

Proposal Report: BC Association of Farmers' Market

LFS 350

TA: Stephanie Lim

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Introduction

The goal of this project is to support the flow of farmers into BC farmers' markets by gaining a better understanding of both the farmers leaving the markets and the new entrant farmers.

As a team of students from the University of British Columbia, we will be working with key stakeholders of the BC Association of Farmers' Markets (BCAFM), which is an organization set out to help "support, develop and promote farmers' markets in British Columbia" (BC Association of Farmers' Market, 2014a).

According to Hamm and Bellow (2003), community food security exists when "all individuals in a community have access to affordable, safe, culturally appropriate, ecologically responsible and nutritionally adequate food at all times". The BCAFM recognizes the significance of achieving a food secure community and has created several initiatives as a result. For instance, one of the main initiatives of the BCAFM is the Farmers' Market Nutrition Coupon Program (FMNCP). In this program, farmers' markets partner with community organizations, who distribute coupons to low-income families and seniors enrolled in their food literacy programs. Each household can receive \$15 in coupons per week, which can be used to purchase fruits, vegetables, meat, fish, eggs, nuts, and herbs at participating BC farmers' markets. The overall benefits for the participants in the FMNCP include increased learning about healthy foods, access and affordability to healthy foods, getting to know vendors, supporting local farmers and a sense of community connection (BC Association of Farmers' Market, 2014b). In addition to fostering a food secure community, the following are a few other initiatives of the BCAFM:

- Maintain and enhance the viability of BC farmers' markets
- Educate the public to choose healthy BC grown agricultural products to ensure a secure food system, reduce carbon footprint, and to ensure the success of small-scale farming in BC into the future
- Deliver a unified industry voice for all BC farmers' markets

With 10 regions and more than 145 markets, the BCAFM has helped increase the viability of small-scale farming in BC. They continue to contribute to the access of healthy, sustainably produced food in communities across BC. Ultimately, its impact extends beyond that of farmers by contributing to the overall food system sustainability and community food security of BC residents.

Significance

The BCAFM has seen significant amounts of growth in both the number of farmers' markets and the number of customers visiting the markets, especially in the last 10 years (Connell & Hergesheimer, 2011). In response to the growth in consumer demand, many markets can benefit from recruiting additional new entrants or maintaining more existing farm vendors. In the context of our project, "new entrants" refers to those people who are entering, or have recently (in the past five years or less) entered the agrifood sector. Although market managers have expressed a desire for more primary producer vendors to participate at markets, there is no

existing quantitative data on the number of new entrants and vendors who plan to leave, nor qualitative data exploring the barriers associated with entering BC Farmers' Markets.

In order to address this knowledge gap, our team will conduct surveys aimed at both new and existing farm vendors to generate quantitative and qualitative data which will help uncover reasons for why farmers are exiting farmers' markets, why more farmers are not entering the markets, and whether there are any inequities that may constrain access to becoming a market vendor. Throughout our work, we will be creating a link between our project goals and the concept of food justice, which "seeks to ensure that the benefits and risks of where, what, and how food is grown, produced, transported, distributed, accessed and eaten are shared fairly" (Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010). We will be able to determine if there are trends related to gender or ethnicity that could indicate reduced participation of certain population groups of BC farmers. Moreover, the surveys will also allow us to determine whether age is a key factor leading to farmers exiting the farmers' market sector. According to Connell and Hergesheimer (2011), "the average age of farmers is an ongoing concern for agriculture in BC and the rest of Canada". Connell and Hergesheimer's data (2011) suggests that more than 50% of vendors are at least 50 years old, giving weight to the suggestion that market vendors may be retiring at a rate that is outpacing the level new entrants in agriculture.

Ultimately, data from our survey will be used to inform and facilitate the design of a future tool, program, or policy that will result in a greater number of primary producers participating at farmers' markets, which is significant for a variety of reasons. For one, by increasing the number of primary producers in farmers' markets, there will be a wider range of products for consumers to select from. A wider selection often attracts more customers, therefore increasing the support to small-scale farmers of locally grown produce in BC and the overall sustainability of farmers' markets. As well, more customers supporting local food movements may result in greater environmental benefits. According to the BCAFM, fresh produce sold at BC farmers' markets typically travels less than 300 km to get there, in comparison to the average North American meal which travels 2,400 km to get from field to plate (BC Association of Farmers' Market, 2014c).

Objectives

In order to aid the flow of new farmers into BC farmers' market, we have established the following objectives:

- Objective 1: Quantify the number of farmers entering and exiting the BC farmers markets
- Objective 2: Gain greater understanding of a) existing barriers for new entrants entering the farmers' markets and b) reasons existing farm vendors plan to leave the market
- Objective 3: Analyze trends from survey participant responses

Methods

In order to achieve our project objectives, our team will utilize a four-step approach. The first step consists of a literature review, where we will conduct a search on current BC farmers'

market information including registration, financial opportunities, vendor profiles, as well as information on the demographic trends of agricultural production in BC.

The process of the literature review is significant for creating a well-designed and appropriate survey, which is the second component of our approach. A draft of the survey questions will be submitted to the BCAFM by February 5th for review and feedback. The final survey construct will be submitted by February 12th, which will then be sent to all registered farm vendors in BC, as well as farmers under the membership of Young Agrarians via BCAFM communication channels. Through our survey, we will be able to achieve our first and second project objectives.

The third step will consist of data analysis. The survey response deadline is February 18th, at which point data analysis will commence. We will look for recurring themes including a) barriers that new entrants are facing, and b) why existing farmers are leaving the markets. In order to analyze the trends and achieve objective 3, we will input data into a spreadsheet using Microsoft Excel and conduct appropriate statistical analyses.

As an additional means to achieve objective 2, our team will also collect data through interviews with farmers' market managers and vendors at the BCAFM conference between March 2nd to 4th. This data will provide us with qualitative information which can either further support the data and trends from the survey responses, or provide new information that was not obtained from the survey response; both of which can enhance our understanding of existing barriers for new entrants entering the farmers' market sector and why existing vendors plan to leave the market.

Outcomes

The Land and Food System students at the University of British Columbia hope to equip the BCAFM with valuable data regarding the number of new primary producer farm entrant vendors in the past 2 years, as well as the number of anticipated exiting vendors within the next 2 years. The findings will be presented on March 26th.

Budget

Our budget is to cover the costs associated with the attendance of BCAFM Annual Conference in Victoria, where we will conduct in-person interviews. The costs include:

- Transportation (van and gas, ferry)
- Accommodations (2 hotel rooms)
- Food (\$30/day per person)
- Conference tickets

Recommendations

Gain a better understanding of the barriers and current trends regarding BC farmers' participation in farmers' markets in an attempt to help overcome the barriers and increase the number of primary producer vendors in BC farmers' markets.

References

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