



INSTITUTE FOR AGRICULTURE AND TRADE POLICY

Networking Small Urban Farmers Markets

Lessons learned from IATP

By Madeline Kastler

Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy

February 2013

Networking Small Urban Farmers Markets: Lessons learned from IATP

By Madeline Kastler

The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy would like to thank the following funders for their support of the Mini Market Initiative:

Elmer L. and Eleanor J. Andersen Foundation

Bellwether Foundation

Center for Prevention at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, a nonprofit independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association

General Mills Foundation

J.R. Albert Foundation

Marbrook Foundation

Minneapolis Department of Health and Family Support

Minnesota Department of Agriculture

Published February 2013

© 2013 IATP. All rights reserved.

The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy works locally and globally at the intersection of policy and practice to ensure fair and sustainable food, farm and trade systems.

More at iatp.org

Overview

While some Minneapolis neighborhoods enjoy a bountiful supply of healthy foods, others do not. Mini farmers markets help address this challenge by bringing fresh, locally grown foods into Minneapolis neighborhoods. This manual shares IATP's experience building and managing a network of these small markets. This guide complements a companion manual that provides guidance to organizations that are managing individual markets.

In 2006, with the help of an intern, the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) began working with neighborhood-based organizations to launch a set of small farmers markets throughout Minneapolis. Mini Markets are farmers markets that have five or fewer vendors and sell locally grown food, fresh produce and home-processed foods.

The markets are initiated, hosted and managed by community organizations and are located on their properties at community centers, senior housing facilities, hospitals, colleges, churches and other locations. Mini farmers markets help increase access to healthy foods in urban neighborhoods, foster a sense of community, provide sales opportunities for small farmers, connect people with the farmers who grow their food and link low-income residents with farmers markets that accept food assistance.

IATP quickly found itself leading a growing network of mini farmers markets throughout Minneapolis. The network grew to include 15–21 mini markets per year, with about 30 participating farmers (some selling at multiple locations).

A majority of the markets are authorized to take Farmers Market Nutrition Program coupons (under an umbrella established by IATP with the State of Minnesota) and several are now able to process EBT/SNAP transactions.



Heritage Commons mini farmers market

IATP provided training, technical assistance, promotional support, evaluation and other services to the network of mini farmers markets. Below we share our approach and lessons we learned in the following areas:

- A. Training, technical support and peer support market managers
- B. Liaison with city government
- C. Policy support
- D. Enabling participating in FMNP
- E. Vendor coordination
- F. Promotions and graphics

We begin by sharing some other more over-arching lessons that have emerged from the experience in Minneapolis. Then for each of the topics above, we briefly recap the role of the "umbrella organization" as it played out in this initiative and then highlight lessons that we learned along the way.

Overarching lessons learned

- Each market manager needs to have sufficient time, energy and resources make the market a success.
- Markets are most effective when they are borne out of the community's interests and aspirations. Prospective market hosts should also determine that they have the customer base needed to support a farmers market before launching a new market. A survey of the community to determine the potential customer base and to get feedback about desired products is important.
- A market's location is also critical to success. Markets benefit from being located near population centers, community gathering places and workplaces, within a comfortable walking distance for shoppers, accessible by transit and in highly visible locations.
- Across Minneapolis and in neighboring suburbs, there has been a proliferation of new markets of various sizes over the past decade. A groundswell of interest among organizations seeking to improve food access in their neighborhood led to many new mini markets being launched in under-served areas of Minneapolis, in particular. The mini market network grew from six markets to 21 markets in just two years. IATP helped all of the organizations who wanted our technical assistance. While we were pleased to support this

growth as it emerged spontaneously, a more deliberate city-wide process for strategically planning the growth of the farmers market sector as a whole could have been beneficial as the demand for local foods and farmers market locations grew.

A. TRAINING, TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND PEER SUPPORT AMONG MARKET MANAGERS

General role

One of the primary roles of the umbrella organization is to provide training and troubleshooting support for market managers throughout the season. This has often meant supporting managers through any and all of the issues covered in this manual and the random stumbling blocks that can pop up throughout the market season. Managers may call seeking help to sort through city and state regulations, talk through personnel issues at the market, solicit advice on promotions, and recruit last-minute vendors.

Effective training of market managers and developing a sense of mutual support among managers is essential. The mini farmers market managers in Minneapolis come from many different backgrounds and professions and running their organization's market is typically a small portion of their job or a volunteer activity with the host organization. Few managers had prior farmers market experience before their organization endeavored to start a market.



South of Lake mini farmers market

IATP's role

IATP trained managers in two basic ways. The most visible were group trainings when market managers would come together for a training event hosted by IATP. We developed and shared our Market Manager "How To" Manual, Powerpoints and other tools to acquaint managers with key issues

like clarifying their roles and responsibilities in managing, hosting a market on-site and understanding applicable city licensing regulations, compliance with FMNP rules, promotional strategies, among other issues.

We also gave managers significant one-on-one attention as they worked through the various components of setting up their market. IATP spent considerable time checking in with managers by phone, visiting their markets, gathering information about how the markets were doing and sharing it with other market managers via email. As the Network became more established, the more experienced managers became "resource people" for newer market managers.

IATP also hosted in-person gatherings each season. These have varied in form and purpose, but have included pre-season planning sessions, a mid-session check-in and a post-season lessons learned/wrap up celebration.

IATP also formed a small advisory committee of managers and vendors that helped shape the overall initiative, provide feedback and develop strategies on issues like vendor recruitment, changes to city regulation, and promotions.

At various points, IATP also conducted electronic surveys to gather all managers' feedback about successes and challenges in a given market season, suggestions for how IATP could improve the support we were providing, and suggestions for how the market network should evolve in the year ahead.

Lessons learned

- Having an advisory group that included both managers and vendors was very helpful in setting direction for the initiative and supporting communication among managers, vendors and IATP. Although people's time was always limited, participants also valued the opportunity to dialogue and share their experiences and ideas.
- In-person gatherings of managers were key for building a sense of community among managers and laying the foundation for managers to become resources for one another. The pre-season dinner and kick-off meeting was particularly well-attended and helpful in shaping activity for the market season ahead.
- Pre- and post-season electronic surveys were a fairly easy way of soliciting managers' input on a wide range of topics.
- Setting up a shared file (through Dropbox) for important documents helped communication with and among

managers and provided a single, reliable location for managers to find key documents.

- Although it was time-intensive, in-person dialogue was a more effective way of sharing information than a market manager listserv or email.
- Forming smaller clusters of markets that are in close proximity to each other can help foster a sense of community among market managers at the neighborhood level and can support cross-market efforts (liked collaborative promotional efforts) within clusters.

B. LIAISON WITH CITY GOVERNMENT

General role

While the process to start a mini farmers market begins in a neighborhood or community, it often times becomes official in city or county government. While city processes for starting a market have been simplified, they remain a challenge for many small market host organizations and their market managers. Among the requirements are that market managers submit properly filled out license applications, accompanying materials (e.g., site maps and photographs) and fees. The umbrella organization needs to understand this process for their municipality thoroughly and ensure that market managers are cognizant of the regulations and submit properly completed paperwork.

IATP's role

IATP established strong relationships with City of Minneapolis staff that had a role in authorizing and inspecting farmers markets. We served as the liaison between the city and the mini farmers market managers to ensure that these processes went as smoothly as possible. We wrote a guide for filling out the initial mini farmers market application form and reviewed all of the markets' applications prior to submitting them to the city in an effort to catch any errors or omissions before they had to potential to derail an application prior to the market season. IATP handled various problems and questions between the two parties.

Lessons learned

- The liaison role has been an important component of maintaining good relationships with the city and for being able to advocate for better, more streamlined regulatory processes on behalf of the mini market community as a whole.

- Having a liaison saves time and helps avoid confusion as city staff and market managers have one point person to go to with questions and concerns. This was particularly important in years when the number of new markets shot up more rapidly than expected.
- The regulatory process for establishing a new market have often been challenging for a new market manager. However, annual renewals are quite straightforward and managers were typically able to handle these on their own after the first year.



Ebenezer Park mini farmers market

C. POLICY SUPPORT

General role

Given its interaction with numerous markets, an umbrella organization can bring a unique perspective to questions about how government policies and processes can more effectively support farmers markets. The umbrella organization can also advocate for small markets that many not have the capacity or interest to engage in lengthy re-negotiations of relevant ordinances, for instance.

IATP's role

Prior to the mini farmers market initiative's start in 2006, even the smallest farmers markets had to go through a costly and complex licensing process with the City of Minneapolis to start their market. In response, IATP worked with the City of Minneapolis to develop a simplified process and a less complex permit requirement. Recognition of mini markets as a special category of markets greatly reduced the time and expense of establishing small farmers markets, enabling community

centers and neighborhood organizations to host a market on their own property. Under the policies developed in 2006, mini markets were allowed to sell locally grown produce only.

In 2011, IATP and other market stakeholders again worked with city staff to write the markets into city ordinance and allow them to offer a wider variety of foods.

Lessons learned

- IATP and the city wanted to assist each other to make the mini farmers market project as successful as possible and this was accomplished, in part, through policy improvements. Small farmers markets would not have been able to easily exist, especially for limited-resource host organizations, without the 2006 changes in city policy that eliminate various financial and procedural barriers.
- By having multiple stakeholders participate in the policy conversation, the resulting ordinances were designed to meet as many needs (among the city and markets of various sizes and locations) as possible.

D. ENABLING PARTICIPATION IN FMNP

General role

The Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) is a federal program enabling participants in the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and Nutrition Assistance Program for Seniors (NAPS) food assistance programs to purchase fruits and vegetables at farmers markets. The ability to accept FMNP coupons and WIC Fruit and Vegetable Vouchers (FVVs) at mini farmers markets is a key strategy for improving food access among lower income residents. While state rules about FMNP vary, some umbrella organizations may play a key role in assisting the markets in their network accept these coupons and vouchers.

IATP's role

In order to be authorized to accept FMNP coupons and WIC FVVs, the Minnesota Department of Agriculture requires that markets have at least five FMNP-authorized vendors. Because the individual mini farmers markets (which are capped at five vendors) are typically too small to be authorized on their own, IATP has served as an umbrella organization for interested markets to obtain FMNP authorization. In effect, the state viewed IATP as one market with multiple satellite locations.

Each state administers FMNP in different ways, so organizations outside of Minnesota should determine local rules and regulations for market and vendor participation in FMNP.



St. Anne's mini farmers market

Lessons learned

- Assisting small markets accept FMNP and WIC FVVs is an important way to serve low-income neighborhoods. Because these benefits are currently handled through paper coupons (rather than through electronic means, like SNAP), they are relatively easy for markets and participating farmers to administer.
- Under the “umbrella” model described above, the umbrella organization will be held accountable by the state for participating markets’ compliance with FMNP rules. This can sometimes be difficult as the umbrella organization is not managing the markets day-to-day and is a step removed from any market-level activities that might be of concern to FMNP regulators. Close communication and thorough training are important for positioning market managers to meet these requirements and for managers to support their vendors in meeting vendor requirements (such as clearly showing prices on all products).

E. VENDOR COORDINATION

General role

The individual market managers are responsible for recruiting and coordinating with their vendors. The umbrella organization, however, can help support this process.

IATP's role

Each year, IATP built a list of interested vendors to share with the network of market managers. IATP has spread awareness through the vendor community about the opportunity to sell at mini farmers markets by posting on listservs, communicating via farmer membership organizations, and presenting or tabling at conferences and other gatherings. IATP has also provided each market with a standardized vendor packet, with an application, tax forms and City of Minneapolis vendor application which they can incorporate information specific to their own market. IATP has also engaged Hmong-speaking summer interns to help with communication between managers and vendors. IATP has provided vendors with reusable price cards with the market logo, which helped them to comply with FMNP rules.



Audubon mini farmers market

Lessons learned

- Building one central list of potential vendors greatly reduced the need for individual market managers to duplicate efforts and recruit vendors on their own.
- Managers also occasionally identified vendors by visiting other farmers markets that have complementary hours of operation. Face-to-face communication can be very effective.
- It is important for managers to recognize that vendors need communication and support from the managers.
- Having vendors who speak a variety of languages requires commitment on the part of the umbrella organization to create culturally appropriate mechanisms to coordinate adequately, and to identify and address vendors' concerns.
- Managers need to carefully calibrate the number of vendors and mix of products with the demand generated by the market's customer base. If there are too

many vendors for the sales volume being generated, the markets will not provide the desired benefits to vendors and vendors' commitment may wane. Community involvement in the market's development and effective siting and promotion of the market are critical.

- If the vendors rely in part on the labor of their school age children, they may have difficulty staffing their market or harvesting product once the school year begins in the fall. Managers should coordinate with vendors to understand the factors that may influence their ability to attend the market at different points in the season.
- We found in some market locations that it was important to recruit vendors who were of a similar cultural background to the markets' customer base. This helped with trust, communication and vendor retention.

F. PROMOTIONS AND GRAPHICS

General role

Because most market host organizations are fairly small, assistance with promotions can be very helpful and can provide a common "look" for participating markets.

IATP's role

Based on input from the market managers, IATP pursued a number of strategies to raise the visibility of the markets:

- We created a logo that provided interested markets with a common "look," while incorporating the name of specific markets. A sample of the generic version of the logo is shown below. The logo was designed with significant input from our advisory group and all of the market managers



Mini farmers market logo

- We gave each manager a CD containing electronic versions of the logo to be used on websites, flyers, etc.

- Each market was provided with high-quality, 4-foot sandwich boards to help with at-market advertising.
- IATP created laminated, reusable price cards for the vendors and t-shirts for the managers with the logo to reinforce the look of logo across the markets.
- Each year IATP maintained memberships with the state farmers market association and the Department of Agriculture's "Minnesota Grown" program, and ensured that the markets were advertised in these and other places that promoted farmers markets in our region.
- Each year we advertised all of the markets in our network, and offered press release templates that managers could edit to suit their own markets and submit to their local neighborhood papers and newsletters.

Lessons learned

- Promoting the market is key. A manager needs to have the time and energy to dedicate to a significant marketing effort in the first few years. Each manager should develop a basic promotions plan to implement throughout the season.
- Having a common logo was greatly appreciated by many of the markets that did not have the capacity to create their own logo and marketing tools.
- In 2012, the umbrella role was shifted to four neighborhood-based organizations that manage a smaller cluster of markets that are in fairly close proximity to each other. Organizing at the neighborhood level has fostered collaboration among these market clusters and led to joint promotions within their communities.