

SPRING OF 2022

SUPPORT, SUSTAIN, SYNC: MAQUOKETA FARMERS MARKET AND SOCIAL LINKAGES

SPRING 2022 CAPSTONE PROJECT



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Capstone Project: School of Planning and Public Affairs



School of Planning
and Public Affairs



The Maquoketa Farmers Market Group project is an Iowa Initiative for Sustainable Communities (IISC) project through the School of Planning and Public Affairs (SPPA) at the University of Iowa. IISC is an “engaged-learning” program through the University of Iowa, founded in 2009, with the intention of engaging students in real world projects in local communities in Iowa. The projects are designed to enhance sustainability and connect students, faculty, and community leaders, while creating a sense of fellowship and collaboration among Iowa’s urban and rural communities. Our student consulting group represents the first cohort of Master of Public Affairs students in the School of Planning and Public Affairs.

MEET OUR CAPSTONE GROUP

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Born in a log hospital near downtown Cedar Rapids, Ted went on to a career in Human Resources for an international corporation, having spent many years in various locations around the United States. In 2004, Ted and his wife relocated to Maquoketa in their retirement, donating

considerable time and resources to various non-profits, service clubs and worthy projects. The new Maquoketa Farmers Market began in the basement of the Jackson County Courthouse when two community advocates called a meeting of the public to see if there was sufficient community interest to pursue the venture. The turnout was overwhelming and thus began an eleven-year journey that included Ted writing the Rules and Regulations, the Vendor Application, the Market Managers Position Description and taking the role of Market Manager.

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In 2014, Heiar also facilitated a regional pilot program called Parks to People. This initiative focused on increasing recreational opportunities in Jackson, Jones, and Dubuque counties. As a result of this pilot program, he continues to serve many of the communities in these counties as a regional Hometown Pride coach.

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Dave Heiar of the Jackson County Economic Alliance

Ted Strait of the Maquoketa Farmers Market

Maquoketa Farmers Market Board Members

Judy Tonderum, President

Leslie Hayes, Vice President

Melissa Wood, Director

Mary Ann McLaughlin, Director

Mary Hayward, Director

Bob Roe, Director

Ted Strait, Market Manager/Secretary Treasurer

Peer Farmers Market Managers

Mississippi Valley Growers' Association Farmers Market – Davenport/Bettendorf

Decorah Farmers Market

Grinnell Farmers Market

Johnston Farmers Market

Waukee Farmers Market

Marion Uptown – Chamber Farmers Market

Keokuk Farmers Market

Kalona Farmers Market

Washington Farmers Market

Nonprofit Organizations

Northeast Iowa RC&D

Iowa Valley RC&D

Maquoketa Hometown Pride and Betterment

Jackson County Economic Alliance

ISU Extension Office

Jackson County Government Officials

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Executive Summary

Farmers markets are deeply rooted in American history. President Thomas Jefferson was known to regularly shop at the Georgetown Farmers Market, a municipally sponsored market, which was common in cities across our young nation.¹ Technological advances, such as refrigeration and better roads lead to the advent of the modern-day supermarket supplied by large wholesalers – not small farms.² Forty years ago, as consumers became more interested in the origins of their food and the harmful effects of large-scale food production and transportation, farmers markets experienced a renaissance. Farmers markets provide economically and socially sustainable venues, connecting food producers directly to consumers who benefit from increased social interaction and affordable, healthy products that promote local economic activity.

The Maquoketa Farmers Market was founded in 2011 by the current market manager, Ted Strait. A team of graduate students from the School of Planning and Public Affairs at the University of Iowa has worked collaboratively with Mr. Strait, the executive board, and relevant community stakeholders to develop innovative approaches to strengthening and building the capacity of the market, while identifying and addressing challenges unique to the organization. Our secondary goal has been to provide a starting point for the implementation of a collaborative food system and increased regional partnerships in Jackson County to promote sustainability, economic activity, access to local foods, and community engagement.

The team conducted a review of academic literature regarding nonprofit organizational structures, local food access policy, sustainability, regionalism, and community outreach. Next, the team engaged relevant stakeholders conducting interviews with city and county officials, board members, farmers market managers, and other nonprofit organizations such as Northeast Resource Conservation and Development, Iowa Valley Research Conservation and Development, and the Jackson County Economic Alliance. Finally, the team organized and facilitated a strategic planning process with the Maquoketa Farmers Market Board. During this process the board identified their three greatest challenges: a) Lack of funding b) Relying upon a single person for management activities and c) Attracting young families to the market.

Recommendations

- Decentralize organizational structure through identification and clarification of formal roles, tasks and procedures, development of an organizational chart, creation of a task force designed to assess financial and organizational viability, and diversification and expansion of the Maquoketa Farmers Market Board.
- Expand Supplemental Nutrition Program Assistance (SNAP) Participation. Develop programming to attract a younger, diverse community.
- Form collaborative relationships with other nonprofit organizations, such as the Northeast Iowa RC&D, Bellevue Farmers Market, and local governments in Jackson County to address common issues, share resources, personnel, and funding sources.
- Support, Sustain, Sync provides a vision of sustainability for the Maquoketa Farmers Market and a starting point for a collaborative local foods system in Jackson County. These strategies are designed to increase the health of fellow Iowans, promote a sense of community, and have a positive economic impact in Jackson County.

¹ Jablow, V and Horne, B. (1999) Farmers Markets. Smithsonian Magazine

² Ibid

Section 1: Introduction

Jackson County is located in the Southeast quadrant of Iowa, bordering the Mississippi River. The county was named after the 7th President of the United States, Andrew Jackson. Jackson is a rural county spanning 656 square miles,³ with 19,500 residents reported in the 2020 U.S. Census Report.⁴ Figure 1 on the next page demonstrates the majority population by race/ethnicity is white, non-Hispanic individuals, making up 96.6% of the population in Jackson County.⁵ Comparatively, in the United States the most common racial group was white, non-Hispanic individuals, making up 57.8% of the population. Therefore, Jackson County is less racial and ethnically diverse than the rest of the United States.⁶ The median household income is \$55,967, less than the national median income of \$65,712, with a poverty rate of 11.4%.

Race and Ethnicity	Percent of Population
White	96.6
Black or African American	0.7%
Hispanic or Latino	1.6%
Asian	0.5%
Pacific Islander	3.0%
American Indian	0.3%
Two or more races	1.3%

Figure 1 Racial Demographics Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020

Maquoketa is the Jackson County seat with a population of about 6,000 people. It is nestled on the Maquoketa River, which runs through the northwestern corner of town. Maquoketa is known throughout Iowa for its natural wonders. To the north, Maquoketa State Park attracts nearly 300,000 visitors each year,⁷ a popular nature area with bluffs, trails, and caves. Maquoketa proper has a small city core and main street. The Chamber of Commerce notes that the town's primary industries are agriculture and manufacturing.⁸ The school district serves about 1,300 students, and maintains two elementary schools, a middle school, an academy aimed at social-emotional learning, and one high school.⁹ Maquoketa currently uses a mayor-city council form of government, with seven elected council positions. The mayor is considered the chief executive officer of the city and facilitates council meetings. The council and mayor represent the city through boards and city commissions.¹⁰ Like many towns in Iowa, Maquoketa faces challenges due to stagnant population growth. In 2010, Maquoketa's population was 6,141, compared to

³ *About Jackson County*. Jackson County, Iowa. (n.d.). Retrieved February 12, 2022, from <https://jacksoncounty.iowa.gov/about/>

⁴ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/jacksoncountyiowa/PST045221>

⁵ Bureau, U. S. C. (2021, October 15). The chance that two people chosen at random are of different race or ethnicity groups has increased since 2010. Census.gov. Retrieved February 8, 2022, from <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/08/2020-united-states-population-more-racially-ethnically-diverse-than-2010.html>

⁶ Bureau, U. S. C. (2021, October 15). The chance that two people chosen at random are of different race or ethnicity groups has increased since 2010. Census.gov. Retrieved February 8, 2022, from <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/08/2020-united-states-population-more-racially-ethnically-diverse-than-2010.html>

⁷ Gerlach, K. (2021, April 14). *Caves at Maquoketa Caves State Park re-open April 15*. Bellevue Herald Leader. Retrieved February 11, 2022, from https://www.bellevueheraldleader.com/news/caves-at-maquoketa-caves-state-park-re-open-april-15/article_9483d7e0-9c78-11eb-857c-bb0b2a6cf320.html#:~:text=In%20the%20last%20month%2C%20they,utilize%20the%20park

⁸ *Maquoketa History*. Maquoketa Chamber. (n.d.). Retrieved February 10, 2022, from <https://maquoketachamber.com/history/>

⁹ *Home*. Maquoketa Community School District. (2021, December 10). Retrieved February 12, 2022, from <https://www.maquoketaschools.org/>

¹⁰ *City Council*. City of Maquoketa. (2022, January 3). Retrieved February 5, 2022, from <https://maquoketaia.com/city-departments/city-council/>

its 2020 population of 6,128.¹¹ While the population has remained relatively stable, population decline is a concern for Maquoketa. The Iowa Small Towns Project maintains that small towns can still thrive. Among their key findings, "smart shrinking" cities have close ties to agriculture, have "diverse social linkages" and high participation in local organizations and projects. These "smart" cities also maintain a culture of openness to new ideas and willingness to improve their communities.¹²

Among its strengths, the **Maquoketa Farmers Market** has over 1,400 group members on Facebook,¹³ which is roughly one-quarter of the population of Maquoketa, and consistently books their venue at capacity. The market is a vital community asset, contributing to the overall health, prosperity, and quality of life in Jackson County.

The farmers market takes place in the parking lot of the Ohnward Fine Arts Center on Tuesday evenings over the summer, running from mid-May to August. The market was founded as a subsidiary of the Maquoketa Chamber of Commerce in 2011. In 2019, organizers filed for Articles of Incorporation with the State of Iowa and planned to seek 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status with the federal government. Ted Strait and a volunteer board have performed all management, administrative and fundraising functions, growing the market to what it is today. There are currently no formal paid staff members. The Maquoketa Farmers Market is interested in pursuing 501(c)(3) status as a nonprofit organization to facilitate sponsorships and grant opportunities. Programming elements include weekly cooking demonstrations at the market from the Master Gardeners Club and a kids' play area. The Maquoketa Farmers Market has created a voucher program through partnerships with a local food bank and other stakeholders, supporting low-income residents. The funds used are allocated through vouchers, handed out at the local food bank, and can be used as a cash equivalent at the market.

The United States is a country built upon the principles of hope, opportunity, and community. As residents, we are blessed to live in communities with members of different ethnicities and nationalities. The convergence of different traditions, norms, religions, and beliefs leads to culturally diverse communities where residents regularly interact with people with diverse customs and life experiences. This builds empathy and compassion for those who are different than we are, while also teaching us that we are more alike than we are different. This exposure to new perspectives and the blending of ideas leads to innovative solutions. An inclusive and welcoming environment is the key element in a prosperous community which promotes equal access to resilient economic opportunity. These are the neighborhoods where people want to live and work. These are the principles that guide project recommendations.

¹¹ U.S. Census Bureau Quick facts: Maquoketa City, Iowa. (n.d.). Retrieved February 5, 2022, from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/maquoketacityiowa>

¹² Shrink-smart small towns: Communities can still thrive as they lose population. Iowa State University Extension. (n.d.). Retrieved February 12, 2022, from <https://store.extension.iastate.edu/product/Shrink-Smart-Small-Towns-Communities-can-still-thrive-as-they-lose-population>

¹³ Maquoketa Farmers Market Facebook Group. Facebook. (n.d.). Retrieved February 11, 2022, from <https://www.facebook.com/groups/334691856589105>

Section 2: Methodology

Research Overview

After discussion with the community partners and interviews with board members, the following goals emerged as pertinent:

- Improve internal processes
- Develop long-term strategies for funding
- Create future programming, while bolstering programs already working
- Identify pathways for innovative solutions and strategies
- Build partnerships with local and regional institutions to improve efficiency and meet the greater needs of the Maquoketa community
- Improve the community's relationship with locally sourced food by improving accessibility and affordability
- Better understand the best applications for regionalism to bridge the gaps between current relationships and future collaboration

This project primarily used three main methods of data collection: a) literature review b) stakeholder and expert interviews, and c) a strategic planning process.

Prior to collecting data, the project first identified three research questions representing the key challenges and concerns for the Maquoketa Farmers Market. The research questions, previously identified, are as follows:

- What are the best practices in farmers markets' organizational structure?
- What are the best farmers market programs for engaging with the community, and what grants are available to fund those programs?
- How can individual farmers markets benefit from collaborating with other markets in their region?

Community Engagement Interviews

A core project component was engagement with community stakeholders and other farmers markets. Key community stakeholders and subject matter experts were first identified, each belonging to four categories: a) similar-sized farmers markets, b) Maquoketa Farmers Market board members, c) city and county government representatives, and d) community nonprofits engaged in economic development. These include the following:

- Farmers Market Managers and Board Members
 - Mississippi Valley Growers' Association Farmers Market – Davenport/Bettendorf
 - Decorah Farmers Market
 - Grinnell Farmers Market
 - Johnston Farmers Market
 - Waukee Farmers Market
 - Marion Uptown – Chamber Farmers Market
 - Keokuk Farmers Market
 - Kalona Farmers Market
 - Washington Farmers Market

- Governments
 - Chairman of the Jackson County Board of Supervisors
 - City Manager of Maquoketa
- Nonprofit Organizations
 - Iowa Valley RC&D
 - Northeast Iowa RC&D
 - Iowa State University Extension Office
 - Jackson County Economic Alliance
 - Maquoketa Hometown Pride and Betterment
- Board Members of the Maquoketa Farmers Market

A set of interview questions relevant to the stakeholder's expertise or involvement with the Maquoketa Farmers Market were formulated. Specific questions were asked about the benefits and challenges of different organizational structures for farmers markets, common difficulties small-scale markets face, how their organization decides to partner with others, and if they would consider partnering with a local farmers market. Some nonprofits and local government representatives were also asked more specific questions about the challenges of managing a farmers market and the possible benefits of regional collaboration with other farmers markets. Peer farmers markets were asked to describe the most successful programs implemented at their market, in addition to general questions about organizational structure. The interview format was designed to gather information and generate ideas, allowing the community member to guide the conversation. A narrative analysis of the collected qualitative interview data was completed to look for insights and compare responses.

Strategic Planning with the Maquoketa Farmers Market Board

A unique strategic planning framework was created, using processes from John Bryson's *Ten-Step Strategic Planning Process for Nonprofits*¹⁴ and the Strategic Doing framework from the Agile Strategy Lab at Purdue University.¹⁵ A virtual session was held with the Maquoketa Farmers Market board on March 31, 2022, from 4:00 to 6:15 pm. Exercises and objectives were explained during each segment of the session. The board members steered discussions, guided by the project team. Four exercises were completed, including:

- Mission Statement Review and Update
- Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Analysis
- Strategic Issue Identification Brainstorm
- What Should We Do? Identifying tasks to address identified issue

In the Strategic Planning Section of this report (Section 6), the rationale for the process, steps taken, and results are discussed in greater detail.

¹⁴ Bryson, J. (2018). *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations: For Public and Nonprofit Organizations, A Guide to Strengthening and Sustaining Organizational Achievement* (5th ed.). Hoboken, NJ Wiley.

¹⁵ *The Agile Strategy Lab at Purdue University - Agile Strategy Lab*. (2020, March 8). Agile Strategy Lab. <https://agilestrategylab.org/the-agile-strategy-lab-at-purdue-university/>

Section 3: Nonprofit Organizational Effectiveness

Nonprofit Basics

Farmers markets vary in terms of structure, sophistication, volunteer capabilities, budget, resource allocation, program offerings and size. While some markets may have the capacity to run multiple days a week, attracting thousands of visitors, others may host a few vendors and operate on a less frequent basis. Though the Maquoketa Farmers Market is a successful endeavor and well-established within the community, this project seeks to identify methods that will help the market become more institutionalized. For this purpose, the following section is centered on the research question: *What are the best practices for farmers markets' organizational structure?*

The following research uses two types of sources. The first type of resources point specifically to the development of farmers markets; including, but not limited to, the Iowa Farmers Market Development Manual published by the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, the resources section of the Iowa Farmers Market Association website,¹⁶ and the NE Iowa RC&D Farmers Market Manager Toolkit – designed to be used in conjunction with existing resources. The second type of resources inform the broader identification of nonprofit best practices in the current academic literature and include subject matter on organizational effectiveness and development.

Farmers markets are structured in several ways. Most markets will be a partnership, sole proprietorship, for-profit corporation, or nonprofit corporation.¹⁷

Structure refers to the organizational pattern, which includes:¹⁸

- Division of labor and chain of command
- The use of rules and procedures
- Centralization and diffusion (decision making authority)¹⁹

The Oregon State Extension Office cites several types of organizational structures of Farmers Markets, including four broad types:²⁰

- An organization among producers without a formal fee structure or guidelines
- Private business led
- Unofficially or informal organization among producers with loose fee structure and guidelines
- Official agreement between producers with a secure and legal tax status

Farmers markets in Iowa often use a fiscal agent with 501(c)(3), 501(c)(5), or 501(c)(6) status. Nonprofits established as a fiscal agent, per the IRS requirements, must retain “the right to decide, at its own discretion, how it will use contributions.”²¹

¹⁶ Resources. IFMA. (n.d.). Retrieved February 2022, from <http://www.iafarmersmarkets.org/resources.html>

¹⁷ Iowa Farmers Market manager manual. Northeast Iowa RCD. (n.d.). Retrieved March, 2022, from <https://northeastiowarcd.org/toolkit/iowa-farmers-market-manager-manual/>

¹⁸ McPhee, R. D., & Poole, M. S. (2001). Organizational structures and configurations. In F. M. Jablin & L. L. Putnam (Eds.), *The new handbook of organizational communication*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

¹⁹ Mintzberg, H. T. (1979). *The structuring of organizations*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

²⁰ *Understanding the link between farmers' market - OSU extension catalog*. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/sites/catalog/files/project/pdf/sr1082.pdf>

²¹ *Fiscal sponsorship for nonprofits*. National Council of Nonprofits. (2022, April 3). Retrieved From: <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/tools-resources/fiscal-sponsorship-nonprofits>

Mission and Public Value

Nonprofit and public organizations must define value through unique processes. For profit entities define value through traditional economic profit models, while public institutions need to focus on the value they create, populations they serve, and sources of income. For example, in nonprofits, the value produced is created through social good, rather than increased revenue and financial return to owners or stakeholders. Furthermore, nonprofits primarily receive funds through sources other than customers or revenue. Mark Moore, of the Harvard Kennedy School, developed a strategic model for nonprofit and public managers maintaining that managers should focus on three key dimensions: a) Public value to the community, b) Suppliers of legitimacy and support, and (c) Operational capacity of the organization.²² According to Moore, the main goal and key performance indicator in the public sector, which includes nonprofit entities, should be to achieve the organization's social mission effectively and efficiently. Moore states, "The defining source of revenue to nonprofit organizations is charitable contributions of money, time, and material."²³ This establishes the requirement for organizations to be responsive to the needs of the groups responsible for these contributions.

A mission statement is a fundamental way in which an organization communicates the public value it creates. According to the *Iowa Principles and Practices for Nonprofit Excellence*, a mission statement should be a clear statement of the services provided by the organization, phrased in a way the public can understand.²⁴ Additionally, the mission statement should be succinct, but still explain the organization's overall guiding objective. A more modern approach from *Nonprofit Quarterly* suggests crafting a mission statement like a poem- "Think carefully about each word of your mission statement, about the range of denotations and connotations it carries, and about the effect it will have on readers." It goes on to say that mission statements are "a carefully-worded piece in which every syllable holds meaning."²⁵

Operations and Building Capacity

Clear institutionalized roles are a key component of successful farmers market organizational structure. The Iowa Farmers Market Development Manual, published by the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship outlines several key roles, including an event manager, communications manager, and operational manager. These "roles" can either be separate people or specific functions of an individual's job description, which are distinct in terms of the task completion required to manage the market's needs. The event manager role includes day-to-day management of the market, and identifies key skills needed for event and volunteer management. These duties include enforcing market rules and regulations, serving as a mediator in disputes, managing volunteer staff and emergency preparedness.²⁶ The manual also states that the market should be structured to financially support operations, and if possible, include a paid market manager.²⁷

²² Moore M. Managing for Value: Organizational Strategy in for-Profit, Nonprofit, and Governmental Organizations. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*. 2000;29(1_suppl):183-204. doi:10.1177/0899764000291S009

²³ Moore M. Managing for Value: Organizational Strategy in for-Profit, Nonprofit, and Governmental Organizations. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*. 2000;29(1_suppl):183-204. doi:10.1177/0899764000291S009

²⁴ "Iowa Principles and Practices for Nonprofit Excellence" <https://inrc.law.uiowa.edu/sites/inrc.law.uiowa.edu/files/pp-2016ed-web.pdf>

²⁵ Finney, C. (2020, January 17). *Mission haiku: The poetry of mission statements*. *Non Profit News | Nonprofit Quarterly*. Retrieved April 9, 2022, from <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/mission-haiku-the-poetry-of-mission-statements-2/>

²⁶ *Iowa Farmers' Market Development Manual, 2003*. Iowa Publications Online. (2003, August 1). Retrieved from <http://publications.iowa.gov/1751/>

²⁷ Ibid

Additionally, the Iowa Farmers Market Development Manual identifies promotions, advertising, and publicity as a distinct role within the market operation. This role may be described as a marketing or communications role, which acts to promote and market the event. Promotions are defined here as “a way to attract attention to your market and involve community members, media, and consumers in the market.”²⁸ Examples of promotions include cooking demonstrations, seasonal festivals, which feature pie baking or eating contests, pumpkin carving contests, raffles, or auctions. Advertising includes duties associated with creating a “look and feel” of the market. This includes the management of media and the public image of the market through the creation and monitoring of promotional materials which represent the market. These may be in the form of shopping bags, t-shirts, banners, or other items. Publicity and media coverage ensure the market is well attended.

The Washington State Farmers Market Toolkit points to one clear strategy for clarifying roles - an organizational chart. According to the market manual, these charts should clearly demonstrate the “governance structure, any committees, and their relationship to the market manager (and any staff) and volunteers.”²⁹ Additionally, it is important to clarify roles and determine a hierarchy for organizational benefit. “Being clear about roles and responsibilities goes a long way to aligning expectations. The ‘chain of command’ must be clear to everyone. This is not just a matter of assigning people jobs, but also consistency about who has the responsibility and authority to make specific types of decisions.”³⁰

Transparency and Accountability

A key organizational metric for accountability is the establishment of 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status for nonprofit organizations. The establishment of 501(c)(3) status is required to obtain grant funding, and preferred by corporate and personal sponsors, donors and volunteers. Annual IRS compliance reporting provides detailed information on revenue amounts and sources, assets, expenses, leadership structure, board members, and amendments to articles of incorporation. These forms are then made available to the public through various nonprofit organizations. Funders find this information vital, as it reveals periods of organizational growth or stagnation, organizational priorities, as well as current capacity, which are all key considerations in funding appropriation.

The Iowa Farmers Market Toolkit from the NE Iowa RC&D also outlines measures to ensure accountability, including data collection, maintenance of records, and reporting and communication. Maintaining proper documentation achieves several goals, including:

- **Maintaining Accuracy:** Ensures agreements, obligations and other requirements are met.
- **Legal Compliance:** Proper documentation is needed to maintain contracts, insurance, leases, and other legally binding agreements.
- **Maintaining Organizational Continuity:** Ensures volunteers, board members and staff maintain continuity of information through turnover and transitions.

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Washington State Farmers Market Management Toolkit. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.wafarmersmarkettoolkit.org/chapter-4/boards-and-advisory-committees/>

³⁰ Ibid

- Informed Decision Making: Metrics can properly inform key decisions made by the board for strategic management.³¹

Nonprofits need to be proactively transparent and trustworthy, maintaining and building trust with their stakeholders. These efforts are achieved through tracking donations, results of programming initiatives, public communications, upkeep of a public website and formal record keeping. Public communication through annual reports and social media can bolster the public image and ensure accountability for the organization. Nonprofits should maintain an evident and measurable commitment to integrity and ethical behavior.³²

Board Structure

Nonprofit boards are a fundamental part of nonprofit organizational structure and serve several purposes. Boards help guide strategic choices by creating a more inclusive component to decentralize decision-making. Boards should reinforce the mission of the organization, guiding decisions that create and maximize value for the communities they serve.

“A resource dependency view suggests that boards are crucial resource streams either politically (i.e., network connections) or intellectually (i.e., informed decision making) and that this can lead to improved performance.”³³ The Washington State Farmers Market Toolkit suggests diversifying the skills of board members to meet phases of growth, which require more technical skills. “As markets mature and operations become more complex, they should evaluate the make-up of its membership to make sure the board has all the specific skills it needs. This becomes especially important if a market decides to pursue federal grants, including the USDA’s Farmers Market Promotion Program, or offer SNAP and incentive programs. As the market is managing public money, these programs require formal internal controls and sophisticated accounting systems.”³⁴

Evaluation of the Maquoketa Farmers Market

The Maquoketa Farmers Market intended to separate from the Maquoketa Chamber of Commerce in 2019, when organizers filed for Articles of Incorporation with the State of Iowa with the goal of forming their own 501(c)(3). The current Maquoketa Farmers Market is a hybrid of two organizational types as defined by the Oregon State toolkit: unofficially or informal organization among producers with loose fee structure and guidelines, and official agreement among producers with a secure and legal tax status. The Maquoketa Farmers Market retains nonprofit status in Iowa but does not maintain a federal exempt tax status. Formal processes have been established around vendor fees, mandates, and guidelines of the market. The market also has an established division of labor among the volunteer board participants. The institutionalization of the market to fully establish and retain 501(c)(3) status has been discussed as

³¹ *Iowa Farmers Market manager manual*. Northeast Iowa RCD. (n.d.). Retrieved from: <https://northeastiowarcd.org/toolkit/iowa-farmers-market-manager-manual/>

³² “Iowa Principles and Practices for Nonprofit Excellence” <https://inrc.law.uiowa.edu/sites/inrc.law.uiowa.edu/files/pp-2016ed-web.pdf>

³³ Brown, & Iverson, J. O. (2004). Exploring Strategy and Board Structure in Nonprofit Organizations. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 33(3), 377–400. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764004265428>

³⁴ Washington State Farmers Market Management Toolkit. (n.d.). Retrieved from: <https://www.wafarmersmarkettoolkit.org/chapter-4/boards-and-advisory-committees/>

a long-term goal of the market by the volunteer board. Constraints to this process have been the mandates and requirements of creating a 501(c)(3), and with the lack of formalized staff, maintaining the requirements of this status could become difficult.

Mission and Public Value

In the case of the Maquoketa Farmers Market, value can be defined through the public service provided to the community. The Maquoketa Farmers Market created a mission statement in 2011 which states: “The Maquoketa Farmers Market's mission is to support Jackson County's small farms and farming families by providing an effective direct sales site for our region's small farmers, and by educating consumers about the availability and quality of nutritional farm products and the benefits of buying direct from local farmers.”³⁵ The original mission statement identifies several key stakeholders, including small and local farmers and consumers. The public value produced includes being a conduit to connect farmers directly with consumers. By allowing direct to consumer purchases, local farmers can receive more money for the food they produce than if they were selling through other avenues.³⁶ Additionally, value is created through the connection of consumers with healthy foods, which is a primary need in Maquoketa due to the food insecure population. Markets supply fruits and vegetables that are in season and local. “Farmers markets reconnect communities to their food system. They create an opportunity where farmers can simultaneously sell fresh, local food and serve as food educators, revitalizing the way consumers shop and eat. They are places where farmers and neighbors meet to socialize and exchange ideas around cooking, nutrition, and agriculture.”³⁷ For example, a 2012 study found that market stands operating once a week in low-income areas helped increase fruit and vegetable consumption for households that lived within walking distance.³⁸ ([Study](#))

Operations and Building Capacity

The Maquoketa Farmers Market is a well-established market in terms of community visibility, which has been operating since 2011 with a volunteer staff. For this reason, Ted Strait and the seven-member board of volunteers have determined the structure and establishment of market procedures. The Maquoketa Farmers Market currently relies heavily on Ted Strait, the secretary of the board, to manage the market. Ted Strait's role encompasses multiple functions, including marketing, fundraising, and event management. Melissa Wood also fulfills marketing functions through the management of social media.

Transparency and Accountability

The Maquoketa Farmers Market is currently working to procure 501(c)(3) status. The market currently has some record-keeping systems in place but does not publish the information to the public through an annual report or website.

³⁵ (2022, March 14). Email to Ted Strait: *Question on Mission/vision*.

³⁶ *About farmers markets*. Farmers Market Coalition. (2017, April 11). Retrieved from: <https://farmersmarketcoalition.org/education/qanda/#:~:text=Farmers%20markets%20facilitate%20personal%20connections,area%20and%20local%20economies%20prosper>.³⁶

³⁷ *Farmers Markets Support Healthy Communities*. Farmers Market Coalition. (2017, July 10). Retrieved from <https://farmersmarketcoalition.org/education/farmers-markets-support-healthy-communities/>

³⁸ Ibid

Board Structure

The Maquoketa Farmers Market board is currently made up of several community volunteers with varying skills, which are utilized by the organization. Board members are recruited through the Maquoketa Farmers Market network and include some former vendors and community members that show interest. Five of the seven board members are Master Gardeners with expertise in agriculture, cooking and selling goods, while others have specialized skills that contribute to organizational concentrations like communication, marketing, fundraising and community engagement. Several board members have been involved in the planning of the Maquoketa Farmers Market from its inception. Institutional knowledge and engagement are valuable skills, but diversity of thought and skills are also key traits for functional boards. The current board has some diversity in the age and gender of participants but overall lacks racial and ethnic diversity. The majority of board members are retired members of the community. Bylaws require that the organization maintains a seven-member board.

Section 4: Community Outreach & Programming

Food Insecurity and Rural Challenges

The phrase “food desert” first originated in the 1990s and was largely defined as any low-income, urban area where residents have no immediate access to affordable, healthy food.³⁹ Recognizing that rural communities face significant economic challenges due to declining job opportunities, a shrinking, but aging population, and the loss of retail markets, the USDA sought to redefine the definition.⁴⁰ The Conservation and Energy Act of 2008 ([2008 Farm Bill](#)) redefined a food desert as “an area in the United States with limited access to affordable and nutritious food, particularly such as an area composed of predominately lower-income neighborhoods and communities.” The 2008 Farm Bill also directed the USDA to identify the characteristics of 6,500 food desert tracts in the United States and recommend measures to address their causes and effects ([study results](#)).

Studies indicate that low-income residents in low-access areas such as Maquoketa pay more for groceries and fresh and healthier options are in limited supply.⁴¹ These residents are at an increased risk of suffering from poor nutrition, raising their incidence of both social and health-related problems.⁴² In rural areas, retail grocery stores struggle with higher transportation costs, wholesale fees, and lack of capital investment. There are four supermarkets in Maquoketa which are clustered near the intersection of Highways 64 and 61 to the Southeast. In most communities, food banks are often the gold standard to address local food insecurity, but in rural areas food banks face many of the same challenges as retail grocery stores in addition to fewer opportunities for corporate and private donations. As a result, much like farmers markets, most food banks are open only limited hours with less variety and only marginally improved access for residents who face time-cost challenges due to conflicting work hours and transportation issues.

Census Data

Understanding the complexity of food access, policymakers considering interventions were now able to place greater emphasis on individual

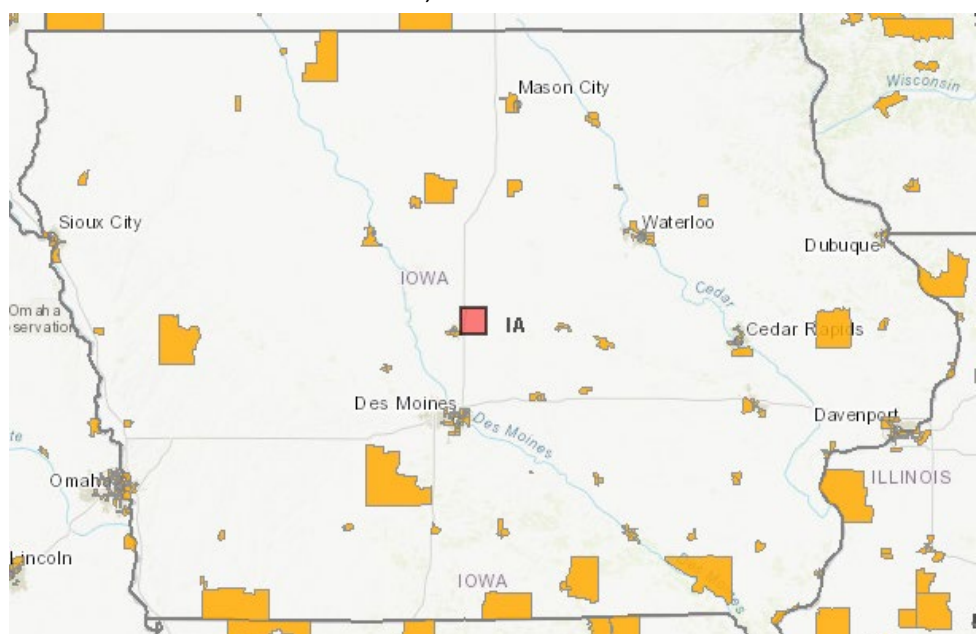


Figure 2 Low-Access Census Tracts in Iowa.
Source: USDA Economic Research/Food Access Research Atlas

³⁹ Walker, R, Keane, C, Burke, J. (2010). Disparities and access to healthy food in the United States: A review of food deserts literature. *Health & Place*, Volume 16, Issue 5, pp 876-884.

⁴⁰ Whitley, S. (2013) Security in Food Deserts, *Journal of Family Social Work*, 16:1, 36-52.

⁴¹ Larsen, K., Gilliland, J. (2009) A farmers market in a food desert: Evaluating impacts on the price and availability of healthy food. *Health and Place*, 15, 1158-1162

⁴² Sadler, R., Gilliland, J., Arku, G. (2013) Community Development and the Influence of New Food Retail Sources on the Price and Availability of Nutritious Food, *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 35:4, 471-491.

characteristics associated with food insecurity such income and access to transportation or healthcare services.⁴³ As a result, in 2013 the USDA Economic Research Service (ERA) discontinued the use of the term food desert. Food insecurity is now measured by census tract. A census tract can be designated as low-income (LI) and low-access (LA) based on multiple factors and are measured separately for each census tract.

Criteria for Low-income (LI) Census Tract: The poverty rate is greater than 20% or median family income is less than or equal to 80% of state median family income or the metropolitan area median family income.

Criteria for Low-Access (LA) Census Tract: At least 500 people or 33% of the population is more than 1 mile (urban) or 10 miles (rural) from the nearest supermarket. ([Food Access Research Atlas](#)).

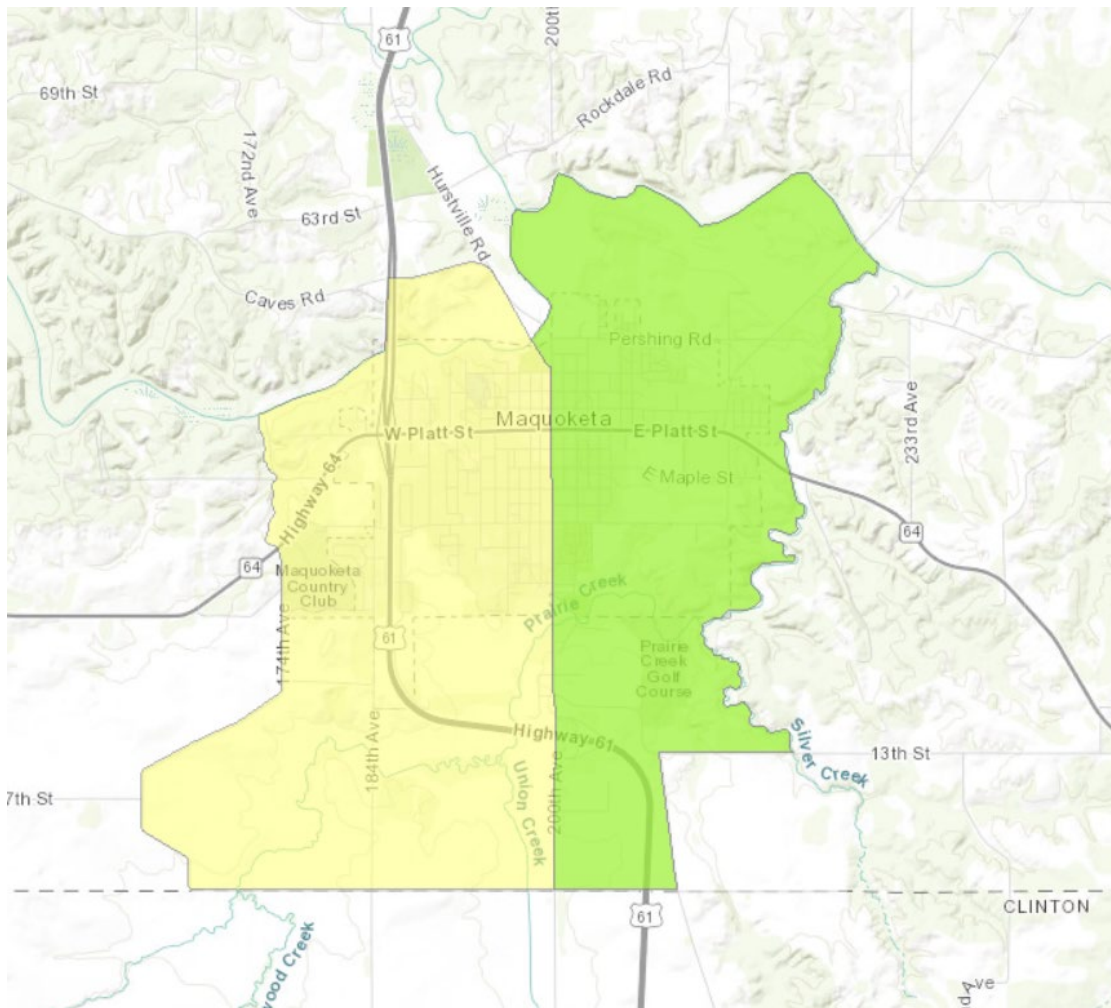


Figure 3 Low-income and Low-Access in Maquoketa

⁴³ Dutko, P, Ploeg, M. and Farrigan, T. (2012). Characteristics and Influential Factors of Food Deserts, ERR-140, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service.

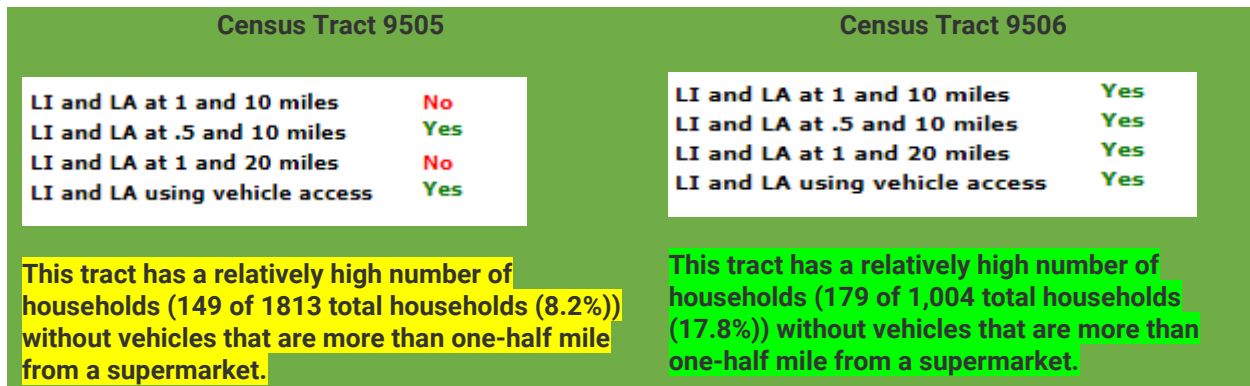


Figure 4 Low-income and Low-Access by Census Tract

Variable	Census Tract 9505	Census Tract 9506
Population	4505	2440
Tract poverty rate	19.8%	26.3%
White population	3877	2279
Black population	14	31
Asian population	19	9
Pacific Islander	40	48
American Indian	10	15
Other/Multiple Race	90	58
Hispanic	70	42
Children age 0-17	917	650
Seniors age 65+	929	356
Low Income Population	1,260	1,104
Households, Total	1,813	1,004
Households Receiving SNAP	387	233
Households Receiving SNAP, Low Access	268	148
Households without a car	207	77

Source: USDA Economic Research/Food Access Research Atlas

Figure 5 Demographic Information for Maquoketa Census Tracts

Figure 5 demonstrates there are 2,817 housing units in Maquoketa and 22% of these households receive SNAP benefits. Additionally, 10% do not own a car.

Federal and State Resources

Simply increasing food access to food in low-income communities is not as simple as increasing supply. Low-income households, spend one-third less on food than higher-income households.⁴⁴ These individuals must choose between spending on housing, education, or food, which accounts for 36% of their monthly income. Therefore, the benefits of supply-oriented solutions, such as more retail options, are severely limited by the lack of available income to spend on food.

Social safety net programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), alleviate demand constraints by providing the means to purchase needed food. Initiatives such as SNAP improve food security by boosting access, supply, and purchasing power, while also focusing local food narratives on resilience and community strength.⁴⁵

Farmers Market Nutrition Programs (FMNP) include Women, Infant, and Child Program (WIC FMNP), as well as Senior FMNP. These programs are funded by the USDA and administered by the Iowa Department of Agriculture (IDALS). WIC and Senior FMNP benefits are distributed by the Hillcrest WIC Clinton office and the Northeast Iowa Area on Aging in Jackson County. Vouchers may be used at any certified vendor registered with the state.

SNAP Electronic Benefit Transfer (SNAP EBT) is an Iowa state initiative that provides point-of-sale electronic machines to participating farmers markets, allowing them to accept SNAP as well as Mastercard, Visa, Discover, and American Express cards. Shoppers visit an exchange booth at the market to swipe their cards in exchange for tokens to be spent at the market. The [IDALS Wireless EBT Project](#) began in 2012 with federal funding intended to increase the use of farmers markets by SNAP recipients, while offering wireless payment transactions for all customers. “We wanted to get away from the stigma of paper coupons,” said Tracy Penick, who coordinates the farmers market benefit program for the IDALS. “When farmers accept the cards, there is no stigma.” The project has attracted SNAP recipients as well as farmers to the market, resulting in a favorable impact on increasing the SNAP redemptions and farmers market sales in Iowa. Currently, there is only one vendor at the Maquoketa Farmers Market, Open Station Farms, who accepts SNAP-EBT. Broadening SNAP access at the market would increase access to food options for 22% of Maquoketa households who receive SNAP benefits.

Month	EBT Transactions	Debit/Credit Transactions	Total Transactions	EBT Sales	Debit/Credit Sales	Total Sales
January	17	333	350	\$841.35	\$17,070.55	\$17,911.90
February	15	414	429	\$939.92	\$14,373.38	\$15,313.30
March	42	615	657	\$3,073.59	\$24,439.30	\$27,512.89
April	61	4,653	4,714	\$5,219.32	\$286,201.89	\$291,421.21
May	255	14,297	14,552	\$7,392.10	\$714,676.23	\$722,068.33
June	339	5,798	6,137	\$8,854.77	\$162,166.78	\$171,021.55
July	1,204	8,788	9,992	\$23,437.22	\$187,437.13	\$210,874.35
August	1,511	7,703	9,214	\$34,221.23	\$164,784.88	\$199,006.11
September	1,085	7,452	8,537	\$28,055.71	\$210,303.87	\$238,359.58
October	688	5,434	6,122	\$16,169.59	\$147,874.94	\$164,044.53
November	76	1,020	1,096	\$4,776.99	\$45,202.36	\$49,979.35
December	49	1,075	1,124	\$2,538.13	\$42,056.67	\$44,594.80
Total for Year	5,342	57,582	62,924	\$135,519.92	\$2,016,587.98	\$2,152,107.90

Figure 6 EBT Sales in Iowa, 2021 Source: Iowa DHS January 2022 Newsletter

In Iowa, Double Up Food Bucks (DUFb) matches every dollar a SNAP recipient

⁴⁴ Bitler, M., & Haider, S. J. (2010). An Economic View of Food Deserts in the United States. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 30(1), 153–176.

⁴⁵ George, C and Tomer, A. (2021) Beyond “food deserts”: America needs a new approach to mapping food insecurity. Brookings.

spends on fresh fruits and vegetables, further incentivizing the use of their benefits at a farmers market where they can double their fresh food budget and increase farmers market sales. All incentive and startup costs associated with DUFB are reimbursed through grant funding provided through the Iowa Healthiest State Initiative. Training and support of SNAP-EBT and DUFB is available on an individual level by Tracy Penick of the Department of Human Services (tpenick@dhs.state.ia.us).

Figure 6 on the previous page includes all farmers market wireless transactions in Iowa during 2021. In addition to \$135,519 in SNAP sales, the EBT system yielded over \$2 million in debit and credit card sales at farmers markets, increasing convenience for all shoppers.

Grant Opportunities

Grant opportunities through the United States Department of Agriculture Farmers Market Promotion Program ([FMPP](#)) are available each year. The funds can be used to increase organizational capacity, provide outreach, training or technical assistance for nonprofits expanding direct producer-to-consumer access to locally produced agricultural products. The average grant is \$100,000 and a 25% match is required for all grants, and organizations must have 501(c)(3) status.

Wellmark Foundation offers grant opportunities for nonprofit organizations in Jackson County, which support projects that increase access to and consumption of nutritious foods. The deadline for application is mid-February of each year. Amounts up to \$100,000 may be requested and require a dollar-for-dollar equal match. Nonprofits must have 501(c)(3) status.

The Healthiest State Initiative, as referenced above, offers incentive and startup costs associated with the Double Up Food Bucks program. In addition, Capacity Building Grants of \$1,500 for farmers markets are available. The current grant cycle closed in February. It is suggested that the Maquoketa Farmers Market sign up for newsletters and press releases to be notified of new opportunities.

<http://www.iowahealthieststate.com/take-action/connect/> For information about assistance from Healthiest State Initiative trained volunteers on staff who are available to assist DUFB operations at farmers markets, contact info@iowahealthieststate.com.

The Maquoketa Farmers Market is also encouraged to monitor state opportunities on a regular basis at IowaGrants.gov.

Peer Farmers Market Best Practices

Figure 7 below is information obtained from each interview conducted with farmers market managers.

Market	Population	SNAP Participation	Hours	Organization Structure	Manager Paid Y/N	Number of Vendors	Fees
Johnston	21,406	Entire market, including Double UP	Tuesday 3:30 to 6:30	Fiscal Agent: Johnston Lions Foundation 501(c)(4)	PT - No	20	\$10 Day Pass \$90 Season
Decorah	7,587	Entire market, including Double Up	Wednesday 3 to 6 Saturday 8 to 11	Fiscal Agent: Visit Decorah 501(c)(6)	PT - Yes	20	\$30 Day Pass \$150 Season \$25 Reserve
Marion Uptown	39,000	They do not meet requirements	Saturday 8 am to noon	Fiscal Agent: Marion Uptown 501(c)(6)	PT - Yes	45 to 50	\$30 Day Pass \$90 Season
Grinnell	9,031	Entire market, including Double Up	Thursday 3 to 6 pm Saturday 10 am to noon	Fiscal Agent: Grinnell Chamber of Commerce, 501(c)(6)	PT-Yes	45	\$115 Thursday \$105 Saturday \$175 Thursday and Saturday \$10/15 Day Pass
Washington	7,313	Entire market, including Double Up	Thursday 5 to 7:30 pm	Fiscal Agent: Main Street Iowa 501(c)(3)	PT - Yes	20	\$5 Day Pass \$60 Season \$100 Season with electric
Waukee	20,785	No	Wednesday 4 to 7 pm	Fiscal Agent: Waukee Business Triangle 501(c)(6)	PT -No	20 to 30	\$10 Day Pass \$90 Season
Bettendorf	35,919	No	Wednesday 2:30 to 6:30	501(c)(3)	No manager, vendors volunteer	20	\$10 Day \$100 Season
Keokuk	10,324	Entire market	Wednesday 4 to 7 pm	Fiscal Agent: Chamber of Commerce 501(c)(6)	PT - Yes	15	\$10 Day Pass \$162 Season
Kalona	2,520	Some individual vendors only	Saturday 9 am to noon	Fiscal Agent: Chamber of Commerce 501(c)(6)	PT - Yes	20	\$10 Day Pass \$120 Season

Figure 7 Peer Farmers Markets in Iowa: Basic demographic information, organizational and market structures of peer farmers markets in Iowa.

Telephone interviews were conducted with peer farmers market managers in Iowa with similar populations. The managers were asked to describe their most successful programs which promoted community engagement and increased market sales. Highlights of innovative programming initiatives are below and include contact information.

Key Information from Interviews

During market manager interviews, in addition to describing successful programming initiatives, market managers also discussed the importance of location, organizational structures which improved efficiency, and volunteered tips on the administration of the SNAP-EBT wireless program.

During the 2020 and 2021 seasons, the Johnston Farmers Market was temporarily located at the Johnston Public Library while City Hall was under construction. During this time, market attendance grew, with many new customers who walked to the market from the numerous apartment complexes located in the adjacent neighborhood. The market manager states their temporary location near the apartment complexes doubled their weekly attendance, while providing families with an enjoyable weekly night out listening to music, having dinner, doing crafts, and shopping. Efforts are underway to provide transportation this season, so these new farmers market shoppers can attend the market as it returns to its home at City Hall.

In Grinnell, three years ago, the Chamber of Commerce assumed management market activities, at which time the market had only 15 to 20 vendors. The market has grown to 42 vendors, which is their maximum capacity. The chamber is proactive in promoting the market, participating in a weekly local radio show, and calling potential vendors each season. Through the chamber, the market has also obtained sponsorships from Unity Point Hospital and Grinnell College.

The Washington Farmers Market began a partnership with Main Street Iowa to provide administrative support to the market several years ago. At that time, the market was encouraged to create an advisory board. This increased community support and the number of volunteers now associated with the market in various capacities, such as advertising and social media marketing.

All peer market managers interviewed indicated they felt participation with the SNAP-EBT program was worth the administrative time and effort, as it increased attendance, sales, and ensured low-income residents can shop at the market. A few markets offered helpful tips:

- Washington Farmers Market: The vendors report their sales weekly to the manager. The manager issues checks to vendors once a month after receipt of payment from the state, estimating this process takes 2 hours each week. This is a process unique to Washington, as most markets issue weekly payments to the vendors and submit monthly requests for reimbursement to the state.
- Decorah Farmers Market: 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 increased market sales by an estimated 10 to 20%. The EBT booth is staffed by high school Honors Society students who work at the market during the summer to fulfill their community service requirements. The use of technically savvy high school volunteers with electronic systems increases efficiency. The market manager also noted that participation in SNAP increases their sales on Wednesday more than on Saturday. Wednesday is a popular market day with senior citizens and those who use SNAP. The community food pantry is five blocks away and is open on Wednesday afternoon. Going to the food pantry and then the farmers market is a big weekly outing for many in the community. Many SNAP users will save vouchers and tokens

during the season and buy tomatoes or other produce in bulk for canning. The Winneshiek Medical Center sponsors the FMNP in Decorah.

- Grinnell Farmers Market: The market manager stated that SNAP-EBT is a “huge draw.” In the past, shoppers were disappointed to find the market listed on the state website as a certified SNAP-EBT participant but discovered when they arrived at the market that only a few vendors participated. The manager states that many of their shoppers travel for an hour or more since they can use SNAP throughout the market. To facilitate the SNAP-EBT program, they partner with local high school volunteer students to facilitate the SNAP booth at the market during the summer months. The manager states the SNAP-EBT program improves each season, as the state is proactive in providing support and estimated administrative time commitment to be a “few hours quarterly.”

The purpose of the peer market manager interviews was to look at how other farmers markets in Iowa addressed resource allocation, structured their organizations and how they obtained market management. Most farmers markets in Iowa operate under a fiscal agent, most often the Chamber of Commerce which also provides staff to manage the day-to-day activities of the market. All market managers interviewed attribute the addition of school or youth activities to keeping families at the market longer, increasing community engagement and sales. These interviews were instrumental in the formation of project recommendations.

Section 5: Regional Collaboration

Collaboration is a relationship between two or more actors that combines their time and/or resources to find solutions to problems without regards to administrative or political boundaries. Regional collaboration, often referred to as regionalism, has fostered waves of enthusiasm and opposition over the years, leaving behind both great successes and disappointment.⁴⁶

Regionalism can be an important tool for rural development. These relationships bring relevant stakeholders together to strategically plan, combine funding, and develop programming that can benefit all parties and create something greater than the sum of its parts. Regional collaboration can provide a vehicle for improving social and economic opportunity and health for all people in a region, by ensuring commonly held interests and perspectives can be brought together to set priorities and drive change.⁴⁷

In the case of the Maquoketa and Bellevue farmers markets, local economic development professionals have suggested collaboration may resolve common problems. Jason Grimm, Executive Director of the Iowa Valley RC&D, identified common challenges of small-scale farmers markets. These include a lack of, and high turnover of, management, decreased funding for marketing, insufficient policies regarding products, pricing, and market standards. Academic literature and case studies have identified that many of these commonly held problems can and have been solved through inter-organizational collaboration. Addressing common issues together can decrease resource expenditure, increase return on investment, attract more funding, among other benefits.

Collaboration is not inherently an efficient solution. It requires quality and driven leadership, interdependence, trust, flexibility and more. A key to successful collaboration is to ensure that all parties experience a beneficial gain. This raises a common concern that collaborating relationships will reflect a dynamic of a strong organization helping a struggling one, while the stronger organization does not benefit. This section will provide the key insights of regional

Due to the resource and time constraints market managers in Michigan's Washtenaw County faced, regional collaboration was used to address commonly held problems like management, scarce resources, stepping on each other's toes and more, and it succeeded. The drive for regionalism was caused by a shortage of farmers and vendors and increased competition between the markets, causing some markets to struggle. These conditions placed large workloads on market managers, eventually leading them to seek help from other markets through collaboration. Today, the collaborative organization shares a website hosting more than 10 markets that work together on advertising, marketing, transportation, and other projects. As a collaborative organization, they can coordinate the times and locations of their markets, rather than competing with one another to reach the most customers.

Washtenaw County is home to Ann Arbor, so the area is much more populous than Jackson County. Still, key lessons can be learned from their success. Collaboration and coordination in marketing have saved market managers time and money. The interdependence and cooperation of all markets has also sustained their individual survival. Instead of competing, they have coordinated locations, hours of operation, vendors, and farmers' goods so that each market can help one another and thrive. The story is reflective of the benefits that can come from a collaboration when farmers markets struggle individually.

⁴⁶ Dabson, B., & McFarland, C. (n.d.). *Collaborative Rural Development and Regional Economic Connectivity Rural Policy Analyst and Researcher*. https://www.stlouisfed.org/-/media/project/frbstl/stlouisfed/files/pdfs/community-development/investing-rural/13_dabson_mcfarland.pdf

⁴⁷ National League of Cities (2021, November 9). *Accelerating Rural Prosperity Through Regional Collaboration*. National League of Cities. <https://www.nlc.org/article/2021/11/09/accelerating-rural-prosperity-through-regional-collaboration/#:~:text=Regional%20collaboration%20provides%20a%20vehicle,set%20priorities%20and%20drive%20change>

collaboration including what is found in academic literature, common benefits and downfalls, and best practices for engaging in regional collaboration.

Literature Review

A key foundational concept is that collaborative management should be a standard component of public and nonprofit management.⁴⁸ Without one another, the network of nonprofits within our communities would likely not survive long-term, and certainly would not be as impactful. However, nonprofits should also recognize that collaboration still complements, rather than supplants, single organization management. Collaboration is a beneficial tool for furthering involved organizations, but the internal development of the individual organization still takes precedence.

Policymakers struggle to keep up with the evolving economic realities of rural areas. Throughout this project, economic development leaders in Eastern Iowa recounted successive funding cuts to local organizations like RC&D's, and the ISU Extension Office.^{49 50} As a result, these organizations are less involved in community development and have decreased the services they provide.

Rural collaboration has a long history in America and is again gaining attention as a means for overcoming resource and service depletion in rural areas. The overarching reason for regional collaboration is that many of the challenges facing nonprofits, local governments and communities are generally of scale and complexity beyond the capacity and resources of any single entity to tackle on its own. Sometimes, only by working across jurisdictions can there be opportunities for growth and betterment.⁵¹ Rural economic development hinges crucially on the ability of communities to collaborate externally with other towns and key institutions.⁵²

Lastly, academic literature identifies that collaboration can help neighboring organizations with similar goals share scarce resources, rather than spend efforts competing, changing a zero-sum situation into one in which everyone wins. Regional collaboration is not just a way for rural communities to pursue growth but can also be a prerequisite for achieving the goal of equitable rural development. Often, governments, institutions and organizations serving rural communities do not have the resources or capacity to achieve this goal on their own.⁵³ Addressing inequities in development requires a high level of intentionality. Regional collaboration can be an effective vehicle to ensure growth for all people and all places in a region, by ensuring that many interests and perspectives are represented and used to set priorities and drive change.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ McGuire, M. (2006). Collaborative Public Management: Assessing What We Know and How We Know It. *Public Administration Review*, 66, 33–43. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/4096568.pdf>

⁴⁹ Heiar, D. (2022, March 22). *Interview with Jackson County Economic Alliance* (R. Downing, Interviewer) [Personal communication].

⁵⁰ Matthiesen, A. (2022, March 11). *Interview with Jackson County Iowa State University Extension Office* (R. Downing, Interviewer) [Personal communication].

⁵¹ LOCUS Foundation (2022). *What We Do: Rural Work: Regional Solutions: Principles and Recommendations for Effective Regional Collaboration*. Locusimpactinvesting.org. <https://locusimpactinvesting.org/what-we-do/rural-work/introduction/principles-and-recommendations-for-effective-regional-collaboration.html>

⁵² Markman, A. (2019, October 15). *Collaboration in Rural Communities - The IC² Institute*. The IC² Institute - the University of Texas at Austin. <https://ic2.utexas.edu/2019/10/15/collaboration-in-rural-communities/>

⁵³ Dabson, B., & McFarland, C. (n.d.). *Collaborative Rural Development and Regional Economic Connectivity Rural Policy Analyst and Researcher*. Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis and Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, Investing in Rural Prosperity.

https://www.stlouisfed.org/-/media/project/frbstl/stlouisfed/files/pdfs/community-development/investing-rural/13_dabson_mcfarland.pdf

⁵⁴ LOCUS Foundation (2022). *What We Do: Rural Work: Regional Solutions: Principles and Recommendations for Effective Regional Collaboration*. Locusimpactinvesting.org. <https://locusimpactinvesting.org/what-we-do/rural-work/introduction/principles-and-recommendations-for-effective-regional-collaboration.html>

Benefits

Attract more funding

A benefit of regional collaboration is that organizations involved may attract more funding. As discussed with the founder of the Jackson County Economic Alliance, a county government would be more motivated to provide funding for initiatives that will impact more than one town in the county.⁵⁵

On a similar note, federal policymakers have made outright attempts to incentivize, and sometimes require, collaboration in grant funding legislation. For example, the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Continuum of Care Program requires nonprofit providers of homeless programs in regions to conduct joint planning with other nonprofit and public organizations and together apply for federal funding. Rural collaboration has also been actively encouraged through the US Department of Agriculture's National Rural Development Partnership. In this program, the USDA, in tandem with state rural development councils, promotes and incentivizes the creation of government, business, and nonprofit partnerships by prioritizing funding for those partnerships.⁵⁶

These examples demonstrate for the Maquoketa Farmers Market how a network of collaboration will provide more opportunities for grant funding from federal, state, and county governments. This increased funding will allow the market and their partners to address commonly held issues like marketing or management and achieve goals like the development of a new website or expanded programming and entertainment.

Common Marketing Goals

A study in the *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development* found that both farmers and farmers market managers have strong motivations to engage in collaborative initiatives. Both share the goal of spending less time on marketing and experience a larger return on investment.⁵⁷ Bringing together marketing expertise and funding will help farmers markets save money and increase exposure. This could certainly be a benefit of collaboration for the farmers markets of Jackson County, as both Bellevue and Maquoketa markets operate with relatively small marketing budgets and staff hours. Collaborating on advertising has been shown to be effective and would be a good starting point for the Maquoketa and Bellevue Farmers Markets, which could later lead to collaboration on other issues like programs, management, and other goals.

This study also displays the potential for farmers and vendors to collaborate with farmers markets on marketing. Farmers also have a vested interest in the success of the markets and would benefit from increased exposure and turnout. As this is the case, and the study points out, farmers have strong motivations to engage in marketing collaborations with the farmers market. Top vendors at the market would be increasingly motivated to collaborate, particularly if their business can be mentioned or displayed. This brings in more funding and an additional collaborative partner, increasing exposure and building the markets collaborative network. This idea can be pursued by directly contacting organizations like the Jackson County Farmers Bureau, or the market vendors.

Increased Efficiency in Distribution of Resources via Joint Funding

Joint funding of projects and initiatives is one way for rural nonprofit organizations to overcome financial constraints. This does not require combining accounts and all financial activity but could be accomplished by one organization invoicing the other for project expenses or paying for their respective

⁵⁵ Heiar, Dave. (2022) *Interview with Jackson County Economic Alliance*. 22 Mar. 2022.

⁵⁶ Murray, M., & Dunn, L.A. (1996). Revitalizing Rural America: A Perspective on Collaboration and Community

⁵⁷ Miller, C., & McCole, D. (2014). Understanding Collaboration Among Farmers and Farmers' Market Managers in Southeast Michigan (USA). *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2014.044.003>

half separately. The pooling of resources often allows for more economic efficiency, as organizations can tackle a commonly held problem or mission together, rather than expending resources addressing it on their own.⁵⁸

For example, Maquoketa and Bellevue Farmers Markets could begin a collaborative effort to create a new website that hosts both markets. The cost of starting a jointly held professional quality website will be less than both markets starting their own. This will achieve a higher quality website than each could have afforded individually. Further, the crossover effect of bringing Maquoketa and Bellevue customers together on one site will increase exposure for both markets. Reaching more customers means more sales and more vendors will be attracted to the market, increasing revenue for both markets. This venture will reduce costs and increase performance indicators.

Obtain Information

Sharing information is often not the main intention for regional collaboration, but it is also beneficial to work with other organizations and develop a consistent line of communication. A survey of rural nonprofits in Illinois and Mississippi reported that sharing information about common clientele was the third most common form of collaboration among 23 options.⁵⁹ Sharing feedback and interactions from consumers, vendors, government officials, as well as trends that management identifies, is also beneficial, as it allows organizations to be more knowledgeable, adapt quickly, and better serve their communities. Furthermore, sharing best practices, processes, and any lessons learned from mistakes can help each organization better themselves and avoid common downfalls.

Increased Consistency Across Markets

In an interview with Jason Grimm, Executive Director of the Iowa Valley RC&D, he described the importance of keeping market regulations and standards consistent. Furthermore, he saw a benefit from consistent regional regulations and standards at all markets.⁶⁰ Having similar rules and standards allows the customer and vendor to have a consistent and predictable experience. With the expectation that the rules are the same at all markets, customers and vendors will have a better experience, increasing market attendance and vendor participation.

Things to be cautious about

See a Path to Success

Most of the parties involved in these collaborations have limited resources, and therefore must carefully choose the collaborative initiatives in which they will invest their time and money. Too frequently, collaborative initiatives fail because participants lack the motivation to participate at a level needed for success. These failures can damage the culture of collaboration within a region.⁶¹ Because of this, the Maquoketa Farmers Market should consider their capacity to participate in a collaboration, ensuring they have the necessary resources and motivation beforehand.

Ensure Mutual Benefit

A main issue to consider when determining whether to collaborate is who will benefit from the initiative and how much they will benefit compared to not collaborating at all. A collaboration is not beneficial if only one partner benefits. A main point raised in discussion with a Jackson County Economic

⁵⁸ Snavely, K., & Tracy, M. B. (2000). Collaboration Among Rural Nonprofit Organizations. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 11(2), 145–165. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.11202>

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ Dansdill, Josh. (2022) *Interview with Northeast Iowa RC&D*. 4 Mar. 2022.

⁶¹ Miller, C., & McCole, D. (2014). Understanding Collaboration Among Farmers and Farmers' Market Managers in Southeast Michigan (USA). *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2014.044.003>

Development official was that the Maquoketa Farmers Market will need to recognize a benefit in collaborating with other farmers markets, particularly in instances where a collaboration appears more like one entity providing assistance without a reciprocating benefit.⁶²

For example, the Bellevue Farmers Market has reported a difficult time recruiting new management. This could raise concerns that a collaboration with the Maquoketa Farmers Market may lead to them taking responsibility for managing some of Bellevue’s operations. Taking more responsibility for another market is likely not in the interest of the Maquoketa Farmers Market, as they are trying to solve for lack of management themselves.

This does not necessarily mean a collaboration is not possible. Collaboration does not have to mean a merging of management or responsibilities. Collaboration on a smaller scale, focusing on marketing, rules and regulations, program resources, and sharing of information, etc., can still be beneficial to both markets. Clear communication and a well-formed agreement that defines the boundaries of the collaboration are recommended.

Scarce resources driving self-interested behavior

State and federal governments continue to provide fewer resources to local governments and nonprofits for public services and economic development initiatives.⁶³ Although this has incentivized regional collaboration in recent decades, scarce resources can also have the negative effect of driving self-interested behavior. Academic literature has recognized that competition for resources and possible decreased capacity for nonprofits can drive organizations to collaborate less.⁶⁴ This may represent a healthy decision for an organization, or a missed opportunity.

Best Practices

Based on academic research and subject-matter expert recommendations, the following components for future Maquoketa Farmers Markets collaborative projects is suggested: (1) Common ground, (2) Leadership, (3) Flexibility, (4) Trust, and (5) Commitment.

Build Common Ground

Stakeholders build common ground most often through similar connections to a place or cause. When looking to partner and collaborate with another organization or entity, leaders should use a common sense of place and community to build the connection and motivation to collaborate and succeed together. This connection can foster trust and participation.

Stakeholders also need to identify shared problems and goals. Three phases are particularly important: defining the problem, analyzing constraints and opportunities, and agreeing on a plan. These actions will



Figure 8 Quote from NC State Extension, Ann Savage et al. (2012)

⁶² Heiar, Dave. (2022) *Interview with Jackson County Economic Alliance*. 22 Mar. 2022.

⁶³ Walters, J. E. (2019, November 27). *Organizational Capacity of Nonprofit Organizations in Rural Areas of the United States: A Scoping Review*. Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership & Governance. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23303131.2019.1696909?scroll=top&needAccess=true>

⁶⁴ Snavey, K., & Tracy, M. B. (2000). Collaboration Among Rural Nonprofit Organizations. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 11(2), 145–165. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.11202>

not only help stakeholders build common ground and connections, but also help start the process of productive collaboration.

Lastly, stakeholders should create a shared vision. Successful collaborations focus on the long-term goals of the stakeholders involved. The long-term goal or goals should be defined early on and revisited periodically to refocus and ensure all participants feel they are on track and achieving what was intended with the collaboration.

Leadership

The quote in Figure 8 rings true for any local initiative and certainly when considering collaborating with other entities.⁶⁵ Collaborations need leaders who have the energy and vision that can motivate others to participate.⁶⁶

Many desirable qualities of collaborating leaders are displayed in Figure 9, including relating and understanding your partners' ideas, fostering respect, trust, and inclusiveness, and stimulating creativity.⁶⁷ Many of these are about being the first to take the initiative, something the original members of the Maquoketa Farmers Market have already done within the community by founding this organization. This community, and particularly, this organization, is certainly not short on leaders who hold these qualities.



Figure 9 Desirable leadership qualities for collaboration

Leadership turnover is an inherent aspect of any organization and can impact the sustainability of an organization and its collaborative initiatives. Partnerships often begin with highly centralized leadership structures in which leadership holds nearly all decision-making and responsibility. To ensure that leadership turnover can be well managed, leaders need to distribute the responsibilities of leadership. Continuing to network with stakeholders and participants by creating shared visions and cultivating commitments allows smooth transitions.⁶⁸ Leaders need to be comfortable with delegating and bringing participants into the work of running the organization and collaborating.

Flexibility

A key component of successful collaboration is the ability to be flexible. Flexibility can mean intentional role-blurring.⁶⁹ The Maquoketa Farmers Market is already familiar with role-blurring, as a large array of

⁶⁵ Savage, Ann et al. (2012). *Working Together: A Guide to Collaboration in Rural Revitalization* | NC State Extension Publications. Ncsu.edu. <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/working-together-a-guide-to-collaboration-in-rural-revitalization>

⁶⁶ Selin, S., & Chevez, D. (1995). Developing a collaborative model for environmental planning and management. *Environmental Management*, 19(2), 189–195. <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf02471990>

⁶⁷ Savage, Ann et al. (2012). *Working Together: A Guide to Collaboration in Rural Revitalization* | NC State Extension Publications. Ncsu.edu. <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/working-together-a-guide-to-collaboration-in-rural-revitalization>

⁶⁸ Ibid

⁶⁹ Bronstein, L. R. (2003). A Model for Interdisciplinary Collaboration. *Social Work*, 48(3), 297–306. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/48.3.297>

tasks are handled by many board members. In collaboration, roles will likely be even more blurred. As more leaders become involved, efforts should be made to avoid task duplication when the same task is done by two people.

As flexibility is needed in a collaborative group's structure, it will also be needed in their methods. All organizations and people will handle situations differently, so it is important to remember that all participants are working toward similar goals. It is also important to remember that collaborative groups need to monitor themselves to ensure they remain flexible, as groups often tend to solidify their norms over time, which can constrain their thinking and behavior.⁷⁰

Trust

The quote in figure 10 is from *Laura Bronstein's, A Model for Interdisciplinary Collaboration*.⁷¹ Building trust in a collaboration is often associated with growing familiarity, working closely together, and meaningful interactions where partners feel their ideas and perspectives can all be shared, listened to, and respected. Rural communities are often small and tight-knit populations, providing an opportunity to build trust and enhance the longevity of collaborative efforts. Once trust is established, it must be maintained through commitment and upholding responsibilities. If not, the relationship will deteriorate, and the collaboration will cease to accomplish its goals.⁷²



Figure 10 Laura Bronstein's "A Model for Interdisciplinary Collaboration"

Reflection and Gathering Input

A key component of improving collaboration is self-evaluation. It is important that reflection is conducted at the conclusion of a collaborative effort.⁷³ Answer and discuss the following questions: 1) What did we do well? 2) What could have been done better? and 3) What else is there left to do? Engaging with these questions will reveal opportunities for improvement and improve the effectiveness of collaborations.

⁷⁰ Mattessich, P. W., Monsey, B. R., & Mn, P. (1992). *Collaboration: What Makes It Work. A Review of Research Literature on Factors Influencing Successful Collaboration*. (pp. 25–29). Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, 919 Lafond, St. Paul, Mn 4.

⁷¹ Bronstein, L. R. (2003). A Model for Interdisciplinary Collaboration. *Social Work*, 48(3), 297–306. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/48.3.297>

⁷² Savage, Ann et al. (2012). *Working Together: A Guide to Collaboration in Rural Revitalization | NC State Extension Publications*. Ncsu.edu. <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/working-together-a-guide-to-collaboration-in-rural-revitalization>

⁷³ Bronstein, L. R. (2003). A Model for Interdisciplinary Collaboration. *Social Work*, 48(3), 297–306. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/48.3.297>

To be well informed and effectively reflect on the status of the collaboration, leaders must be engaged with volunteers, vendors, customers, and other leaders of the organization. Leaders should ask and discuss these three questions of others as well and bring the information they receive to meetings with other stakeholders. Doing this will create a bottom-up filter of ideas that is healthy for organizational development.

Process and Structure of Collaboration

If a regional entity is formed between farmers markets, this analysis directs how the structure ought to be developed over time.

There are many roles that contribute to the success of a collaboration in a community, referenced in Figure 11. To start, new collaborations require innovators, people willing to take risks, and be the first to develop new ideas. The Diffusion of Innovation Theory suggests only 2.5% of a community are true innovators. Next are the early adopters (13.5%) who embrace change and represent leaders of opinion in the community. Most people want to see an idea begin to pan out before they adopt it. These are the early and late majority, who make up 68% of the community.⁷⁴ At the start of a collaboration, there may not be many people or organizations involved, which only further emphasizes the need for bold, well-connected, innovative leadership. It also means it is important for innovators and early adopters to demonstrate the success of the collaborative effort. When initial success is demonstrated, you will begin to see the network grow, as the early and late majority will buy in.⁷⁵ As more people become part of the network and more customers and vendors benefit from the collaboration, more opportunities for the collaboration and individual organizations will arise.

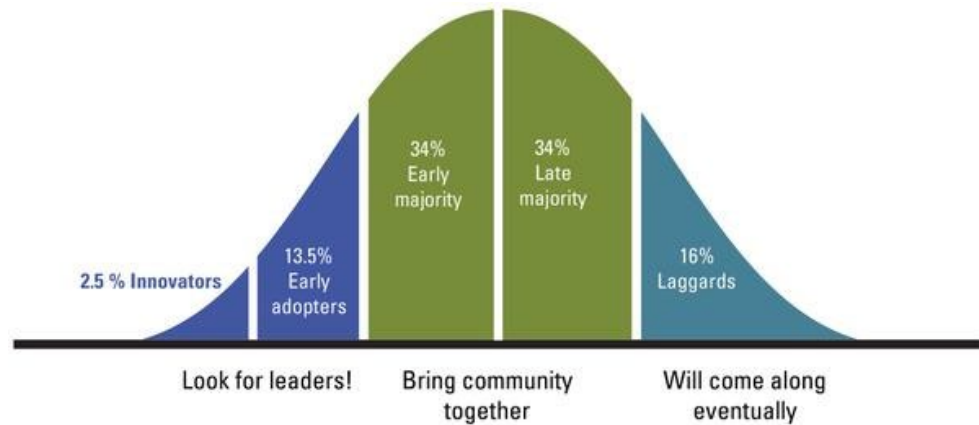


Figure 11 Proportion of innovation adopter types in a community (adapted from the Diffusion of Innovations Theory, Rogers, 2003)

⁷⁴ Rogers, E. M. (2004). *DIFFUSION OF INNOVATIONS Third Edition*. <https://teddykw2.files.wordpress.com/2012/07/everett-m-rogers-diffusion-of-innovations.pdf>

⁷⁵ Savage, Ann et al. (2012). *Working Together: A Guide to Collaboration in Rural Revitalization* | NC State Extension Publications. Ncsu.edu. <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/working-together-a-guide-to-collaboration-in-rural-revitalization>

As the collaboration develops, leadership should also change. Figure 12 illustrates this dynamic. As the collaboration develops, it should transition from a highly centralized leadership, in which the main

leadership makes all decisions and does most of the work, to a less centralized structure. As the collaboration progresses, leaders will bring more people into the network and delegate increased responsibility. This cycle will continue until the original leadership is now a coordinator, which allows new leadership to make and enact decisions.⁷⁶ This will not only allow the collaboration to operate and grow more efficiently, but also make it more established and able to take on challenges like leadership turnover.

Building a regional collaboration can be challenging and take time, but the potential rewards are significant. The biggest payoff of a successful collaboration may take considerable time to come to fruition. Experts recommend patience and persistence and continue investing in the long-term.⁷⁷

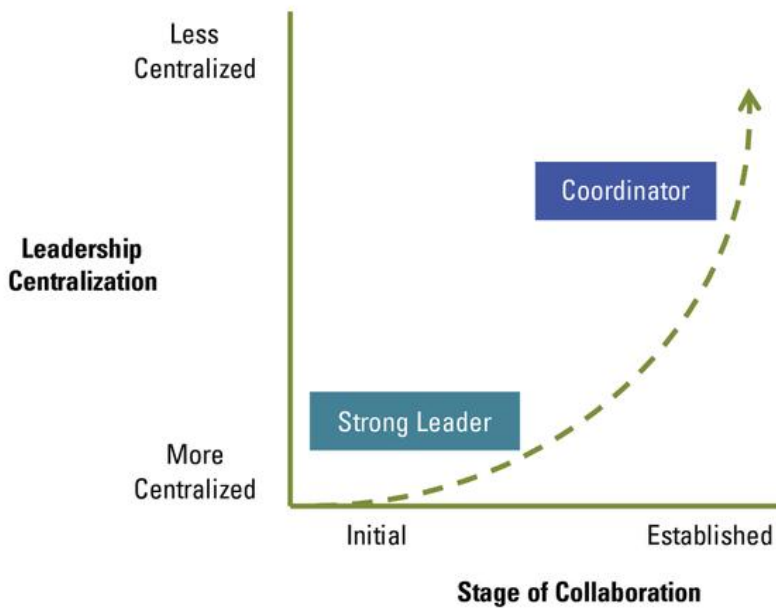


Figure 12 Leadership becomes less centralized as collaboration continues. (Savage et al. 2012)

⁷⁶ Ibid

⁷⁷ LOCUS Foundation (2022). *What We Do: Rural Work: Regional Solutions: Principles and Recommendations for Effective Regional Collaboration*. Locusimpactinvesting.org. <https://locusimpactinvesting.org/what-we-do/rural-work/introduction/principles-and-recommendations-for-effective-regional-collaboration.html>

Section 6: Strategic Planning

Unique Strategic Planning Process

A virtual strategic planning session was conducted via Zoom on March 31, 2022. In attendance were all seven Maquoketa Farmers Market board members, the student consultant team, and faculty advisors. The session length was just over 2 hours and included several activities. Our strategic planning process was created from standard practices and concepts from current nonprofit strategic planning literature. The first step in the process was identification of Maquoketa Farmers Market organizational strengths and weaknesses, as defined by informational interviews of the board members. A framework was created to clarify the mission of the organization, use strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to define strategic issues, and finally define tactics needed to address strategic issues. This is essentially a “triage” of organizational issues, which allows the board to clearly refine the most pertinent organizational needs and begin to address them.

Icebreaker

First, we completed an icebreaker activity designed to create a positive mindset, and have the board get into a creative headspace. Research shows that small modifications in our communication, designed to create a positive mindset can increase happiness and effectiveness at work and in teams.⁷⁸ We asked each member of the group to “Share their why” – or describe the reason they engage with the organization, and what deeper values lie behind their participation. The activity was used to generate “buzzwords” to use during our next activity, the mission statement clarification exercise.

Mission Clarification

In John Bryson’s *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations*,⁷⁹ he lists “mission clarification” as one of the 10 steps in his formula for strategic planning. A nonprofit’s mission can be viewed as its “guiding principle” and sets a framework of understanding for internal staff, stakeholders, and external audiences, and helps determine essential decisions on strategic issues. It can be understood as the “north star” for guidance if internal conflicts arise. An organization’s mission is its “why.” The Maquoketa Farmers Market original mission statement reads:

“The Maquoketa Farmers Market’s mission is to support Jackson County’s small farms and farming families by providing an effective direct sales site for our region’s small farmers, and by educating consumers about the availability and quality of nutritional farm products and the benefits of buying direct from local farmers.”

The board members discussed leading principles of the organization and drew from the recorded “buzzwords” from the introduction. The board created a new mission statement, which they now have the option to build upon or adopt as it is. The created mission statement is:

“The Maquoketa Farmers Market’s mission is to support area producers, educate consumers on the availability of local foods, and foster a sense of community.”

⁷⁸ Wharton Executive Education, “Five Minutes to Great Meetings: Start with the ‘Power Lead.’” 31 Jan. 2020, executiveeducation.wharton.upenn.edu/thought-leadership/wharton-at-work/2018/03/five-minutes-to-great-meetings/.

⁷⁹ Bryson, J. (2018). *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations: For Public and Nonprofit Organizations, A Guide to Strengthening and Sustaining Organizational Achievement* (5th ed.). Hoboken, NJ Wiley.

SWOT Analysis

SWOT, an acronym for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats is a commonly used exercise during strategic planning. Due to its flexibility, there are many ways to organize the brainstorming of the organizational SWOT analysis. Strengths and Weaknesses are identified as internal components of the organization, focused on operational capacity, leadership dynamics, divisions of labor, skills or vulnerabilities of staff and volunteers, as well as others. Opportunities and Threats are characterized as forces external to the organization, which may impact the mission. This includes dynamics which arise in the organization's policy field, community demographics, the economic and political context of a service area, and even weather patterns which may impact the organization.

In the exercise, opportunities and threats external to the organization were discussed and recorded. Opportunities and threats were matched to internal strengths and weaknesses identified within the organization. These were all recorded on a table and put on display for the board to see.

There were several themes which resulted from the SWOT analysis, including the need to address the financial capacity of the organization. Fundraising was named as both an opportunity and a threat. In the case of the Maquoketa Farmers Market, having a person skilled in this area is a strength, but the *reliance on one person* has become a weakness. Programming was listed as a strength (Number 4, internal strengths) which can be modified to address the opportunity of getting more young families involved in the market. Common thoughts from the board members included the need for continuing programming, engagement from the community (both vendors and customers) and the need to diversify tasks to reduce reliance on a single volunteer. See Figure 13 for the SWOT Analysis produced from the strategic planning meeting.

<p>Opportunities</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Expanded fundraising 2. New Location (new extension building) 3. Still many people who don't participate in the market 4. Getting young families and individuals involved 5. More entertainment events to provide date nights and community gathering 6. Always need to be growing 	<p>Internal Strengths</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ted is highly skilled and connected. Many board members are well connected and active in the community. 2. Master gardener program connection with extension office 3. Partnership with Community Cupboard. 4. Marketing- local advertising- Facebook page has 1400 followers. 5. Have hosted events with music, programming, dance studio was involved. Lots of customers show up for contests and special events. 6. Lots of natural growth in vendors, inquiries from new vendors.
<p>Threats</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Not enough fundraising opportunities in the area. 2. Losing management and volunteers. 3. Sustainability- keeping customers 4. Keeping vendors 5. Competing community events in nearby towns and food stands near the market. 6. Declining customers at the end of the season 	<p>Internal Weaknesses</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hard to have one person to rely on. 2. Aging volunteers and members. Don't have resources to pay people. 3. It can be a challenge to keep everyone happy. Also, the time of day (4pm Tuesday) for working people isn't ideal. Hard to understand how to engage with the younger population. 4, 5 and 6 did not come up with matching weaknesses.

Figure 13 SWOT Analysis from Strategic Planning Meeting

Strategic Issue Identification

According to Bryson, strategic issues are fundamental issues that embody a conflict. The conflicts vary in terms of means to an end (how and what to do), why an organization might do something (the philosophy behind an issue), where and when (the location, timing, and situation of something), and who might be impacted. Although sometimes conflict can be difficult to deal with in an organizational context, strategic issues are fundamental policy questions which need to be dealt with expeditiously for the organization to survive and thrive.⁸⁰

After breaking into two separate groups to encourage more engagement, the board members were asked to use the SWOT analysis and their own ideas to help identify strategic issues which are most pertinent to the organization. The framing of these issues was written out in a specific structure: "The issue is _ which could mean _". After lists of issues were made in both breakout rooms, everyone recollected, and the lists of issues were consolidated. After reviewing the list, board members were

⁸⁰ Bryson. (1988). A strategic planning process for public and non-profit organizations. *Long Range Planning*, 21(1), 73-81. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0024-6301\(88\)90061-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/0024-6301(88)90061-1)

asked to vote for the top three most important issues facing the organization. The top three issues voted for are listed in Figure 14.

Other strategic issues that were mentioned include needing more volunteers, having consistent popular programs or events, attracting new vendors, and a declining turnout at the end of the year.

What Should We Do?

Ed Morrison, the creator of Strategic Doing states that the best framework is based on two core concepts. First, simple rules manage complexity. Second, that conversations can guide and address strategic issues.⁸¹ We used the Strategic Doing framework to inspire our process in the last exercise entitled “What Should We Do.” This fulfills the *doing* (action oriented) nature of the process. While many strategic plans have the reputation of being “put on a shelf and forgotten about” the task portion of the strategic planning is designed to create an easily digestible plan for the Maquoketa Farmers Market team to act upon with ease as the 2022 market season commences.

Following a short break, the board members voted on the top three strategic issues they wanted to address. Board members then came up with a list of tasks to address each issue. This included first steps to address immediate issues, as well as ideas that would still need to be developed to accomplish longer-term goals.

The board's ideas to address the top strategic issues were as follows:

Issue 1 - Lack of funds to achieve our goals

- a. Asking for donations in letters to businesses or postcards at community events***
- b. Star shopper program – pay a yearly fee and get into the market first***
- c. Advertising sponsorships***
- d. Apply for funding from the county board of supervisors***
- e. Apply for grants***
- f. Legacy commitments - requires being a 501(c)(3)***

Issue 2 - Relying on one person for management

- a. A couple people need to start training alongside Ted***
- b. Recruit somebody to manage the market via:***
 - Internships and job shadow programs***
 - AmeriCorps or similar program***
 - Chamber of Commerce job fair***
- c. Make the marketing manager a paid position***
- d. Partnering with other local organizations***

The top three strategic issues identified:

- 1. The issue is a lack of funds to achieve our goals, which could mean not growing the market to be sustainable.***
- 2. The issue is we rely on one person for management, which could mean nobody will lead the market if we lose them.***
- 3. The issue is attracting young families and individuals, which could mean a slow decrease in customers.***

Figure 14 Top 3 Strategic Issues

⁸¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vqk1ibe9sDw>

Issue 3 - Attracting younger families and individuals

- a. Partnership with the YMCA***
- b. Survey younger families to find out what they want***
- c. Boy and Girl Scout badges, through master gardeners***
- d. Events that draw in young kids***
- e. Bubble night***
- f. Bingo night***
- g. Educational activities to occupy kids***
- h. Contests***

Creating a Strategic Plan

From exercises completed by the board, along with recommendations from this report, the one-page document filling the next page is a sample strategic plan which can be adopted by the Maquoketa Farmers Market organization if they choose. The strategic plan can be used as a roadmap for the organization on what to focus on, but also as a document to share with potential funders, stakeholders, volunteers, and community partners.

MAQUOKETA FARMERS MARKET STRATEGIC PLAN 2022-2024

STRATEGIC ISSUE 1: FINANCIAL CAPACITY

THE ISSUE IS A LACK OF FUNDS TO ACHIEVE OUR GOALS, WHICH COULD MEAN NOT GROWING THE MARKET TO BE SUSTAINABLE.

- ENGAGE WITH THE NORTHEAST RC&D, WHICH CAN ASSIST WITH A FINANCIAL ANALYSIS & RECOMMENDATIONS TO BUILD THE FINANCIAL CAPACITY OF THE MFM
- RECRUIT ONE NEW MEMBER TO THE BOARD WITH GRANT WRITING SKILLS, EXPERTISE IN FUNDRAISING, FINANCE, OR FAMILIARITY WITH SNAP PROGRAMS.
- APPLY FOR FUNDING WITH JACKSON COUNTY. BE PREPARED TO HAVE A SPECIFIC PURPOSE AND BE ABLE TO REPORT BACK AS THE MONEY IS SPENT.

STRATEGIC ISSUE 2: SUCCESSION

THE ISSUE IS WE RELY ON ONE PERSON FOR MANAGEMENT, WHICH COULD MEAN NOBODY WILL LEAD THE MARKET IF WE LOSE THEM.

- CREATE A FLOW CHART OF TASKS TO HELP UNDERSTAND THE CURRENT CAPACITY OF THE BOARD, AND WAYS TO DIVERSIFY THE MARKET MANAGER ROLE.
- BEGIN TRAINING TO DIVERSIFY TED'S ROLE AT THE MARKET, TRAIN A FEW PEOPLE ON THE VARYING TASKS THAT ARE NEEDED TO RUN THE MARKET ON THE DAILY BASIS
- CREATE A COMMITTEE OR TASK FORCE WITH THE PURPOSE OF REVIEWING THE FINANCIAL STATUS WITH THE PRIMARY OBJECTIVE OF DECIDING THE BEST PATH FORWARD

STRATEGIC ISSUE 3: TARGET MARKET

THE ISSUE IS ATTRACTING YOUNG FAMILIES AND INDIVIDUALS, WHICH COULD MEAN A SLOW DECREASE IN CUSTOMERS.

- INCREASE DIVERSITY OF INDIVIDUALS ON THE BOARD (AGE, RACE) AND DIVERSITY OF EXPERIENCES (PAST VENDORS OR ACTIVE CUSTOMERS OF THE MARKET.)
- EVENTS WHICH APPEAL TO KIDS: INCLUDES BINGO NIGHT, BUBBLE NIGHT, AND OTHERS. INCREASING DIVERSITY ON BOARD CAN HELP GENERATE FURTHER IDEAS.
- COLLABORATION WITH ORGANIZATIONS THAT HOST YOUNG PEOPLE. IDEAS INCLUDE RECRUITING HIGH SCHOOL VOLUNTEERS FULFILLING COMMUNITY SERVICE REQUIREMENTS.

THE MAQUOKETA FARMERS MARKET STRATEGIC PLAN IS HAS BEEN CREATED FROM THE STRATEGIC PLANNING SESSION WITH THE BOARD, WITH RECOMENDATIONS INTEGRATED FROM RESEARCH, INTERVIEWS, AND FARMERS MARKET BEST PRACTICES COLLECTED BY THE STUDENT CONSULTING GROUP. THIS IS AN EXAMPLE OF WAYS TO BREAK DOWN THE LARGER RECOMENDATIONS INTO A SHORTER PLAN, WITH STEPS TOWARDS A LARGER GOAL.

Section 7: Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to address the key challenges and concerns for the Maquoketa Farmers Market. The recommendations address each of the previously identified research questions.

1. What are the best practices in farmers market organizational structure?

Recommendation: The Maquoketa Farmers Market board should move to decentralize the current organizational structure. Several strategies include diversifying decision-making and clarifying roles for specific tasks central to the operations of the market. These strategies are divided into smaller steps and include some short-term remedies.

- **Create an organizational chart to clarify roles, tasks, and responsibilities.** This should include the formal organizational structure, committees, board members and volunteers. See appendix for an example.
- **Decentralize market tasks.** Begin training one or two people on specific market management tasks and document procedures which detail these activities. The market manager's tasks may be dispersed among volunteers and paid staff.
- **Create a committee or task force to determine long-term financial viability.** The primary purpose of the taskforce is to explore options to improve organizational viability. This could include the option to continue to fundraise, obtain sponsorships, hire a farmers market manager, collaborate with local organizations and determine if the organization should obtain 501(c)(3) status or operate under a fiscal agent. The Small Business Development Center is a service provider that can help navigate the process of determining and establishing the most optimal business structure for the farmers market.
- **Recruit new members to the board.** While the active and engaged board has been a strength for the organization, it will become important to continue to recruit new board members as responsibilities shift. This small and agile organization has the opportunity to expand the board now to avoid transitional challenges later. Current board members should stay active during the recruiting and onboarding process to create continuity. This is also an opportunity to establish strategic partnerships, develop new programs, as well as engage new members of the community. This will strengthen the organization and create more opportunities to engage younger and more diverse communities. Suggestions are to add one new member who has a relationship with a current or potential strategic partnership, such as the Chamber of Commerce, Iowa State University Extension Office, an Iowa RC&D, workforce development organization, or local community college. Other new board members could have grant writing skills, expertise in fundraising, finance, or familiarity with SNAP programs. You may find these individuals through direct outreach to the Area Agency on Aging, chamber networking events, or a local community college.

2. What are the best farmers market programs for engaging with the community, and what grants are available to fund those programs?

Recommendation: Expansion of nutrition programs and youth activities will reduce barriers to accessing healthy, local foods and encourage spontaneous connections among diverse groups, who may not have much opportunity to interact in other situations.

- **Expand Supplemental Nutrition Program Assistance (SNAP) participation to include SNAP-EBT and Double Up Bucks through The Healthiest State Initiative.** Currently, 22% of Maquoketa households receive SNAP benefits. If the market expands acceptance of SNAP market-wide they will increase their potential customer base by 620 households within Maquoketa.⁸²
- **Develop programming intended to attract a younger, diverse crowd.** This can be accomplished through programming relationships with local K-12 schools or youth organizations. Several examples are provided in Section Four of this report.

3. How can individual farmers markets benefit from collaborating with other markets in their region?

Recommendation: The Maquoketa Farmers Market board should seek assistance and collaboration with other organizations. Greater financial capacity can be obtained by applying for funding with the County Board of Supervisors, engaging in a financial analysis with the Northeast RC&D, and partnering with the Bellevue Farmers Market on small projects. Collaborative partnerships can enable the organization to attract more funding, spend less resources, obtain advice and information, and create a more long-term sustainable organization.

- **Collaborate with the Bellevue Farmers Market, starting small.** Early collaboration could include sharing information and experiences, coordinating hours of operation, and replicating standards, rules, and regulations. Further collaboration on projects like a marketing campaign would be a great next step and lead to further resource and task sharing. Collaboration will have many benefits including attracting more funding, obtaining information, saving resources, and more. This could be initiated with an information gathering meeting between markets to discuss common ground and interest in collaborative efforts.
- **Engage with the Northeast RC&D, which offers free formal financial analysis and recommendations.** This could include the development of a strategic plan to build organizational capacity allowing the means to hire a market manager. If this is not feasible, the Northeast RC&D can provide education and guidance in fundraising methods.
- **Apply for funding with Jackson County Board of Supervisors.** Contact Jack Willey or the Board of Supervisors office, to inquire about filing a funding request. A contract will have to be signed between the Maquoketa Farmers Market and the County. This will outline how the money will be spent and require that the spending is reported back to the County as it is done.

⁸² USDA Economic Research/Food Access Research Atlas

Conclusion

Farmers markets are important community and economic institutions and serve as catalysts for development in rural areas. These markets bolster the local food economy, connect farmers and entrepreneurs directly with consumers, and build community ties resulting in strengthened social linkages⁸³ and increased social capital, which can create positive health and economic outcomes.⁸⁴

The Maquoketa Farmers Market has remained a steadfast establishment for the last 11 years. Creating a plan to solidify the continuity of the market will benefit the local community. By focusing on organizational effectiveness and ensuring the sustainability of the organization, the market can bolster its mission to provide consumers with access to local foods, create economic opportunities for area producers, and promote social good through programming and partnerships with local nonprofits. Maquoketa residents who live in low-access or low-income census tracts face barriers to accessing fresh, healthy, and affordable foods. Programs and partnerships within Maquoketa will connect residents to resources, stimulate economic activity, and are vital to the well-being and prosperity of the region.⁸⁵ Additionally, a regional approach in Jackson County will expand opportunities for other markets while achieving the objectives of the Maquoketa Farmers Market. Creating shared responsibility through an expanded network aids in decentralizing the structure of the organizations, allows greater flexibility, expands capacity, and increases the chances of long-term sustainability.⁸⁶

Support Sustain Sync: The Maquoketa Farmers Market and Social Linkages comparative approach uncovered best practices in nonprofits, similar farmers markets in Iowa, and regional collaborations. Drawing from best practices and the current board members' institutional knowledge, recommendations center on the ultimate goal of expanding upon the mission of the market. The social good produced from the market ripples through the community, encouraging spontaneous connections among diverse groups, while providing a space for education, resource sharing, and financial exchange.⁸⁷ The Maquoketa Farmers Market is a key example of how one community organization can create an impact greater than the sum of its parts.

⁸³ *The cultural significance of farmers markets*. Farmers Market Coalition. (2011, July 13). Retrieved February 12, 2022, from <https://farmersmarketcoalition.org/the-cultural-significance-of-farmers-markets/#:~:text=Farmers%20markets%20are%20important%20for%20many%20reasons.&text=By%20providing%20a%20cost%20effective,generation%20to%20take%20dup%20farming>.

⁸⁴ Larsen, K., Gilliland, J. (2009) A farmers market in a food desert: Evaluating impacts on the price and availability of healthy food. *Health and Place*, 15, 1158-1162

⁸⁵ *Mapping food deserts in the United States*. USDA ERS - Data Feature: Mapping Food Deserts in the U.S. (n.d.). Retrieved February 6, 2022, from <https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2011/december/data-feature-mapping-food-deserts-in-the-us/#:~:text=Low%20income%20census%20tracts%20with,are%20defined%20as%20food%20deserts>

⁸⁶ The NC State Extension Publication: Working Together: a Guide to Collaboration for Rural Revitalization

⁸⁷ Ibid

Appendix

Peer Farmers Market Interviews and Contact Information

Johnston Farmers Market

Contact: Judy Anderson (andrsnjudy@mchsi.com)

Programming Features:

- Kids Make and Take Crafts Tent
- Live Music
- Food Trucks
- Booth dedicated to rotating nonprofit use

Decorah Farmers Market

Contact: Kristen Eggen (keggen@seedsavers.org)

Programming Features:

- Live music funded by community sponsorships who advertise and promote the event. The market manager attributes an increase in attendance by 25% to the addition of live music with local artists. School music programs and youth groups often perform in exchange for market bucks. Families attend to support youth and increase market attendance and sales.
- Created a community stall for nonprofit organizations who use the opportunity to promote activities and programs. This has been used to distribute AmeriCorps kits and by the library to promote summer reading program sign-ups.
- Currently exploring an Art Market in May, possibly Mother's Day, before the market season starts to generate interest.

Marion Uptown Chamber Farmers Market

Contact: Tami Schlamp, (tami@marioncc.org)

Programming Features:

- The Power of Produce (POP) Club is a Farmers Market Coalition initiative that provides Farmers Markets with educational programming developed by the Iowa State Extension and Outreach. POP Club engages kids in the local food system through conversations directly with farmers, educational games, and demonstrations. Participants in the Two-Bite Club are rewarded for taking two bites of a featured fruit or vegetable with a \$3 voucher to spend at the market.
- Partners with Marion City Fire Department, who provide demonstrations and allow kids to tour their equipment.
- Food vendors.
- Music is paid for by sponsors (Farmers State Bank, ImOn, Mercy Care, and Summit Pointe). Sponsors promote the music events through their various media channels.

Grinnell Farmers Market

Contact : Marissa Pronschinske (marissa@getintogrinnell.com)

Programming Features:

- Plant-a-Pizza: For \$3 participants can plant their own pizza plantar with an onion, tomato, and basil plant. Prepared and sold by a vendor.
- Unity Point sponsors and manages a booth each week and advertises different free health screenings each week.
- Farmers Market Poster Contest at local elementary schools. The market manager goes into the classroom and provides education on farmers markets and healthy eating, and then hands out the contest information. Students bring their posters to the market for judging, and the winning posters are displayed around town.

Washington Farmers Market

Contact: Sarah Grunewaldt (sarah@washingtونيowa.org)

Programming Features:

- Scholastic Books makes bargain books available for \$1 each to teachers. Through a partnership with a local teacher, the market purchased 100 books paid for through a local business sponsorship in exchange for advertising at the market as well as a business logo sticker placed inside the book cover. The books were then given away free to kids at the market. The initial goal in Washington was to give out 600 books over 6 weeks. The program was such a success they ended up giving away 1500 books in 15 weeks. This program doubled their weekly attendance and increased sales.
- Each week they feature a guest food truck.
- Salsa contests made with products purchased at the market.
- Free booth space for local nonprofits.

List of Contacts

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Jack Willey – Chairman of the Jackson County Board of Supervisors

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LuAnn Goeke – Executive Assistant of the Jackson County Board of Supervisors

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Tracy Penick – Department of Human Services SNAP Contact

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Joel Youngs- Small Business Development Center

Other Figures

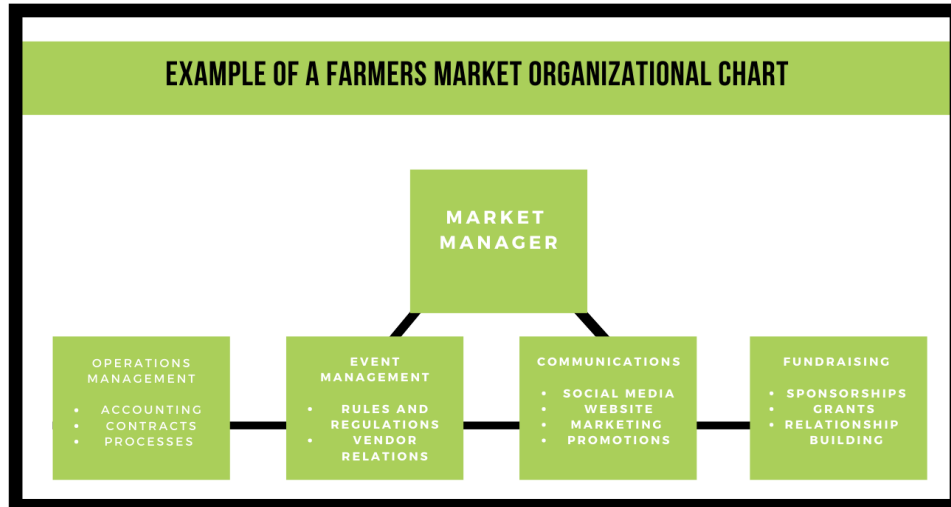


Figure 15 Example of Organizational Chart

501(C)(3)	FISCAL AGENT WITH A 501(C)(3)	FISCAL AGENT WITH A 501(C)(6)
FARMERS MARKET FILES FOR OWN STATUS	FOUNDATIONS, NONPROFITS, COMMUNITY ORGS	CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE, ASSOCIATIONS
DONATIONS ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE	<u>DONATIONS ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE</u>	<u>DONATIONS ARE NOT TAX DEDUCTIBLE</u>
ORGANIZATIONAL DECISIONS ARE MADE BY STAFF AND BOARD	FISCAL AGENT MUST HAVE DISCRETION ON HOW IT WILL USE CONTRIBUTIONS	FISCAL AGENT MUST HAVE DISCRETION ON HOW IT WILL USE CONTRIBUTIONS
<u>REGULATORY PAPERWORK NEEDED (IRS INSTRUCTIONS)</u>	<u>REGULATORY OR COMPLIANCE REQUIREMENTS CAN BE DELEGATED</u>	<u>REGULATORY OR COMPLIANCE REQUIREMENTS CAN BE DELEGATED</u>

Figure 16 Differences Between 501c3 and Fiscal Agents