

Ensuring Public Trust in Direct Farm Sales

Why This Project?

Farmers market customers trust that they are buying directly from the farm that grew or raised and even processed the products displayed before them on market day. This trust is a powerful motivation and sets direct sales apart from other market channels. Any time integrity of a farmer or farmers market is challenged, it hurts all farmers and markets, including the vast majority who are honest. In California and a few other states, negative media has asserted that farmers are “not farmers” and vendors are making false claims about their products.

Example of Negative Media:

L.A. Farmers Markets Exposed

Often, produce sold at stalls isn't organic, grown by small farms – or even spray-free

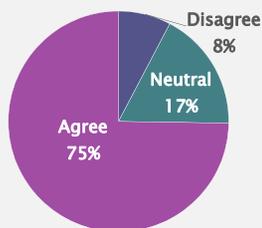
By Beth Barrett
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While there is no evidence that misrepresenting products is a problem at Washington farmers markets, there is strong interest from farmers and market managers to research the feasibility of a farm “verification” program.

Farmers Want to Ensure Market Integrity

In a 2012 survey of farmers market vendors, 75% of farmers agreed that:

“There should be a way to verify that all farm vendors at WA farmers markets are farmers.”



N = 507
Survey of 1,250 farmers market vendors conducted by WSU and the Farmers Market Action Team.

Project Approach

- Form an Advisory Team of farmers, farmers market managers, Washington State Department of Agriculture, and Washington State Farmers Market Association.
- Research existing farmers market certification programs used by individual market associations and other states.
- Develop recommendations for how a “farm verification” program might work in Washington.
- Get feedback from farmers, market managers, and other stakeholders.



Farm Direct Sales at the Downtown Farmers Market, Walla Walla

FM Certification Strategies in the US



Inspection Program at Farmers Market Org.

Ex: **Greenmarket** in New York City; ~240 farmers and over 50 FMs.

PRO: In-house inspection, desk and market audits; flexible review process for modifying rules; branding program. Advocate for farmers.

CON: Expensive for market; challenge for market staff to have ag knowledge needed.



Independent, 3rd Party Certification Required

Ex: **Greencity Market** in Chicago; requires farmers to be certified by one of eight independent certifiers.

PRO: Easier to manage for market. Branding larger than any one FM.
CON: Not all certifiers have same level of rigor; passes on burden to producer.



State Legislation

Ex: **California Certified Farmers Market Program:** >700 FMs and 2,200 farmers.

PRO: One set of standards for entire state. Authority of the state is behind the program. Public process.

CON: Hard to change. Working across jurisdictions can be challenging.

Limited capacity for reinforcement. Limited to specialty crop producers.



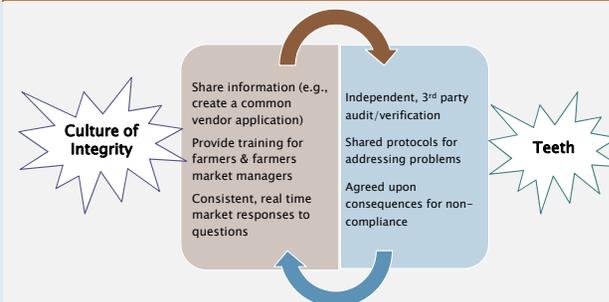
Voluntary Program

Ex: **Fulton Street Farmers Market** in Grand Rapids, MI.

PRO: Flexibility for producers; relatively inexpensive to manage; clear rules about signage at market.

CON: Relies on self-claims after initial inspection. Market staff shoulders inspection and management. Signage only relevant to one market.

Proposed Ideas



Potential Benefits

- ✓ Clear and fair standards for all farmers and markets
- ✓ Professionalization of farmers markets
- ✓ Deterrence against possible fraud or misrepresentation
- ✓ More efficient and productive farm visits
- ✓ Consistent response to questions and enforcement
- ✓ Marketing distinction for farmers and farmers markets
- ✓ Builds confidence and reduces risk of negative media that hurts public trust

What Will Work Best for Washington State?

Legal
Fair
Signage?
Funding?
Objective
Information
Training
Customers
Technology?

Project Advisory Team



Wade Bennett (farmer), Zack Cook (Pike Place), Dan Coyne (WSDA), Chris Curtis (Neighborhood FM Alliance), Karen Kinney (WSFMA), Judy Kirkhuff (Seattle FM Association), Steve Phillips (farmer), Jason Salvo (farmer), Darrell Westover (farmer); Colleen Donovan (coordinator)

Please let one of us know if you are interested in helping.

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WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

Small Farms Program

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