

The Market Profile: a history

Integral to the functionality of Farmers Market Metrics is the Market Profile, the evolution of which traces back well over a decade. The Market Profile collects relatively static structural characteristics of a market organization in order to provide context for interpreting the metrics each market is measuring.

Background of the tool

Researchers and practitioners alike have been working to distill the many organizational structures, policies and services offered by farmers markets into a set of common or comparable characteristics. Dr. Alfonso Morales analyzed the structural components of Chicago's Maxwell Street Market in 1995 (Morales, Balkin and Persky, 1995), and Oregon State University performed structural research in "Analyzing Three Farmers markets in Albany and Corvallis Oregon," in 1998 (Lev & Stephenson, 1998). This work was expanded a decade later in Stephenson's 2008 book Farmers' Markets: Success, Failure, and Management Ecology, which clustered markets based on the size of their regular vendor base and then identified how "good" markets shared characteristics in the areas of "atmosphere, product and community." The nonprofit Project for Public Spaces also explored public market structures, and eventually developed a place making audit, which identified and qualified physical assets of healthy living activities.

The New Orleans-based farmers market organization, Market Umbrella, began field-testing its economic survey tool, the Sticky Economy Evaluation Device (SEED) in 2001, and using it in tandem with a contextual component they called the Market Portrait. The Market Portrait was embedded within the SEED report but also designed to stand on its own as a printable snapshot of what Market Umbrella called the 4Ps: a market's **place, procedures, people** and **products**. The purpose was to be able to compare a market's structure to other markets while also recognizing the uniqueness of the community in which a market operates. In other words, for Market Umbrella, it was not enough to only know the dollar amount of sales from when the opening bell rings until the last truck drives away, but also necessary to also understand the rules, traditions and expectations of that market community in order to measure its success.

Market Umbrella's Market Portrait was tested by market managers: Australian market organizers sat down with Deputy Director Darlene Wolnik at their 2009 national conference to complete the form and provide feedback on its usability. Additionally, markets across Louisiana and Mississippi volunteered time in 2007 and 2008 to complete a Portrait with markets across the U.S. joining the field-testing in later stages. By 2010, SEED and the Market Portrait had been used by more than 200 account holders, and in 2015 are still offered without cost to markets and civic leaders as a tool to present a multi-layered portrait of a public market.

In 2010, the Center for Disease Control's (CDC) Communities Putting Prevention to Work Program (CPPW) grant funded the Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC) in order to provide technical assistance to CPPW grantees as they sought to implement community-based healthy food interventions. This marked the beginning of a technical assistance collaboration between CFSC and Farmers Market Coalition, which provided support specifically to city and county public health agencies that had chosen to include farmers markets in their CDC-funded projects. In the course of this process, FMC, with the assistance of consultants Suzanne Briggs and Darlene Wolnik, developed "Learning Circles" comprised of these grantees in order to identify common characteristics, struggles, and successes. Acknowledging that Market Umbrella's Market Portrait was a valuable but underutilized resource in the eventual development of comprehensive market typologies, the FMC team developed a modified version, calling it a "Profile." A draft of this profile was presented during an FMC "SNAP/EBT Short Course" hosted at the

national CFSC Conference in November 2011, receiving valuable input from participants as well as the members of the CPPW Learning Circles. The profile, like the Portrait, consisted of general organizational data that require an hour or less to gather by the market manager or board member, and did not duplicate other national surveys like the USDA Farmers Market Survey.

During 2014 and early 2015, the AFRI project team (Alfonso Morales, Sara Padilla, Darlene Wolnik, Jennifer Cheek, Stacy Miller, Lauren Suerth, and Youn Hee Jeong) engaged in series of dialogues to determine which questions were most relevant and appropriate to include for this project. Upon reflection, the team modified the Profile tool yet again in order to better address the AFRI project's goals, which include understanding the barriers and challenges markets face both as data collectors and as data users. In addition to gathering relatively static demographic information about the market, the Profile questions reflect the following themes: Management, Vendors, Accessibility, Community Relations, and Market Promotion. Each theme represents an important part of market operations and relationships.

The nine markets recruited to participate in the AFRI data collection project will test this version of the Profile in 2015 and 2016 to allow the team to further refine the tool. Market management will be asked to complete the Profile by entering information into an online portal hosted by the Farmers Market Coalition. While the Profile is not intended to be an exhaustive mechanism for collecting information, it is an important part of a process many markets find useful, data collection, analysis and reflection, and further reporting and relationship building. Thus, market managers will learn how to use the data gathered to describe their markets, assess their needs and progress toward their goals, and advance relationships in their communities. Additionally, as the number of markets using the Profile grows, the resulting data will be of interest in shaping new knowledge and policy making on marketplaces.

The Profile will serve many purposes: by outlining the structural framework of those markets, we will increase the quality of the metrics themselves; the Profile will allow the market's capacity to be understood more fully and be gauged in regard to their collected projects or larger impacts within their community. The Profile will also cross-reference market profile characteristics with metric data, so that an analysis might reveal correlations between markets that operate at certain days, times, or scales and may assist with creating market typology that can be used by partner organizations and funders to better understand how to support markets.

Because some market-hosting organizations wear multiple hats with varied missions, the Profile would gather market-level, not organization-level data, (so that a Wednesday market hosted by XYZ organization might have a separate profile from a Saturday XYZ market); however it seems important to note here that Farmers Market Metrics will allow the metrics themselves to be aggregated across market locations.

In the future, the Farmers Market Metrics' Market Profile instrument may work in serving a primary role as the go-to national market database containing information both historic and dynamic. This database may help stakeholders understand the variety of approaches there are to build and expand successful marketplaces for thousands of farmers, eaters, and neighbors.