

Date: May 4, 2022
To: Maquoketa Farmers Market
From: University of Iowa Masters of Public Affairs Capstone Team, Ryan Downin, Jody Josten, Deanna Robinson
Re: Recommendations

SUMMARY

To reduce risk to the organization, the Maquoketa Farmers Market needs a clearly defined continuity plan created within a larger strategic vision for the organization.

BACKGROUND

The Maquoketa Farmers Market was founded in 2011 by the current market manager, Ted Strait. On Tuesday evenings from mid-May to August the market operates in the parking lot of a local nonprofit, the Ohnward Fine Arts Center, located near the Jackson County Fairgrounds. The market has flourished for 11 seasons under the volunteer leadership and dedication of their market manager and seven-member board. Currently, the market manager would like to develop a plan to transition management and administrative tasks to new personnel.

In partnership with the Maquoketa Farmers market, our team engaged relevant stakeholders and conducted a series of interviews with local officials, board members, and nonprofit leaders to develop an innovative approach to strengthening and building the capacity of the market through this period of transition. Additionally, the team identified potential regional partnerships intended to increase funding and allow for resource sharing. Lastly, the team organized and facilitated a strategic planning process with the Maquoketa Farmers Market Board. At the conclusion of this session the board identified their three greatest challenges: a) lack of funding b) relying upon a single person for all management activities and c) attracting young families to the market. When board members were asked what would happen if these issues were not addressed their collective response was that the market might close. What would happen if the Maquoketa Farmers Market discontinued operations?

Researchers at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) have surveyed producers to gain insight into the importance of the direct-to-consumer marketing opportunities for small and mid-sized farming operations. Forty-two percent of respondents reported that 100 percent of their products were sold at farmers markets with 63% reporting the elimination of intermediaries resulted in significantly higher profit margins.¹ Farmers reported net profits were four times higher at farmers markets versus conventional markets for their products.² The availability of direct-to-consumer marketing is critical for small and mid-sized family farms giving them a competitive edge which many depend on for survival.³ Farmer markets are a gathering place for community engagement which add vibrancy and revenue to local communities. The following recommendations present opportunities for innovation and the possibility of a new and reimagined future for the Maquoketa Farmers Market which will benefit all of Jackson County.

¹ Kambra, K. and Shelley, C. (2002) The California Agricultural Direct Marketing Study. U.S. Department of Agriculture/California Institute of Rural Studies, Davis, California

² Ibid

³ Ibid

STAKEHOLDERS

- Maquoketa Business Community: Represented by several groups including the Maquoketa Chamber of Commerce, Betterment Corporation and the Ohnward Fine Arts Center, retail establishments, food producers and local nonprofit organizations. This group will support the Maquoketa Farmers Market.
- The City of Maquoketa and Jackson County: As the county seat of Jackson County, Maquoketa is a central focal point of civic and economic activity for 19,485 residents. The [National Community Survey](#) is the gold standard in assessment of community needs performed annually in partnership with the International City/County Management Association (ICMA). This survey provides the most accurate depiction of community livability from the resident's perspective. Residents consistently indicate the features they most value within a community are the opportunities for economic independence through the availability of jobs, local businesses, and shopping. They also desire the opportunity to try something new and give high marks to communities with gathering places that allow for personal connections. Collectively, the residents of Jackson County, as well as local government entities will support the Maquoketa Farmers Market.

BEST PRACTICES

- Washington Farmers Market (population 7,313): Several years ago, the Washington Farmers Market was operated independently and faced organizational challenges which threatened its viability. The market initiated a partnership with Main Street Iowa for administrative support and assistance. Main Street Iowa required the market to create a community advisory board to help guide organizational development. This increased community support and yielded several new volunteers associated with the market in various capacities such as communications, accounting, and social media marketing. The market was featured at the 2022 Farmers Market Association Workshop where they shared some of their innovative programming strategies.
- Decorah Farmers Market (population 7,587): Josh Dansdill, Northeast Iowa RC&D, serves on the farmers market board and is instrumental in applying for and managing grants. Josh also manages the SNAP Double-Up program administration and reimbursement. The addition of SNAP-EBT and Double-Up initiatives in Decorah increased market sales by an estimated 10 to 20%.
- Douglas County Food Policy Council/Kansas: The council was initially established by the County Commission in 2010 to support the Lawrence Farmers Market. Council representatives now include farmers, health professionals, senior citizens, community and faith-based organizations, at-risk populations, schools, and the local health department. Following formation of the food policy council the Lawrence Farmers Market piloted several state programs promoting farmers markets. Due to their success, there are now over 16 food policy councils in Kansas serving 36 counties.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Decentralize organizational structure: This can be accomplished through the formation of a community advisory committee or task force to support planning, develop formal institutional roles and organizational structure. This committee can also advise on strategies and policies related to market sustainability and coordinate initiatives and promotional programs through greater community involvement.
- Diversify and actively recruit new members to the board: This is an opportunity to create more strategic partnerships, build programs and create more trust and commitment among regional organizations, as well as engage new members of the community, ultimately strengthening the organization and creating more opportunities for engaging young people and more diverse audiences. Ideally, this will be the addition of 2-4 new board members.
- Collaborate: Successful collaboration has the potential to make organizational operations more efficient and ensure the sustainability of the market long-term. Collaboration has become a growing safety net for rural nonprofits. Bellevue Farmers Market in Jackson County faces similar challenges with management turnover and lack of resources working together may yield positive results.

NEXT STEPS

- At the next board meeting determine the structure of community advisory board and extend invitations to relevant stakeholders.
- Contact Josh Dansdill, Northeast Iowa RC&D. Josh has volunteered to assist and consult with the Maquoketa Farmers Market regarding organizational development and SNAP-EBT administration.
- Set a meeting with the coordinators of the Bellevue Farmers Markets to discuss collaboration and resource sharing.