching tools to focus on leadership development and the generation of job skills. One farmer explained,

*We do a lot of work that's around community organizing, around critical thinking, thinking about the food system in general and asking questions about why we see the conditions we do...really trying to get folks to think about multiple places in the food system they can plug in...And, I think we definitely see ourselves as a sort of laboratory where folks can come and learn those methods and then take them elsewhere and apply them over and over again.*

The gardens were one of many organizational efforts to help community residents think more critically about the food system. These community leaders talked about farming as an activity that allowed them to address broader social change and community organizing.

The other nonprofit farm used farming activities as part of their vocational rehabilitation program. The farming arm of their organization was developed to provide a work space for their clients, individuals who are recovering from traumatic brain injuries. As such, their programs focus on restructuring their client's lives and living situations to assist them in adapting to their

condition. Overall, these farmers are motivated by the desire to create change outside of the agriculture industry.

### ***Why do Farmers Choose to Participate in Farmers Markets in Low-income, Urban Areas?***

Understanding farmers' priorities and motivations, and how they differ amongst different farmers, is important to understanding why farmers choose to participate in farmers markets located in low-income, urban areas. Economically motivated farmers are more driven by financial return to support their livelihood, a new business, or both. Other farmers with lifestyle intentions put a greater value on personal enjoyment or the opportunity to further their civic contributions. These motivations, combined with personal circumstances, impact their market selection considerations.

#### *Livelihood Strategy*

The data show clearly that farmers who need to support their livelihood choose markets according to their potential for profits. These farmers are generally full-time, professional farmers and they treat farmers markets as a professional endeavor. At the time of the study, they sold at an average of six farmers markets per week compared to three farmers markets for the rest of the sample. In each of these cases, the farmers sell at well-established farmers markets in addition to the market in a low-income, urban area. They identified these well-established markets as their "primary" markets. One farmer explained,

*We stay at the [well-established farmers market] probably because financially we know we can move a lot of our produce there and we are committed to that market. We have a lot of customers there and it is a market where people are more affluent.*

Farmers identified high customer traffic and a loyal and buying customer base as being important reasons they select and stay at these markets. As established and well-known farmers in the area, they stated they are regularly recruited to join new farmers markets, like the ones in this study.

However, they generally attend these markets on a trial basis to assess their potential for market sales and profits. These farmers all have different time periods that they consider necessary to evaluate a market, ranging from a few market days to a couple of market seasons. However, the potential for strong sales was commonly mentioned as a reason for selecting markets, regardless of their location.

Economics play an important role in farmers' decision-making regarding market participation as did their commitment to these markets. Making money is a top priority. When specifically speaking of their participation in a farmers market in the low-income area of study, nearly every farmer was willing to tolerate poor sales up to a certain "break even" point. However, when it got to a point where it "did not pay" to go, farmers often made the decision to quit the market. One farmer explained,

*"I don't think we're going to go again because it wasn't very profitable. Now, again, I'm not a recordkeeping person, but just off-hand you know, I kind of know how much produce we have to sell at a given market in a week in order to break even. Unless we can break even, we can't afford to go. If it's more than four hours, it's about \$450 we figured. That's our break even thing."*

In fact, 80% of these farmers discontinued their participation, or dropped out, of the farmers markets in low-income, urban areas. In some cases, farmers directly attributed their drop out to the market's "poor performance." In other cases, farmers talked about the need to choose between markets and having "to pick out [the] best." In the end, these farmers sought out and stayed at markets that were economically viable for them. These results suggest that these farmers who are commonly recruited by market organizers are not likely to commit to these markets for the long-term. Instead, farmers and gardeners that are not primarily motivated by financial return are more likely to have sustained interest in farmers markets located in low-

income, urban areas. The remaining portion of this paper explores why these farmers choose this type of market.

### *Business Opportunity*

Market sales are a consideration for farmers who view farmers markets as a new business opportunity. However, since many of these farmers must balance this new business opportunity with other employment it is important that the farmers market they choose is a “good fit.” As such, these farmers indicated that market day scheduling is important, but that small markets are also desirable as there is opportunity to grow their business without a great deal of competition or stress. One farmer who has a full-time, nine-to-five desk job described why it made sense for him to sell at a small farmers market included in this study,

*I thought it would work well to go to the [case study] Farmers Market my first year. I was only there my first year. They were brand new that year. I was brand new that year. They are growing slowly and that matched the volume that I could grow. So I could still take an appropriate quantity and not have too much at the end...I couldn't survive at the [well-established market in a nearby affluent area]. I would be in business for a half an hour. Then, I would have to stand behind an empty table...They both [the two farmers markets he was currently selling at] have about the right amount of people for the volume I am growing and what I am taking. I don't have to compete with the people selling watermelon and corn and stuff like that. I am competing with a few other vendor tables. At [case study market], like I said earlier, there are like four or five other people like me there...it still fits my scale....She [the market manager] was a little more causal and that took some of the anxiety away from the producers. I think the producer needs to know what they are getting themselves into at the market...I think the reason that everybody stayed at [the case study market] was because they are small and the volume they can produce works at a lower attendance market...Right now I can probably produce enough for that four-hour market.*

He explained that the scale of the market, the vendor composition, and the market management were all important factors in figuring out if the market would work for him. These findings were common across farmers who seek markets that work as a small business incubator.

It is important to note that these farmers were focused on growth, expansion or “scaling up.” One farmer expounded that it takes time to see if a business opportunity will be viable. He

said, “By the second or third year, I could see that it was going to be a viable business and it’s going to take off.” These farmers understand that it takes time to develop their business and so are often willing to commit to small, new markets where they anticipate an opportunity to grow their business as the market becomes established.

### *For Recreation*

Individuals and families that attend farmers markets to support their gardening have different considerations about market selection. They also have different expectations of the market than economically-motivated farmers which is related to their motivations and their smaller scale of production. They make a conscious effort *not* to turn this work into a full-time job and as such it is very important that the market fits into their schedules. The majority of these gardeners had to find a farmers market that did not interfere with their work schedules. Consequently, these gardeners preferred Saturday markets. One gardener who was a full-time graduate student explained, “I am supposed to be at work during the work week, so the other markets were kind of out of the question.” She needed a market that she could attend “without having to miss work, or having to get up ridiculously early for some of these ones that start at 6 a.m.” In the remaining case, the couple gardened as a retirement hobby. They preferred a weekday market. The husband explained,

*The biggest thing is time. I didn’t want to turn this into a full-time job. It’s just something I do as a hobby...I don’t want to turn this thing into another job. It’s a hobby...I didn’t want to really give up a Saturday. I want my Saturdays...because I’ve got weddings, I’ve got family reunions...Saturdays are a rough day because our summers are short anyways and everything is planned for the summer, usually on Saturdays.*

It became very clear that for these gardeners, the farmers market needed to be on the right day for them, during favorable hours, and in peak season when their gardens were abundant.

In addition to timing, these gardeners sought out small farmers markets located close to their homes. All of the gardeners in the sample sell only at small farmers markets in early stages of development. One of the gardeners explained,

*It was smaller, so it made it a lot less intimidating for me to be a grower. After talking to [market management], she mentioned that some of the other people are growing in their backyards like me, so I wasn't competing with a lot of people that do this as their main source of income. That's kind of intimidating to be selling right next to them. They know what they are doing and have done it for years.*

Another vendor selling at the same farmers market agreed. She stated, "I really like the fact that it's small and we are closely knit...it's probably less competition too because the market is so small." As this quote points out, these small markets also provide a social space where gardeners can form relationships with other vendors and market shoppers. Throughout the course of interviews, these individuals talked about the good relationships they have with other vendors, and overall how friendly people are at the markets.

Clearly, making money is not a top priority for these gardeners and as such they have different expectations than other market vendors. These market gardeners do not expect, or want, high sales volumes, but instead want to be in a welcoming atmosphere where market managers are "nice" and accommodating. They like selling at farmers markets where there are "no hassles." For example, one vendor explained that if he wanted to or had to leave early he would like to go without being "chastised." Market management is important and these vendors spoke very highly of the market managers. Overall, they are not looking for formal governance structure or market policies. Instead, they want personable managers who are receptive to their concerns on an ongoing basis. One of the gardeners said,

*I would have to say your most important part of a local farmers market is getting the right market master – somebody who can relate, who doesn't have to know everything but should have some common knowledge about gardening, some common knowledge*

*about the business aspect of it, but most important should be very personable and have great communication skills.*

Being in an atmosphere they enjoy satisfies them even if the monetary returns are very low. Market sales do not support them or their families, but money earned may help pay for their gardening hobby and allow them to recoup direct costs for inputs such as “seeds, pots and potting soil.”

### *For the Public Good*

Farmers that fall in the final group of this study, those that are motivated by public good, have the highest levels of commitment to markets in low-income, urban areas. These farmer-vendors primarily consider the teaching or training opportunities that the market in their community can provide for their program participants. Selling at farmers markets is viewed as an entrepreneurial experience that these community organizers can build into their curriculum, either formally or informally. The farmers markets they participate in need to be busy enough to give their youth participants or clients the “opportunity to run a stall by themselves” and in the same way cannot be too busy where it would become an overwhelming experience.

In these instances, the money earned through market sales is regarded as a valuable teaching tool. For half of the farms, the money is split between the gardeners as a profit share so the financial component becomes an incentive as well as a teaching tool. For the other half of farms, the money earned at the market is reinvested in the farm and pays for production costs. However, it should be noted here that all of these farms indicated the income is not critical. Even for the farms that use market revenue to support production costs, they still seek other funding to cover costs associated with staffing and capital improvement expenses. For these vendors it is important that their training opportunities, and thus the farmers markets they participate in, are located in their communities. One farmer explained that it is important for

them to participate in farmers markets in their neighborhood because their “sales are still focused on trying to improve access in the community that we are working with.” For them, many markets lack appeal because they are “not serving our immediate neighborhood or furthering our other goals.” Markets located in their community make sense, and they are largely able to commit to these markets because it aligns with their organizational or personal mission.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this paper is to provide a better understanding of farmers’ decision-making regarding farmers market participation in low-income, urban areas. Farmers were differentiated based on their motivations for participating in these markets. These motivations subsequently influence the choices and commitments farmers make regarding market participation. Farmers who are economically motivated to support their livelihood were least likely to stay with a market in a low-income area. By contrast, farmers who are motivated by lifestyle goals are more likely to sustain their participation in farmers markets in low-income, urban areas. Additionally, farmers who identify these markets as business opportunities are likely to continue to participate in these markets as they grow their businesses. Understanding the differences in motivations and expectations that farmers hold is important for developing a committed vendor-base at farmers markets in low-income, urban areas.

This paper provides findings with both scholarly and practical applications. In terms of scholarly contributions, the results presented here that distinguish farmers’ approaches to farmers market selection can be used as a basis for future studies. These distinctions, based on motivations, are useful in that they identify key differences within the larger category of market farmers, and conceivably other market vendors. These differences have not been defined previously in the literature and as such provide a new way for describing farmers. Food system



scholars and farmers market researchers may draw on the types of farmers identified here, as defined by farmers' primary motivations, to position and relate their research to other studies focused on farmer vendors.

Future studies may seek to explore each type of farmer comparatively or separately. In this study, farmers were differentiated based on economic and lifestyle motivations. However, during the course of study, four main categories emerged; two characterized by economic motivations (livelihood strategy and business opportunity) and two characterized by lifestyle motivations (recreation and public good). Thus, this study took a comparative approach. Additional comparative studies are necessary, in different settings (e.g., different types of farmers markets and different geographical locations) to verify, modify and/or expand these classifications. Future studies should also investigate each type of farmer separately in an effort to add depth to our understanding of these categories and their potential for forthcoming investigation.

These results also underpin more practical research and application. Findings provide market organizers and managers with valuable information regarding what types of farmers are best suited for farmers markets located in low-income, urban areas. Results indicate challenges associated with recruiting farmers who rely on their farm to support their livelihood. These farmers attend these markets on a trial basis and exhibited high rates of drop-out. While findings suggest that the individuals and families who are most commonly recognized as farmers are not best suited for these markets, they also underscore opportunities for recruiting new kinds of farmers to these markets.

Food security advocates who seek to improve access to fresh, affordable foods in these communities can draw on the results presented here to avoid common challenges associated with

farmer-vendor recruitment and retention. Based on this research, market organizers in low-income, urban areas should consider focusing recruitment on local, farmer-vendors who have strong non-financial motivations and do not rely on farming as their sole source of income. These types of farmers include individuals or households seeking to develop or expand a business, residential and community gardeners, and local organizations that use farming in their programs to address community-based goals. Results indicate that these types of farmers seek out farmers markets located close to their homes and are more likely to commit to these markets in their early years of development. This is not to suggest that farmers who rely on farm and farmers market income to support their livelihoods will not sell at or attend these markets. However, market managers need to be able to clearly describe the customer traffic and sales potential to determine if it is the right time for these larger-scale farmers to attend the market.

Overall, these findings are particularly important since the identification, recruitment and retention of farmer-vendors are crucial for the development and expansion of farmers markets (Govindasamy et al., 2003). Ultimately, it is fundamental to understand farmers' motivations and perspectives in order to strengthen farmers markets. Farmers markets should be stronger as individual outlets and collectively when farmers find the types of markets that work best for them. Market managers can focus on recruiting vendors with motivations that align with their market mission and help farmers set realistic expectations for their participation.

## **Chapter 3. Development of Small, Early-stage Farmers Markets in Low-income, Urban Areas**

### **Introduction**

The growth of farmers markets has received considerable attention in recent years; however, little attention has been paid to the number of farmers markets that fail. Since 1994, the number of farmers markets across the United States has increased dramatically from 1,755 to 7,175 in 2011 [United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), 2012]. However, Stephenson et al. (2008) warn that this growth is misleading as a number of farmers markets fail each year. The fragility of farmers markets is of particular concern given that they have been shown to be important outlets for small and mid-sized farm direct marketing (Andreatta and Wickliffe II, 2002; Kambara and Shelley, 2002; Ross, 2006) as well as for strengthening communities (Abel et al., 1999; Baker et al., 2009; Lyson, 2004). Farmers markets are also increasingly seen as a strategy to improve food access in low-income, urban areas (Fisher, 1999; Markowitz, 2010; USDA, 2002).

The literature on farmers market development suggests two main theories. First, the development of farmers markets is characterized by a progression from a volatile period of uneven supply and demand to a viable period with a good balance between market vendors and shoppers (Lloyd et al., 1987). During this development period, Lloyd et al. (1987) suggest that the composition of vendors transitions from a mix that includes hobby and part-time vendors to one in which full-time, commercial vendors predominate. A second theory suggests that markets increase in size as indicated by the number of vendors and management capacity (Stephenson, 2008). Taken together, these theories suggest that vendor professionalism and market size signal

market development and likely survival; however, neither of these is specific to farmers markets located in low-income communities.

Thus, it is unknown if the theories of farmers market development proposed by Lloyd et al. (1987) and Stephenson (2008) are valid in low-income, urban areas. In addition, the literature does not address how markets in low-income areas progress from an initial volatile period to a stable, steady state. The practitioner literature recommends that farmers markets in low-income areas must function in a way that is viable for farmers, be based in community support and have subsidized management [Fisher, 1999; Project for Public Spaces (PPS), 2003; USDA, 2002]. However, these recommendations are not connected to a process or theory of market development for low-income areas. In addition, they are based on work that is more than a decade old (Fisher, 1999) and the economic, cultural and public policy landscape for farmers markets has changed greatly since then (Winne, 2008).

The objective of this paper, therefore, is to advance a working theory for farmers market development in low-income, urban areas. Through this work I seek to understand the experience of market insiders with respect to market development and characterize what this means for current theory. To do so I examine six cases of small farmers markets that are in early stages of development<sup>6</sup> in which survival is not yet certain and address the following questions: What is the process of development for small, early-stage farmers markets in low-income, urban areas? What does this say about the theory of farmers market development for these markets?

This research takes a qualitative, case study approach. It relies on in-depth interviews with market organizers, managers, and participating farmers as well as participant observation. The results are analyzed thematically, through my lens as an insider to the world of farmers

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<sup>6</sup> Farmers markets in early stages of development are referred to as early-stage markets from this point forward.

markets and through dialogic interaction with knowledgeable insiders and outsiders to the world of farmers markets. Results suggest that the development of small, early-stage farmers markets in low-income, urban areas is more complex than currently presented in the literature. These markets require complex forms of management to achieve a product mix appropriate for the community in which they function. At the same time, management uses a flexible, emergent approach to foster the evolution of market policies that support and retain market vendors. The paper concludes with implications for further research and for practice.

## **Literature Review**

Before exploring how markets survive, it is useful to understand why they fail. The topic of farmers market failure is rarely addressed in the literature. To date, the research by Stephenson and colleagues on why markets fail is the only work that specifically addresses why some markets close (Stephenson et al., 2006; Stephenson, 2008; Stephenson et al., 2008). Based on a multi-year, mixed methods set of studies in Oregon, Stephenson (2008) found that young markets are more likely to fail than older markets. Typically, the decline is quick with most failures occurring within four years after the market is established. In addition, smaller markets are also more prone to failure. Stephenson (2008) maintains that size is particularly important as it is associated with a market's ability to acquire paid personnel to manage the functions necessary for market growth. Larger markets can take advantage of economies of scale, as they have greater potential to raise revenue through daily stall fees. Stall fees are especially important because they provide markets with a source of self-sustaining funds. Smaller markets, by contrast, have fewer vendors thus limiting the amount of administrative revenue that can be raised through daily stall fees.

While new markets and small markets are particularly vulnerable to failure, Stephenson (2008) acknowledges that the exact reasons for market failure are unique to each market and involve a complex set of issues that are internal and external to the market. Nevertheless, he and others (Fisher, 1999) characterize market failure as a “downward spiral” that often starts with declining numbers of customers and then vendors with little ability of market management to intervene and stabilize the market. Other researchers have commented on the difficulties of achieving this balance between customer and vendor turnout (Burns and Johnson, 1996; Oberholtzer and Grow, 2003; Hughes and Mattson, 1992). The common conclusion is that viable farmers markets must reach a healthy balance of having enough farmer vendors to attract enough customers and vice versa. The question, of course, is how to achieve this.

Typically, observations on farmers market failure are offered as part of a larger discussion on the growth and development of farmers markets. Two main theories exist. Stephenson (2008) maintains that market size (as measured by number of vendors) provides the best way to characterize different stages of farmers market development. Based on empirical observations, Stephenson (2008) finds that larger markets are more likely to sustain themselves. He offers a theory of market development that includes a progression from smaller, more vulnerable markets to larger markets that are more robust. As markets increase the number of participating vendors, they employ more management tools and structures resulting in a greater management complexity. Examples of management complexity include acquiring and paying a market manager, planning for and securing stable revenue, having a functional organizational structure (Stephenson, 2008) and strong market policies and governance tools (Hamilton, 2002; Stephenson, 2008). Management, therefore, becomes increasingly more professional and less informal as markets increase in size.

Stephenson's (2008) model of market development specifies four stages of organizational development: 1) micro markets with 5 to 8 vendors; 2) small markets with 9 to 30 vendors; 3) medium markets with 31 to 55 markets; and 4) large markets with 56 to 90 vendors. Micro and small markets differ only in size and in the number of simple management tools that are used. By contrast, Stephenson (2008) maintains that the transition between small and medium size markets is the most difficult since markets become substantially more complex to manage. This transition is identified as most difficult because growing beyond a medium size market typically requires paid personnel to handle the associated volume and complexity of market management. Stephenson's (2008) model does not identify or discuss the development of farmers markets that have limited growth potential.

Lloyd et al. (1987) offer a theory of farmers market development that is complementary to the Stephenson (2008) model. While Stephenson (2008) highlights market size as an indicator of development, Lloyd et al. (1987) mark increasing vendor professionalism and stability in the consumer and vendor base as signs of development. Lloyd and colleagues propose a three-stage process. Stage one typically lasts for one to three years and is characterized by uneven levels of supply and demand. Vendors include hobby and part-time growers, but the authors recommend that market organizers strive to recruit full-time, professional farmers as soon as possible. Stage two describes a period of community acceptance indicated by a more consistent customer base. The vendor mix comprises mostly part-time and full-time commercial growers although some hobby gardeners may still be present. During this stage markets are at less risk for failure because the vendor mix includes larger, more established producers that can provide a consistent supply of produce to draw customers to the market. Stage three is a mature and viable market. Full-time, commercial farmers sell a significant amount of product to a regular customer base.

Andreatta and Wickliffe II (2002) note that this framework is useful for thinking about how farmers markets develop, but it fails to reference features associated with specific market goals such as the desire to support small, diversified, local farms which has become increasingly important in recent years.

The literature does not suggest development models specific to low-income areas. Alarmingly, many farmers markets located in low-income, urban areas struggle with the same issues that Stephenson et al. (2008) link to market failure: achieving a balance between supply (vendors) and demand (customers), gaining community support, and market organization (Fisher, 1999). Failing markets are often small with limited resources and they struggle with maintaining a sufficient number of vendors. In addition, markets in low-income areas are challenged by specific issues including the safety of market sites and an inherent tension between keeping prices low enough for consumers yet high enough to be profitable for farmers (Fisher, 1999; Markowitz, 2010). Without sufficient consumers and thus steady and sufficient revenues, farmers for whom financial returns are their most important priority are less likely to remain committed to markets in low-income areas (see Chapter 2).

Thus far, there is only one study that focuses exclusively on farmers markets in low income areas. In his report on farmers markets in low-income communities, Fisher (1999) presents examples of markets that have both succeeded and failed. In all eight cases, market organizers planned well and worked hard to sustain the market, but the outcomes were very different. Markets were located in either low-income areas or on the “fringe” between poor and wealthier communities. Their varying degrees of success led Fisher (1999) to conclude that markets located in strictly low-income communities face barriers above and beyond those facing all farmers markets. As such, he makes specific recommendations for farmers markets in these



communities. Drawing on his cases, Fisher (1999) maintains that farmer selection and retention as well as strong community ownership and subsidies are key to the survival of farmers markets in low-income areas. While Fisher's (1999) work summarizes the experience of these markets and provides recommendations, it does not propose or connect itself to any theory of market development (e.g., Lloyd et al., 1987).

Thus, a review of the literature reveals the issues and challenges farmers markets face during periods of fragility, but it leaves questions unanswered regarding the survival and development of farmers markets in low-income, urban areas. Are current development theories such as Lloyd et al. (1987) and Stephenson's (2008) appropriate for these farmers markets? Should early-stage markets in low-income areas strive for growth and professionalism of the vendors as a means to greater stability and development? In addition, given the evidence of small markets in low-income areas that have survived and thrived, what is the experience of these small markets as they struggle to establish themselves? What has been this process of development and how does this relate to strategies of development for markets located in low-income areas? This work aims to fill this gap in the literature by adding to the understanding of the process of development for small, early-stage farmers markets in low-income, urban areas.

## **Methods**

This research explores the development of farmers markets located in low-income, urban areas using a qualitative, case study approach. Qualitative inquiry is suitable for this study because it seeks to develop an emergent theory that is informed by the perspectives of individuals who are intimately involved in the phenomenon under study (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008; Maxwell, 2012; Patton, 2002).

Given my personal and professional involvement with Michigan farmers markets, this study is grounded in an ethnographic approach and therefore employs participant observation. Participant observation is a methodology that involves naturalistic interaction with informants in which data are systematically and sometimes unobtrusively collected. It involves taking part in the regular activities associated with the topic of study and includes a number of different data collection methods, including direct observation, natural conversations and interviews (Spradley, 1980; Bernard, 1995; Dewalt and Dewalt, 2002).

### ***Sampling***

Using purposeful sampling (Maxwell, 2012; Patton, 2002), three Michigan cities representing geographically distinct areas of the state were selected for study. On average, these cities have lower median household incomes than the state average (see Table 3). They are also characterized by a higher percentage of the population at or below the poverty level, higher unemployment rates, and a greater percentage of households receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits than the state average.

Within each of these cities, two early-stage farmers markets located in low-income areas were identified as cases, for a total of six case study markets. Early-stage markets were defined to be less than ten years of age and either of micro or small size<sup>7</sup> using Stephenson's (2008) definitions of market size. The case markets were purposely chosen to be young and small given the finding that these markets are more likely to fail (Stephenson 2008). However, I was careful to select markets that had survived through two years of operation so they could describe a process of market development.

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<sup>7</sup> When used alone, the term small in this paper encompasses both micro and small markets, thus referring to markets with 30 vendors or less.

Table 3. Demographic Profiles for the Three Low-income, Urban Areas in this Study

	City 1	City 2	City 3	Michigan
Population	713,777	114,297	188,040	9,883,640
Median age (years)	34.8	32.2	30.8	38.9
Race (percent of population)				
White	10.6	61.2	64.6	78.9
Black or African American	82.7	23.7	20.9	14.2
Other	6.7	15.1	14.5	6.9
Median household income (dollars)	28,357	37,666	38,344	48,432
Percentage of population whose income in the past 12 months was below the poverty level	34.5	24.7	24.3	14.8
Unemployment Status (percent of population)	13.5	8.3	7.8	7.3
Percentage of households receiving SNAP/Food Stamps	38.4	28.7	27.2	16.9

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census and 2010 American Community Survey

### ***Data Collection***

In-depth interviews were conducted with market managers and 32 farmers who had experience with at least one of the six selected case study farmers markets. In-depth interviews provide rich data, characterized by depth and detail. They were chosen because of their strength in providing descriptive and explanatory data based on first-hand knowledge, experience and perceptions pertaining to the research questions posed (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006). For the purposes of this research, farmers are defined as individuals or families who grow and sell edible crops for human consumption including, but not limited to, fruit, vegetables, meat, poultry, and dairy products. In markets with less than 10 vendors, census sampling was used and interviews were requested with all farmers. In markets with more than 10 vendors, stratified random sampling (using a random number generator) was used to select participants with varying experiences including: (1) farmers that had been participating in the farmers market for two or more years, (2) farmers that were new to the market that season, and (3) farmers that had participated in the market at one time but no longer sold at that market.

Interviews were conducted between October 2010 and April 2012 using structured, open-ended interview guides (approved by the Social Science/Behavioral/Education Institutional Review Board at Michigan State University; IRB# 10-495; see Appendix) to collect data on farmers market development and overall experiences. The interview guide queried market managers about the market's history, the market's evolution and development, and the conditions they identify as most important to market survival. Another interview guide queried farmers about their experiences with the case study markets, what they believe it is going to take for the market to continue to operate, and what they identify as most important for the survivability of farmers markets in low-income, urban areas. Interviews lasted between 45 and 150 minutes yielding rich descriptions of their farming and market experience. With permission from participants, interviews were audio recorded and were transcribed verbatim. In exchange for participating in the study, farmers were provided with a \$25 cash honorarium.

### ***Data Analysis***

Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously as is recommended for inductive, qualitative work (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006; Miles and Huberman, 1994). Following each data collection, memos were written including details about the research participant, themes and concepts that emerged from the interview, and reflections on the process. The results were analyzed thematically, through my lens as a farmer, market vendor, and director of the state's farmers market association, and through dialogic interaction with knowledgeable insiders and outsiders to the world of farmers markets. A coding system was defined, and redefined, as themes and concepts emerged throughout the data collection process. These codes, or labels, were used to assign units of meaning to the descriptive text compiled during this study (Miles and Huberman, 1994). QSR NVivo 9.0 (QSR International, Doncaster, Australia), a qualitative

research analysis software, was used for data management and retrieval throughout the analysis. Data were analyzed using the farmers market as the unit of analysis.

Displays were formed around the research questions and emerging themes (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Summary statements were written to summarize data relevant to major themes that emerged. These statements were then organized into a display to facilitate comparison across cases and identify emergent patterns.

## **Results and Discussion**

This work explores the process of development for six small, early-stage farmers markets located in low-income areas. I first examine the experience of these markets and then consider how these experiences add to the theory of development for farmers markets in low-income, urban areas.

### ***What has been the Experience of the Small, Early-stage Case Markets?***

An overview of the case markets is provided in Table 4. All of the case study markets included in this study are open-air, seasonal markets that operate one day per week for four to seven hours. Each was an early-stage market, ranging from two to seven years of age at the time data collection began. In addition, all markets were either micro or small-sized using the definitions of market size presented by Stephenson (2008). At the time of this writing, all of the case markets except one have survived. The failure of one market is not viewed as problematic. To the contrary, for the purposes of this study this experience adds richness to the body of data collected from the cases.

Discussions with insiders on the history of their markets revealed that these markets were established with varying purposes. Some intended to increase food access in their community, others aimed to promote opportunities for small business development, and one was motivated

by a larger community revitalization effort. All, however, were established under the leadership of strong local organizations that obtained external funding to support, at least partially, the development of the farmers market.

Overall, the data reveal that the case markets experienced struggles that are commonly reported in the literature. Five of the six markets, for example, experienced a high degree of market manager turnover in spite of the fact market managers were paid and expressed commitment to the goals of building a successful farmers market. Most also experienced at least one change in location during their short existence. At the same time, evidence also shows that the markets have had support from a parent organization thus demonstrating high organizational capacity as described by Mino (2012). When one market organizer was asked how they handled the change that came with four different managers and five locations in eight years, she responded, “I think consistency. I think if the health department didn’t provide so much support it would be very less successful.”

The data also reveal a persistent struggle by each market to develop a balance between the vendor and customer bases. The evidence extends across all case study markets and suggests that obtaining this balance is the single most challenging aspect of the early-stage experience. One woman who managed a three-year-old market said, “I feel like I’m *still* struggling with balancing the vendors with the shoppers.” A farmer elaborated, “...it’s finding that balance to be able to provide...more options for our customers, but then to be able to draw more customers into the area.” In particular, managers felt it was important to consistently provide shoppers with a mix of basic food products, such as fresh vegetables, meat, eggs, or dairy products in order to build a larger base of return customers. Managers would then focus on providing a greater diversity of products, including culturally-appropriate offerings, to keep customers interested in

the market. These offerings supplement basic food products and include items such as specific produce varieties or cultivars, value-added products, ready-to-eat foods, and other specialty items. At the same time, it was clear these early-stage markets could not yet support a large number of vendors. As such, managers spoke at length of their ongoing efforts to develop the right product mix, with the right number of vendors at their markets. Interestingly, market managers rarely spoke of the need to grow the number of vendors per se or to grow the base for stall fees, as suggested by Stephenson (2008). Rather, this was an iterative and adaptive process. Most described a process by which they fine-tuned their understanding of the appropriate composition of vendors that would provide commitment among vendors and consumers and thus stability to the market.

The stories and logic of this process are detailed below. Overall, they demonstrate an emergent, but complex strategy of market development that is at odds with the current theories of farmers market development. Current theories focus on developing larger markets with more vendors thus generating more administrative revenue to support management (Stephenson 2008) and seeking greater professionalism among participating vendors (Lloyd et. al. 1987). Insight into how these case markets negotiate these scenarios (or not) is useful to understanding the development process of small, early-stage markets in low-income, urban areas. In addition, looking more closely into this process provides an opportunity to add to these theories, particularly in the area of small markets located in low-income areas where very little has been said. Accordingly, in the next sections I

Table 4. Case Study Overview

City	Farmers Market (FM)	Year Started	Market Organizer	Market Manager Continuity	Market Manager Compensation	Market Location Continuity	Average Number of Vendors per Market Day	Vendor Fees
City1	FM1	2006	Nonprofit community development corporation	One market manager	Paid	One location	15	\$20/day if paid weekly, \$15/day if paid monthly, \$13.50/day if paid for the full season
	FM2	2008	Neighborhood development coalition	Four market managers	Paid	Two locations	7	\$15/day or \$160/season
City2	FM3	2004	Neighborhood center	Four market managers	Paid	One location	15 to 20	\$12/day flat rate, \$9/day if paid weekly, \$8/day if paid for the full season
	FM4	2009	Community development association	Three market managers	Paid	Two locations	8	No vendor fees
City3	FM5	2003	County health department and city food systems council	Four market managers	Paid	Five locations	4 to 6	No vendor fees
	FM6	2006, closed in 2011	Neighborhood organization	Four market managers	Paid initially, then volunteer after grant funding expired	Three locations	3	No vendor fees



examine the strategies for development as described through the voices of market managers and participating farmers.

### ***What is the Process of Development for Small, Early-stage Farmers Markets in Low-income, Urban Areas?***

In this section I examine aspects of the early-stage experience for small markets in low-income, urban areas and consider what it means for current theories of farmers market development. Thus far, the literature says very little about the process of development for small markets. Stephenson (2008) implies that the preferred path is for markets to grow beyond the micro-to-small size and to sustain themselves financially from vendor stall fees. He also observes that smaller markets are informally managed and that management becomes more complex after markets reach a medium or large size.

Yet, the data from this study indicate that establishing a small farmers market in a low-income area requires complex management. Stephenson (2008) states that this complexity includes developing a stable revenue source to acquire paid staff who will invest more time in the market both during and out of the market season. The most important and complicated aspect of market planning and development is in finding a vendor mix that will help build a loyal base of return customers. In general, respondents described a process of active adaptation as organizers worked to understand the vendor and product mix that made the most sense for their communities.

### ***Complex Strategies for Development***

Contrary to Stephenson's (2008) theory, the data on the development process suggest the use of complex management strategies and deliberate planning for even the smallest of markets. Two distinct strategies for establishing the vendor mix were described by these case markets.

The first strategy involved identifying only a few vendors (e.g., four to 6) at the start and then diversifying the product mix by slowly adding vendors as the consumer base develops. Market managers described these vendors as “core” vendors because they showed commitment to the market from the very beginning and because they provide a product, such as fresh produce, that managers perceive to be fundamental to a farmers market.

To preserve the commitment of core vendors, and thus stability of the market, markets were careful to limit competition when they sought to expand the diversity of products at the market. One market manager explained that to retain the farmers participating in her market they need to “make some money.” She is therefore careful to control market growth by seeking new vendors who offer a different type of product or who are not viewed as direct competition to her two largest farmers who provide a variety of staple goods including fresh produce, meat, eggs and baked goods. She therefore adds vendors that sell prepared foods as well as “backyard” and community gardeners. In this case, gardeners bring specialty varieties such as heirloom tomatoes and Asian vegetables not provided by the larger farmers selling at the market. One of the residential gardeners selling at this market explained why he felt the market needs a mix of large vendors who offer a variety of products and smaller vendors like him,

*If you only had two tents up with the two big vendors, visually it wouldn't be too much of a draw from the street. We have to be there. The littler vendors need to be there. I think it balances out and everyone knows their role and it works.*

Another market used the same strategy but developed a more collaborative approach to expanding its product mix. This market grew from its initial core group of three vendors to an average of 15 vendors per market day over a four-year period. The market manager explained that after the first year or so she stopped recruiting new vendors because she felt the community could support the market at that scale. However, her core vendors continue to recruit new

vendors that offer products they believe will “complement what they have.” She said, “They have been right. I have trusted them.” She underscored the need to target the right producers and consider the interests of her core vendors,

*If the right vendor comes with the right product then I am willing to expand...but, now what I mean, just to put another produce vendor selling the same things as the other vendors, then no. It would just decrease income...Same thing with the baked goods. You know, there is a limit on how much baked goods this customer is going to buy. Just because there are more bakers doesn't mean they are going to buy more sweets, so I think to want to limit it, you know. I would rather have the ones that I already got make money...So yes, there is room for growth, but I would want to make sure I could manage that growth.*

Managed growth in this market thus takes a more collaborative approach, with the vendors recommending who and what products should be allowed to join the market.

The second strategy followed by the case markets included a process of recruiting a large number of farmers and vendors (e.g., 10 to 15) before the market was established. While this strategy took substantial organization and planning up front, it has not been successful for these early-stage markets. Rather, market organizers quickly learned that their customer base could not support that many vendors. One market had 20 farmers its first year, but over time many of these farmers became “frustrated” because there were not enough customers coming to the market. By the third year of operation, 7 of the 20 remained before the vendor base dwindled to just three consistent vendors. This market eventually closed.

A second market took the same approach and focused on the “quantity” of vendors when the market was first established. The first market manager had strong relationships with commercial vegetable farmers surrounding their community and used these relationships to recruit farmers to the market. One of the farmers described how he attended the market to help his friend. He said, “I’ve known him for quite a while...this was his baby and we wanted to try to help him out.” After just one market day, farmers began dropping out due to “poor market

performance.” The market struggled to keep vendors until organizers were forced to reconceptualize it. They refocused their efforts on the community aspects of the market and found a new manager who lived in the community. She in turn used her relationships to recruit community and residential gardeners to sell at the market, in effect wholly recreating the vendor mix. Thus, the market transitioned from having a large number of farmers from outside the community to a new, smaller model where mostly “local folks” sell at the market. This strategy resulted in greater commitment and thus stability for the market.

The point of these examples is to illustrate the complexity of establishing an appropriate vendor mix for these early-stage markets. Market development is characterized by a process of assembling a diverse offering of products with a small number of local vendors. To achieve this markets draw on an eclectic mix of vendors. One market manager explained, “We intentionally invite a wide variety of types of growers. We do that deliberately. That’s part of the balance that we choose for this market.” Another market manager added that each type of vendor has different priorities and different sales expectations. She indicated that this works to the advantage of the market. A fewer number of larger farmers provide a consistent and abundant supply of fresh produce, and in some cases meats, cheeses and other fresh foods. Other farmers, gardeners and organizations add diversity.

Understanding the appropriate mix of products and thus vendors for a local market suggests a fairly complex process of management. It requires committed personnel who can invest a substantial amount of time in planning for the market, understanding the unique needs and wants of the community in which the market functions, and then finding and maintaining a small group of vendors who will provide a diverse product offering. In addition, these results challenge the suggestion by Lloyd et al. (1987) that markets must strive to increase the

proportion of commercial, full-time vendors as they develop. Instead, as part of their development the markets in this study did the opposite; they purposely limited the participation of farmers who need to generate a high volume of sales to sustain their interest in the market. They recruited and retained local organizations, residential and community gardeners and other farmers who would remain loyal to the market. By contrast, markets that tried to “start big” soon discovered they needed to reduce the size of their market and identify a mix of vendors that do not all expect high sales volumes. In sum, the constant balancing suggests that establishing a small farmers market in a low-income, urban area is a significant and complex undertaking.

### *Evolution of Market Policies*

The results of this study also indicate that the development process for these markets involves a gradual evolution of market policies that support the retention of the core vendor mix described above. The literature indicates small markets use simple management tools such as site maps and written policies (Stephenson, 2008). However, the findings from this study suggest the development of these tools and specifically market policies is not a simple process. Instead, it requires a steady but complicated progression towards policy-in-practice which may even contradict existing policies.

The majority of markets included in this study<sup>8</sup> showed a predisposition to establish policies as part of an orderly and professional market. Said one market manager,

*This is a very well run, well managed market and they [vendors] like that – the predictability, the structure and the reasonable fare. Everyone is pretty much treated alike. There is no favoritism.*

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<sup>8</sup> One market described their “verbal” market policy as a “general agreement” amongst their three consistent vendors. In this case, there was little interest in developing written policies. This market closed in 2011.

At the same time, respondents suggested that enforcing market policies that encouraged professionalism sometimes interfered with efforts to achieve a balanced vendor mix. As a result, the markets in this study adopted an intentional flexibility with regard to the interpretation of their market policies. One market manager explained her desire to be flexible with enforcement as she felt she was not in a position to make demands of vendors whose participation she regards as being vital to the market,

*The overarching concern from the first year, that continues right up until this minute, is it's [a low-income, urban area], so we have to go out of our way [for our vendors]. We have to compensate, offer incentives. We are in no position to be making demands...If [the fruit vendor] didn't bring gorgeous fruits, I wouldn't be bothered with her. But, she brings gorgeous fruit. So, her flaky self is welcomed anytime I can get her. And, the other thing is I plan my [market] layout around her flakiness. She's at the end, so if she shows up we don't have a problem and if she doesn't show up we don't have a problem. You know, I have learned through the years. I used to have her over here in the middle and I thought, [to myself], "Get smart!"*

Other managers agreed that they need to be flexible with market policies during the early years of establishment to engender vendor commitment.

Examples of this flexibility exist across the cases. Two case markets define themselves as producer-only markets. However, the market manager from one of the markets “doubts” that some of her vendors are “really growing everything that they are selling,” and chooses not to enforce her policy. During interviews with two farmers selling at this same market, they openly discussed selling products sourced from other farms. The market manager from the other market decided to allow a farmer to “represent” another farmer even though that was not permitted in their market policy. She felt it was necessary to maintain a local offering of fruit, which consumers demand and is difficult to source. In this case, the fruit farmers were nearing their seventies and felt they had reached a stage in their life where they were unable to keep up with selling at multiple farmers markets. The market manager relaxed enforcement of the rules and

was flexible with the arrangement to preserve the product diversity and relationships at her market.

While the first two examples demonstrate policy-in-practice regarding enforcement, written policies also showed a propensity to evolve. One market, for example, reevaluates its market policy at the end of each market season. They invite all of their vendors to a year-end business meeting and the market manager takes “realistic” policy suggestions. When their market faced increased interest from neighborhood crafters, the manager and vendors decided to revise the market’s policy to limit the number of craft vendors who could sell on regular (non festival) market days. They felt it was important to maintain an abundance of food related products to correspond with their mission of providing access to healthy foods. However, they were careful to “grandmother” in two existing craft vendors who helped get the market established.

*They were some of our first and second year supporters. They really helped with getting this market off the ground. Since then, the policy has shifted because we have an overwhelmingly amount of arts and crafts that want to come in. We have kind of shifted our policy to festival only.*

In this example, the market adjusted its written policy to support its mission, while also showing support for two of its core vendors. Thus, policy adjustments were made in a way that was consistent with vendors’ interests and would retain community support for the market. This example demonstrates the more flexible, emergent approach that early-stage markets use to develop market policies and structures.

To date, there is virtually no discussion on the process of how farmers markets develop working policies. The above findings, however, generate insights into policy development that is specific to small, early-stage farmers markets in low-income, urban areas. These findings suggest that the unique constraints of these early-stage markets encourage the development of

market policies in a more organic and emergent fashion. Policies that provide structure, order and professionalism in larger, more established markets seem to work less well in markets where organizers must work to develop a sense of vendor commitment.

## **Conclusion**

This study contributes to the literature by advancing a working theory for farmers market development in low-income, urban areas. In particular, I find that the two main theories of farmers market development currently presented in the literature are not applicable to small, early-stage markets in these low-income communities. These theories maintain that the development process should include increases in market size and vendor professionalism (Lloyd et al., 1987; Stephenson, 2008). Specifically, they suggest that the path to development requires markets to acquire more vendors, and specifically more full-time, commercial farmers to succeed (Lloyd et al., 1987; Stephenson et al., 2006). In addition, the complexity of management strategies increases once markets exceed more than 30 vendors (Stephenson, 2008).

Evidence from this study, however, diverges from these theories. Instead, the case study farmers markets in this study showed little need to significantly increase their vendor base. Managers suggested that the customer base for these early-stage markets does not yet justify or support a large market in terms of vendor numbers. Rather, these markets intentionally stayed small, and focused on developing a mix of vendors and products. None of the managers felt that more vendors or more full-time, commercial farmers would be appropriate for these markets. In fact, that approach is likely to have put these markets at greater risk. Determining the appropriate balance for each market was fostered by community-based market management that could accommodate the constraints associated with establishing a market with a limited consumer base.



The results also suggest that even small markets in low-income areas require complex forms of management. In the literature, Stephenson (2008) suggests that there is little complexity of management for small markets. However, the case markets in this study demonstrated aspects of complex management including paid personnel who are involved in budgeting, planning and other highly specialized tasks. These market managers are responsible for the operation of the market, but also function as community-organizers. In order to foster the development of a vendor and product mix that works for the community, they bring residents together to collectively attain a shared self-interest. They strive to create a farmers market that is accessible to the community, both potential vendors as well as shoppers, and represents the community's desires for a marketplace. As such, market policies and management practices tended to be less formal than those reported in the literature (Stephenson, 2008) and more customized to the needs of the particular market and its participants. In addition, they often evolved through an emergent process of practice. Management showed flexibility and allowed for policies and practices to evolve in a way that was accommodating to the community and to their core vendors.

Thus, the process of development in these early-stage farmers markets in low-income, urban areas is characterized by markets' abilities to provide a diverse product offering from a small, but diverse vendor mix. To do this, even these small markets require complex management strategies. These findings suggest that is difficult and perhaps ineffective to generalize a process of farmers market development across markets of all types. While this study provides insights into the important elements of market development for small, early-stage markets in low-income, urban areas, it also identifies a need for further study of market

development. Further research is necessary to distinguish types of farmers markets in operation across Michigan and the United States using community and market characteristics as opposed to market size or number of vendors which are now commonly used in the literature. Subsequently, researchers will then be able to explore how market development differs across market types and also the commonalities that exist. More research is essential for sustaining the growth of farmers markets in low-income communities and beyond.

These findings also have important implications for practice. New and small markets are particularly vulnerable to failure and as such can benefit from best practices derived from similar cases of market development. First, I recommend that organizers interested in starting farmers markets in low-income areas begin with a small, core group of farmers and vendors. Once a strong core is established, then a market should focus on diversifying the product availability. Second, I caution that even small markets in these areas require complex forms of management. The survival of these markets hinges on the ability of markets' organizers to adapt to the community's needs and support operations during those initial and sometime volatile periods.

## **Chapter 4. Using a Case Approach to Assess Farmers' Attitudes Regarding Central Terminal Model Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) Programs at Selected Michigan Farmers Markets<sup>9</sup>**

### **Abstract**

Recently, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has pushed to increase the number of farmers markets that accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits (formerly known as food stamps) via Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT). However, a small percentage of farmers markets accept SNAP and little is known of the experience of the farmer-vendors who participate in central terminal model EBT programs at farmers markets. The objective of this exploratory study was to elucidate farmers' attitudes regarding central terminal model EBT programs at selected Michigan farmers markets. This study used qualitative research methods and a case approach. Thirty-two farmers that participated in central terminal model EBT programs at farmers markets were interviewed. Three main themes emerged. First, based on their experiences, farmers expressed a positive attitude toward central terminal model EBT programs at farmers markets. Second, positive attitudes were often associated with the view that market managers had made it easy for farmers to accept EBT benefits and freed them from the administrative burdens of redemption and federal reporting. Third, farmers believed that accepting food assistance benefits attracted new customers to the farmers market thus expanding their customer base. While these results may not be reflective of farmers' attitudes in other regions, the themes that emerged highlight topics that may be important considerations

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<sup>9</sup>This chapter has been accepted for publication (HORTTECH-02352) and is tentatively scheduled for publication in HortTechnology 23(1), February 2013.

when making future decisions about the expansion of electronic food assistance programs at farmers markets.

## **Introduction**

A farmers market is a public and recurring assembly of farmers or their representatives who sell food or agricultural products they produce directly to consumers. In addition, farmers markets may include a variety of other vendors as determined by market management [Michigan Farmers Market Association (MIFMA), 2012a]. Farmers markets are credited with providing a range of benefits from promoting small and mid-sized farm viability to strengthening communities (Abel et al., 1999; Ross, 2006). Considering these benefits and the growing popularity of locally-grown foods (Keeling-Bond et al., 2009; Zepeda and Li, 2006), the increase in the number of farmers markets across the country is not surprising (1755 in 1994 to 7175 in 2011) (USDA, 2012). The trend is similar in Michigan with the number of farmers markets growing from 90 in 2001 to more than 300 in 2012 (MIFMA, 2012b).

Many new farmers markets are located in low-income communities where residents do not have easy access to fresh and healthy foods. Limited access to nutritious food may be linked to poor diets, increases in obesity, and diet-related diseases (USDA Economic Research Service, 2009). However, recent evidence suggests that when low-income individuals have access to retail outlets that provide affordable, nutritious foods, they make healthier food choices and have better health outcomes (Flournoy, 2011). Food security researchers and advocates argue that farmers markets are needed most in these communities as they provide access to nutritious foods that are not available otherwise (Bell and Standish, 2009; Pothukuchi and Thomas, 2004).

Farmers markets, however, are especially vulnerable to failure in low-income communities and therefore present a number of challenges (Fisher, 1999; Project for Public

Spaces, 2003). Markets in low-income areas often struggle with high farmer and vendor turnover rates and a general lack of vendor commitment (Alkon, 2008; Fisher, 1999). Fisher (1999) concludes that for farmers markets in low-income areas to be successful, farmers must provide an appropriate mix of product at affordable prices. However, he also notes a “fundamental tension” between farmers earning a fair price and the ability of low-income shoppers to pay such prices. Alkon (2008) reports that the need for farmers to earn a fair price can and sometimes does conflict with a market’s goal to improve food access for low-income shoppers. Thus, to address the need for farmers to earn adequate revenue at farmers markets, market organizers continually seek ways to expand a market’s customer base and increase sales. Recent research indicates that the number of customers has a significant positive influence on vendor participation in farmers markets (Hofmann et al., 2009).

One way to increase the customer base is to introduce new populations, such as food assistance program recipients, to the farmers market. SNAP recipients can purchase food at farmers markets if EBT is available. EBT is a system that allows recipients of federal food assistance programs to purchase food from an authorized retailer using a benefits card. An EBT card works like a debit card and allows recipients to authorize the transfer of their food assistance benefits from a federal account to a retailer’s account, such as a farmers market or grocery store (Montri et al., 2011). The total value of SNAP sales offers significant revenue to food retailers. In Michigan, for example, SNAP brings \$245.6 million of food sales to the state each month (State of Michigan, 2012). In the United States (U.S.), 44.7 million people, or 13% of the population, used EBT in 2011 to redeem \$71.8 billion worth of SNAP benefits [USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), 2012a]. SNAP-eligible food items include food or food

products for human use such as breads, meat, dairy products, cereals, seeds, fruit, vegetables, and plants or seeds for use in a home garden to produce food for personal use (USDA FNS, 2012b).

In the past, food stamps were widely accepted in farmers markets. However, most farmers markets discontinued accepting food stamps when the program transitioned to EBT since they were no longer able to accept paper coupons (USDA FNS, 2010). Instead, EBT requires a point of sale device (POSD) to accept food assistance benefits as payment. Since farmers markets typically operate in temporary or open-air venues, they often lack the infrastructure needed to support a POSD. Recent evidence suggests that many vendors are now dissuaded from accepting SNAP/EBT due to the cost and administrative burdens of purchasing and operating a wireless POSD (MIFMA, unpublished data). As such, food stamp redemptions dropped dramatically in farmers markets between the early 1990s and mid 2000s when the program transitioned to EBT (USDA FNS, 2010).

A central terminal model EBT program at farmers markets, however, can alleviate much of the burden for individual vendors, increasing their sales especially among clientele who might not otherwise afford fresh foods. Under a centralized system, markets provide a central POSD to accept benefits from all SNAP shoppers. The POSD deducts food assistance benefits from a shopper's EBT card and in exchange the market issues an equal value in alternative market currency, usually a wooden nickel or paper scrip, that the shopper may use to purchase eligible items from any vendor at the market. Vendors accept the alternative currency like cash and are later reimbursed by the market. Under this system, the market takes responsibility for the costs of operating the POSD and for complying with federal requirements to account for the distribution of federal food assistance benefits. The market also assumes responsibility to reimburse the vendor for their EBT sales occurring at the market (Montri et al., 2011).

Despite growing interest in expanding the number of farmers markets accepting EBT (Buttenheim et al., 2012), little is known about the experience of EBT from the perspective of the actors who implement these programs at farmers markets. The peer reviewed literature on farmers markets has primarily focused on consumer access, nutrition education, and consumer participation in food assistance programs (Anliker, 1992; Balsam et al., 1994; Dollahite et al., 2005; Just and Weninger, 1997). At the practitioner level, market organizers and agricultural educators have published how-to guides and case study reports on EBT programs (e.g., Montri et al., 2011; Wasserman et al., 2010). Mino (2012) reports that the administrative burdens of implementing these programs are significant and suggests that not all farmers markets may be candidates for EBT. Yet, the literature offers nothing about farmer experiences with EBT programs at farmers markets. Like market staff, farmers are intimately involved in the EBT redemption process and as vendors they are necessary for the program to function. What is their experience and how does it affect the market?

Accordingly, the objective of this study was to use a case study approach to explore farmers' attitudes regarding central terminal model EBT programs at selected Michigan farmers markets. Michigan is an appropriate site for this work because, in contrast to most states, there is now substantial experience with EBT at Michigan farmers markets. In 2006, only three Michigan farmers markets were authorized to accept EBT. In 2012, more than 100 farmers markets accepted EBT. Currently, Michigan leads the midwestern U.S. and ranks third nationwide in the number of farmers markets authorized to accept EBT (Roper, 2012). The majority of these farmers markets (77 of 78 in 2011) use a central terminal model (Segar, 2012). EBT redemptions at Michigan farmers markets have increased exponentially from \$15,832 in 2007 to \$898,194 in 2011 (Segar, 2012) and Michigan is now fourth in the nation in the total

EBT sales that take place at farmers markets (Roper, 2012). As such, Michigan farmers are increasingly familiar with and have experience with EBT redemption at multiple markets.

As a case study, the intention of this work is not to generalize from a sample to the population, but to identify emergent themes that may be important to current efforts to expand EBT programs at farmers markets and for future research. These themes may then be subsequently investigated using sample surveys and appropriate hypothesis testing. Case study sampling does not allow generalization to the larger population of farmers markets or farmer-vendors across the region or country. However, the research design purposely samples across a wide range of farmer experiences. Gaining a better understanding of farmer perceptions and preferences will help researchers and practitioners develop further research, policies and programs that will work for farmers. Doing so will help improve the functioning of EBT programs at markets and the retention of farmer-vendors. In addition, given that farmers markets are venues for the sale of horticultural products this work also supports the overall sustainability and profitability of the horticultural industry.

## **Methods**

This study used a qualitative, case study approach. Qualitative work is suitable for topics in which little is currently known and thus seeks to understand insider' perspectives on what is most important (Maxwell, 2012). This research methodology seeks rich data, characterized by depth and detail, as a means to develop an emergent theory informed by the perspectives of those involved in the phenomenon under study (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008; Patton, 2002). Purposeful sampling was used to identify "information rich" research sites with the most relevant and interesting properties given the aim of the study (Patton, 2002). Accordingly, three Michigan cities representing geographically distinct areas of the state with high volumes of Food



Assistance Program eligible recipients were selected for study. Within each city, two case study markets in early to mid-stages of development were identified, for a total of six case study farmers markets. Early to mid-stage markets (Andreatta and Wickliffe II, 2002; Lloyd et al., 1987) were selected for study as this sector represents the area of greatest growth potential for EBT programs in Michigan farmers markets.

A total of thirty-two farmers were interviewed at the six case study markets. In small markets with less than 10 vendors, census sampling was used. In markets with 10 or more vendors, stratified random sampling (using a random number generator) was used to select participants with varying experience at each location: (1) farmers that had been participating in the farmers market for 2 or more years, (2) farmers that were new to the market that season, and (3) farmers that had participated in the market at one time but had since left. Farmers are defined as individuals who grow and sell edible crops for human consumption including, but not limited to, fruit, vegetables, meat, poultry and dairy products. All farmers interviewed had experience with EBT at farmers markets.

In-depth interviews were conducted between Oct. 2010 and Apr. 2012, using a structured, open-ended interview guide (approved by the Social Science/Behavioral/Education Institutional Review Board at Michigan State University; IRB# 10-495; see Appendix). In-depth interviews yield descriptive and explanatory data (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006; Patton, 2002) and were chosen because of their strength in providing data based on first-hand knowledge, experience and perceptions pertaining to the research questions posed. During these interviews, farmers were asked about the characteristics of their farm, farmers market participation and participation in market EBT programs. Interviews lasted between 45 and 150 minutes. In exchange for participating in the study, farmers were provided with a \$25 cash honorarium.

In-depth interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. A thematic coding system was developed to systematically identify recurring themes in the textual data (Patton, 2002). Codes are used to identify and extract text that serves as evidence for specific themes (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Thematic coding is particularly important in situations in which simple word searches are inadequate. In this study, it was particularly important since farmers often do not identify food assistance programs by their official names. Rather, they speak at length of their experience with a particular program but use incorrect program names or reference the program using attributes of the process used at the farmers market for redemption or reimbursement (e.g., “the market tokens”). In such situations, thematic coding is important as researchers can analyze the data based on respondents’ descriptions of the EBT program rather than the (often incorrect) titles they used to identify the program. Codes were applied to the text from each data collection using QSR NVivo 9 (QSR International, Doncaster, Australia). Data were then extracted and summarized using displays. A display is a visual format that reduces the textual data and aids in identifying patterns and drawing valid conclusions (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

## **Results**

Farmers represented a wide variety in agricultural experience, ranging in years of farming experience from 5 to 70 years. In terms of scale, production areas ranged from 400 square feet to 900 acres with 70% of the sample growing on less than 5 acres as prior research has shown is common for farmers market growers (Griffin and Frongillo, 2003). Farmers also showed a diversity of experience with farmers markets selling at one to 20 different farmers markets over a period of one to 64 years. Eighty-nine percent of the farmers interviewed sold horticultural products, primarily fresh fruit and vegetables. Farm characteristics are provided in Table 1.

Using a qualitative approach proved to be particularly important in this study due to the numerous inconsistencies in the language used to describe food assistance programs common at farmers markets. During the course of interviews with 32 farmers, they used 40 different terms to identify four major food assistance programs found in Michigan farmers markets. When referring specifically to SNAP EBT, farmers used 16 different terms to refer to the electronic technology, the federal or state program name, or the alternative redemption system used in the farmers market (Table 5). As stated above, analysis was based on descriptions of the EBT program as opposed to relying on the often incorrect terms farmers used to name the program.

Table 5. Terms Farmers Used when Referring to Michigan Farmers Market EBT Programs.

Reference	Terms Used
Electronic technology	“EBT,” “Electronic Benefits Transfers,” “EBT card,” “EB cards or whatever,” “Bridge Card machine”
Federal or State program name	“SNAP,” “food stamps,” “bridge cards,” “bridge program,” “benefits”
Alternative redemption system	“Market tokens,” “wooden tokens,” “tokens,” “coins,” “bridge card money,” “laminated money”

Three main themes emerged during this research. First, based on their experiences with central terminal model EBT programs at farmers markets, the majority of farmers had a positive attitude regarding EBT. Second, many reasoned that their positive attitude emerged because the markets made the programs simple and convenient for them to participate in the redemption process. Third, some farmers believed that when a farmers market accepts food assistance benefits it attracts new customers and thus expands the market’s customer base.

Farmers interviewed had experience participating in central terminal model EBT programs at the case study farmers markets. Nevertheless their experience with these programs was not limited to the case study markets as farmers sold at one to 20 other markets, some of which had central terminal model EBT programs as well. The vast majority of farmers (85%) had positive comments about EBT programs at farmers markets. The remaining 15% were

indifferent, meaning that they neither viewed the program negatively or positively. This minority of farmers all had production areas of two acres or less and indicated that EBT sales were not an important source of revenue for them.

For the 85% of farmers that viewed EBT programs positively, about half (48%) explained that EBT sales were important as a source of revenue for them. With the market's EBT program, farmers said they were able to capture a small, but important portion of sales that they would not have access to otherwise. The remaining 52% of farmers spoke positively about EBT programs but did not identify a benefit that accrued to them personally. Rather, they stated that EBT and federal food assistance benefits were either important for the market or for the community where the market was located. Some stated that farmers markets should market to the needs of the surrounding community. For example, one farmer specifically commented that operating food assistance and EBT programs represented an "important philosophy of the market" and allowed the market to address community needs. Another farmer added that EBT programs at the market provided low-income community members who participate in the federal SNAP program the opportunity to use their benefits to buy fruit and vegetables. Overall, these farmers were pleased about their participation in a farmers market that had a real focus on improving food access in lower-income communities.

The second theme that emerged addressed the perceived convenience and simplicity of participating in central terminal model EBT programs. Nearly half (45%) of farmers attributed their positive attitude about accepting EBT benefits to the way in which the farmers market(s) operated these programs. Farmers repeatedly emphasized that their main focus during market hours was on selling their products and attending to customers. Hence, without the current centralized EBT program in place at these markets, farmers suggested that the EBT redemption

process would be too onerous to take on individually. The farmers who spoke positively about EBT program(s) identified specific ways in which the market(s) made it easy for them to accept SNAP benefits. Some expressed their relief that the market took care of the administrative work with the USDA in turn making the process of redemption easy for them. Others referenced their hesitation to work with electronic devices or to split their time and attention between attending to customers and complying with the multiple steps required to redeem and accept a customer's benefits using EBT.

Generally, farmers agreed that having programs that were well administered and managed for them was critical. They indicated that they wanted a no-hassle system where they could depend on the market to manage the program as opposed to having a program that each vendor would have to manage individually. For instance, one farmer talked about the importance of having a strong market manager that understands growers and is timely and organized to manage food assistance programs on behalf of the farmers and vendors at the market. None of the farmers interviewed talked about central terminal model EBT programs as being cumbersome, difficult or challenging. Rather, many made concise statements about the redemption processes, saying they "work great," are "very simple," or are "a piece of cake." One farmer specifically discussed his experience in multiple markets by saying he depends on the market to take care of the administrative aspects of completing the USDA authorization paperwork, creating and administering an alternative redemption system in the market, and making the whole program as easy as possible for the vendors.

The third theme that emerged is that some farmers believed that accepting food assistance benefits at farmers markets attracts new customers, therefore expanding the market's customer base. A small but noteworthy minority (25%) maintained that EBT shoppers would not attend

the farmers market if they did not have the ability to use their SNAP benefits at the market. As one farmer stated, the EBT program “brings a different crowd of people down.” Farmers, however, were mixed on the point of whether these programs generated repeat or regular shoppers. A few farmers even suggested that having the program helped to expose shoppers to new products that are more likely to be found at a farmers market. One farmer explained that they are not only seeing many lower-income shoppers at the market but “for maybe the first time in their life they are able to buy fresh, organic produce.” Therefore, some farmers believed that the EBT program attracted new customers and also gave them the opportunity to purchase new items that they would not purchase under different circumstances.

Finally, at the end of each interview, farmers were asked about what they identify as most important for the survivability of farmers markets in low-income areas. Twenty-two percent of the farmers indicated that EBT programs and the acceptance of a wide variety of food assistance benefits were essential for the sustainability of farmers markets in low-income areas. In these instances, this was related to the third theme regarding the potential for food assistance programs to expand a market’s customer base. One farmer explained that accepting EBT attracted new market shoppers from the community saying “especially...the way the economy is right now, a lot of people are participating in programs the government is offering.” Another farmer added that EBT programs at farmers markets help attract a new and diverse customer base, but also help keep a market successful.

## **Conclusion**

While these results are reflective of these Michigan case markets, their applicability to other farmers and other regions may or may not hold. However, the themes that emerged provide insights into farmers perspectives that can be considered by farmers market

management, state and federal policymakers, and other researchers interested in food assistance programming in a farmers market setting. In terms of market management, study results indicated that some farmers perceive central terminal model EBT programs as a method to bring new customers into the market thus expanding the market's customer base. Market managers operating farmers markets in low-income, urban areas may consider establishing centralized EBT programs in an effort to both attract new customers and expand the purchasing power of low-income shoppers who could use their food assistance benefits at the market. A strong customer base has been shown to influence vendor participation (Hofmann et al., 2009) and could be important for recruiting new vendors and retaining existing vendors. This is important as previous research has shown that the identification and recruitment of potential vendors are essential for the development and expansion of farmers markets (Govindasamy et al., 2003). When establishing a new EBT program, managers may also want to consider that the farmers in this case study viewed these programs positively when they were managed by the market, well administered, and overall very simple for vendors. These findings suggest that farmers markets that have the capacity necessary to manage these programs can be perceived by farmers to have important programs in place that influence the overall success of the market. As other studies have indicated, management is an important factor in successful farmers markets (Stephenson, 2008).

In terms of informing state and federal policymakers, these results demonstrated that the farmers who participated in this study generally viewed government funded food assistance programs positively when managed by a third party, in this case the farmers market. Farmers' acceptance of EBT programs in farmers markets is important to helping the USDA reach its goal to increase the number of farmers markets authorized to accept SNAP/EBT and SNAP

redemptions at farmers markets (USDA, 2010) and overall improve access to fresh, healthy foods. As program and policy changes are made to increase EBT at farmers markets, policymakers should take into consideration the need for market management capacity that farmers indicate as essential for making the central terminal model EBT programs run simply and effectively for them. Considering farmers' perspectives, as this study did, is necessary for developing well-informed solutions.

Overall, this study indicates that participating farmers had a positive experience with central-terminal EBT programs at Michigan farmers markets located in low-income, urban areas with high levels of SNAP distribution. Results suggest that EBT programs help expand a market's customer base, contribute to farmer revenues, and are perceived as important programs for market sustainability. Increasing SNAP redemptions at farmers markets should be viewed as both a public health intervention for low-income and underserved families (Buttenheim et al., 2012) as well as an opportunity for farmers and the horticultural industry to access a greater portion of SNAP benefits distributed each month.

The results from this study can provide a basis for future studies, both qualitative and quantitative. These findings offer a foundation for future research on this topic by identifying the variety of ways in which farmers refer to EBT programs. Development of future quantitative studies will unquestionably need to cogitate the lack of uniformity in language in order to gather reliable data. Additional research is necessary to understand farmers' attitudes regarding individual vendor-operated terminals for SNAP and other food assistance programs like Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and the federal Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP). Furthermore, future research should explore how EBT contributes to overall farmer-vendor profitability. Finally, in order to encourage greater adoption as is desired by the USDA, research



should explore the perceptions and preconceived notions of farmers who do not currently use EBT in order to better understand constraints and barriers.

## **Chapter 5. Conclusions**

The pace of farmers market research has been unable to keep up with the dramatic and hurried growth witnessed in the farmers market sector over the last two decades. As the number of new farmers markets established each year continues to increase, so does the number of individuals involved with organizing, managing, and frequenting these markets - venues that have been lauded as the “flagship” of the local food systems movement (Lyson, 2004) and “powerful symbols of progress” (Winne, 2008). The farmers market community is hungry for data, statistics, case studies, best practices and lessons learned: research that builds on the nascent foundation of academic and practitioner publications to strengthen scholarly analyses and practical applications. The body of work presented in this dissertation draws on the experiences and wisdom of market insiders in an effort to enhance the farmers market literature and provide insights for the skilled market leaders and organizers behind the development of these community institutions.

### **Scholarly Contributions**

This study contributes to the literature by advancing research on farmers market development. Just a few applied studies focus on understanding and resolving management issues (Fisher, 1999; Lloyd et al., 1987; Andreatta and Wickliffe II, 2002; Stephenson, 2008). The research presented here draws on these studies to enhance the farmers market literature. The farmers market literature spans the disciplines of economics, geography, horticulture, and rural sociology (Brown, 2002) and constitutes a growing segment of the broader alternative food systems literature. Farmers markets are an especially important research topic in the alternative food systems literature as they have been identified as having a “keystone” function in rebuilding regional food systems (Gillespie et al., 2007). As keystones, they are identified as joining

together and supporting local producers, local households and local communities to create broad economic and social benefits. This body of work is meant to add to and enhance the scholarly discourse on farmers markets as important parts of alternative food systems development.

Following the introduction, in Chapter 2, I generate novel insights about the farmers participating in these markets; how they make decisions about which markets they will attend and what sustains their interest in a market. I offer a new way to view farmer participation, based on a classification of farmers' motivations. This contribution to the literature provides researchers with an alternate basis on which to differentiate the types of farmers participating in farmers markets aside from standard labels such as full-time, part-time, hobby, or retired. Using economic and lifestyle motivations to describe farmers is new to the farmers market literature and offers opportunity for further exploration and refinement.

Characterizing and understanding the individuals and families who sell at farmers markets is essential to furthering the literature on market development. These farmers and vendors are vital to the operation and success of these markets and as such their voices and perspectives should be central to the discourse. Chapter 2 shows how farmers consider multiple motivations for participating in farmers markets that they must prioritize as they choose the markets at which they will sell. The farmers interviewed as part of this study all sold at small, early-stage farmers markets in low-income, urban areas. They represent a small subset of farmers, agricultural entrepreneurs, gardeners, and organizations selling at farmers markets. There is an enormous need for further investigation of what drives farmers, small businesses and individuals to participate in farmers markets and regional food systems. This research with a focus on farmers' perspectives, motivations and decision-making will add greater detail and depth to understanding the development of markets and the food systems in which they operate.

In Chapter 3 I advance a working theory for farmers market development in low-income, urban areas. Farmers markets are often identified as a strategy for supporting health and nutrition in underserved communities (Flournoy, 2011). However, these markets face challenges above and beyond those facing all farmers markets and as such are more vulnerable to failure. In addition, they are small and have limited growth potential. As Fisher (1999) indicates, the communities in which these markets function have limited purchasing power and generally residents have less time and resources, which impedes their ability to shop at these venues. The evidence from this research suggests that farmers markets operating in low-income areas are fundamentally different than those that operate in other more affluent communities. They have unique challenges due to the limited resources available as well as unique needs associated with food access and food security. As a result, the development process these markets undergo diverges from existing theories.

The two main theories of farmers market development currently presented in the literature maintain that the development process involves an increase in size, management complexity, and vendor professionalism (Lloyd et al., 1987; Stephenson, 2008). While there is general agreement that markets become more viable and experience less risk for failure as they develop, my findings suggest a different process of development for these markets. The evidence presented here suggests that early-stage markets remained small and focused on developing a mix of vendors. In addition, management of these markets is more complex than suggested in the literature. Market leadership requires a community organizing approach, one that recognizes the specific challenges a community faces, but also its unique resources and can thus establish the farmers market as part of the community. This is especially important in low-income communities because these farmers markets do not function solely as a place for

commerce. Instead, this study found that managers seek to create public spaces that are welcoming and inclusive to a small but diverse composition of farmers and products.

Overall, this work contributes to the farmers market literature and the broader alternative food systems literature by adding important findings regarding farmer participation and market development. In terms of farmer participation, this research generates a new way to classify farmers and may be a catalyst for a scholarly debate on who is and who is not a “real” farmer. The results presented in Chapter 2 may challenge common assumptions about the farmers who sell in farmers markets and certainly demands further research on the types of farmers who participate in farmers markets, their motivations and their decision-making. In terms of market development, the findings from this study indicate that farmers markets in low-income, urban areas undergo a distinctive process of development. The research presented in Chapter 3 is presented to fill a gap in the literature regarding farmers market development in low-income, urban areas. My findings address this gap and at the same time draw attention to an area of interest – farmers market development – that is largely understudied. There exists a substantial need for ongoing research into this important issue. Findings would be applicable not only to the farmers market community, but should also be of interest at a broader scale to food systems scholars who identify farmers markets as one part of local or regional food systems.

### **Practical Applications**

These findings also have important implications for practice. In the mid-1990s Marion Kalb, head of one of the premier organizations developing farmers markets in the United States, said, “We aren’t quite sure anymore how to organize farmers’ markets in low-income communities” (Fisher, 1999). The research presented here indicates that market organizers today face some of the same challenges noted more than a decade ago. However, this research

provides another layer of insights that can aid market managers in developing new markets, or new solutions. I offer specific findings regarding farmer selection and recruitment as well as recommendations for developing the market and market programs. The findings in this dissertation have important implications for market leaders organizing farmers markets in low-income, urban areas.

First, I explore farmer participation as driven by farmers' motivations. Farmers are said to be the lynchpin to market survival. The premise is simple: "No farmers, no market" (Winne, 2008). However, recruiting and retaining farmers is a common challenge for farmers markets located in low-income, urban areas (Fisher, 1999; Alkon, 2008) In this dissertation, I find that farmers who sell in these markets are driven by different motivations that influence their choices and commitments to markets. The results show that the farmers who market organizers most often recruit have earnings expectations that these markets can rarely meet. I recommend that market organizers consider recruiting different types of growers including community organizations, gardeners, and farmers seeking business opportunities.

Second, the findings regarding farmer participation set the stage for Chapter 3, which addresses the development of small, early-stage farmers markets in low-income, urban areas. I find that the development of these markets involves a community-based approach that will be intentionally flexible to accommodate for the distinctive needs of individual communities. I draw on lessons learned from the case study markets to recommend that farmers markets in these communities start small (e.g., with four to 6 vendors) and then focus on diversifying their product mix in a way that limits competition but continues to pique consumer interest. This is not a simple undertaking. In addition, markets should adopt a flexible, emergent approach for developing market policies and structures. Farmers markets are as distinctive as the

communities in which they operate and the policies governing their operation need to allow for customization during the early years of establishment in order to engender farmer commitment. These findings are consistent with the practitioner recommendations put forth by Fisher (1999) over a decade ago, but also expand these recommendations and tie them to an evolving theory.

Third, in Chapter 4 I specifically focus on central terminal EBT programs in place at these markets to better understand farmers' participation and attitudes. Establishing EBT at nontraditional retailers has been identified as a challenge, and "as multivendor sites, farmers' markets are the most complicated of these nontraditional retailers" (Fisher, unpublished report, 2011). My results indicate that farmers have a positive attitude regarding EBT programs because they are simple and convenient. However, in order to provide simple and convenient programs for their vendors, markets must have the capacity to administer and implement a centralized system (Mino, 2012). This finding is particularly relevant at this time given that federal policymakers are interested in expanding EBT programs at farmers markets and have invested substantial funding in this expansion without research or evaluation results to inform how they work best for stakeholders and what is necessary to manage them.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

The strength of this study is its concentrated focus on one type of farmers market: small, early-stage markets in low-income, urban areas. Further research should explore farmer participation and market development in other types of farmers markets to determine if these findings hold true, or if different development models should be suggested based on different types of markets. Different types of markets may include those in rural communities, those located in middle or upper-class communities, and those managed by different types of leadership organizations (e.g., local governments, Downtown Development Associations).

Furthermore, the markets included in this study have high organizational capacity. Future research should include markets in low-income, urban areas that lack support from a parent organization.

This study featured the perspective of market managers and farmers. Farmers are defined as individuals or families who grow and sell edible crops for human consumption including, but not limited to, fruit, vegetables, meat, poultry, and dairy products. Farmers have been identified as the “backbone” of farmers markets (Fisher, 1999) and thus were important insiders to highlight. The majority of farmers in this study are small-scale (70% grow on less than 5 acres) producers. It is likely that scale of production could influence farmers’ perspectives and motivations. Future research should endeavor to include farmers who have a larger scale of production. Additionally, I did not interview other market vendors (e.g., value-added food businesses, cottage food producers, ready-to-eat food vendors, artisans or crafters, or other nonfood businesses). Future studies should investigate the motivations underlying these business owners’ decisions to further understand market participation for the full scope of market vendors.

Finally, this study was situated in Michigan. Michigan is the second most agriculturally diverse state in the nation producing an abundance of high quality food and agricultural products (USDA Farm Service Agency, 2012). In specific regards to the farmers market industry, Michigan ranks fourth in the country in the number of farmers markets behind California, New York, and Massachusetts (USDA, 2012) and has a strong statewide association supporting the advancement of these markets. Michigan is also a national leader in implementing food assistance programs at farmers markets (Roper, 2012). Future research should include wider



geographic variability to explore differences that may exist in other parts of the United States or world.

## **APPENDIX**

## Consent Form for Farmer Vendors

You are being asked to participate in a research project focused on sustaining farmers markets in low-income, urban areas. As researchers, we are required to provide a consent form to inform you about the study, to explain the risks and benefits of participation, and to empower you to make an informed decision. Participation is voluntary and you can withdraw from this study at any time. Please feel free to ask us any questions you may have.

### Study Title:

Sustaining Farmers Markets in Low-income, Urban Areas: Exploring Farmers' Perspectives on Participation

### Researchers:

Dr. Kimberly Chung, Associate Professor, Department of Community, Agriculture, Recreation and Resource Studies (CARRS); kchung@msu.edu; (517) 432-6140

Dru Montri, Ph.D. Student, Departments of Horticulture and CARRS; dnmontri@msu.edu; (517) 432-3381

Institution: Michigan State University

### Mailing Address:

151 Natural Resources Building  
East Lansing, MI 48824

You are being asked to participate in a research study to understand why farmers participate in farmers markets located in low-income, urban areas. You have been selected as a possible participant, because you sell at, or have in the past sold at, one of the farmers markets that has been selected as a participating site. We received your contact information from the market manager. From this study, we hope to learn what motives farmers to participate in farmers markets located in low-income, urban areas and why farmers choose to participate in newly established markets in these areas as opposed to well-established markets in the same vicinity.

In the entire study, approximately 50 people are being asked to participate. Your participation is completely voluntary and will take between one to two hours for an indepth, face-to-face interview. During this interview, you will be asked questions about farming and market participation. You will not be required to answer any question you do not feel comfortable answering, and you can withdraw at anytime without consequence. Upon completion of the interview, you will be compensated \$25 for your participation. The interviews will be audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim. We will share our research findings with you at the completion of this project.

You will not directly benefit from participation in this study; however, your participation will contribute to new practices and policies that support farmer participation in farmers markets located in low-income, urban areas. There are minimal risks associated with participating in this study. Confidentiality of records regarding this research will be maintained to the utmost degree and your confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. A

pseudonym will be used in all notes and reports for cities, farmers market names and your name. A key will be maintained separately from the data to maintain your privacy throughout the project. The data will be stored on computers at Michigan State University and will be protected so that researchers and Institutional Review Board staff will be the only ones that have access to the data. If you prefer to be identified, please initial below to grant specific permission for your identity to be disclosed.

If you have concerns or questions regarding this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact Dru Montri at 517-432-3381 or at 172D Natural Resources Building, Department of CARRS, East Lansing, MI 48824. If you have any questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, fax 517-432-4503, e-mail irb@msu.edu, or regular mail at 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

Your signature below indicates your voluntary agreement to participate in this study. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

Print Name:

Signature:

Date:

Your initials here indicate your agreement to be audio recorded during this interview.

Yes  No Initials: \_\_\_\_\_

Your initials here allow your identity to be disclosed in reports and presentations. By checking yes and then initialing, you are indicating that we should use your real name and not a pseudonym in notes and reports.

Yes  No Initials: \_\_\_\_\_

This consent form was approved by the Social Science/Behavioral/Education Institutional Review Board (SIRB) at Michigan State University. Approved 6/8/11 – valid through 6/7/12. This version supersedes all previous versions. IRB # 10-495.

## Farmer Interview Guide

Research Questions: (1) What motivates farmers to participate in farmers markets located in low-income, urban areas? Are farmers motivated by personal gain or do they intend to further public goals as well? How do farmers balance individual and civic interests? (2) Why do farmers choose to participate in newly-established farmers markets in low-income, urban areas as opposed to well-established markets in the same vicinity?

The purpose of this interview is to explore farmers' perspectives on participation in farmers markets located in low-income, urban areas. Through this interview, I will (1) identify what motivates farmers to participate in the farmers market selected as a study site and (2) ask farmers specifically about why they are participating in the selected farmers market as opposed to a nearby, well-established farmers market.

### **Will you tell me about yourself and how you got involved in farming?**

**When** did you start farming?  
(year and stage of their life)

**How** did you get started?  
(farming background or first generation)

**What** made you want to farm?  
(educational/professional background in ag or other)

What role does the farm play in supporting your family?  
(off-farm employment; percentage of total income)

### **Will you tell me more about your farm?**

Location

Size (total acreage and acreage in production)

Ownership

Labor

Crops

Production practices

Value-added products

Marketing outlets

**How did you get interested in farmers markets and what has been your experience with market participation?**

**When** did you start selling at farmers markets?

**What** made you start selling at farmers markets?

How many different markets have you participated in?

How do you choose which farmers market you will attend?

**I want to focus now specifically on \_\_\_\_\_ (the specific market site identified as part of this study). Can you walk me through your experience with this market from the time you decided to vend at this market until the present?**

**When** did you start selling at this farmers market?

**Why** did you select this farmers market over others in the area?

And, specifically, what made you select this farmers market over \_\_\_\_\_ (Stage 3 market identified in this study).

What role(s) do you have in this market?

Have the mission or motivations for the market changed at all since you've been involved?

For what reason(s) have you continued to participate in this market? Or, what made you drop out of the farmers market?

**What conditions are most important to you what selling at a farmers market? What do you base your commitment to the farmers market on?**

Management style and policies

Governance structure

Community support

Vendor mix

Customer base

Economic factors

Others

**Tell me more about the other vendors that participate in this farmers market.** Who are they, what type of products do they sell, and why do they participate?

How would you characterize the other farmers that participate in this farmers market? How are they similar and different from you? (Identify their definition of farmers.)

What do you feel is critical for recruiting farmers to this farmers market?

What do you feel is critical for retaining farmer vendors?

**Please describe the market characteristics that affect your decision to sell at farmers markets.**

**What is it going to take for this market to continue to operate year after year?**

**Overall, what do you identify as most important for the survivability of farmers markets in low-income areas?**

## Consent Form for Market Managers

You are being asked to participate in a research project focused on sustaining farmers markets in low-income, urban areas. As researchers, we are required to provide a consent form to inform you about the study, to explain the risks and benefits of participation, and to empower you to make an informed decision. Participation is voluntary and you can withdraw from this study at any time. Please feel free to ask us any questions you may have.

### Study Title:

Sustaining Farmers Markets in Low-income, Urban Areas: Exploring Farmers' Perspectives on Participation

### Researchers:

Dr. Kimberly Chung, Associate Professor, Department of Community, Agriculture, Recreation and Resource Studies (CARRS); kchung@msu.edu; (517) 432-6140

Dru Montri, Ph.D. Student, Departments of Horticulture and CARRS; dnmontri@msu.edu; (517) 432-3381

Institution: Michigan State University

### Mailing Address:

151 Natural Resources Building  
East Lansing, MI 48824

You are being asked to participate in a research study to understand why farmers participate in farmers markets located in low-income, urban areas. You have been selected as a possible participant, because you manage, or were involved with organizing, one of the farmers markets that has been selected as a participating site. From this study, we hope to learn what motives farmers to participate in farmers markets located in low-income, urban areas and why farmers choose to participate in newly-established markets in these areas as opposed to well established markets in the same vicinity. We believe that this information will help sustain farmers markets, like yours, located in low-income, urban areas.

In the entire study, approximately 50 people are being asked to participate. Your participation is completely voluntary and will take between one to two hours for an indepth, face-to-face interview. During this interview, you will be asked questions about the history of your market, current market conditions and the vendors that participate in your market. You will not be required to answer any question you do not feel comfortable answering, and you can withdraw at anytime without consequence. The interviews will be audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim. We will share our research findings with you at the completion of this project.

You will not directly benefit from participation in this study; however, your participation will contribute to new practices and policies that support farmer participation in farmers markets located in low-income, urban areas. There are minimal risks associated with participating in this study. Confidentiality of records regarding this research will be maintained to the utmost degree and your confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. A



pseudonym will be used in all notes and reports for cities, farmers market names and your name. A key will be maintained separately from the data to maintain your privacy throughout the project. The data will be stored on computers at Michigan State University and will be protected so that researchers and Institutional Review Board staff will be the only ones that have access to the data. If you prefer to be identified, please initial below to grant specific permission for your identity to be disclosed.

If you have concerns or questions regarding this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact Dru Montri at 517-432-3381 or at 172D Natural Resources Building, Department of CARRS, East Lansing, MI 48824. If you have any questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, fax 517-432-4503, e-mail irb@msu.edu, or regular mail at 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

Your signature below indicates your voluntary agreement to participate in this study. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

Print Name:

Signature:

Date:

Your initials here indicate your agreement to be audio recorded during this interview.

Yes  No Initials: \_\_\_\_\_

Your initials here allow your identity to be disclosed in reports and presentations. By checking yes and then initialing, you are indicating that we should use your real name and not a pseudonym in notes and reports.

Yes  No Initials: \_\_\_\_\_

This consent form was approved by the Social Science/Behavioral/Education Institutional Review Board (SIRB) at Michigan State University. Approved 6/8/11 – valid through 6/7/12. This version supersedes all previous versions. IRB # 10-495.

## Market Manager Interview Guide

Research Question: How do farmers markets advance from an early, unstable stage of development to the next and what role do farmers play in this process? Does farmer participation influence progression through the stages of development and thus market sustainability?

The purpose of this interview is twofold: (1) identify market-level conditions and practices that are important to the overall sustainability of the market and (2) to ask managers specifically about the vendors that participate in their market, how they characterize farmers, and what they identify as being critical for farmer recruitment and retention.

**Tell me more about the vendors that participate in your farmers market.** Who are they, what type of products do they sell, and why do they participate in your farmers market?

Market capacity

How would you characterize the **farmers** that participate in your farmers market? Or, how do you describe them? (Farmer participation; identify their definition of farmers.)

What do you feel is critical for recruiting farmers to your farmers market?

What do you feel is critical for retaining farmer vendors? Do you worry at the end of the season? How has this changed over the years?

**Please describe the market characteristics that you believe are favorable to farmer participation.**

**What market-level conditions do you feel are most important to the overall staying power or survivability of the market?**

Management style and policies

Governance structure

Community support

Vendor mix (core vendors?)

Customer base

Economic factors

Others

**What is it going to take for your market to continue to operate year after year?**

**How has the market evolved since it started? (development of the market)**

**Tell me about the history of the farmers market you manage.**

From the time when the idea of starting a farmers market came about, can you walk me through the organizing efforts?

**When** did the process begin?

**What** was the motivation behind starting a farmers market?

**Who** has been involved? **Who** is involved now?

What role(s) did farmers have in the development of the market? What role(s) do farmers have now?

What are the biggest changes you have seen in the market since it started?

Has the mission or motivations for the market changed at all?

**Overall, what do you identify as most important for the survivability of farmers markets in low-income areas?**

**LITERATURE CITED**

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