The Farmers Market Coalition is a nonprofit that creates educational resources, provides networking opportunities and serves as a voice in federal policy issues for farmers markets nationwide.
Economic / Ecological / Human / Community

There are more than 8,000 farmers markets in the U.S. bringing significant environmental, social, economic and health benefits to their communities, but these impacts aren’t being documented in any significant way.
The lack of consistent, longitudinal data on farmers markets makes it difficult for managers to effectively promote and grow their markets, and also prevents policy makers from being able to properly support their good work.
Farmers Market Metrics is an online tool that will give market managers the power to collect and communicate data, while also aggregating that information, eventually providing the first comparable dataset on farmers markets across the country.
In order for market managers to actually use the tool, it has to be worth their very limited and often volunteer time. So to incentivize its use, Market Metrics will automatically generate a short summary report that can be used to both manage the market internally, and to promote publically the market’s impact.
Will market managers want the summary reports?

Will they be useful in practice?

This was the assumption we tested during our prototyping period – that market managers would love to have a succinct, visually engaging, one-page report on their market, and would use it to better communicate with their vendors, customers and stakeholders.
To test our theory, we selected a set of 8 markets from different regions, with varying economic, social, environmental and health missions. All of the markets had collected some data during their 2013 season, but hadn’t analyzed or shared it.
We worked with managers, food policy analysts, and public health researchers to choose a set of 12 metrics out of our original list of 80, that were both easy for market managers to collect, and of particular interest to customers, city officials, funders and community partners.
We then created one-page summaries that clearly displayed that data and very briefly highlighted why that particular information was important. For example: The fact that 51% of this market’s vendors were minorities showed that the market was serving as an important entry point for a specific group of small-businesses and entrepreneurs.
The market managers loved the summaries, but wanted the data to be distilled even further into simple, clear visuals for promotional materials. So we chose four of the data points best suited for social media, and created small graphics in addition to the summaries.
Another lesson learned was the need for guidance on **who might be interested in the data**, **what type of messaging to use**, and **how to get it out there**. So we created a communication plan for managers, with press release templates and talking points organized by the relevant data point and audience.
Once the markets received what had now turned into a full package of materials, they shared them widely. The data was: presented at board meetings; included in newsletters & bulletins; printed on t-shirts; laminated and displayed on market tents; used as an annual report; and sent to city officials, and potential business sponsors.
“The image you posted with how much income the market helps generate for vendors is fabulous and we would love to do something similar down here at our market.”

Eme Crawford, Soda City Farmers Market, NC

The managers got a lot of great feedback from their communities, and were contacted by other managers in their states, wondering how they had gotten the data and created the reports.
FMC also received a significant number of inquiries from market managers across the country who learned of the project and wanted to be included. The demand for this product was made clear throughout the process.
I visited Annick, the President of Southwest Community Farmers Market in Miami, who after seeing the Metrics Summaries form other markets, showed me that she had **started collecting data on her own market for the first time.**
It’s too early to see if the reports will result in increased funding opportunities, or increased sability in the market organizations, but the mangers were overwhelmingly pleased, and the participants stated that they wanted to continue working with us on the project.
One of the other main things we learned was that the reports will need much more flexible when it comes to customization. The grassroots nature of farmers markets allows them to respond their communities unique needs, with very little staffing and mostly volunteer support. Those stories (how many volunteer hours, number of staff, etc.) also need to be told through the data.
Research in progress:

(1) Target: Which data points to use?
(2) Method: How should it be collected?
(3) Analysis: What’s it telling us?

Since we last met in Pittsburgh, FMC has been working with Dr. Alfonso Morales at the University of Wisconsin on a three-year research project to (1) Look further into which metrics markets should be collecting  (2) Find the most effective ways to collect the data, and (3) Understand what each metric is actually telling us about the market’s work.
Staff from the **Center for Disease Control** has had input into the project, helping to create and analyze metrics. The CDC is interested in using metrics to understand how all local food efforts are impacting the physical health of Americans.
Next steps include continuing with the research behind the metrics, and developing the actual report generation tool. We have begun building the market metrics database through the Farmers Market Coalition website, and will be expanding the testing group to about 40 markets this summer.