

**USDA Federal State Marketing Improvement Program
FINAL REPORT**

Title: "Is this local? Ensuring Public Trust in Direct Farm Sales"
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Report Submitted By: Colleen Donovan and Marcia Ostrom, Washington State University Small Farms Program

An outline of the issue or problem. *Provide enough background information for the reader to understand the importance of the project. This section may draw from the background and justification contained in the approved project proposal.*

In November 2011, the LA Weekly released a scathing exposé of Los Angeles County farmers markets. The article raised a series of issues including misrepresenting where produce came from and how it was grown, breaking market policies, lack of enforcement of California's certified farmers market system and the concerns of shoppers. And while acknowledging that most farmers are honest, even a state such as California with one of the country's first legislated certified farmers and farmers market systems is struggling.

Since then, the headlines have continued:

- "Fraud happens at Connecticut's famers' market – but not often," *Connecticut Mirror*, August 2012.
- "Stamping Out Farmers Market Fraud," *Modern Farmer*, October 2014.
- The "Farm to Fable" trilogy from the *Tampa Bay Times*, April 2016, which included a focus on farmers markets "lacking in food from local farms."
- "Is it Really "Local Food"? How to Vet Your Farmers Market Vendors," *Organic Authority*, August 2016.
- "Your Favorite Farmers Market Food Might be a Scam," *Good Food*, October 2016.
- "Action News Investigation: Is Farmers Market Produce Really from the Farm?" *Action News WPVI-TV*, November 2016.

Fortunately, the Pacific Northwest has not experienced the degree or scale of issues raised in these reports. Nevertheless, each of these articles has been heavily circulated among the farmers market community and they are referenced as a touchstone of deep concern. Given the importance of shopper trust as a marketing distinction for the farmers market brand, anything that puts the smallest crack in shoppers trust in *any* farmers markets jeopardizes shoppers sales at *all* farmers markets. Most shoppers are not aware of the nuances among different farmers market's organizational structures and lump all farmers markets and their vendors into one consumer category.

Today, Washington State has over 165 unique farmers market locations, supporting over 1,200 farm vendors, and hundreds of thousands of shoppers. A conservative estimate of annual farmers market sales is around \$50 million. A consequence of this success is that farmers markets face increasing competition for shoppers, farm vendors, and organizational support. The increase in CSAs, buying clubs, agritourism, food hubs, farm stands and other direct marketing innovations mean that shoppers have more options to buy directly from farmers.

Likewise, farmers are diversifying their market channels to include selling to chefs, schools, hospitals and other institutions. The need or temptation for some farmers markets to accept resellers to fill gaps in product mix is there. The temptation for farmers to supplement what they sell with products they did not grow is there. And mistrust among vendors can poison a market community. At the same time, the complexity and demands of running a successful farmers market continue to grow with every change in food safety regulation, federal food assistance program, and cut in public funds. Finally, each market is organized in a unique way based on its history, location, mission, and institutional context.

Within this context, creating and enforcing individual farmers market policies about reselling or supplementing product is a daunting proposition. And yet the challenge of maintaining and protecting the integrity of “farmers markets” is vital to the future of this direct market opportunity and workhorse of the regional food system.

Out of necessity, individual farmers markets have taken on the burden of “farm inspections” or farm visits. A June 2014 survey conducted as part of this project confirmed that 91% of market managers were concerned with ensuring their market integrity (n=32). And while 44% of markets required some sort of farm audit, farm visit, farm inspection or third-party verification for their farm vendors, few markets have the capacity to implement their own policies. The biggest challenges included:

Single Biggest Challenge for Farmers Markets	Percentage
Not enough time to visit farms	33%
Concerns about having enough knowledge to conduct a thorough farm visit	21%
Not enough money to visit farms	15%
It is hard to visit farms (generally, due to distances, time, etc.)	15%
Communication barriers	9%
Concerns about having a negative effect on market manager’s relationship with vendors	6%
N = 33	100%

Even when a single market or market association is able to manage their own farm verification program, this approach is highly inefficient at the regional or state level and cumbersome for farmers who are obliged to host multiple visits. For farmers markets the extra staff time and travel are expenses few can afford. Furthermore, the vast majority of market managers lack adequate knowledge about farming and food production to be able to accurately evaluate a

farm. Complicating this limitation is the diversity of growing regions and unique seasonality that they would need to understand. Even if managers had the appropriate agricultural knowledge, they would still only be evaluating the farm in relation to their markets – and not the full portfolio of market channels that the farm sells through. And finally, language and cultural barriers – especially with Hmong and Latino farm vendors – can make farm inspections and collecting the right information a very complicated and time-consuming process.

Somewhat counter-intuitively, our research showed that farmer vendors want a statewide farm verification program. In 2012, the WSU Small Farms Team, in partnership with the WSFMA and Washington Farmers Market Action Team (a diverse group of stakeholders), conducted the first-ever statewide survey of farmers market farm vendors¹. Preliminary results show that 75% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that “there should be a way to verify that all farm vendors at WA farmers markets are farmers” (n = 508). Indeed, this project was initiated in direct response to the ideas, concerns and energy of our state’s farmers market leaders, most experienced managers, and farmers themselves.

A description of how the issue or problem was approached via the project. *Reference the project objectives and work plan.*

To proactively research ways to ensure the public trust in farmers markets (and avoid jeopardizing sales for farmers who sell at Washington State farmers markets), this project took a facilitated, systematic, and statewide approach. Our assumption was that transparency and trust in the *process* of deciding how to establish a “verification” program would be essential to creating genuine ownership, objective consideration of various options, and momentum for designing the next steps. We started with three objectives: (a) form a representative stakeholder advisory team, (b) research options that might work in Washington, and (c) share findings and get feedback from stakeholders.

¹ “Engines of the New Farm Economy: Assessing and Enhancing the Benefits of Farmers Markets” project led by Marcia Ostrom, Colleen Donovan, José L. García-Pabón, Jessica Goldberger, and Vicki McCracken of Washington State University and the Washington State Farmers Market Action Team. The Agricultural Food Research Initiative of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA, Grant #2009-55618-05172, supported this project. Please see <http://smallfarms.wsu.edu/marketing/> for more information.

The “Market Integrity Project”



“An advisory team of stakeholders, in conjunction with Washington State University, will assess the feasibility of, and develop the framework for a farmer “verification” program to help ensure public trust in local products sold in farmers markets.”

1 Our first project objective was to form an Advisory Team that brought together a diverse group of stakeholders representing farmers, farmers markets, and Washington State agricultural interests to research a farm “verification” program through a transparent, participatory, and wide ranging, exploratory process.

Ongoing Advisory Team members include:

- Carrie Olson, Renton Farmers Market
- Chris Curtis, Neighborhood Farmers Market Alliance (manages 7 farmers markets in Seattle)
- Dan Coyne, WSDA Organic Food Program
- Darrell Westover, Westover Farms (vendor)
- Jason Salvo, Local Roots Farm (vendor)
- Judy Kirkhuff, Seattle Farmers Market Association (manages 3 farmers markets)
- Karen Kinney, Washington State Farmers Market Association (with 114 member markets)
- Mary Dimateo, Olympia Farmers Market
- Steve Phillips, Port Madison Farm (retired cheesemaker/vendor)
- Wade Bennett, Rockridge Orchards (vendor)
- Zack Cook, Pike Place Market (manages the Farm Program and 4 satellite farmers markets in Seattle and Redmond).

The Advisory Team met in person at Pike Place Market (Seattle) on January 10, 2014, April 9, 2014; July 8, 2014; September 18, 2014; December 17, 2014; October 14, 2015; April 5, 2016; and October 7, 2016. Between in person meetings, the Advisory Team communicated via email, phone, and in person at conferences, farmers markets, and other meetings. Advisory Team participation and commitment was strong throughout the project, especially given the demands they already had on their time.

② With an Advisory Team in place, the second core project objective was to research the feasibility of a farm verification program for Washington State farmers markets. While there was significant interest in the California model of a state-legislated certification program, we knew was problematic in some regards and Washington State did not have the adequate public resources to make it work. However, we were interested in analyzing this program and others being used around the county to find out which aspects might work and which would not. The idea was to learn what is working elsewhere and what proven features might be appropriate for the Pacific Northwest. Likewise, it was important to better understand and document the ways that farmers markets in Washington had been approaching farm verification and what was working well.

Some of the initial research questions for such a program include:

- What programs or models are being employed by other market associations, regions, states, or countries? What has been successful? What lessons and best practices can we learn from these programs?
- What is the full menu of inspections and certifications (required and/or voluntary) that the “typical” farmers market farmer already navigates every season? Are there any efficiencies we can gain or programs we can leverage?
- What do consumers in Washington State expect from their farmers markets? How can a program increase consumer trust and reduce market risk?
- What are the various ways that such a program could be structured? What is the most appropriate institutional or organizational home? What options would exist for enforcing, funding, and sustaining such a program?
- Would it work best if it were voluntary or required? Should such a program include all vendors or just farmers?
- How could such a program add-value and be marketed to farmers and key market outlets? Would point-of-sale labeling or other customer education be needed?

Other critical questions that were added later include:

- What features or characteristics of the program were most critical to its voluntary adoption by markets, farmers, and other vendors, as well as credibility among shoppers and the media?
- Who and how would farm verification be conducted?
- How would enforcement be designed and managed? What kind of “teeth” would be most effective?
- What education and outreach is needed for farmers and other vendors?
- What education and outreach is needed for farmers market managers and other organizers?
- What kind of signage standards are needed and would be acceptable?
- What is the best or most viable business model in the short- and long-term? The Advisory Team established from its first meeting that the program needed to be designed to be self-sustaining and relevant for years and decades to come.
- What kinds of start-up resources, technology, and investment would be needed? Where would ongoing operating revenue come from?

③ The third core project objective was to share what was learned and get feedback from key stakeholders throughout the process. This occurred in a variety of ways including presentations and small group discussions at conferences, webinars, one-on-one meetings, market, and farm visits.

For example, the *Tilth Producers of Washington Conference* which gathers a large network of over 500 organic and sustainable, primarily direct market farmers, and the *Washington State Farmers Market Association (WSFMA) Conference* which brings together over 240 farmers market organizers, farmer vendors, and partner organizations, provided two key annual outreach opportunities in 2014, 2015, 2016 (and 2017).

A description of the contribution of public or private agency partners in terms of the work performed.

As evidenced by the strong leadership provided by our advisory group, this project has garnered significant support from farmers markets, farmers, nonprofit, and public partner. Cost share contributions for this grant came from the:

- Washington State Farmers Market Association (staff time, travel, outreach to member markets, conference support);
- Washington State Department of Agriculture's Organic Program, our state certifier (staff time, travel, expertise in certification and inspection, data management, training opportunities);
- Seattle Farmers Market Association (staff time, farm visits, travel, vendor expertise, vendor relationships); and
- Pike Place Market (staff time, meeting venue, farm visits, travel).

In addition,

- Chris Curtis and the Neighborhood Farmers Market Alliance contributed significant leadership, national networking, vendor expertise, farm visits, travel, and marketing know-how. The NFMA also served as the applicant for a FMPP proposal to continue funding for this project (which was not funded);
- The WSDA Natural Resources Assessment Section and WSDA Crop Inspection Program were extremely helpful in sharing their expertise in agricultural mapping and explaining how marketing orders work.
- King County Ag Program hosted quarterly market manager meetings and invited Colleen Donovan to present about this project and receive input from market managers.
- Market managers from the Puyallup Farmers Market, Renton Farmers Market, Ballard Farmers Market, and others contributed time and support on farm visits.
- The Farmers Market Coalition contributed constructive feedback and a national platform to share findings from this project and connect with other farm verification programs.
- Chris Quinlan at Market Wurks was willing to share his expertise with farmers market management software.

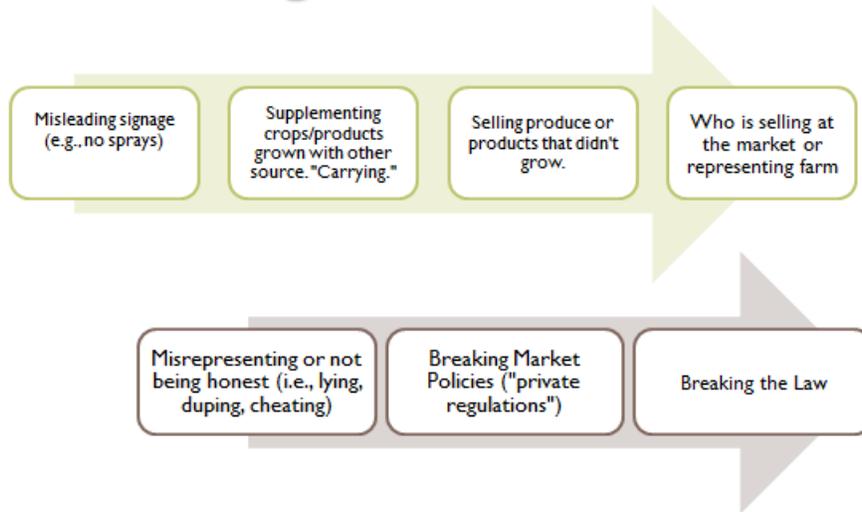
- Arturo Guerrero, Chris Curtis, Erin Timmerman, Karen Kinney, Kate Smith, Leigh Newman-Bell, and Merrilee Runyan contributed to the creation and translation of the “Pocket Guide of Farmers Market Terms in English and Spanish.”

A summary of results, conclusions, and lessons learned. *Lessons learned should cover both positive and negative aspects. Include a discussion of how the project was evaluated and whether or not it met project objectives. To the extent possible, include measurable results. At least one quantifiable metric must be included that indicates the change in status of the project from initiation to completion.*

With regards to farmers market integrity, there is no single issue that undermines public trust. Rather, there are a range of issues -- from vendors using signage that is intentionally or unintentionally misleading to outright breaking the law and consumer fraud. Understanding the underlying causes of each issue is an important step in designing effective strategies to address the issue. If vendors are out of compliance with market policies, is it because they don't know or understand them or are they intentionally disregarding them. If the former, what can markets do (or what are they already doing) to make their policies clearer, less confusing, and easier to understand? For farmers and processors selling at multiple markets, taking the time to learn each market's policies and keep them straight can be a challenge.

On the other extreme, vendors may be knowingly selling products that they have purchased or traded and passing them off implicitly or explicitly as their own. This is known as false advertising or consumer fraud. We know that vendors are under pressure to keep their tables full and to meet payroll. However, this is a serious offense at most markets and can severely damage relationships if accusations are made. Since responding in real time can be problematic, many market managers would benefit from having standard protocols in place for collecting evidence and addressing accusations in fair ways.

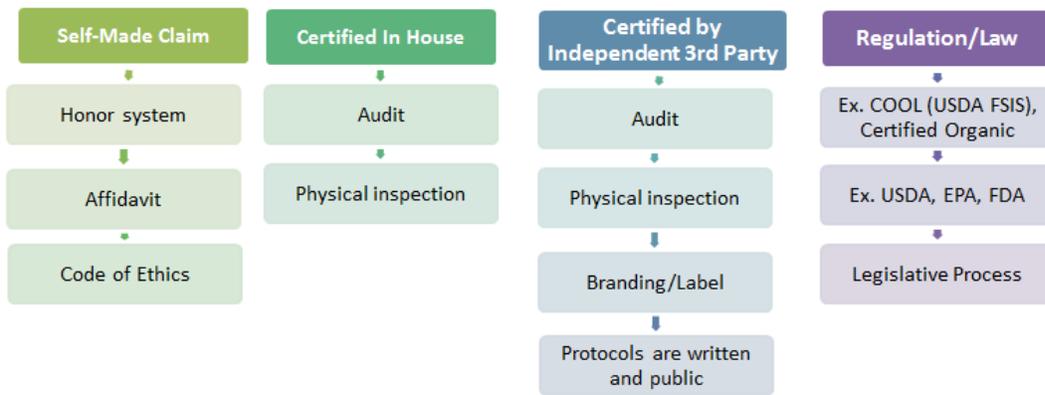
A range of trust issues



For many markets and vendors, their first reaction when an accusation is made is to do a farm visit or inspection. Through this project, we have tried to distinguish between the two types of activities even though they continue to be conflated. Key differences are outlined in the following table.

Feature	“Farm Visit”	“Farm Inspection”
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To get to know farmers; build relationship with farm, and products. To better understand farm operation. Public Relations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To verify information provided by vendor. To better understand farm operation. Maybe routine inspection or in response to a concern.
Preparation	Minimal	Significant
Tone	Casual	Formal and objective
Protocol	Free form	Semi-structured
Follow up	Thank you and share photos (as appropriate); feature in blog post or other promotions	Written report with outcomes; and thank you.

When researching the ways in which claims were made and verified four broad categories emerged: (1) self-made claims by the producer; (2) claims that could be certified “in-house” by a farmers market or market association; (3) claims that were certified by an independent third party of some sort; and (4) claims that had some level of legal requirement and oversight. Different farmers markets had different levels of acceptance for how claims were verified.



Across the US, the geographic scale of certification and/or verification varies from the jurisdiction of a single market to a county to an entire state. Some market associations, especially in the northeast, cover portions of multiple states.

In addition, the scope of what is being verified or inspected varies considerably. Some markets are only looking at the source of products and business standing (licenses, permits, etc.), whereas others are also focused on production practices and product claims. Verifying food safety practices is less common but may increase whenever the media brings a problem to light, raising consumer concerns.

From researching the different approaches to verifying farm vendors at farmers markets employed in the US, four primary models emerged: (1) The California Model; (2) In-House Farmers Market Association; (3) Third Party Certifications; and (4) Optional within a Farmers Market.

① *California Model*

The “California Model” tends to be what markets and farmers in Washington State look to first. The State of California has a government-run Certified Producer and Certified Farmers Market program that is mandatory. It was created by state legislation in the late 1970s and in 2012 had 3,350 certified producers and over 800 certified farmers markets. Only farmers selling specialty crops are Certified Producers; farms selling meat, poultry, eggs, dairy, aquaculture and other value added products are verified to be in compliance with permits and licenses and can sell in the certified section of the farmers markets.



In this system, the California Department of Food and Agriculture is responsible for advisory support, enforcement, administrative support, training, county co-ordination, issuance of advisory opinions, hearing appeals. They receive funds quarterly from farmers markets who collect a per-market-day fee from agricultural producers. The other key player is the County Agricultural Commissioner, an office staffed at the county level. They do the on-the-ground

② *In-House Farmers Market Association*

A second model is to build an audit program into an association that manages multiple farmers markets. The Greenmarket in New York City is one example. In their case, the Greenmarket manages over 50 farmers markets that draw farmers from multiple states reaching 250 miles to the north, 120 miles to the south, and 170 miles to the east.

They have a Farmer and Community Advisory Committee (FCAC) that has played a valuable role in guiding Greenmarket policy and operations. The FCAC meets monthly to provide a forum for ideas, guidance in implementing the Greenmarket mission, peer review in the enforcement of Greenmarket Regulations, and a hearing place for Producer grievances.

Greenmarket has an inspection department with one full time staff and part-time seasonal support within its organizational structure. The vet new farmers and if they have to investigate an accusation, the accusing vendor must put money on the table. They also have enforcement protocols including fines and possible suspension from market.

Pros: The farmers market association can set up policies and protocols that best serve its needs. Farmers can be directly involved and make changes, if needed. There is more flexibility. The association has long-term relationships with its vendors.

Cons: The scope of work (in terms of producer types, geography, market experience) is substantial for a lean staff to manage. Managing an in-house audit program adds significant costs to running markets. It puts the market more directly in an enforcement role and may incur additional liabilities.

③ *Third Party Certifications*

The “Third Party Certifications” model relies on farm and processor vendors to acquire one of a prescribed list of nationally recognized third party certifications in order to be allowed to sell at the farmers market. The Green City market in Chicago is one such example. They require their vendors to have one of eight pre-selected certifications in order to sell at their markets: Animal Welfare Approved, American Grassfed Association, Certified Naturally Grown, American Humane Certified, Certified Human Raised and Handled, Food Alliance Certified, Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program, and Certified Organic.

Pros: Cost-effective for the market organization to manage. Relatively easy to verify. Certifiers are already doing consumer education and branding so vendors and markets don’t have to do as much.

Cons: Not all of the third-party certifications have equivalent rigor. Obliges vendors to pay for certification costs and requirements. May not cover all product categories with equal standards.

④ *Optional within Farmers Market*

The final model is the most flexible in that a market may create a voluntary program that is optional for vendors. An example is the “100% Homegrown Program” from the Fulton Street Market in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The program allows a vendor to display the “100%

homegrown signage” on certain products if they pay a reasonable one-time cost and are inspected when they are certified. The emphasis is on branding at market. The program also includes a formal “product challenge” process.

Pros: Clear marketing benefits to participating producers. Relatively self-funding.

Cons: Does not verify all vendors equally. May not raise sufficient funds for ongoing enforcement and certification. High degree of self-monitoring. Credentials of inspectors may vary.

There are certainly more variations of how farmers markets are taking on this challenge and some, like the Agricultural Institute of Marin, use more than one. However, these are the four primary models that we found in this research.

Summary of Key Tips and Findings

Best practices from the research on current farm inspection/verification programs include:

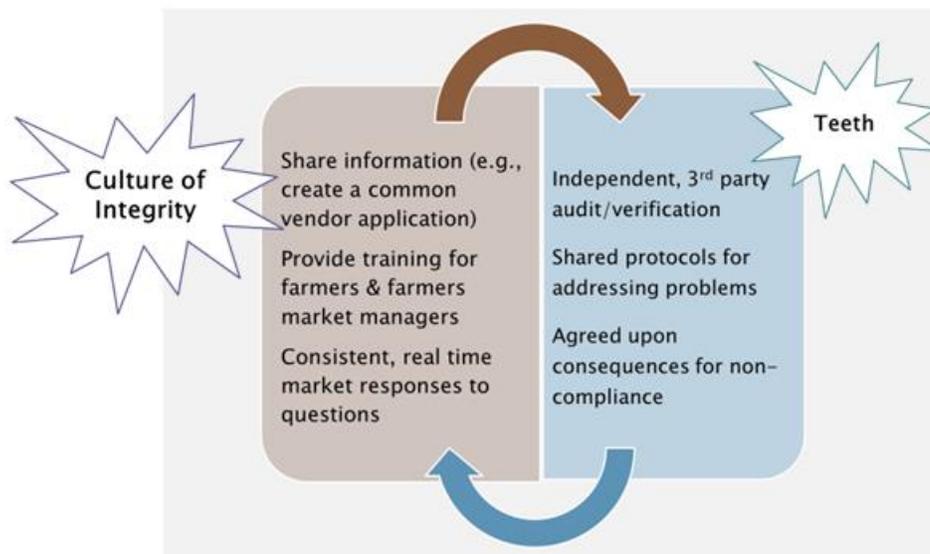
- Involve producers in developing policies and the appeal process.
- Maintain the highest degree of confidentiality: legally is it required and out of respect for everyone involved.
- Transparency in the why, how, when, where, and who are critical to maintaining confidence in the program.
- Tie any inspection program to the markets’ mission and core values.
- Written policies are necessary but insufficient. Policies also need to be shared at vendor meetings and one-on-one.
- Make inspections or verification steps routine. This helps reduce any perceived stigma and fear.
- Formal (written) mechanisms for complaints tend not used by vendors. They tend to prefer “chatter.”
- Just knowing someone representing the market is “paying attention” helps reduce the incidence of complaints and violations.
- Standardized practices across counties (or states) are more efficient: load lists, certificates, penalties.
- Manager education and training is a key piece of successfully implementing any program.
- Making farm or processor “certifications” useful beyond selling at farmers markets (CSA, farm stands, sales to restaurants, independent grocery, etc.) adds marketing value for farmers.
- Managers are the “first line of enforcement”; they need education and a training curriculum; and they are also accountable to the program (and also subject to penalties).

Envisioning a Washington Program: potential applications and recommended approaches
Market Integrity Project Advisory Team met throughout the project to discuss what a program in Washington might include. Key values and goals of such a project were identified as:

- Transparency
- Easy to understand
- Self-funding
- Minimize burden on farmers and managers
- Possibility of sanctions or “teeth”

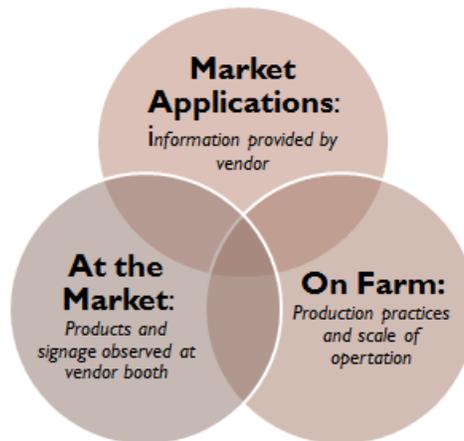
One of the key insights was to invest in creating a “culture of integrity” within the farmers markets and among vendors. This is especially critical knowing that it is cost-prohibitive to verify every farm, every year and manage enforcement. As one farmers market manager put it, even with a good certification program, “Evidence of production is not proof of production” of what is being sold at the market. Cultivating some level of intrinsic trust and self-driven integrity would increase the overall project’s effectiveness and efficiency.

Working Model



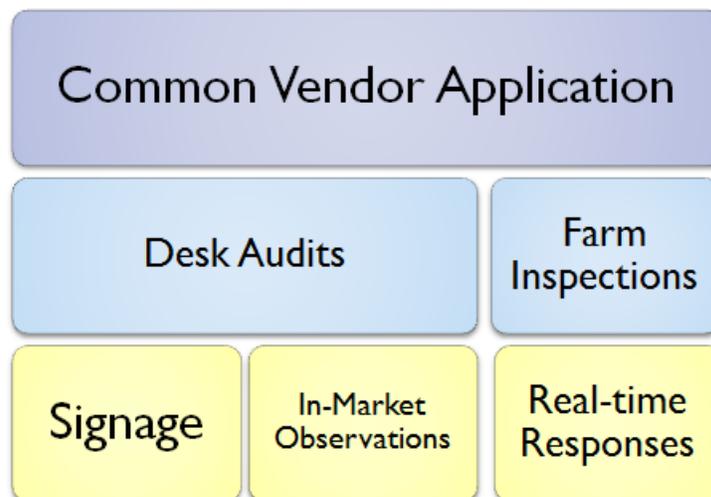
Another key conclusion is that farmers market integrity cannot be certified or verified on the farm alone. Instead, a more productive strategy is to consider what information the farm vendor provides to the market *in concert with* what it is that market managers observe in the vendor’s booth *and* what evidence of production there is on farm. By triangulating all evidence, we are better positioned to assess if there are legitimate red flags that need further information or explanation or, alternatively, if information is syncing up in such a way that merits greater confidence in the producer’s claims.

Triangulation



The functional components of our approach include an online “common vendor application” (inspired by the common application now used by colleges) to reduce the information management load burden on vendors and markets alike, “desk audits” to quickly verify business and license information from online sources or paper files, farm inspections; and developing shared signage standards to ensure communication to shoppers is clear, accurate, and consistent (less confusing) throughout the farmers market brand. Finally, we believe an education component will be needed for both market managers and farmers. Market managers need help knowing what to look for on market day and what questions to ask- and how to ask them. Farmers have legitimate questions about what is and is not allowed at markets, as well as what licenses and permits they need for each City and County. Creating a menu of “real-time responses” is also needed to ensure that concerns are addressed in fair and consistent ways that build confidence in the system, contributing to the overall culture of integrity.

Components



Common Vendor Application

Currently, farmers markets create their own vendor application which may be a simple one pager to a 13 page booklet; it may be a downloadable PDF from a market webpage or web-based form that can only be filled out online; rules and policies may be spelled out or unwritten; the application due dates vary widely, as do the vendor expectations and terms in which vendors are accepted. The membership, application, and booth fees charged to vendors are also widely variable. While farmers markets will always reflect the needs and interests of their community, the wide ranging application process contributes to incomplete and sometimes inconsistent information about vendors. As such, this project has embraced creating a “Common Vendor Application” that markets could voluntarily choose to use. Farmers are very enthusiastic about being able to fill out one application and send it to multiple markets. Markets are also extremely supportive of streamlining the vendor application process and knowing what the “right” questions are to be asking and what information should be required. In fact, this is probably the most popular aspect of the project.

Through the FSMIP project, a Common Farmers Market Vendor Application was developed with ten sections. The questions have been refined based on feedback from markets, farmers, and discussions with licensing and permitting authorities. The intention is to have only the questions that are most meaningful and necessary to keep it as concise as possible. Collecting information that can be verified online (e.g., Department of Revenue, Organic Certification, County property maps) or through archival files will save time and effort through “desk audits.” And not collecting information that is already available through other means; farms tend to have multiple inspections and visits from voluntary certifications to or to meet WSDA or food safety requirements. We also see the vendor application as a way to increase vendors’ understanding of what permits and licenses are legally required to do business in Washington State. Having information from the same vendors over time will also help surface inconsistencies that may merit further investigation.

Farmers Market Vendor Application

*DRAFT: November 2016
Farmers Market Integrity Project*

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The intention throughout the project has to *be of service* to farmers and other vendors, raising the bar and reducing risk for everyone. It is crucial that these efforts be construed as uniformly applied and not “out to get” certain vendors. Therefore, the intention is to support farmers and other vendors if and when information is missing from their application.

Currently, the working Common Vendor Application has been shared with markets and many have adapted their current applications to use the same questions. It has also been translated into Spanish as communicating with some of the Latino farmers has been a significant challenge. Several key questions remain:

- What information and questions should be collected from other vendor categories?
- How could a Common online Vendor Application in Washington work with online tools that are already in use such as Manage My Market and Market Wurks? Or is an entirely new system a better option?
- How can vendor security be guaranteed in today’s online environment?

Cherry Pilot

To test the project’s working components and gather more farmer feedback, a pilot was conducted in the 2016 season. The focus was on vendors selling cherries at farmers markets. Cherries were selected because they are a source of controversy among vendors; are a high value product and highly perishable product with defined season; cherry production is highly nuanced due to microclimates, cold storage, etc.; and sweet cherries have a federal Marketing Order in Washington.

We inventoried the vendors selling cherries and at what markets. Before conducting a desk audit and farm visits, Colleen Donovan researched the marketing rules and relevant production, packing, and cold storage information. This resulted in a 6-page overview written to educate farmers market managers about the “Bottom Line for Selling Sweet Cherries at Farmers Markets in WA.”

Key take aways from the 2016 Cherry Pilot include:

- Cherry production is complicated by the diversity of production methods (scale and orchard architecture), on-farm capacity, and agroecological areas.
- Process was time consuming even for just a few farms and just one crop.
- Farmers were very appreciative of our thorough approach and taking this issue seriously.
- We learned more about what the right questions are to ask farmers and what is a legitimate red flag may be vs a common misunderstanding.
- Market integrity is more than visiting farms.

“Pocket Guide of Farmers Market Terms in English and Spanish”

One of the strongest lessons of this project has been the profound challenges market managers and farmers can have with even basic communication. Not just with applications, but also throughout the season. There are many reasons for this, including English proficiency. But

literacy also plays a role as does familiarity with how agricultural enterprises work, especially across geography and agroecologically different regions. Moreover, farmers of limited economic means may be extremely resourceful and engage in more informal exchanges that can't be described neatly on an application form, in signage to customers, or even be easily translated into standard definitions of what constitutes a "farm".

To facilitate communication between market managers and Spanish speaking farmers, their families, and employees, we created a *"Pocket Guide of Farmers Market Terms in English and Spanish."* It has 25 pages of:

- General Terms: people and organizations; market infrastructure; safety and food safety, and sales;
- Products: fruits, vegetables, cut herbs, other, and value added products;
- Market Day: phrases, signage, customer service;
- Market Season: time and schedules, days of the week, months, weather; and
- Market Requirements: application, farm and business information.

While it will not resolve deeper communication challenges, it is a good-will tool that shows farmers that we are trying to help. Printed copies were distributed at the Washington State Farmers Market Association conference and to key markets with high numbers of Latino farmers. The Pocket Guide has proven to be incredibly popular and even inspired the creation of others in more languages. The Farmers Market Coalition and Crossroads Market in DC have also received copies. A PDF is available and will be posted on the WSU Small Farms and Food Systems Team website: <http://smallfarms.wsu.edu/>

A discussion of current or future benefits to be derived from the project.

The Advisory Team has identified the below as the primary benefits of this project:

- Builds confidence and reduces risk of negative media that hurts public trust
- Professionalization of farmers markets
- Marketing distinction for farmers and farmers markets
- Clear and fair standards for all farmers and markets
- Deterrence against possible fraud or misrepresentation
- More efficient and productive farm visits
- Consistent response to questions and enforcement

Recommendations for future research and, if applicable, an outline of next steps or additional research that might advance the project goals.

1. What are Washington State farmers markets' and vendors' "willingness to pay" and for what mix of farm verification/market integrity program services?
2. Rolling out the "Common Vendor Application" and researching what is needed to make it applicable to all vendors not just farmers.
3. Legal review of application and policies.

4. Selecting the right information management system and technology that is user-friendly and has the necessary security.
5. Is there merit to researching the possibility of creating a “farmers market vendor license” at the state level to simplify the verification process by shifting the responsibility to the vendor and enforcement to state mechanisms?
6. What is the right business model that can be self-sustaining and yet have enough revenue to meet participating markets’ and vendors’ expectations for delivery and service?
7. What is the appropriate and feasible organizational home where this program can and should be housed?

A description of the project beneficiaries including the number, type and scale of producers, processors, and other businesses.

This project primarily benefits farmers market farmers and farmers markets. The table below outlines potential short-term and long-term benefits. There are approximately 165 farmers markets in the state and over a quarter are in King County. In the course of the current FSMIP project, at least 50 farmers markets have benefited through increase knowledge, tools, and skills. There are well over 1,000 producers and processors who would benefit from the successful implementation of this project. They are primarily small-scale, direct marketing producers and processors that have built up a dedicated farmers market shopper base.

Beneficiary	Short-term benefits	Long-term benefits
Farmers markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reduced work setting up-vendor’s current business information, licenses, permits ▪ Support ensuring farmers understand market policies ▪ Direct support and reduced workload for market manager verifying vendors’ compliance with market policies. ▪ Professionalization through robust and enforceable policies and consistent responses to vendor questions and enforcement, educational resources on WA agriculture, and signage standards. ▪ Building confidence and reducing risk of negative media that hurts public trust 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Further farmers markets’ position as the most authentic place to find local food and real farmers ▪ Professionalism and confidence increase as managers increasingly know that their vendors are truly selling what they are advertising ▪ Markets ability to recruit/retain best farmers increases ▪ Clear and fair standards for all farmers and markets ▪ Deterrence against possible fraud or misrepresentation ▪ Proactive response to negative media ▪ Marketing distinction for farmers markets and increased customer reliance on these markets as consumers understand the importance of being able to buy from authentic retailers

Farmers

- Reduced time and effort completing market applications
- Support complying with legal business requirements
- Support understanding and complying with market policies
- Assistance with cross cultural communication between farmers and markets
- Improved signage, including “We grow what we sell” banner
- Reduced conflict among vendors
- Confidence in farmers markets as fair market place
- Confidence in fellow vendors
- Protection of shoppers trust in farmers market brand; continued sales
- Marketing distinction for farmers
- Farmers may be able to leverage their participation to establish their *bona fides* as vendors in other marketing channels

Additional information generated by the grant project such as publications, presentations, and websites.

Poster:

Ensuring Public Trust in Direct Farm Sales

Why This Project?

Farmers market customers trust that they are buying directly from the farm that grew or raised and even processed the products displayed before them on market day. This trust is a powerful motivation and sets direct sales apart from other market channels. Any time integrity of a farmer or farmers market is challenged, it hurts all farmers and markets, including the vast majority who are honest. In California and a few other states, negative media has asserted that farmers are “not farmers” and vendors are making false claims about their products.

Examined Negatively:

L.A. Farmers Markets Exposed

Often, produce sold at stalls isn't organic, grown by small farms – or even spray-free

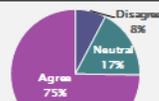
By Beth Hepler
March 16, 2011

While there is no evidence that misrepresenting products is a problem at Washington farmers markets, there is strong interest from farmers and market managers to research the feasibility of a farm “verification” program.

Farmers Want to Ensure Market Integrity

In a 2012 survey of farmers market vendors, 75% of farmers agreed that:

“There should be a way to verify that all farm vendors at WA farmers markets are farmers.”



U = 207
Survey of 1,250 farmers market farmers conducted by WSU and the Farmers Market Action Team.

Project Approach

- Form an Advisory Team of farmers, farmers market managers, Washington State Department of Agriculture, and Washington State Farmers Market Association.
- Research existing farmers market certification programs used by individual market associations and other states.
- Develop recommendations for how a “farm verification” program might work in Washington.
- Get feedback from farmers, market managers, and other stakeholders.



Farm Direct Sales at the Downtown Farmers Market, Walla Walla

FM Certification Strategies in the US



Inspection Program at Farmers Market Org.

Ex: Greenmarket in New York City; ~240 farmers and over 50 FMs.

PRO: In-house inspection, desk and market audits; flexible review process for modifying rules, branding program. Advocates for farmers.
CON: Expensive for market; challenge for market staff to have ag knowledge needed.



Independent, 3rd Party Certification Required

Ex: Greencity Market in Chicago; requires farmers to be certified by one of eight independent certifiers.

PRO: Easier to manage for market. Branding larger than any one FM.
CON: Not all certifiers have same level of rigor; passes on burden to producer.



State Legislation

Ex: California Certified Farmers Market Program > 700 FMs and 2,200 farmers.

PRO: One set of standards for entire state. Authority of the state is behind the program. Public process.
CON: Hard to change. Working across jurisdictions can be challenging. Limited capacity for reinforcement. Limited to specialty crop producers.



Voluntary Program

Ex: Fulton Street Farmers Market in Grand Rapids, MI.

PRO: Flexibility for producers; relatively inexpensive to manage; clear rules about signage at market.
CON: Relies on self-claims after initial inspection. Market staff shoulders inspection and management. Signage only relevant to one market.

Proposed Ideas



Potential Benefits

- ✓ Clear and fair standards for all farmers and markets
- ✓ Professionalization of farmers markets
- ✓ Deterrence against possible fraud or misrepresentation
- ✓ More efficient and productive farm visits
- ✓ Consistent response to questions and enforcement
- ✓ Marketing distinction for farmers and farmers markets
- ✓ Builds confidence and reduces risk of negative media that hurts public trust

What Will Work Best for Washington State?

Training
Legal
Doable
Fair
Signage?
Objective
Customers' Information
Technology?

Project Advisory Team

Wade Bennett (farmer), Zack Cook (Pike Place), Dan Coyne (WSDA), Chris Curtis (Neighborhood FM Alliance), Karen Kinney (WSRMA), Judy Kirkhuff (Seattle FM Association), Steve Phillips (farmer), Jason Salvo (farmer), Darrell Westover (farmer), Colleen Donovan (coordinator)

Please let me up know if you are interested in helping.

Project Funding

State and private funds for this project were matched with Federal funds under the Federal-State Marketing Improvement Program of the Agricultural Marketing Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Grant #1405172 (2012).



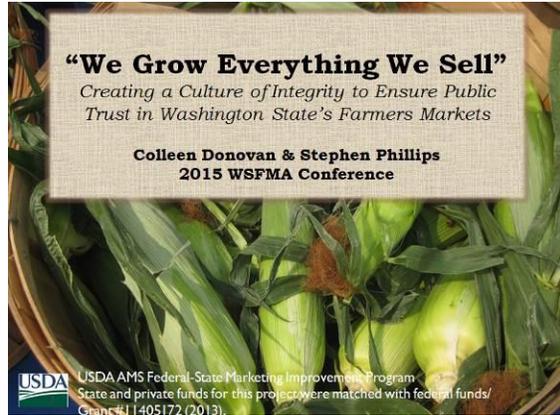
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

Small Farms Program

Principal Investigators: Marcia Ostrom & Colleen Donovan

Presentations:

At the WSFMA conference in February 2015, Colleen Donovan and Steve Phillips (Port Madison Farm) did a presentation to farmers market organizers and farmers in the large ballroom. The goal was engage this group of stakeholders in the process and let them know what to expect so that they are more receptive/willing to participate when we roll a new market integrity program out. There was significant interest and most people wanted to know when the common vendor application would be available. 56 people completed evaluations, 91% thought the information shared was good (16) or excellent (33) and 100% said they increased their knowledge about this topic.



At the WSFMA conference in February 2016, Colleen Donovan and Zack Cook (Pike Place Market) did a presentation to farmers market organizers and farmers in the large ballroom. 38 people completed evaluations, 71% thought the information shared was good or excellent; and 87% said they increased their knowledge about this topic. Other evaluation comments included:

--I appreciated the balance of what markets can do pre-emptively and also after a complaint. Well rounded approach to market integrity – very excited about this project!

--Excellent information! Keep up the good work.

--So helpful! Zack and Colleen both provided excellent information.(7x)

--Identifying cost-effective ways to verify sourcing claims was helpful.

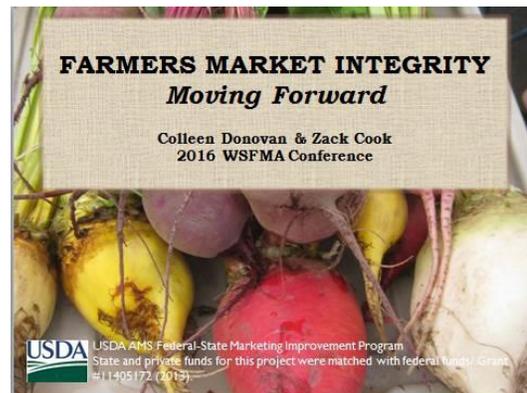
--online workshop to get involved with the process.

--I hope this project moves forward in 2016 & will be a great asset to FMs in WA.

--Please continue this workshop each year. Watching the integrity project grow is my favorite part of the WSFMA conference. Ready to get started using a system of integrity at our market.

😊

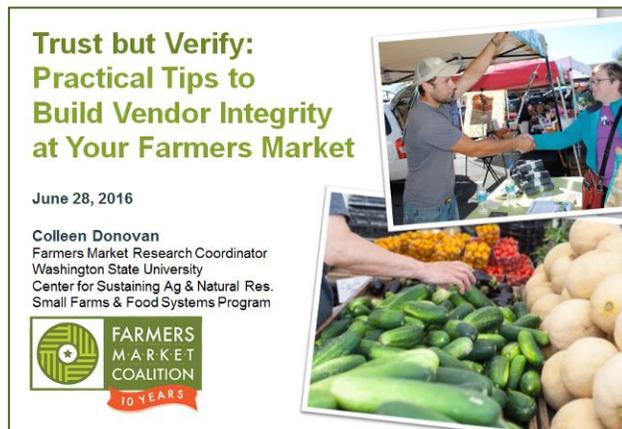
--lots of comments about wanting to see how this work progresses (8x)



In addition, Colleen Donovan presented an update on the Farmers Market Integrity Project at the 2017 WSFMA conference in Blaine, WA. She also was invited and presented on Farmers Market Integrity at the Wisconsin Fresh Fruits and Vegetable Conference in January 2017.

Webinars:

- Pop Up Webinar on “Desk Audits” on March 29, 2016, link to the recording:
<http://breeze.wsu.edu/p377b2oeqlc/>
- Farmers Market Coalition Webinar “Trust but Verify: Practical Tips to Build Vendor Integrity at Your Farmers Market” on June 28, 2016:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ybCFPZGstc>



- Pop Up Webinar on “Farmers Market Vendor Applications”:
<http://breeze.wsu.edu/p82nyxw9kmr/>

Online: Section on Market Integrity and Farm Verification in the 2016 “Washington State Farmers Market Management Toolkit,” including 16 page overview based on research conducted for this project: <http://www.wafarmersmarkettoolkit.org/chapter-6/farmers-market-integrity-and-farm-verification/>

For more information on this project, please contact:

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