



Extending Roots of Fresh Stop Markets Across the Southeast Region

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Introduction

The affordability and accessibility of fresh, local produce has marginalized communities across the southeast region of the United States for decades. These communities have been comprised of lower-income people who do not have the ability to buy this produce, thus, they resort to cheaper, unhealthy food. To combat this, New Roots, Inc. has created Fresh Stop Markets (FSM's) in Louisville, Brandenburg, and Hazard, Kentucky that provide communities access to fresh, local, affordable produce.

Through FSM's, New Roots, Inc. builds the capacity and leadership qualities of farmers to achieve agricultural sustainability and social justice. In order to achieve these goals, FSM's provide a new economic opportunity that financially supports their farming operation, reduces the environmental impact of agricultural and transportation practices, introduces an education component about the produce at the markets, and offers produce at lower prices on a sliding scale model.

By interviewing a farmer, a board member, and market leaders, this project intends to gather the essential components of FSM's to create a toolkit for replication, produce metrics to measure the success of the markets, and further build the leadership and agricultural capacity of local farmers.

Objectives

- To carry out qualitative interviews with leaders of six FSM's in Kentucky to identify how various leadership roles and responsibilities are divided among volunteers at a given FSM
- To conduct participatory observations in two FSM markets to develop a deeper understanding of the markets' operations



Research Questions

1. What is unique about FSM, compared with farmers markets and other direct marketing mechanisms?
2. What differences and similarities exist across markets?
3. What are the necessary components of a successful FSM?
4. What are the challenges for the model to be successful?
5. What further research is needed?

Methods

Qualitative data was collected through interviews and participatory observations.

Interview

1. Six interviews conducted
 - One farmer
 - One board member
 - Four market leaders
2. How the interview was conducted
 - One in person
 - Two on Zoom
 - Three on the phone

Participatory Observations

1. Observations conducted in two places:
 - West Louisville FSM
 - Brandenburg FSM
2. Actions:
 - Setting up tables and produce
 - Building relationships with shareholders and how site people
 - Organizing shareholders to recruit new shareholders
 - Informing non-shareholders of food

Themes:

- Leadership
- Farmers
- Model
- Organization
- Partners
- Shareholders
- Financial

	Farmer	Non-Farmer	Total
Market Leader	1	4	5
Board	0	1	1
Total	1	5	6

Findings

1. Market is owned by the community it is in
 - Relies on volunteers to operate markets
 - Sliding-scale fee based on income
 - Food justice mission
 - Pop-up markets are bi-weekly
2. Differences:
 - Produce preferences (organic v. conventional, seasonal produce, etc.)
 - Demographics (socioeconomic status, etc.)
 - Support and organizing by community

Similarities:

- Strong leadership presence
- Passionate volunteers
- Began at place of interest (e.g. churches)
- Well-defined leadership roles

3. Necessary Components:

- Local Produce
- Accessible produce
- Affordable produce
- Education
- Chef using produce available
- Sliding-Scale payment

4. Challenges:

- Full community buy-in
- Financial sustainability
- Established leadership and conflict management
- Effective communication with all stakeholders
- Training/ distribution of knowledge

5. Further research:

- Democratic shareholding
- More financially sustainable model
- Greater community buy-in

Lessons Learned from YSE

1. In terms of collecting qualitative data, everyone's perception of a question or willingness to truthfully answer the question is different.
2. When doing participatory observations, it is essential to remove any boundaries that may lessen the opportunity to collect data.
3. Communication with your team is one of the most pressing challenges.
4. Creating deep relationships with people can be more important than creating a multitude of relationships.



Conclusions

At the conclusion of this experience, I have learned more about qualitative data collection, participatory observations, and food systems than any classroom could teach me. As I continue my undergraduate education over the next three years, I will have a greater repertoire of skills than my peers, which will give me the confidence and ability to continue my undergraduate research experience.

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