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## **Farmers Markets Need Support to Collect More Data**

December 18, 2018 - Collecting data at farmers markets is not a new endeavor. But until recently, the data was largely collected and used by researchers, often to understand the role farmers markets play in the broader food system. Over the last seven years, the [Farmers Market Coalition](#) (FMC) - a national nonprofit dedicated to strengthening farmers markets - has partnered with research institutions and market organizations to better understand how market organizations have begun to collect and use data.

While until recently it was rare for market organizations to participate in the collection of their own market-level data, more and more markets have reached out to FMC over the last decade for data collection technical assistance. In 2011, the organization began to identify common characteristics and impacts of market programs, and realized more research into evaluation resources and tools that could be used easily by understaffed market operators was needed.

In a [new article](#) published in the *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development* (JAFSCD), FMC outlines the industry need behind creating the [Farmers Market Metrics](#) (Metrics) program, and a timeline of the steps and partnerships that led to the creation of the tool, as well as best practices uncovered during its development.

Key recommendations include:

- Create assigned roles for the market's data collection team, and choose training materials that set expectations for seasonal staff, volunteers, and interns to maximize time and efficiency.
- Prioritize staff support to allow market leaders more time to oversee data collection.
- Gain vendors' trust in the program for sharing and storing sensitive data.
- Patience and support from funders and network leaders for each market's level of capacity and comfort with data collection.
- More assistance from funders and network leaders in helping markets select metrics to collect, as well as advancing data collection training for market staff.
- The use of tools such as the USDA's Local Foods Economic Toolkit, coupled with consistent support from academic partners, will encourage market leaders to delve more deeply into economic data and to feel more confident sharing results.

"FMC's efforts to craft a suitable set of resources and a data management system for high-functioning but low-capacity market organizations has helped many stakeholders

understand and share the many positive impacts their partner markets are making,” said FMC Senior Advisor and article author Darlene Wolnik. “But our analysis concludes that there is still foundational work to be done by those stakeholders to aid these organizations in collecting and using data.”

Wolnik continued, “The good news is that market-level data collection yields important information that markets can use to improve operations, share with researchers, communicate impacts to stakeholders, advocate for and promote the vendors and more.”

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*The Farmers Market Coalition (FMC) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to strengthening farmers markets for the benefit of farmers, consumers, and communities. For more information about the Farmers Market Coalition, visit [www.farmersmarketcoalition.org](http://www.farmersmarketcoalition.org)*