



## Farmers Market Evaluation 101

Farmers markets across the country have a significant impact on the communities they serve. They provide multiple benefits including:

- Preserving rural livelihoods and farmland
- Stimulating local economies
- Increasing access to fresh, nutritious food
- Working on system changes to reduce inequities
- Supporting healthy communities

The national Farmers Market Coalition (FMC) has noted the growth in the culture of data collection projects at markets over the last few decades. In response, this national entity has begun to provide resources and training to market communities in partnership with funders and network leaders. The information included in this document is a good start in designing an evaluation system for your market, but check out [FMC's evaluation resources online](#), to see what other templates that markets have uploaded into the [FMC Resource Library](#).

## Good Data Comes from Good Data Collection

To gather good data, a market will need to recruit volunteers, reassign organizational staff, or, in the best scenario, have market partners or funders offering support to manage this for the market. For that very reason, these methods work for volunteer or low-capacity markets or for other partners to do the collection. Here are some tips to start with:

1. **Select specific audiences for the data.** Using a few simple tools such as FMC's Audience Exercise found on [www.farmersmarketmetrics.guide](http://www.farmersmarketmetrics.guide), choose only a few stakeholders in each season that you want to influence or keep engaged. Add new ones each season.
2. **Collect as little data as possible.** This seems counterintuitive, but many markets exhaust their team by collecting too much data that they never use! Or, some market stakeholders forget that the market is not a laboratory but an actual mercantile space that needs to operate as smoothly as possible. Remember that every piece of data collected will need to be checked (probably by you) for accuracy and relevance, so the less added work, the better.
3. **Start with the simple data.** Any data point that requires complete collection (like vendor sales) or advanced calculations (like figuring out the average sale per shopper) should be added in later seasons and not at the start of a data collection phase.
4. **For each data point (metric) that you gather, use it often** on social media, in your email signature, on chalkboards, shared with vendors. Use the data again and again.

5. ***Always consider the amount of time and staffing required*** to collect, enter, analyze, AND use the data in the project design.

Figure 2.1 below presents the components of a complete evaluation system. This graphic will also be helpful for you to show to your market community when you plan the evaluation season to understand the many steps involved.



## Selecting Metrics

When choosing metrics, re-read the goals of a project or, in many cases, a market's mission statement provides clues where to begin. Let's say that your market's mission highlights supporting regional producers; in that case, selecting the metrics: *"Average distance in miles traveled from production site to market"* or *"Total acres owned or managed by market vendors"* would be helpful to measure its success.

Find the FMC list of Metrics Chart here: <https://farmersmarketmetrics.guide/resources/>

## Methods for Data Collection at Farmers Markets

FMC currently focuses on three general data collection methods. They are listed below, with how markets use them. These three methods were selected because they are relatively cost-effective, practical and gather the information that farmers markets usually collect.

- **Document Review** – using administrative documents, or those created during market activities, to pull out relevant data points. A good example is using the merchant report from an EBT machine to determine the day’s total SNAP sales.
- **Observation** – taking notes (usually via a tally) on products, people’s activities (such as event attendance or the number of recipes taken), weather records, added educational programming, and conducting visitor counts.
- **Surveys** – this is asking questions of customers or vendors through questionnaires to determine vendor demographics and customer desires or activities.

Here is an example of how to schedule the different data collection efforts a market might attempt. We recommend conducting these activities 2 - 4 days per season to collect a representative sample of data. Here is an example of how to schedule them:

**Visitor Counting Days:** On the 4th, 10th, 16th, and 22nd market days of the season

**Visitor or Vendor Surveys:** On the 4th, 10th, 16th, and 22nd market days of the season

**Other Observation:** On the 6th, 12th, 18th, and 24th market days of the season

If two seasons of data collection are needed, repeat for each season.

## Tips for Successful Data Collection Days

Collecting data either via an online form that anyone can access from their phone or tablet or it can be collected on slips of paper. The latter will require someone to do the data entry once all are collected and checked.

Find templates at <https://farmersmarketmetrics.guide/resources/> under Data Collection Methods.

Some general tips about data collection day(s):

1. Assign one person as Survey Leader. That should not be the market manager if at all possible. That person will manage the team, collect completed surveys and check the tallies throughout the day.

Keep water and extra supplies and chairs for between shifts and have everyone introduce himself or herself. Explain the day’s breakdown, including where everyone is to be at what time. If there is time, do one or two rounds of role-playing with the survey leader acting as the data collector.

Assure the collectors that this will go well and be easy work. Offer some sample language for intercept or dot surveys, such as: *“Do you have a minute to help the market?”* and give a simple explanation to use when questioned by visitors or vendors, such as, *“We’re gathering information to help the market.”*

2. When handing the collectors their interview or observation sheets, mark their name and goal for completion for that hour on the top sheet or a post-it note.

Then, ask them to come back to the booth or arrange to meet them at a specified time at the end of that time period. All collectors should have 5 minutes as needed or a longer break for those collectors working the entire market day. Make sure the Survey Leader has all of the team's mobile numbers; you'd be surprised at how hard it can be to spot a volunteer!

3. Give everyone the name and phone number for the Survey Leader to call if they have an issue, even if that person will be checking with them regularly. If possible, also introduce each collector or counter to the vendor nearest to their station.
4. At the end of their first collection, ask collectors how things went, ask them to describe one of their data collections, and ask them for any ideas to make it easier or more fluid the next time.

## Analysis of the Data

**Analysis is the process of identifying patterns and correlations within the raw data and then translating into usable information.** Analysis can answer some important questions like "How is this market benefiting vendors?" or "How are attitudes, behaviors, and knowledge changing because of the market?"

The approach to data analysis may vary, depending on who is leading the research effort. Like everything else about a farmers market, a collaborative and open process works best. The responsibility can be shared with university researchers, other markets, or municipal or agency partners. When working with partners, markets should still **retain ownership of their raw data** and ask for author credit for all analysis and reporting or, at a minimum, be acknowledged as a full partner. When the analysis is done in-house on spreadsheets, [FMC's resource](#) on organizing the data will be helpful. In most cases, analysis is a simple process of calculating numbers for a market day or season. Just make sure that the analysis is appropriate and will not skew later data collection efforts. For example, taking a tally of visitors only on special event days may mean the analysis inflates the actual number of visitors over a season. Or vendor data does not include a large portion of the vendor base, meaning that the data is not really representative. When there is less data, there may still be a way to use it to report, with a case study approach ("On the first market day of the year, prepared food vendors reported a 25% increase in sales over the year before.")

## Using the Data

Check out these two FMC toolkits for how your market could use the data you collected to its best advantage:

<https://farmersmarketcoalition.org/national-farmers-market-week/>

<https://farmersmarketmetrics.guide/metrics-in-action/>

Please share your data reports with FMC and upload your evaluation best practices to the FMC Resource Library for your peers to use for their evaluation plan.