



**FOSTERING SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS IN NEWFOUNDLAND:  
A Case Study of the West Coast Farmers' Market**

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# **Fostering Sustainable Food Systems in Newfoundland: A Case Study of the West Coast Farmers' Market**

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## SECTION 1

### **Research Background and Purpose**

This research project was funded by the Applied Research Fund of the Leslie Harris Centre for Regional Policy and Development and ran from July 2011 – June 2012. This one-year research project is part of a larger 3- year study of food security in the Humber River Basin called *Food Security in a Time of Climate Change, Assessing and Building Capacity for Alternative Food Networks and Production in the Humber River Basin* funded by the Humber River Basin Project (HRBP) at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University. The HRBP-funded study examined the strengths and weaknesses of the local food system in the Humber River Basin through a community food security assessment.

The Harris Centre funded farmers' market study aimed to provide insight into opportunities for improving local food marketing by specifically looking at the potential for farmers' markets to succeed in this region.

The project endeavored to assess the potential for a farmers' market on the west coast of Newfoundland and Labrador, using the West Coast Farmers' Market as a case study. An evaluation was conducted of this market from July 2011 – March 2012 to explore its challenges and success, and to seek potential ways forward for this specific market as well as for others in the province.

In order to assess the potential of a farmers' market we committed to the following objectives:

1. To assess the supply and demand of locally produced food in western Newfoundland
2. To gather and analyze stakeholder views on the need and potential for developing farmers' markets in this region, as well as the barriers to its development
3. To examine farmers' market governance models in other jurisdictions
4. To evaluate current efforts to develop a farmers' market in reference to the case site of Corner Brook and to make practical recommendations for continued development at this site and in other communities in the province

## SECTION 2

### *A. Farmers' Markets as Tools for Sustainable Food Systems*

There has been an explosion in the number of farmers' markets across the continent in the past few decades (Stephenson, Lev & Brewer 2008; Chorney in Feagan, Morris & Krug 2004). In Newfoundland and Labrador, new farmers' and community markets have also opened within the past five years including markets in St. John's, Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Stephenville, Corner Brook, Fogo, Torbay, CBS and Norris Point. This trend has been driven by a number of different but interconnected factors, including increased consumer interest in fresh, quality and local produce, a desire on the part of small farmers to access better pricing through direct marketing, and a push by municipalities for downtown revitalization (Sanderson, Gertler, Martz & Mahabir 2005).

It can be argued, however, that by meeting these and other social, environmental and economic goals, farmers' markets can also contribute to the larger aspiration of more sustainable food systems. Farmers' markets are often listed alongside other initiatives such as community supported agriculture programs, community gardens, food policy councils and others, as strategies for creating a more sustainable food system (Hinrichs & Lyson 2007).

Commonly associated with 'localization', a sustainable food system is seen as a journey towards an "equitable, viable food system that accounts for social, economic and environmental concerns for citizens in developing and developed countries, rural and urban regions alike" (Blay-Palmer 2010). A sustainable food system is seen as a process, rather than an endpoint, and scholars debate the steps, strategies and knowledge needed to move us along this path.

Research has shown that farmers' markets can and do play an important role in many regions and have been shown to have significant economic, social and environmental benefits. A 2009 study estimated that farmers' markets contribute between \$600 million and \$1.9 billion to the Ontario economy alone (Farmers Markets Ontario 2009). In a review of American farmers' markets, economic benefits were seen to exist at the community and farmer level. These markets contributed to local economies while allowing small-scale farmers to make a fair living, sometimes solely from market sales (Brown and Miller 2008).

Small-scale farmers may benefit from direct selling at a market because their other marketing options can be limited. Wholesalers often prefer to deal with large volume producers, which leaves out many smaller farmers (Gale 1994). In Newfoundland and Labrador, this situation is also common, as wholesalers have indicated a preference for "one desk marketing" rather than transactions with multiple small producers (Hussey 2007). Medium and larger farms can also see benefits however, as a farmers' market can be an extra source of revenue. Direct marketing can usually provide a much better price for the farmer than wholesaling (Gale 1994).

Although social benefits are less measurable, both consumers and vendors at Ontario farmers' markets also report enhanced community connection and local pride thanks to these markets (FMO 2009). Hunt (2007) also found that more farmers were motivated to expand and improve farming practices and products because of their direct relationships with customers. Community Food Markets in Waterloo were shown to have

multiple social benefits including improved access to fresh fruits and vegetables for specific populations (hospital residents), partnership building and community pride (Blay-Palmer & Koc 2010).

Purchasing locally produced foods that are in season instead of imported products is also noted as reducing negative impacts on the environment, including a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions (Scott and MacLeod 2010). In addition, farmers' markets are acknowledged as overall contributing to more localized food systems, and may potentially allow for a greater diversity of available local foods, increased control over access to food and increased support for smaller scale and organic growers (Feagan, Morris & Krug 2004).

Although there is considerable literature on farmers' market benefits, there is less information on the challenges of developing and operating a market or knowledge related to farmers markets that fail.

In a comprehensive study done on farmers' markets in northwestern United States, the most common reasons for farmers' markets failing to live up to their potential include size (markets that are too small) and product availability issues (when they lack diverse products to meet consumer expectations), revenue problems (when farmers feel they are not earning enough profit from their participation), and staffing issues (due to low paid or volunteer staff and, therefore, high staff turnover) (Stephenson, Lev & Brewer 2008). Often a combination of problems is at work. For example, in farmers' markets in Ontario, producers struggle with labour shortages and rising costs of production and they see a need for more marketing to the public as well as the participation of new vendors who would 'fill out' the market and better serve customer requests (FMO 2009).

One important element for success, as noted in the literature, is the main objective of the market, or the main reason for its establishment, which is often reflective of the initial market organizers. For example, markets created by environmental organizations tend to stress reduction of the environmental "footprint" of food growing and consumption. Yet these goals might be of less interest to other stakeholders who are motivated by economic goals. In this case, Feagan, Morris & Krug (2004) stress the need for public discussion and education to delineate and broaden the goals sought by all people involved. Also of interest is work noting how diverse groups might need to work together to make a successful market. For example, a 2008 study found that a market developed by community members with the goal of economic development had a higher number of consumers than a market that was organized by farmers themselves (Hofmann, Dennis and Marshall 2008).

While literature on the impact of and barriers to farmers' markets is developing in other regions in the country, there is limited research on these issues in Newfoundland and Labrador. This is a significant gap in the literature but also in local policy debates given the many opportunities farmers' markets could bring to communities in this province. This research aimed to fill this gap by understanding the context of farmers' markets development and exploring consumer, vendor and organizer motivations, as well as external perspectives.



## *B. Agricultural Context in Newfoundland and Labrador*

A farmers' market depends on a consistent supply of food products to ensure success. Although food can come from a multitude of sources, a farmers' market is inherently associated with farming as its name makes clear. Before looking more closely at farmers' markets, it is therefore important to understand some of the historical and current context of agricultural development in the province.

According to Espie (1986), the commercial agricultural industry in Newfoundland and Labrador has been underdeveloped throughout much of its history. Even at times of peak development, the proportion of farmers relative to the rest of the population has always been far below that of other provinces. Even when farming was at a high point in terms of numbers of farmers in 1951, 5.5% of the Newfoundland population was farmers as compared to almost 20% in Nova Scotia (Scott 2011).

In the post-Confederation era, farming was affected by increased urban development in St. John's and the influx of more competitively priced Canadian farm products (Murray 2002). Farming operations also changed dramatically: mixed farms characteristic of agriculture in the province were replaced by larger, more specialized, capital-intensive farms that could compete with imports more successfully. Government programs also supported these larger farms to the detriment of smaller, more diversified operations (Espie 1986).

As of 2003, government agricultural support has been in the form of joint funding programs between the provincial and federal governments (AAFC 2003). A variety of support programs are now in place and some farmers report that provincial government support for the industry is currently the strongest of any province in Canada (personal communication, Eugene Legge, February 2011).

The history of agricultural development in the province continues to impact the industry today. The number of farms and farmers remain quite small, and there continue to be a large number of smaller farmers. Over half of all farms in Newfoundland and Labrador had cash receipts under \$25,000 and three quarters of all farms were under \$100,000. Only 8% of all farms had cash receipts of half a million or more (Statistics Canada 2006).

Despite some current active developments, there are a growing number of major issues in the agricultural industry in the province. Although supply management has meant stability for farmers in poultry, eggs and milk, these sectors are still dependent on expensive imported feed. Other sectors face very high costs of production and competition from imported products (NLFA 2005). There are very few new entrants in all sectors, even those in supply-managed commodities, and the number of farms and farmers has been on a downward trend since the 1950s (Statistics Canada 2006).

Many farmers have simply left the industry while others have become larger to try to remain profitable. The remaining farmers face serious economic challenges made clear in a recent report on the future of farming in Atlantic Canada commissioned by the four Federations of Agriculture, (*Opportunities and Challenges in Atlantic Agriculture*). The profitability of farming is decreasing as farm input prices rise faster than the farm product prices. Net farm income is dropping while, farm debt is increasing exponentially (Scott 2011).

## SECTION 3

### **Methods**

Researchers used a variety of methods of data collection throughout this research project, including focus groups, surveys, interviews, literature and document reviews, and participatory observation. A case study evaluation was conducted of the local West Coast Farmers' Market. Methods were selected to obtain information from a variety of sources. Data collection took place throughout the duration of the project, from July 2011 to March 2012. All research instruments are included as appendices to this document.

#### *Surveys*

Researchers used before and after vendor surveys for vendors who participated in the 2011 market season. At the beginning of the market season in mid-July, researchers approached all vendors at the market and gave them an information sheet, a consent form and a beginning-of-season survey. They asked vendors to fill out the survey at home and return it. The return rate for the beginning-of-season surveys was 55% as a number of vendors did not return after the surveys were given out. Eleven surveys were given out and six were returned.

In mid-October, an end-of-season survey was given to the same vendors. The return rate was 78% with some surveys being returned in person at the market and a small number being conducted over the phone after the market season was over. Nine end-of-season surveys were given out and seven were returned. Five of the vendors filled out both the beginning and end of season surveys. Survey collection and analysis were completed in January 2012.

Customer intercept surveys were completed throughout the market season. Researchers approached customers (randomly selected) at each market and asked whether they were willing to participate in a survey. If they agreed, researchers asked a series of 15 questions related to their behaviour and opinions of the market. Overall, 43 people were surveyed between July and October, with an average of 3 people surveyed per market day.

#### *Focus Groups*

Four separate focus groups with key stakeholders in the community were held between September 14 and October 17, 2011. Participants were chosen based on their experience or knowledge of farmers' markets, agriculture and economic or community development.

Purposive sampling was initially used, followed by "snowball" sampling as we asked participants to identify other key individuals or organizations. A wide invitation list was created including representatives from the following groups: past and current vendors at the West Coast Farmers' Market; provincial government employees with Innovation, Trade and Rural Development, Natural Resources (Agrifoods Branch), and the Rural Secretariat; federal government employees with ACOA; representatives of the Community Business Development Corporation; representatives of the Humber Economic Development Board; and members of community organizations.

An invitational email was sent to all potential participants with a number of suggested dates. Follow up phone calls were also made to ensure receipt of the email. Participants were asked to indicate available times, and then a date was chosen based on the responses. Not everyone who was invited was able to attend. There were 3-4 participants in each focus group and overall 14 people took part. Each was asked to sign a consent form and could choose whether to be identified in the report as well as whether they would permit audio recording. Focus groups were 1-1.5 hours long and were facilitated by one of the researchers involved. Notes were taken during each focus group by another researcher. Focus group notes were then transcribed, or carefully written notes were developed immediately after the session.

#### *Interviews*

Individual interviews were held with 6 farmers in the region, as well as with former and current staff and volunteer organizers of the market. One on one semi-structured interviews were set up with each of these people and a consent form was signed.

Organizers were mainly asked about the history and development of the market, while farmers were asked about their potential interest in and challenges to participation in a farmers market situated in Corner Brook.

#### *Participatory Observation*

As volunteers at the market, researchers attended many of the market days to observe operations over the duration of the market in the 2011 season. We spent time at the market conducting surveys, but also simply watching what was happening, or getting involved in volunteer activities, such as setting up and taking down tables and tents.

## SECTION 4

### **Results**

#### *A. Supply and Demand on the West Coast*

##### *Supply*

To gain a better understanding of potential local food supply in this region, we used three different indicators: data available through government sources, information from government employees and other community stakeholders involved in our focus groups, and reports from individual farmers.

Although seen as one of the most productive agricultural regions in the province, the Humber Valley currently has just a small number of commercial food producers. There are 32 commercial farms in this region (Dept of Municipal Affairs 2011), however, not all of them produce food or would have products suitable for a farmers market. For example, about 2/3 of these farms are dairy, fur, sod and Christmas tree farms, none of which would be considered farm market products. Because dairy is a supply managed sector, the milk produced can only be sold through the wholesale market and not through direct marketing.

Of the approximate 10-12 commercial farms that do produce potential farm market products in the Humber Valley, there are only 3 major fruit and vegetable producers and a number of smaller farms, which mainly produce root crops or small fruits such as strawberries and raspberries. There are just 1-2 small scale honey producers, and similar numbers for pork, beef and greenhouse operators. There are also a small number of 'hobby' or part time farms, but exact numbers are not available.

Although this study planned to conduct a food shed analysis<sup>1</sup> for this region using government statistics, we immediately discovered that assessing the actual amount of food produced on these farms is challenging as yield data is not collected and published at the regional level. Such statistics are only available at the provincial level.

In individual interviews with some producers, however, we learned that some of them grow hundreds of thousands of pounds of root vegetables each year or millions of pounds of small fruits. One farmer could therefore potentially feed many people.

As one example, the largest potato producer in the province is located in the Humber Valley, with an average yield of 1 million pounds of potatoes annually. Residents of this province eat a little over 70 pounds of potatoes a year, which means that this one farm would meet the potato consumption needs of 50% of the regional population of the Humber Valley for a year. Because potatoes can store well, they can be sold throughout the year, rather than all at once.

However, the case is different for small fruits. Although producers grow more than enough to feed the regional population during harvest season (mid summer), they all have to be sold fresh within a very short period of time. Small fruits could therefore only be available regionally for a few weeks, unless processing was done.

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<sup>1</sup> A food shed analysis tries to better understand the (actual or potential) sources of food for a specific population (Peters et al 2008)

The perception of the adequacy of local supply to meet the needs of a farmers market varies within our research. Three of the four community stakeholder focus groups felt that Corner Brook has potential for the development of a farmers' market because there are an adequate number of food producers in this region, even though the numbers are fairly low. Because we are situated between both the Humber Valley and the Codroy Valley, there is a sense that we are in a good location to benefit from the agriculture that is happening in the region. Some of these producers are also looking for business opportunities and the chance to expand beyond what they are currently doing.

Most research participants sense that that we have sufficient variety of food products to support a market, including vegetables, seafood, honey, some meat and some eggs. There is also potential for other products such as berries which are currently being commercialized. Some producers have cool storage to allow for a longer market season.

Although when talking about potential, many participants generally felt that there are enough suppliers with enough diversity, the opposite viewpoint was also brought forward a number of times. Some participants wondered if there were enough producers and product to feasibly create a market for the region. Because demand is high and the growing season is short, supply may not be able to keep up. There was general agreement that it would be difficult to have a year round market, as there is a definite lack of fresh produce for most of the year.

These examples provide a glimpse into current local supply. However, more quantitative data would be needed to understand the amount of food produced regionally, and how much of this food would be available to be sold at a farmers' market.

#### *Demand*

There is a large gap between supply and demand. According to our research, there is quite a large demand for locally produced food in this region but limited supply.

There was near consensus among focus group participants that there is a large enough demand from the population in the western region to support a diverse farmers' market in Corner Brook. Not only is Corner Brook considered a service centre and a hub for the western region, participants felt that there were certain segments of the population that would support a market for varying reasons.

The following are the specific categories of people who participants felt would be likely market customers:

- 1) Segments of the Corner Brook population who are environmentally and health conscious will seek out local food because of its association with certain held values (quality, freshness, environmentally responsible, socially responsible, supportive to local economy)
- 2) The student and university population generally have more experience with farmers' markets in other parts of the country and the world, and will be more familiar with and interested in such an initiative

3) There is a small but growing population of ethnic minorities who are interested in certain difficult to find food products and would seek them out if they were available at a market

4) There is a large enough demographic of individuals in a higher income bracket who can afford to pay for the 'quality' premiums sometimes associated with products at farmers' markets (i.e. artisan goods)

It was also acknowledged by those who work with producers in the region that vegetable farmers regularly sell all of their products each season. "Moving" the product they produce is not generally a problem, and so this indicates a fairly high demand for local produce in the region. This information was further solidified when speaking with farmers themselves both in a focus group and in individual interviews, as all farmers who participated indicated a strong demand for local produce. At a farmers' roundtable organized in March 2012, a pre-session questionnaire was given out and 90% of those who filled it out indicated that they felt there was enough demand in the region to support a farmers market.

At the same time, half of the customers surveyed at the farmers' market in fall 2011 indicated (without prompting) that the main reason they came to the market was that they were looking for local produce.

More quantitative research may be needed to better understand both the supply and demand for local produce, including the amount of food produced regionally, the amount of food available for direct marketing, the prices that customers are willing to pay, the demographic that purchases local, and whether there are limits to local demand. Although there is near consensus that we have a large enough customer base to support a market, there is a sense that the market still needs to be convenient and have a reliable supply of products in order for people to support it.

### *B. Case Study of West Coast Farmers Market*

The West Coast Farmers' Market was an initiative of the Western Environment Centre, a charitable environmental education organization. The market ran for three consecutive years, from 2009 – 2011, with an initial one-time market in 2008. The market was able to attract funding each year that it operated, mainly in the form of government grants. These included a project grant and two employment grants. Each year the market would open with one market day during Environment Week in early June, and then would start on a regular basis every Saturday from 10 am – 2 pm from the beginning of July to the end of October. The market was located on the Majestic Lawn, at the far eastern end of West Street.

Tables and tents were donated by the City of Corner Brook, and were set up and taken down each Saturday morning by volunteers and one staff person. The Western Environment Centre rented table space to vendors for \$10/day and the number of vendors fluctuated throughout the seasons and years, from as low as 3-4 to as many as 12-15.

Non-food vendors often made up the bulk of the vendors particularly in July and August but in September and October, more vendors had produce available. Most vendors participated by showing up and selling their wares themselves, but one farmer sold on consignment, with a small percentage of the profit returning to WEC through a mark up. In the 2011 season, another vendor used the market as a hub to sell their regular weekly produce baskets to customers. Customers would simply show up to pick up their pre-ordered baskets, and financial transactions were conducted externally to the market.

The Western Environment Centre would also set up a table or two to display environmental pamphlets and information, and to sell coffee and tea. In the first couple of seasons, soup was donated by local restaurants and WEC used the sales as a fundraiser.

Sometimes market days were used to celebrate occasions such as World Food Day with barbeques or corn boils, or organizers would set up the market at events such as the Agrifoods and Garden Show or the East West North Festival. Particularly on the first market day of the season, there would be live music and face painting to create a fun and welcoming atmosphere.

Overall, the market had very little formal structure or policy. It wasn't until the third year that a working group was formed to oversee the market. This working group was loosely organized, and members included a number of vendors as well as some Western Environment Centre volunteers. Although the working group had intended to address both short and long term planning of the market, because of limited capacity, most of the work done by the group was planning just for the 2011 market season. This working group has now dissolved. However there is currently discussion about creating a new working group.

The following is a progression of the farmers' market over the past four years.

#### *Community Market 2008*

The first market organized by the Western Environment Centre was a one-time event during Environment Week in June 2008, and was called a Community Market to emphasize the social and cultural aspects of the event. Although food and farming was

one element of the market, it was not the primary focus, particularly as there were no farmers involved. One local nursery attended the event, with herbs and other plants, and there was also a local foods cooking demonstration.

Aside from these, there were a number of other displays, booths and activities, including sessions on composting and bike maintenance, value based activities to foster discussion on community priorities, live music and a plant exchange. The market was held on the lawn of the First United Church, showing a long standing relationship between WEC and the church community. The event was seen as a great success and participants at the time even talked about making it a weekly event.

#### *West Coast Community Market 2009*

In the fall of 2008, the Western Environment Centre applied for a Provincial Wellness Grant, a granting program offered by the Department of Health & Community Services for wellness-related initiatives. The project was the coordination of a weekly community market for the coming 2009 season. Notably, in the proposal, the market was called the West Coast Community Market, with the recognition that there would be multiple activities involved, rather than just selling produce.

The four original main goals were: 1) Increase healthy eating; 2) Support local business; 3) Promote sustainable lifestyle alternatives in areas such as energy use, home renovations & gardening; 4) Enhance quality of community living.

WEC was successful in receiving funding, however, one of the original supporters (the NL Environment Network) had to step back from administrative support, leaving WEC with less administrative capacity. At the same time, there was a decision made to change the market's name to West Coast *Farmers'* Market, thereby omitting the 'community' piece and shifting the focus to farm products.

Volunteers with the Western Environment Centre then sought out other partners and subsequently worked with a Market Development Officer at the Department of Natural Resources, Agrifoods Branch to develop a plan to reach out to farmers and develop the market concept.

At the time there was no official farmers' market committee. The Western Environment Centre board was ultimately responsible for the project, however, the main lead was the chairperson who took on much of the supervisory and organizational responsibilities.

In spring 2009, a market coordinator was hired and the first market was held during Environment Week, with plans for a weekly market from July to October. Some of the main challenges at the time were recruiting volunteers regularly and getting local food producers involved. Organizers made attempts to recruit farmers from the region, but generally this did not work very well. Many farmers were supportive of the project, but were unable to attend because of a lack of time and/or staff capacity. Approximately 3-4 small food producers were interested in participating as well as some members of the arts and crafts community.

There was some support from the City of Corner Brook. They allowed the market to use the Majestic Lawn, and purchased tables and tents which the market could use each week. The City's Sustainability Coordinator was also quite helpful by providing as much



assistance as she could, particularly in terms of guiding market organizers through City bureaucracy.

#### *West Coast Farmers' Market 2010*

The market coordinator's contract ended in spring 2010. Two market brainstorming sessions were subsequently held in April 2010 with market organizers, volunteers, vendors and the interested public. The turnout was good, and there were many ideas suggested for market improvements. One of the main issues was the lack of an indoor venue, because both vendors and customers would stay away if the weather was bad. There was also a need for more farmers and more produce.

Lack of capacity was still an issue however, and continuing from the previous year, WEC still did not have a market steering committee that could follow up on the suggestions made.

Around the same time, volunteers put together an application for the Job Creation Partnership program, available through the federal government (Service Canada). Interestingly, however this was originally intended to be a Community Garden Coordinator position, rather than for the market.

Once the position began, the work of the market gradually began to take over as a priority project. Overall, much of the coordination and logistical work was done by the coordinator, with a number of WEC board members helping out with administration and on the ground activities at the market.

Vendor recruitment was done by phone, using a list that had been put together the year before by the previous coordinator. Again it was difficult to recruit vendors and many potential vendors told organizers that it was quite challenging and cost prohibitive to take time and effort to participate in the market. Another challenge was that partly a new market had just opened in Stephenville, which was a closer venue for some producers.

Many of the challenges of the first market (2009) were again a problem in 2010, namely vendor recruitment and retention, lack of an indoor or weather-proof venue and volunteer recruitment and retention. The market did have some regular customers, and there were a small number of committed vendors. However there were not many food vendors, which was a concern to market organizers and for customers. Finding an alternative venue became a top priority as organizers thought this would bring more customers and more vendors, and discussions started with a number of groups, including the City of Corner Brook on other possibilities.

#### *West Coast Farmers' Market 2011*

In November 2010, the Western Environment Centre decided to form working groups to better provide structure for their multiple projects and to provide a way for volunteers to get involved more easily. A farmers' market working group was created with two board members as leads, however, after a couple of months, one of the board members had to step down from this lead role. Other members of the working group included a small number of vendors, some other WEC volunteers, and a representative from the Agrifoods Branch of the Department of Natural Resources.

WEC was also able to access another government employment program (Targeted Wage Subsidy) to continue funding for the market coordinator for the 2011 season. The funding would run until October 2011, so volunteers also submitted a number of project proposals in attempts to continue the coordinator position beyond October, but none were successful.

The working group started to meet in January 2011 with the intention to plan the market for that season, as well as try and do some long term planning for coming years. At the same time, the main market organizers were busy with the challenge of finding an alternate space. At the beginning of the year, the City had committed to allowing the market to set up in a new location – Margaret Bowater Park on O'Connell Drive. Organizers thought this would be an improvement because many more people visit that park than the Majestic Lawn and there would be potential shelter under an awning of a new building in the park. Unfortunately, after this commitment and after some advertising had already happened to indicate the new location, there was a reversal on the decision.

Organizers now had to spend time letting people know that the market would indeed remain at the Majestic Lawn. There were also a number of meetings with the City discussing other possibilities for future market development.

With all the work invested in searching for a new venue, there was very little energy or time to do longer term planning. However, the working group was able to plan and implement the market for the 2011 season.

### **Vendor Perspectives**

In the 2011 season, a variety of vendors participated in the West Coast Farmers' Market. Ten different vendors participated in our study and half of them were food vendors. Food products included fresh produce, jams and jellies, tea, prepared foods and honey products. The other types of vendors included those who sold body care products, dog treats, woodwork and handicrafts.

Most vendors showed up to sell their own products, but a small number of vendors sold their products in other ways. One of the vendors participated through a commission relationship. The market coordinator would pick up produce from the farm each week, and would sell it at the market, earning a small commission from sales for the Western Environment Centre. Partway through the season, another vendor switched from active participation at the market, to using the market as a distribution hub for their regular weekly vegetable baskets.

Most vendors were very small scale, with half of them reporting no paid employees. The largest employer had only seven employees, six of whom were seasonal. Half of the vendors were 'committed' vendors and had participated in both past market seasons of 2009 and 2010. Three others had participated only in the 2010 season and there were two brand new vendors. Of the two new vendors, one participated early in the season, and then was unable to continue because of her personal schedule. The second new vendor joined the market later in the season, but then stayed until the end.

All vendors sell their products at other venues. Three of them sell from their own retail outlets, while four of them sell at other retail outlets. Other popular selling venues include

craft and trade shows, as well as the local flea market, held every Sunday in one of the malls. Two of the vendors had also participated in other farmers/community markets, located in Glenburnie and Stephenville.

Generally all surveyed vendors have a positive impression of the market, enjoy their time there and think it is worthwhile to attend for variety of reasons. Almost all plan to attend the market for the next season. However, almost all of them experience challenges to participation, and have a number of suggestions for improving the market.

At the beginning of the season, when asked why they decided to participate in the market this year, about half indicated felt that it would be a good venue for selling their products, and also they enjoyed the social interaction. The low table fee was also mentioned as a factor, as well as the location. One vendor participated primarily because they wanted to see the market succeed and another participated simply because they were approached by the market coordinator.

When asked what they liked the most about the market, most of the vendors identified the social and friendly atmosphere of the market. Vendors also mentioned enjoying being outside, interacting with customers, and the fact that it is a community meeting place. One vendor was enthusiastic about the opportunity to gain access to a market that would otherwise be unavailable to them. This vendor was able to try out a few new products, in essence, testing their market potential.

When it comes to direct economic benefits, the picture is a little less positive. At the beginning of the season, five of the seven vendors that returned their surveys felt that it was financially beneficial to attend the market. Of these five, only one felt the same way at the end of the season. In terms of building a customer base as well as supporting a project that they believed in, most vendors felt it was worthwhile to attend. These opinions stayed fairly consistent from the beginning to the end of the season.

When it comes to participation challenges, the most common for vendors is the lack of time and resources needed to be in attendance at the market during the day. Another common challenge is the seasonality of the produce, as the vendors who are producing vegetables do not have much available until halfway through the regular market season (September).

The top concern voiced by most vendors concerned the venue. Although the actual downtown location seems to generally work well, particularly in terms of attracting foot traffic, there is an obvious need for vendors to have a more comfortable, permanent and sheltered venue. Vendors also indicated that there is a definite need for more vendors, both in variety and number. More advertising and promotion was also suggested as a way to bring in more customers.

When asked about what is needed to get other vendors to participate, again most survey respondents cited an indoor, permanent venue. Having a larger customer base was also suggested. A number of the vendors felt that they needed to network amongst themselves, and use word of mouth in order to attract more vendors. When asked whether they would attend a market the following year, virtually all responded positively. Only one vendor said they were unsure whether they would attend. It appears that current vendors are attending because they enjoy the social aspects and/or want to support the market project.

### **Customer Perspectives**

The large majority of customers at the market during the 2011 season were Corner Brook residents or from neighbouring communities. Very few were tourists. Of all those surveyed, only a few were visiting from elsewhere, with the farthest visitor traveling from Quebec. Most of the customers were women. The vast majority of customers were over the age of 25, indicating that very few university students frequent the market. One third of all customers surveyed were between 40-60, while a quarter each were between 25-39 and over 60.

Almost 40% of people had heard about the market through word of mouth. One quarter of people either saw the market sign at West Valley Road or just happened to be passing by the market site, and a little over 10% heard about it online, either through Facebook, the WEC website, cornerbrooker.com or the East West North online schedule. Two thirds of the customers stated that the main reason they came downtown that day was to attend the market. Of those, 46% planned to shop elsewhere in the downtown area.

A little over a third of those surveyed were first time customers, while almost half visited fairly regularly, either weekly or 1-2 times a month. Customers generally spent less than \$20 during their visit, with more money being spent in September and October than in July and August.

All customers surveyed indicated that they purchase local food in other places, predominantly at grocery stores (65%). However, 40% also purchase local food at roadside stands and directly from local farms. Four people mentioned purchasing from the Riverbrook Farms Country Market, a farmer owned and operated retail outlet in Corner Brook.

In the early part of the season, people were drawn to the market mainly out of curiosity, whereas in the later half, most people came down with the specific intention to buy produce. When asked the main reasons for visiting the market that day, only three customers in July and August stated that they were looking for local produce, with about half of the customers there simply out of curiosity or because they were passing by. In contrast, more than half of customers surveyed in September and October specifically mentioned that they were looking for local vegetables. Other reasons given throughout the whole market period were: to support local, to buy various other local products besides produce (honey, jam, preserves), to attend the corn boil (an event in October), and to socialize.

Customers generally had a positive impression of the market, with some suggestions for improvement noted. Almost all customers said the location, as well as the date and time of the market were convenient. A couple of people mentioned that a location nearer the city centre would be better, and during the summer a weekday might work better because many people are away on weekends.

Overall the outdoor venue was very important to customers at the market. Despite variable weather conditions, more people felt that an outdoor venue was more important than an indoor venue. Almost 80% said that an outdoor location was either very important (43%) or somewhat important (34%), whereas only 50% said an indoor location was very (20%) or somewhat important (30%).

About 50% of the people thought access to washrooms was very or somewhat important. Three quarters of the people surveyed felt that having the opportunity to buy lunch was either very or somewhat important.

Almost all customers wanted to see other products, mostly a better selection of produce (particularly for customers in September and October), but also prepared foods, arts and crafts, baked goods and activities (workshops, yoga, face painting).

The most popular attractions that would bring people to the market in the future include free food samples (67%), musicians (55%), BBQs (48%), workshops (43%), and activities for kids (36%). Three quarters of the people stated that there were other products they would like to see at the market. Most wanted to see a larger selection of local fruits and vegetables, and this was a common statement even during September and October when there was a larger amount of produce for sale.

### ***Farmer Perspectives***

Some research was conducted with farmers, most of whom had not participated in the West Coast Farmers Market. Individual interviews were held with five main fruit and vegetable producers, one dairy farmer and a focus group was organized in partnership with the Agrifoods Branch (Department of Natural Resources), Model Forest of NL and the Humber Economic Development Board. Attendance was good as 13 producers were there, representing nine different farming operations from a variety of sectors including pork, beef, greenhouse products, dairy and horticulture.

Subsequent roundtable discussion focused on the potential for different types and models of farmers' markets. Overall there was a sense that a farmers market would be of interest to some, but not all farmers. Most participants were already either running their own farm stand or retail outlet in which they already sold directly to customers. Some were interested in a farmers' market if they knew it would be another way to increase their sales.

Farmer participation would also depend on a number of conditions, including an appropriate indoor venue with washrooms, coolers and other necessary facilities; a guaranteed customer base; an adequate number of farmers involved to provide variety and consistency (at least 4-5 different farms); clear guidelines for product standards and for the roles and responsibilities of vendors; as well as an agreement on pricing across the market to ensure fair competition. Essentially, some farmers would be willing to give a market a try if it was organized, professional and a fairly low risk venture.

Although various models were presented, the initial feeling was that a 'traditional' model of a farmers market would be preferred by most farmers, which is the model primarily used by the West Coast Farmers' Market. This would mean that vendors would show up with their own goods, rent a table and either do the selling themselves or employ a salesperson (for a description of various other models see Section 8). There also seemed to be some interest among farmers for a cooperative market model. More work is needed to explore these potential options.

At the same time, it became clear from the focus group that very few, if any of the farmers in attendance, would be able to help spearhead market development. Most of them are already very busy particularly during the time of year when the market would operate, and there is no organized regional association to provide support.

### *C. Community Stakeholder Perceptions of Challenges and Opportunities*

Questions with focus group participants revolved around four main themes: potential and current benefits of farmers' markets in the region; the potential for development; main challenges and how to overcome them. Participants were also asked to envision an ideal farmers' market in Corner Brook and to consider their own role in supporting or developing a market.

#### *Benefits*

Some participants feel that because many producers are fairly small, are part time or 'hobby' farmers, they will benefit by cutting out the 'middle man' and selling directly. A market could be beneficial to this type of producer because they generally have difficulty accessing the larger grocery chains which currently dominate the grocery market in the province. At the same time, certain items could be sold at a market that otherwise would not be economical on a larger scale.

A farmers' market can also cut down on the 'red tape' for producers by going through the proper process of permits, insurance and licensing. Individual vendors would not need to then purchase their own permits, and this can therefore give greater access to different sized producers.

A market provides an opportunity for branding, for providing visibility for new, or even existing producers and can also put a "face to the name", thereby increasing customer loyalty. A market could also have economic advantages beyond the individual producers. A market would provide spin off benefits, particularly if local dollars are able to stay within the local economy through support of market vendors.

A market can act as a venue for 'testing' out new products for existing businesses, or for new entrepreneurs to try a new business idea. Items like non-timber forest products (berries, chanterelles, etc.) were mentioned as a potential new business opportunity in this region in particular. Markets also act as a tourism destination all around the world, and could draw tourists into the Corner Brook area.

There was considerable discussion of the benefit of 'local food'. Many participants associated the idea of local with high quality, freshness, nutrition, and good taste. A farmers' market was seen as a place to access foods that were fresh, healthy and tasty because they hadn't travelled thousands of miles. Local foods also were seen to last longer than imported foods from the grocery store.

The concept of community cohesion was also important in focus group discussions. All four focus groups mentioned some positive social benefits to a market. It can act as a community focal point and as an important way to socialize and get to know the producer of your food. It will allow people to get a better sense of where their food comes from and they can ask questions about how it was produced.

The idea that we need to support local food producers because of our dependence on imported foods was also noted by two participants. They felt that a market could support increased food security. Related to this point, two participants also mentioned that exposure to farmers at a market might help young people consider farming as a viable career option.

Although environmental benefits weren't brought up by many participants, there were a few statements relating to the idea that a market could provide more access to organic foods.

#### *Potential*

Participants agreed that there was considerable potential in this region to ensure a successful farmers' market. The main challenge is harnessing these advantages and prioritizing its development. Advantages include a large population base, including certain demographic classes that are more likely to support a market (see Section 3A); the organizational and research capacity in the region; government support from multiple levels; as well as the supplier base, in terms of both food products and arts and crafts (see Section 3A). Although not all participants universally agreed with all of these items, particularly the size of the supplier base, the majority felt that these were the most notable benefits to help create a market.

There were also a number of participants who noted the variety and quantity of arts and crafts, as well as some other products and services that are in the region, which could also have an important role to play at a market.

Although the harvest season generally starts later in this region than in other parts of Canada, it also continues later into the fall. Farmers are often pulling out crop into November and December, allowing for a market into the Christmas season.

Government support from multiple levels in this region is also seen as fairly strong for a market. The City of Corner Brook would like to see a successful farmers' market and would potentially be willing to support it. They have already provided support to the West Coast Farmers' Market, such as through purchasing tents and providing the use of space and electricity at the Majestic Lawn. There could potentially be increased infrastructural and financial support from the City of Corner Brook.

The provincial government has an agricultural marketing division which has also provided some support to the current market, and can continue to do so, particularly if the economic benefit to producers is clear. The Rural Secretariat for the western region (Corner Brook – Rocky Harbour) can provide organizational support, particularly in the initial stages of establishing a committee to spearhead a market. The Department of Innovation, Business and Rural Development can provide support to build organizational capacity as well.

Entities like ACOA and the federal Department of Agriculture and Agrifoods can also potentially provide support in various forms to a market, mainly in terms of funding. ACOA can work with the secondary food processing sector. In addition, the joint federal-provincial funding program, Growing Forward, could be a funding opportunity for such a project.

#### *Barriers*

Participants feel that issues related to producer participation are some of the largest obstacles in making a market a success in Corner Brook. There are a number of distinct challenges related to producers' ability and willingness to participate or run a farmers market.

#### *Perception of Competition*

Generally in the province, farmers sell directly from their farms, operate individual roadside stands or sell through other retail outlets. This relates to another main challenge that was brought up by most participants: the perceived negative competition that would result from producers all operating in one location. We heard the perception that in this province farmers have had success with selling as individual business operators rather than working together. The potential benefits of a diverse multi-farmer market have not been obvious.

#### *Lack of Time*

Many farmers are quite busy during harvest season and do not have the extra labour required to send someone to manage a booth at a market. If they run their own roadside stand, it is doubly difficult to operate two separate retail locations. There are also other costs associated with participating at the market such as travel, packaging and customer 'bargaining'.

#### *Larger Societal Trends*

There are also larger trends at play. The number of farms is generally on a decline in the province, and the average age of farmers is in the late 50s. There are very few young people getting into farming, and those farms that do exist do not necessarily want to grow or expand beyond current operations.

#### *Farm Size*

The farm industry in this province is split between a small number of very large and profitable farms, mainly in the supply management sectors, and a large number of very small farms, mainly fruit and vegetable, livestock or non-food products (sods, Christmas trees, flowers, hay). There aren't many 'in-between' or medium sized farms that have the capacity or interest in participating in a farmers' market.

#### *Organization*

The lack of an organized, established group that has the capacity to take leadership on market development was discussed in three focus groups. Four participants indicated that this is one of the largest barriers faced by the development of a market.

Currently there is no producer association in the area, and no farmers or farmer groups that are pushing for the development of a market in Corner Brook. Although focus groups state that there are numerous resources available to support a market, most funders prefer to work with, or are limited in that they can *only* work with an industry group.

Although a number of farm industry associations exist provincially, participants knew of no such groups in this region. Current market efforts are spearheaded by the Western Environment Centre, a non-profit, volunteer-driven organization. Most participants agree that a successful market requires more resources than those which are currently available and a market cannot rely primarily on volunteer time. Many organizations are able to support development of a farmers market, but perceive they are unable to take the lead.

For example, the City of Corner Brook is limited in its ability to take leadership because of other competing businesses in town. Although they could support a farmers' market if



developed by another organization, preferably producer-led, the sense is that they cannot take the lead without criticism from market competitors, such as grocery stores and other retail outlets. At the same time, the City would prefer to work with a strong, established organization that could commit to such a project for a number of years to ensure that any infrastructural or financial support was worth the investment in the long term. The City requires a long term plan and vision for a farmers' market.

#### *Location*

Nearly all participants cited finding an appropriate location and venue for a farmers' market as a challenge. Because of the unpredictability of the region's climate, it is critical for vendors and consumers to have a space that provides shelter when the weather is inclement. The current location on the Majestic Lawn is not ideal as it is an outdoor venue and can be quite uncomfortable for both customers and vendors. A permanent structure is also preferred, rather than the current tables/tents set up.

Appropriate facilities also need to offer electricity, parking, coolers and other important services to vendors, and must be in a consistent and easily accessible location for consumers. An indoor/outdoor location is considered the best option because some participants feel that the ability to be outdoors in good weather is also an essential part of the market atmosphere. Because of the aging demographic, accessibility is also important to keep in mind.

## SECTION 5

### **Discussion**

#### *Potential Ways Forward?*

Based on this case study of one particular market in Newfoundland and Labrador, a number of challenges and possibilities emerge. If a market was to be re-developed in the region or in other areas of the province, the following aspects should be taken into consideration.

#### *Multiple Partners and Wide Community Support*

From the research conducted, it becomes clear that a market must be a project with multiple partners and community support. A lack of partners for the West Coast Farmers Market has led to a market that is under resourced with limited capacity for growth or even maintenance of the status quo. There are many individuals and organizations who see the benefits of a market and who think one is possible, however there are few who have the capacity or the mandate to develop the project on their own. Leadership has primarily come from the Western Environment Centre and this situation could possibly continue, but strong partners are critical for redevelopment.

It was noted that there is a lack of industry leadership and capacity directed towards a farmers market. In this region and in other areas of the province however, it may be unrealistic to expect farmers to take the lead on such an initiative. There are a limited number of farmers in the region and in the province generally, the average age of farmers is increasing, and there is a lack of a regional industry association in western Newfoundland. It is also clear that farmers are not the only beneficiaries of a market, and should not be considered as such. Markets can and do benefit food producers, but many benefits accrue to other segments of the community. As such, it makes sense to have a diversity of groups support the initiative.

A farmers' market is a project that allows for the involvement of many entities, as there are multiple benefits that cross boundaries of economic and community development, health, and environmental sustainability. For example, cities have a long history of supporting farmers' markets because of the important role they can play in food security and employment creation. Other common market partners include economic development groups, industry associations or cooperatives and other types of non-profit organizations. Currently in Newfoundland and Labrador, there are a number of different market organizers, including Regional Economic Development Boards, some municipalities (i.e. Town of Torbay, Town of CBS), as well as some non-profit organizations.

One example to learn from is Happy Valley-Goose Bay where a large number of groups came together to support the farmers' market, including the Central Labrador Economic Development Board (CLEDB), the Food Security Network - NL, the Regional Wellness Coalition, the Mennonite Central Community and the Town of Happy Valley - Goose Bay. The lead group was the CLEDB but other organizations recognized other benefits that a market could provide. Funding has now been secured from different levels of government.

There is generally considerable organizational skill and resources within organizations in this area that could benefit market development. Groups in this region who could be involved include the Humber Economic Development Board, the Model Forest of NL,

Department of Innovation, Business and Rural Development, Department of Natural Resources (Agrifoods Division), Rural Secretariat (Corner Brook-Rocky Harbour), Agriculture and Agri-foods Canada (Growing Forward), the City of Corner Brook, Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), the NL Federation of Cooperatives, the Western Environment Centre and potentially other non-profit groups, including those in the health sector. Some representation from the agricultural community would also be critical.

Each of these entities can provide different skills and resources. The Humber Economic Development Board is able to apply for funding to promote economic development projects in the area. Unlike other entities such as the CBDC, they are not limited to supporting individual business people, but can support a project as a whole. Within their performance-based operational model, if a farmers' market was chosen by the REDB as an Initiative, then they could take the lead on such a project.

The Model Forest is currently working with other groups, including the REDBs in the area to support the development of a non-timber forest product (NTFP) industry. They have applied for funding to support a cooperative for NTFP producers, and such a project could potentially link to a farmers' market, as the cooperative would need marketing venues. It is acknowledged however that with very recent cuts announced to the REDBs as well as to the Model Forest of NL, that they will have considerably less capacity to spearhead projects.

The Department of Innovation, Business and Rural Development would be able to work with a group that wanted to form a market on business development and planning. The Department of Natural Resources (Agrifoods Division) works with individual farmers to support business development. In terms of marketing, the department can continue to provide marketing support. Representatives of Agrifoods could also work with farmers to provide information about a market as an economically viable venue.

The Rural Secretariat works on partnership building, community engagement and research and could provide support in those areas, particularly in the start up phases.

The City of Corner Brook can support the development of a market through infrastructure and site selection. Although they could support a farmers' market if developed by another organization, preferably producer-led, the sense is that they cannot take the lead without criticism from market competitors, such as grocery stores and other retail outlets. At the same time, the City would prefer to work with a strong, established organization that could commit to such a project for a number of years to ensure that any infrastructural or financial support was worth the investment in the long term.

ACOA could potentially have a role with planning and business development, particularly if there were secondary processors involved. The Western Environment Centre itself can provide the experience and history of operating a farmers market in Corner Brook and can also potentially offer volunteer resources.

Citizens are also becoming 'drivers' of farmers' markets and could be included in a market committee. Although they may not have the resources that an incorporated group could provide, these champions can be key leaders in making the project move forward. For example, in the case of the St. John's Farmers Market, market development was driven by a mix of individual volunteers, rather than a structured organization. Once the market was established, a more formal entity was created, but in the initial stages,

the small group of citizen leaders was instrumental. This small group also helped to envision how the market would operate – the model that was chosen was a multi-functional not for profit cooperative (SJFM Consultants Report 2009).

*Long term planning and clear measurable objectives*

As the market changes and grows over the coming years, it is important to create a strategic planning document that guides the project and sets out a clear vision, as well as goals and objectives. Although efforts were made to do some planning for the West Coast Farmers' Market, the lack of resources ensured the focus was on the short term (i.e. making the market happen each year). This has led to a problem where market objectives are unclear, as there is no guiding document or plan. There is uncertainty about what the market is meant to achieve, and how to measure success.

Because a market has the potential to create a number of benefits from customer to farmer to community, the organizers need to determine the 'why' of their particular market. For example, is it primarily an economic development strategy? Or is it a way to increase the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables? Is one of the goals to increase the visibility of local foods? These and other questions need to be discussed to determine market expectations.

Planning should also include widespread vendor and citizen involvement. There was an assumption with the West Coast Farmers Market of "if you build it, they will come" rather than a deeper understanding of farmer perspectives. This has led to attempts to 'pull in' farmers and other vendors after the market has been established rather than involve them upfront. A number of farmers have mentioned certain aspects of the market that don't suit their needs, including the timing of the market as well as a lack of electricity and other facilities. Vendor involvement would be able to address these concerns from the beginning.

Such a plan might also open doors to partnership support and financing, as many funders look for evidence of long term project sustainability.

*Appropriate season and timing*

To ease the burden on organizers, it might make sense to build up to a weekly market rather than run a full season market right away. This would allow for better long term planning, rather than focus on the short term planning of making the market happen each week. If the market continues to rely heavily on volunteers this would also help with volunteer burnout, which was a problem for the West Coast Farmers Market.

Appropriate timing in this area might be late summer to late fall, rather than throughout the whole summer. A number of communities in this province such as Conception Bay South, Gander and Torbay run a market for a small number of weeks, or spread out market events over a few months, rather than do a weekly market. Particularly in the start up phase, this would allow the market to build a foundation, without overburdening finances or other resources.

*Consistent and continuous marketing*

Our research has shown that most participants at the West Coast Farmers Market were local people, most of them within a specific demographic (middle aged women). Most had heard about the market through word of mouth, rather than through formal advertising. It was noted that very few tourists or younger people attend the market.

Generally more marketing needs to happen, but a plan to focus on certain populations might be of use.

For example, targeted marketing to the tourist population might increase numbers especially throughout the summer when many local people are away for the weekends. Although focus groups suggested that the university population would be market supporters, there were very few young customers, indicating a lack of university students. Although much of the university population is gone during the summer, a targeted campaign during the fall months could attract more students particularly if there were incentives and promotions for students.

Marketing also needs to be consistent and continue beyond the first year, as new farmers' markets often invest more in advertising and sometimes attract more attention from the media than ongoing markets.

To continue to draw in customers over the years, continued marketing must happen, which can also include partnering with other community happenings. Other ideas identified by research participants include strategies such as market coupons, or organizing special events. In Corner Brook, there was success at bringing people to the market when organizers partnered with the Pride Parade, or organized events such as the World Food Day corn boil.

#### *Ensuring an adequate market size*

Although small markets can certainly be successful in some circumstances, they can be problematic in that vendors may not make enough revenue to justify the effort. At the same time, smaller markets often don't bring in enough administrative revenue to be self-sustaining. The market coordinator position at the West Coast Farmers Market was paid for by project funding as well as through various government programs. This provided very little stability, as well as a low salaried job. Within the three years of the market, there were two market coordinators, as well as fairly high turnover of volunteer organizers. A heavy reliance on volunteers was also seen as the cause for volunteer burn out.

As a non-profit organization, dependent on project funding, there was very little administrative revenue for the market. Combined with the small size of the market and the lack of successful fundraising efforts, there was very little money to do important things like advertising and professional development.

Most customers and vendors in this research also identified a need for more products and vendors at the market. To reduce the risk to vendors, it is important to have a large enough number and variety of vendors secured in advance of launching the market. A market must be large enough able to draw in enough customers so that it is of some economic value to the vendors. Most farmers involved in this research would not consider participating in a market unless it was large enough from the beginning.

Research participants felt that people generally would prefer to purchase all of their groceries in one location, rather than go to multiple venues. People also tend to fall into a routine where they mainly shop at the same places, week after week. Although there is near consensus that we have a large enough customer base to support a market, there is a sense that the market still needs to be convenient and have a reliable supply of products in order for people to support it.

A market needs to become a part of a customer's regular routine, and unless the market can offer a consistent supply of goods, it will be difficult to get people coming back. Many markets end up in a downward spiral in that they can't attract new customers without new vendors, but they can't get new vendors without more customers. This is the situation identified in the community stakeholder focus groups.

#### *Location*

Throughout the research the issue of finding an appropriate location and venue for a farmers' market was brought up consistently. Because of the unpredictability of the region's climate, it is critical for vendors and consumers to have a space that provides shelter when the weather is inclement. The current location on the Majestic Lawn is not ideal as it is an outdoor venue and can be quite uncomfortable for both customers and vendors. A permanent structure is also preferred, rather than the current tables/tents set up.

Appropriate facilities also need to offer electricity, parking, coolers and other important services to vendors, and must be in a consistent and easily accessible location for consumers. An indoor/outdoor location is considered the best option because some participants feel that the ability to be outdoors in good weather is also an essential part of the market atmosphere. Because of the aging demographic, accessibility is also important to keep in mind.

It is also important to consider which community in the region could host a farmers market. The largest centres in the region are Deer Lake and Corner Brook, with each having their own advantages. Deer Lake is closer to the farm population as well as near the highway towards Gros Morne National Park which sees thousands of tourists for certain parts of the year. However Corner Brook has a much larger population as well as a higher number of non-farmer businesses who could be potential vendors.

#### *Appropriate Governance and Operational Models*

Farmer and vendor recruitment was one of the main challenges identified in this research. Considering different ways to run a market would potentially offer options that would be amenable to vendors. A number of these models are outlined below.

##### *One Desk Marketing*

Farmers often do not have time and cannot pay employees to attend markets. To deal with this issue, the idea of one desk marketing could be implemented. This would mean that a central body would purchase product from a variety of producers and sell it at the market on their behalf.

##### *Third Party Brokering*

This would be a form of one desk marketing. A broker acts as the liaison between the farmers and the market, and purchases in bulk from a variety of producers. The broker is then fully responsible for pick up, sales and for dealing with excess product if it is not sold. Revenue is generated by adding a small mark up on prices at the market.

This model benefits producers because it requires the least amount of work from them, but it also means the least amount of control over what happens. They may not have a final say over the final price at the market. There is also no direct connection between the farm and the produce, and consumers don't get to know individual farms. They therefore lack the individual branding or marketing advantage.

A local non profit organization could serve as a broker, collecting product and selling it at the market, using revenue generated to support their activities. This would be a social enterprise model. A private business could fill the same role, serving as a middle person between producers and market consumers.

#### *Cooperative Brokering*

Another alternative is that producers could join a market cooperative, which could then buy from producers and sell produce at the market. The cooperative acts as the broker but all the producer members benefit because revenue generated could be used for local marketing, administration or salespeople

This is slightly different from third party brokering because the producers themselves have much more control over what happens to their product once it goes to the market. Members could pay fees to the co-op to support it administratively, then the co-op would buy from producers and sell at the market on their behalf. A mark up at the market could be used to pay for staff as well as collective marketing.

#### *Labour Sharing*

Rather than set up a cooperative, a group of farmers could informally pool resources to pay for a small number of market staff to sell their products at the market. Farmers could either collectively hire someone who would be responsible for selling at the market or farmers could take turns sending one of their employees to sell products for the group.

This is different from brokering because there is no middle person. This is more like a traditional model of a market because farmers must bring their produce into the market, but there is an informal arrangement where a group of farmers decide to share staff.

Staff people are paid either by a percentage of sales or by an agreed upon mark up. Farmers are responsible for bringing their products to a market but market staff people are responsible for selling. Excess product is the individual farmer's responsibility. One of the other benefits of labour sharing is that individual branding and marketing are possible at the market.

#### *Farm Share Pick Up*

The market could act as a simple pick up spot for 'farm share' programs. In a farm share, a number of customers sign up and pay for a weekly basket of products from a producer and then they pick up the basket at the market.

Producers benefit because they get guaranteed, regular sales each week. There is work in initially setting up and maintaining the farm share however it creates convenience and ease for the customer because they simply go to one spot to pick up their fresh farm products. A successful farm share is already currently being operated in the area which could act as an example to other producers.

## SECTION 6 *Knowledge Mobilization*

As part of the research project we were committed to mobilizing the knowledge we gained in a number of different ways. We have been working with a variety of groups within the region to keep them up to date on the research and to identify ways that the knowledge can be put to use. These organizations include the Western Environment Centre, the Humber Economic Development Board, the Model Forest of Newfoundland and Labrador, the Rural Secretariat, the City of Corner Brook and the Agrifoods Branch of the Department of Natural Resources.

As an important partner on the project as well as potential end users of the knowledge gained, the Western Environment Centre has been kept informed about the project over the past year. A number of initial meetings were held with Western Environment Centre volunteers and staff to determine research design.

We presented preliminary research results at a Western Environment Centre board meeting in January 2012 with subsequent discussion on how results could be used. In April 2012 a draft evaluation report was sent to the board for their input in advance of the release of the final report. A short presentation was also given at the Annual General Meeting in May 2012 to a group of approximately 25, which included the WEC board, general WEC members, as well as a few members of the general public.

All focus group participants received a copy of the results of that piece of the research before it was incorporated into the final report. All participants will also receive a copy of the evaluation report as well as the final research report.

In partnership with the Model Forest of NL, the Market Development Officer at the Agrifoods Branch, and staff at the Humber Economic Development Board, a farmers' roundtable was held to not only gain insight into farmers' perspectives on farmers' market development, but also to present on some of the research to date. The focus was on the types of farmers' market models that might work in this region. Discussions included the advantages and disadvantages of the different models presented.

We have also worked with Students in Free Enterprise at Grenfell Campus, as they are trying to plan a project around a farmers' market. We have had a number of meetings with them to explain the research we are doing to see if there is a fit for their potential work. A faculty member, Dr. Jose Lam, is involved with the students, and plans to continue working on farmers' market research based on the discussions we have had with them.



## SECTION 7 *Conclusion*

This research explored how the West Coast Farmers' Market was able to fulfill different needs of market users, the potential and challenges of market development for the western region to market development, and ways forward to develop and improve the market.

Our analysis showed that the challenges faced by the local market organizers were common to markets across North America. The market was financially and resource constrained from its beginnings. Funding came from short term project grants, and there was very little revenue generated from the market itself to allow for sustainable financing. It was also difficult getting farmers and other vendors involved consistently, which prevented the market from having a regular supply of goods.

Most of the non-participant farmers involved in the research felt that it was currently not worth their while to participate in the West Coast Farmers' Market. Most farmers were unwilling or unable to take the risk involved in participation as they were already comfortable with their current selling avenues. However, some farmers said that they would be willing to participate in a market if certain conditions were met including an appropriate venue and a large enough customer base.

So while the West Coast Farmers' Market has had a difficult start, the research found that WEC, the primary market organizer, was able to create a market that provided a positive, social atmosphere for the farmers who did participate, other vendors and customers. Vendors generally enjoyed their time there and indicated that they would return to participate in the upcoming season, despite the fact that most of them felt that financially, the market was not meeting their needs. Benefits were tied to their ability to grow their customer base, as well as commitment to supporting a project they believed in. Vendors felt that securing an indoor venue would be the best next step for improving the market. Customers also enjoyed the farmers' market, particularly that it was outdoors and gave them an opportunity to purchase local produce. However, most wanted more attractions such as BBQs, free food samples, activities for children and workshops as well as more produce with more variety.

Further, farmers generally (non-participants and participants) felt that demand for a farmers market is high in this region because of the interest in purchasing local food. A wider group of community stakeholders also feel that there is great benefit and potential for a farmers' market on the west coast, and specifically in Corner Brook because of the large population base. Most of these stakeholders—including various provincial government departments, the City of Corner Brook, community groups, and federal government agencies—expressed their desire to see an established and stable committee spearhead a market which would preferably be driven by industry. None of them felt that it was within their jurisdiction to organize a market.

Our research has shown there is real potential to develop a farmers' market in the western region of Newfoundland and Labrador but it is likely that it will only work if the widespread community benefits of a market are recognized across multiple organizations. One of the major questions is who can spearhead a market, as it is generally perceived that the farming industry themselves should be in the lead. Arguably however, there are considerable limitations to an industry-lead market, and it is

suggested that a group comprising multiple organizations work together to oversee market development.

If the market is re-developed, other important aspects to consider include long term planning with clear measurable objectives, appropriate timing and seasonality, consistent and regular marketing, ensuring an adequate market size, choosing an appropriate location and exploring various market models.

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