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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### University of Wisconsin and Farmers Market Coalition Awarded USDA AFRI Grant to Grow Customer Base at Farmers Markets

January 16, 2024 - The [Farmers Market Coalition](#) (FMC), in partnership with the University of Wisconsin-Madison, is excited to announce an [award](#) from the USDA Agricultural and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) grant program to strengthen the capacity for farmers markets to attract new customers. A competitive agriculture science grant within the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), AFRI grantees aim to improve rural economies, nutrition, and agriculture, with a particular focus on benefits to small and mid-sized farms.

The [project](#) includes a national survey to identify current and potential farmers market consumers with an emphasis on individuals underrepresented at farmers markets. From those findings, messaging strategies will be tested on social media through partnerships with diverse farmers markets. The project will then create and distribute free resources markets operators can use to publicize their market within these audience segments.

“We are thrilled to conduct the first national survey about farmers market participation in 20 years. Our results will inform more effective strategies to promote farmers markets,” said Bret Shaw, principal investigator of the grant and Professor with the Division of Extension and Department of Life Sciences Communication at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. “For example, the reasons why people go to farmers markets – and the reasons why they may not – may differ in urban versus rural settings. By understanding the needs of different communities, we can communicate more effectively about the value of farmers markets in ways that resonate most with them.”

In addition to FMC, the University of Wisconsin has also partnered with state farmers market leaders in Alaska, Colorado, Illinois, Minnesota, Vermont, and Wisconsin. Selected farmers markets from those six states will test the data-driven messaging that results from this comprehensive survey. Dr. Laura Witzling, research consultant for the Farmers Market Coalition, will also serve as a team leader, along with Darlene Wolnik, Senior Project Manager at FMC.

“FMC is delighted to partner with the University of Wisconsin on this important national project,” said Wolnik. “Findings from the survey will be used to create evaluation and messaging resources that will be included in an updated version of FMC’s National Farmers Market Week Toolkit, a free resource that FMC offers annually for market leaders to educate their community about their market, which this year falls on August 4-10, 2024.”

The project also plans to conduct a series of webinars to allow for regional dissemination of its findings and resources to Extension professionals and to other food system leaders.

“We hope our work will attract new customers to farmers markets and encourage existing customers to attend more frequently to purchase food directly from small and medium sized farms at farmers markets,” said Shaw. “Many farms rely on farmers markets to provide this kind of high-level marketing support, and we aim to help them expand their customer base through our research and resources to support farmers market managers and others who support farmers markets in their communities.”

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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 national Farmers Market Coalition, visit [www.farmersmarketcoalition.org](http://www.farmersmarketcoalition.org)*