

Exploring a Farmers' Market Network in New Brunswick

A summary of perspectives and recommendations

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tegan@acornorganic.org

Executive Summary

Recent decades have seen a growing interest in farmers' markets, further establishing their place as a social, cultural and economic driver in urban and rural communities across the country, and New Brunswick is no exception to this trend. While this study did not set out to determine an exact number of farmers' markets in the province, it is estimated that there are now approximately 35 markets in the province, which suggests an increase of around 35 per cent over the past five years.

About the Study

Since 2000, the Atlantic Canadian Organic Regional Network (ACORN) has been the key organization for information on organic agriculture, eating organics, and connecting all the parts together in Atlantic Canada. Farmers' markets are one of these critical parts for a number of reasons – just one being that they serve as a main marketing outlets for organic producers in the province.

The purpose of this study was not to necessarily promote the benefits of a farmers' market network, but rather:

- 1) To develop an understanding of the challenges New Brunswick farmers' markets face, as well as areas where they are currently successful;
- 2) To explore whether a provincial farmers' market network could address any of these challenges or if there could be interest from markets in forming such an entity.

To achieve this purpose, this study set out to interview as many farmers' markets and provincial farmers' market associations as possible within the prescribed time frame (January-March 2014). Eleven markets and three farmers' market associations participated in the study (see Appendix A for a full list).

About Farmers' Market Networks

With the principle that there is strength in numbers in mind, most provinces have organized to create provincial farmers' market associations. Exactly how this network is structured and how it functions varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, but all of them operate as membership-based entities. The most common benefits farmers' market associations offer their membership include:

- Increased communication between markets
- Marketing support and branding
- Advocacy
- Liability insurance at affordable rates
- Training opportunities
- Bulk purchasing power

Three case studies of farmers' market groups from across the country are provided in this report: Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia, Alberta Farmers' Market Association, and Saskatchewan Farmers' Market Cooperative.

New Brunswick Farmers' Market Challenges

Although there has been a rise in support for farmers' markets in the province, no market is without its challenges. These are most commonly related to infrastructure, growth, finances and marketing, and are described in detail in this section of the report.

New Brunswick Perspectives on a Farmers' Market Network

Overall, the idea of a provincial farmers' market network was met with interest and enthusiasm by New Brunswick farmers' markets, and not many significant concerns were raised. The greatest interest in forming a network was related to the potential to increase in communication between market managers, to share best practices and ideas. Other perceived benefits include marketing support and training opportunities. The most concern with the development of a network stemmed from the need to pay membership fees. There was some willingness to contribute financially to the development of such a group, but also reservation given that the benefits are mostly unknown at this time. Additional concerns relate to the time commitment required, possible rules and regulations coming from a higher body, and geographical challenges in representing the entire province.

Recommendations

The overall reaction to the idea of forming a provincial farmers' market network in New Brunswick suggests that there is interest in revisiting the opportunity. At the time of report completion, the Dieppe Market had taken some leadership and begun to organize an initial meeting of markets to start creating those connections between market managers. Based on the perspectives provided as part of this study, the following recommendations are given as guidance for farmers' markets in the next steps to developing a provincial farmers' market network:

- ❖ Self-organize a meeting for market managers and strive to coordinate such meetings on at least an annual, if not biannual, basis.
- ❖ Explore partnerships and/or funding opportunities to support these initial meetings.
- ❖ Engage all types of farmers' markets.
- ❖ Create a means of continuing this communication after the meeting.
- ❖ Do not rule out a formal structure and membership fees.
- ❖ Share this report with your Board of Directors, vendors and/or advisors and have a discussion about the potential for a farmers' market network in the province.

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Overview of the Farmers' Market Sector

Farmers' markets have long been a traditional marketing outlet for farmers and a gathering place for communities. Recent decades have seen a growing interest in farmers' markets, further establishing their place as a social, cultural and economic driver in urban and rural communities across the country. In fact, it is estimated that the number of farmers' markets in Canada almost doubled in between the late 1980s and 2004.¹ More recent statistics from Nova Scotia alone indicate that farmers' markets in that province have seen more than a three-fold increase since 2004.²

The increasing popularity of markets have led governments and citizens alike to recognize the significant economic contribution farmers' markets make directly and indirectly to communities. In 2009, the newly formed Farmers' Market Canada released a study on the economic impact of farmers' markets in the country. It included data from all ten provinces and found that farmers' markets generate \$1.03 billion in annual sales, creating an overall economic impact of up to \$3.09 billion.³

To date there is no economic impact data specific to New Brunswick farmers' markets, but a 2013 economic impact study conducted by Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia provides a better sense of the impact of farmers' markets in the Maritime region. Their study collected data on one "typical" summer market day and found a one-day economic impact of \$43,757.51 per market, or an estimated \$1.8 million over the year.⁴

¹ Feagan, R., D. Morris, K. Krug. Niagara Region Farmers' Markets: local food systems and sustainability considerations. *Local Environment* 9 (3), 2004.

² Crawford, Kyle & Keltie Butler. *Cultivating Community Economy: Nova Scotia Farmers' Market Economic Impact Study 2013*. 2013. Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia.

³ Farmers' Markets Canada. *The National Farmers' Market Impact Study 2009 Report*. 2009. Farmers' Markets Canada.

⁴ Crawford, Kyle & Keltie Butler. *Cultivating Community Economy: Nova Scotia Farmers' Market Economic Impact Study 2013*. 2013. Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia.

About this Study

Rationale & Purpose

Since 2000, the Atlantic Canadian Organic Regional Network (ACORN) has been the key organization for information on organic agriculture, eating organics, and connecting all the parts together in Atlantic Canada. ACORN aims to enhance the viability and growth of the Atlantic Canadian organic agricultural community through:

- Facilitating information exchange between and amongst organizations and individuals;
- Coordinating non-formal education for producers through to consumers;
- Networking with all interested parties both regionally and nationally.

The majority of New Brunswick organic farmers sell their products direct to consumers, largely at farmers' markets across the province. On behalf of its members then, ACORN is committed to supporting and strengthening farmers' markets in New Brunswick. Of course farmers' markets benefit far more than the organic sector. The value of an open network for farmers' markets in the province presents a number of possible benefits for not only markets and their vendors, but also for their host communities and economies.

That said, the purpose of this study was not to necessarily promote the benefits of a farmers' market network, but rather:

- 1) To develop an understanding of the challenges New Brunswick farmers' markets face, as well as areas where they are currently successful;
- 2) To explore whether a provincial farmers' market network could address any of these challenges or if there could be interest from markets in forming such an entity.

Scope & Methodology

To achieve this purpose, this study set out to interview as many farmers' markets and provincial farmers' market associations as possible within the prescribed time frame (January-March 2014).

It was beyond the scope of this study to compile information such as an exact number of farmers' markets in the province, although a relatively comprehensive contact list was developed in order to ensure a representative participant group. One of the challenges in determining such a number is having an agreed upon definition of a "farmers' market." Many provincial associations have established strict "Make it, bake it, grow it" policies, or requirements related to a minimum

percentage of vendor-produced goods being sold in order to be considered a farmers' market. This study did not define such criteria, though markets known to not feature farmers or much local product were not contacted for an interview.

It is estimated that there are approximately 35 markets in the province, of which eleven (31.4%) participated in this study. This participant number represents a balance of year-round markets and seasonal markets. Mostly well-established markets participated, but some newer markets were also included as part of an overall effort to gather perspectives from a diversity of markets in the province. See Appendix A for a full listing of participating markets.

Markets and individuals who agreed to be part of the study participated in interviews mostly by telephone, averaging around thirty minutes. Two markets submitted responses by email. The majority of those interviewed were market managers, though some vendors and board members were also interviewed.

Background

New Brunswick is one of only three provinces (the others being Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland & Labrador) that does not have a provincial farmers' market body. However, there have been a few efforts in the past to create such an organization. Most recently, over 2008-2009, a couple of meetings were organized by a New Brunswick producer with the support of Farmers' Market Canada. These meetings in Memramcook and Fredericton generated some interest in the idea, but there were no lasting efforts beyond the meetings.

Perspectives of a few who were involved in this process indicate that there was no progress made for several reasons. One possible issue is timing. Five years ago some markets that are now well-established were only beginning. Another is the concern that a provincial body would have potentially imposed rules and regulations that might be difficult for a market to meet (e.g. type of vendor preference is given to). Finally, the initiative coming from an out-of-province organization may have been a cause for concern, or at least may not have created the level of engagement and empowerment that would be needed to see farmers' markets organize in the province.

New Brunswick Farmers' Markets

While there is no provincial specific data to go on, it does seem that New Brunswick is no exception in the national trend of growth in farmers' markets. This study did not set out to confirm the exact number of farmers' markets in the province, but estimates that there are approximately 35 markets in New Brunswick, which would suggest an increase of around 35 per cent over the past five years.

New Brunswick's markets are relatively well-distributed around the province. The majority are seasonal with large, year-round markets operating in four urban centres: Moncton, Dieppe, Fredericton, and Saint John.

Challenges

Although there has been a rise in support for farmers' market in the province, no market is without its challenges. These are most commonly related to infrastructure, growth, finances and marketing, and are described in detail in this section. It is worth noting that of the markets involved in this study, there was none reporting challenges significant enough to warrant any major threat to the market's existence.

Infrastructure

By far the most often-cited challenge New Brunswick markets note they are facing is related to the infrastructure they have available to them. Many markets are held in old buildings in need of power supply upgrades to meet the needs of today's vendors.

Existing structures dictate customer flow, leading to circulation issues. Pair this with a high volume of market-goers, and some markets find themselves with the envious problem of not having enough space for both customers and vendors.

For some markets a total lack of infrastructure is a considerable challenge. Outdoor markets have their benefits, but weather conditions and electricity supply do present themselves as even greater obstacles.

Growth

Depending on the market, concerns related to growth are either about maintenance or active encouragement. Markets that are fortunate to be thriving still struggle to ensure that all vendors, and therefore the market as a whole, continue to be focused on improving sales and displays. The need for active encouragement of growth is most often a problem for the smaller and seasonal markets. These markets are caught in the "chicken-and-egg" dilemma of needing

to attract more customers, but needing more vendors to attract them, and vice versa.

Finances

Some markets expressed that budget surpluses are a rarity, if achieved. This financial situation limits activities such as marketing or the market's ability to offer a paid manager position, both specific needs identified by markets experiencing some financial struggle.

Marketing

A number of markets expressing a need for marketing support referenced the idea of a provincial farmers' market brand to help promote all markets through a unified campaign. Others still were interested in being able to share marketing ideas amongst market managers to gain new insights into how to better promote their market.

About Farmers' Market Networks

Farmers' markets are universally and accurately recognized as significant economic drivers and community builders, but these benefits are not simply realized with the existence of a farmers' market in a community. As with any business or initiative, a market requires considerable support, energy and dedication to fulfill its potential. There are many factors that contribute to the success or failure of a market, and these are largely circumstantial and individual. However, there are many keys to success that are achievable when all farmers' markets unite as a sector – the whole principle behind farmers' market networks is that there is strength in numbers.

With this principle in mind, most provinces (and the majority of states south of the border) have organized to create provincial farmers' market associations. Exactly how this network is structured (non-profit, for-profit, cooperative) and how it functions (volunteer or staff-led) varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, but all of them operate as membership-based entities. The benefits offered to membership range depending on the capacity of the group, but this list outlines the most common benefits farmers' market associations offer their membership:

- Increased communication between markets leading to information/idea/best practice sharing
- Marketing support and branding
- Advocacy
- Liability insurance at affordable rates
- Training opportunities
- Bulk purchasing power

In order to provide a better idea of what a farmers' market network could look like, three case studies of farmers' market groups from across the country are provided here.

Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia

Founded in 2004 as a cooperative association, Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia (FMNS) has always had an Executive Director position. This permanent staff role has no doubt led the organization to what is now a period of growth for FMNS. In addition to providing its members with intensive training opportunities and other benefits, the organization has conducted economic impact studies of farmers' markets in the province.

Capacity	Executive Director
Fee Structure	\$1.90 per vendor per week
#1 membership benefit	Training programs (for market managers, vendors, and a newly developed Market Leader training; also working on social media and customer service trainings)
Other benefits	Two annual meetings, promotional support, advocacy
#1 challenge	Lack of additional funds to increase level of work and therefore membership benefits
Other challenges	Maintaining a membership fee that balances organizational support and affordability for markets
Website	farmersmarketsnovascotia.ca

Alberta Farmers' Market Association

Alberta has quite a unique model in that the provincial Department of Agriculture has a dedicated Provincial Farmers' Market Specialist who oversees a Farmers' Market Approval Program. This program, however, is separate from the Alberta Farmers' Market Association (AFMA), though they did both form around 1994. While there is significant provincial support for farmers' markets, the need for an industry voice was recognized as a necessity for times when an advocate for farmers' markets would be needed.

Capacity	Volunteer-run; had an Executive Director from 2004-2009 and still access government funding on a project-basis occasionally
Fee Structure	\$65 per year for vendors and sliding scale for markets based on number of vendors (e.g. \$75 for 10 to 25 vendors)
#1 membership benefit	Liability insurance at a base cost of \$150/year
Other benefits	Website and phone app that promote member markets and vendors, newsletter, advocacy, affordable nutritional labelling (association owns a nutraCoster)
#1 challenge	Retaining membership with reduced organizational capacity
Website	albertamarkets.com

Saskatchewan Farmer's Market Cooperative

The Saskatchewan Farmer's Market Cooperative started in the mid-1970s, making it quite possibly one of the oldest farmers' market associations in Canada. Its volunteer Board of Directors believes the cooperative structure has been a great advantage to the organization, but does recognize the challenge that the "one member, one vote" principle raises for larger markets since they pay larger fees and do not necessarily obtain greater benefits.

Capacity	Volunteer-run
Fee Structure	\$25 per vendor per year
#1 membership benefit	Liability insurance at no extra cost
Other benefits	Advocacy, training offered at AGM, coordinates bulk buying of supplies (e.g. Bernardin jars, clam shells, etc)
#1 challenge	Filling director positions on the board
Other challenges	Keeping larger markets as members, fostering a network across a large province
Website	saskfarmersmarket.com

New Brunswick Perspectives on a Farmers' Market Network

Overall, the idea of a provincial farmers' market network was met with interest and enthusiasm by New Brunswick farmers' markets, and not many significant concerns were raised. The greatest interest in forming a network was related to the potential to increase communication between market managers, to share best practices and ideas. The most concern with the development of a market stemmed from the need to pay membership fees. There was some willingness to contribute financially to the development of such a group, but also reservation given that the benefits are mostly unknown. These perspectives and more are outlined in the following pages.

Perceived Benefits of a Network

Communication and sharing between markets

When asked about possible benefits of a New Brunswick farmers' market network, the prospect of not reinventing the wheel was quite clearly the most appealing benefit to markets. There is recognition that of course every market is unique, but that many of the day-to-day challenges and issues markets deal with are common across the board. Even markets that demonstrated little interest in any of the other potential benefits saw great merit in increasing communication between market managers. This communication was envisioned as once or twice annual meetings, which would build relationships and encourage more outreach and communication between meetings, as needed.

Marketing

Smaller and newer markets were keen to learn from older markets how to develop a farmers' market culture across the entire province to see markets be successful regardless of the region in which they are located. Beyond sharing best practices in marketing and promotion, the idea of a provincial farmers' market campaign was recognized as one possible way to achieve this scale of marketing that would be a benefit to all markets. Such a campaign could include a marketing kit featuring promotional pieces such as a poster with unified New Brunswick farmers' market branding with space for individual market details.

Training

With such excellent training being offered by a bordering farmers' market association (Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia), some markets were aware of what was possible and saw that forming some sort of provincial body may make similar training an option in New Brunswick. Whether or not a formal association would be required for such training to be delivered was a point of difference among some markets, but the benefit of training for market managers and vendors alike was definitely noted.

Other Benefits

Advocacy and insurance are two of the more common benefits provincial farmers' market associations provide their members that did not figure prominently in the interviews, though they were each raised once by different markets as potential positive outcomes of a farmers' market network.

Concerns with a Network

Fees

As the discussion of a farmers' market network is only in the beginnings of a conceptual stage, it was a challenge for interviewees to answer questions about

willingness to pay membership fees since the value that would be offered is so hypothetical. However, it was generally agreed that the most significant concern related to a fee was that it be reflective of the value provided. The sliding scale approach taken by Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia was most often provided as an example since it is a Maritime association and therefore most participants would potentially be familiar with it. This approach was perhaps detrimental to the idea of a fee since FMNS is a well-established organization offering high-value training and promotional support and charges fees that reflect that reality. The sliding scale structure was expressed as a potential barrier for some of the larger markets, although there was still some willingness to pay – so long as the fee was reflective of the value markets felt they would receive.

Time commitment

With uncertainty around what markets might be willing to pay, the likelihood that efforts will be voluntary is more of a certainty, at least at this stage. This route increases the time required to develop and maintain the network, which is of concern with market managers who typically already have such limited schedules. While a concern, many who raised the issue of time acknowledged that it could be worth it for the benefits the network could provide.

Rules and regulations

This concern relates to the possibility that a provincial farmers' market network would create rules and regulations that markets in the province would have to follow, and that these might not take individual by-laws or realities into consideration. Only one market expressed this as a concern, which is interesting to note given that in the past it was believed that this was more of a significant issue.

Geography

New Brunswick is certainly not the largest province in Canada, but there is still vast territory to cover and significant distances to travel between markets. This factor will have to be taken into account in planning meetings, with a rotation of central locations as the best means to address this concern.

Recommendations

The overall reaction to the idea of forming a provincial farmers' market network in New Brunswick suggests that there is interest in revisiting the opportunity. With understanding that the creation of a formal network with a fee structure takes considerable time, the approach that the majority of markets seem most interested in is to develop an informal, grassroots network for market managers and by market managers. At the time of report completion, the Dieppe Market

had taken some leadership and begun to organize an initial meeting of markets to start creating those connections between market managers.

Below is a list of recommended next steps for farmers' markets to take in developing a provincial network to strengthen farmers' markets in New Brunswick.

- ❖ *Self-organize a meeting for market managers and strive to coordinate such meetings on at least an annual, if not biannual, basis.*

This study found that there is considerable interest among market managers in building a communication network by which they can share best practices and learn from one another. A face-to-face meeting is the first step in building this communication network, and facilitating discussions for further exploration of farmers' market network development. Most market buildings would be suitable venues to host such a meeting, though location centrality should be considered. A preliminary meeting should be held within the next six months, so as to gain on any potential momentum generated as a result of this report.

- ❖ *Explore partnerships and/or funding opportunities to support these initial meetings.*

While it would be wise to keep costs as low as possible, it would be helpful to have some support in the beginning, especially to ensure maximum participation by markets across the province. There may be willingness and ability for each market to assume travel costs for its manager for the day of the meeting, but the option of travel subsidies may be the needed and/or appreciated support to ensure that any market that wishes to participate is able to attend. Food, host market honourarium, and speakers are also potential costs to consider. Partnering with an existing association or a municipality would allow access to provincial monies that could help cover these costs.

- ❖ *Engage all types of farmers' markets.*

In order to determine exactly what a network might look like for farmers' markets in New Brunswick, all markets that identify as farmers' markets - year-round or seasonal, new or established, large or small, 40% farmers or 20% farmers, outdoor or indoor - should be invited to attend. Whether the group decides to establish criteria that will need to be met to be considered a farmers' market is for the group to decide, but all markets that stand to benefit from a possible provincial network should have a say in its development.

This study was limited in the number of farmers' markets it could interview, but over the process of reaching out to markets across the province, ACORN's farmers' market contact list has been updated and is accessible by searching "NB" and "Farmers' markets" on ACORN's Organic Directory at this link: acornorganic.org/resources/organicdirectory.

❖ *Create a means of continuing this communication after the meeting.*

There are plenty of free and accessible digital communication services (Facebook, Google Groups, etc.) that would not require too much time for a volunteer or two to create and oversee. Such a platform would enable market managers to easily reach out to all other market managers without having to wait for the next meeting or to make a number of phone calls before having insight into how to deal with a particular issue.

❖ *Do not rule out a formal structure and membership fees.*

It is true that before a fee can be charged there needs to be value that merits that fee. Voluntary efforts to organize communications and meetings should not be discounted in this calculation. An informal, grassroots network for New Brunswick farmers' markets is most certainly achievable and quite desirable, but the reality is that leadership of at least one market and some financial resources are required to take such an initiative forward. While registering as an official organization and creating a fee structure does require quite a time commitment, it does provide a financial base for the group to draw from and also opens the door to funding opportunities. Without these supports, project possibilities such as New Brunswick farmers' market branding and promotions, training programs, etc. will be very difficult to coordinate. While it may be years away from being a possibility, the capacity that a part-time staff could lend to the organization should be discussed.

❖ *Share this report with your Board of Directors, vendors and/or advisors and have a discussion about the potential for a farmers' market network in the province.*

The main purpose of this study has been to initiate dialogue and ACORN does not wish for this conversation to stop with the completion of this report – this is only the beginning!

References

Crawford, Kyle & Keltie Butler. *Cultivating Community Economy: Nova Scotia Farmers' Market Economic Impact Study 2013*. 2013. Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia.

Farmers' Markets Canada. *The National Farmers' Market Impact Study 2009 Report*. 2009. Farmers' Markets Canada.

Feagan, R., D. Morris, K. Krug. Niagara Region Farmers' Markets: local food systems and sustainability considerations. *Local Environment* 9 (3), 2004.

Resources

Farmers' Market Coalition ~ farmersmarketcoalition.org

This US-based national farmers' market network has a whole host of resources valuable to Canadian markets: A farmer's market list-serve, Market Manager FAQ, resource library, and more.

Farmers' Markets Nova Scotia ~ farmersmarketsnovascotia.ca/for-members

The association's Resources section features a good selection of resources for markets. Many are password protected for their membership, but some are freely accessible, including topics such as social media, preventative health care model, and an advice column.

BC Association of Farmers' Markets ~ bcfarmersmarket.org/resources

This website includes access to a comprehensive range of farmers' market resources, including tools and learning modules for board governance, marketing, and more.

North American Farmers' Direct Marketing Association ~ farmersinspired.com

Although largely American, this site features some helpful farmers' market resources.

ACORN Organic Directory ~ acornorganic.org/resources/organicdirectory

In addition to featuring all organic producers and processors in Atlantic Canada, ACORN's Organic Directory also lists all farmers' markets. You can search for updated New Brunswick contacts by selecting "NB" and "Farmers' markets."

Appendix A: List of participants

Thanks to all those who offered their time and thoughts for this study.

Alberta Farmers' Market Association
Bouctouche Farmers' Market
Boyce Farmers' Market
Marché Dieppe Market
Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia
Marché Moncton Market
Museum Market
New Brunswick Department of Agriculture, Aquaculture & Fisheries
Newcastle Market
Queen's Square Farmers' Market
Rowena Power
St Andrews Farmers' Market
Sackville Farmers' Market
Saskatchewan Farmer's Market Coop
Sussex Farmers' Market
Woodstock Market