

SHORT TERM

Improve Internal Operations

- › Clarify board duties
- › Identify staff needs
- › Update financial systems

Diversify Funding Sources

- › Minimize fundraising competition with partners

Grow Membership Engagement

- › Increase membership numbers
- › Stimulate market engagement with FMC programs and resources

Professionalize FM Industry

- › Build culture of Data collection
- › Influence Technology development
- › Collaborate with State associations

Increase the Visibility of FMs

- › Highlight market operators
- › Combat abuse of farmers market terminology

Prepare for 2023 Farm Bill

- › Invest in partnerships for advocacy initiatives and collaboration

Align Activities and Mission

- › Remain transparent and accountable to members

MID TERM

LONG TERM



**Farmers Market Coalition
Five Year Strategic Plan**

Top Level Goals & Strategies
January 2020

Farmers Market Coalition Five Year Strategic Plan Summary

January 2020



A Message from the Executive Director

Since the Farmers Market Coalition was founded in 2007, it has served as a resource and a guide to farmers markets across the United States. With a robust membership spanning all 50 states, FMC has grown to be the only national organization advocating for and supporting the needs of farmers markets. Within the sector, FMC is admired for our heart and respected for our expertise, yet we have faced challenges as well, both for the field of farmers markets and for the organization. For these reasons, the FMC board tasked me with developing a plan to guide the organization into the next phase in its growth. This document is a summary of our full, 31 page plan, intended to highlight the key concepts that are likely to be of interest to external stakeholders. For those interested in reading the full plan, it can be found on our [website \(LINK\)](#).

I am tremendously proud of how well we have delivered on our goals and the detailed plan we have created. I am grateful to the staff, board, members, and other stakeholders for their level of engagement paid in this process. That so many people care so deeply about this organization is a testament to the outstanding work it has done and the lives it has impacted over its relatively short lifespan.

A special thanks goes out to FMC board members who served on our Strategic Planning Task Force: **Anupama Joshi, Allen Moy, Hugo Mogollon, Ross Dakin, and Sagdrina Jalal.**

And the specialist of thanks goes to Nancy Mendrala who has provided invaluable guidance and support through every step in this process. Her probing questions helped ensure that the final plan was one that was carefully considered and intentionally decided and our regular check-ins held me accountable for making progress each week. Without Nancy we would not have this plan at this time. Thank you Nancy.

We have laid out an ambitious set of goals for ourselves to achieve over the next five years. This reflects the fact that there are many needs within the farmers market sector and many opportunities for FMC. As we move into implementation, it will be vital that we regularly review our progress towards our goals and that we share our successes (and failures) with our members and external stakeholders in order to remain transparent and accountable. We hope that those of you reading will continue to engage with us about this plan and our work as it is as much for you as it is for us.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ben Feldman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Ben Feldman
Executive Director
Farmers Market Coalition

Background

The strategic planning process is intended to identify FMC's core functions, set key goals in relation to those functions, outline strategies to achieve those goals, and draft implementation tactics, resulting in a plan for the organization's next five years. Simultaneously, the process itself facilitated organizational cohesion among the board and staff; improved organization-wide clarity on FMC purpose, representation, and role; and increased transparency and inclusion with members and other stakeholders.

Who are we?

FMC was founded by a cohort of market operators from across the U.S. with ongoing support from USDA and with national partners such as Projects for Public Spaces (PPS) and The Wallace Center at Winrock. Originally loosely organized as the Farmers Market Consortium in 2005, the entity was formally incorporated as Farmers Market Coalition in 2007. Although much has changed since then, FMC's mission remains: "to strengthen farmers markets for the benefit of farmers, consumers, and communities."

Stakeholders responses revealed that FMC is a trusted, valued and respected organization that occupies a unique niche in the field. While other entities may touch on parts of our work, none focuses on the specific needs of farmers market operators at the national level.

Historically, FMC has often tried to serve all farmers market stakeholders (markets, farmers, consumers, etc.) equally without identifying our primary stakeholder. The feedback we received consistently supported the idea that FMC's primary stakeholder is the farmers market operator — while farmers markets exist to benefit farmers, consumers, and communities, FMC's role is to support the individuals and organizations that do the work to plan, host, and manage farmers markets.

What is a farmers market? Why farmers markets?

As part of this process, the question of what it means to be a farmers market and why we care about them surfaced time and again. While additional discussion of these questions is presented in the full plan, it is worth noting that historically FMC has shied away from creating a strict definition for farmers markets, preferring to allow communities to create their own definitions based on their individual needs. While strict definitions may not be appropriate, FMC can and should do more to put forward our perspective on what constitutes a farmers market, specifically focusing in on the idea that "farmers market consists principally of farms selling directly to the public products that the farms have produced."

Furthermore, farmers markets do not exist simply as an end in and of themselves; they are also a tool. Markets function as an effective tool to increase farmer revenue, to support sustainable agriculture practitioners, to increase fresh food access, to grow and sustain small businesses, and to bring communities together. We support farmers markets for the wide range of benefits that they provide and the values upon which they are based. FMC's work should help to ensure that farmers markets are achieving these benefits and supporting these values, offer ways for markets to demonstrate their success, and share those successes with decisionmakers.

Core FMC Functions

The strategic planning process also clarified two main categories into which the bulk of FMC's work falls:

1. **Supporting market operators ability to do their work more effectively** such as training, technical assistance, resource development, and efforts to professionalize the industry
2. **Providing a voice for market operators to external stakeholders and decision-makers** such as through federal policy advocacy, consumer education, and promotion of farmers markets.

Supporting Farmers Market Operators

Farmers market operators occupy a unique and often overlooked position within the food system. Farmers markets are “trendy” in popular culture, however there is a significant gulf between that view and public understanding of and therefore support for the operational needs of markets. While farmers markets are often celebrated for the services that they provide to farmers, shoppers, and communities, the pivotal role that operators play in ensuring the success of the market is regularly left unrecognized.

As the only national organization dedicated to supporting and strengthening farmers markets, it is vital that FMC continues to provide resources, training, and technical assistance to farmers market operators and managers, while acknowledging and accounting for their variety in size, scope, mission, and capacity.

Providing a Voice for Farmer Markets Operators

The other main role of FMC identified by stakeholders is to provide a unifying voice for farmers markets. Whether in terms of advancing the policy landscape, educating and marketing to potential consumers, or communicating within the industry about important issues, there is a significant opportunity for FMC to embrace the role as a national leader and voice for the farmers market industry.

Top Level Goals of Five Year Plan:

With all of the above in mind, we have identified seven top level goals which will guide and define our work over the next five years. The full FMC Strategic Plan provides additional detail, including sub-goals and the strategies that we will use to achieve these goals.

1. *Improve the internal functions of the organization in order to more effectively and efficiently deliver on FMC's mission. [Short Term Goal]*

To advance the core mission and achieve key goals, it is essential that FMC's operational foundation reflects and supports organizational priorities. The strategic planning process included a critical examination of the structure and function of both the board and daily operations, identifying strengths and weaknesses and exploring ways to improve.

Areas of focus include:

- › Clarification of board duties and protocols to better support FMC's vision, goals, and development;
- › Identification of staff needs, opportunities, and support to be most effective and engaged in their roles;
- › Improvements to financial systems tracking and reporting procedures.

2. *Diversify sources of funding, increase unrestricted income, and develop sustainable funding source in order to increase the long term financial stability of the organization. [Mid Term Goal]*

The need to diversify revenue sources is driven by two important factors:

- › The expectation that membership dues remain a limited source of income in order to keep membership accessible to as many markets as possible, and
- › A historic reliance on a single large source of government funding.

FMC will pursue a fundraising strategy that minimizes direct competition with market organizations, prioritizes partnerships with members and state associations, and broadens the overall funding pool available to farmers markets. Untapped opportunities such as fee for service work, lead generation referral, major individual donations, and corporate sponsorship are main strategic focuses.

3. Increase the number and quality of engagement of farmers market operators utilizing FMC programs and initiatives. [Mid Term Goal]

Increasing FMC's membership numbers allows us to necessarily be more effective as an organization by increasing our reach, resources, and training opportunities to more markets. As a voice for markets, larger membership numbers lend power to FMC's advocacy and partnership initiatives. FMC will seek to increase membership numbers through better service including improved membership systems, updated and well-promoted member benefits, and close work with the need of state associations.

4. Support professionalization of farmers market operators and state farmers market associations through training, technical assistance, resource development, data collection and research. [Mid Term Goal]

The need for training, direct support, and resource development for farmers market managers is clear. While some states have robust training programs for market managers, others lack such programs entirely and no consistent standard exists nationally. Further, markets often lack the internal resources or know how to address challenges, particularly ones that have unique impacts on the farmers market sector but are rooted in larger and more complex issues. Our stakeholders view FMC as experts in the field, and expect our continued guidance through developing resources and toolkits, providing technical assistance to markets, and assisting them in developing their individual and organizational capacity.

Areas of focus include:

› **Data Collection**

FMC has been on the forefront of promoting and facilitating the culture of data collection at farmers markets and while tremendous progress has been made over the last five years, there are still major gaps in data about the industry and a need for a culture of data collection within the market industry. Recently, FMC's primary focus has been the Farmers Market Metrics Program, however there is an opportunity for additional contributions to the field in terms of research, data collection, evaluation and reporting on farmers markets.

› **Technology**

Technology is of particular interest among FMC stakeholders. Farmers market operators interact with technology that falls into four main categories: market management software, SNAP and Credit/Debit processing technology, data collection technology, and technology used for promotion or education. At present, the unique needs of the industry are only partly met as market operators typically lack the resources to develop custom applications and technology companies often lack a basic understanding of the farmers market sector. Experience with data collection and SNAP processing, as well as national scope, positions FMC well to engage with existing technology providers to improve the technology available to market operators.

› **State Farmers Market Associations**

Since FMC's founding a wide diversity of state farmers market associations have emerged and many struggle with accessing sufficient resources and developing capacity. It will be necessary for us to engage productively with state associations to cultivate collaboration, avoid competition for funding, and provide ongoing support for capacity building.

5. Increase the visibility of farmers markets, and the central role of market operators in ensuring farmers market success. [Mid Term Goal]

Stakeholders believe it is important that FMC has a role in tracking and providing perspective on national trends and the state of the industry including:

- › Highlighting the critical and often overlooked role farmers market managers play in the alternative food system, including the success of consumer facing food access and health programs, as well as farmer support programs.
- › Efforts to address the dilution of farmers market terminology by those outside the sector.

6. Build relationships and develop capacity to ensure that FMC is prepared advocate for the needs of our membership in the 2023 farm bill. [Long Term Goal]

[Long Term Goal]

In the lead up to the 2018 Farm Bill, FMC made its heaviest investment in policy advocacy and has had some recent policy successes regarding WIC. But to achieve ongoing, sustained success, FMC will need to build stronger relationships with other policy organizations, federal agencies, and elected officials. We will also need to build champions from within the movement who are trained, comfortable, and prepared to engage with elected leaders. In particular, FMC will need to plan to build the capacity and relationships to ensure policy success in the next farm bill.

7. Align FMC's activities and funding more precisely to its core mission, offering more transparency and clarity to members and stakeholders. [Long Term Goal]

[Long Term Goal]

A challenge for non-profits is the constant need for fundraising which can lead to organizations contorting their activities to meet the requirements of funders, limiting effectiveness and often leading to mission creep. This strategic planning process has been an important opportunity to reorient FMC around our mission and identify funding opportunities that fit with our core mission. Over the next 5 years, it will be necessary to remain focused in order to retain this alignment. Our main means of keeping this focus will be to increase transparency and regular communication with members and stakeholders who will help hold FMC accountable and on mission.