SHARING THE HARVEST: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF FARMERS’ MARKET MANAGERS’ AND VENDORS’ SOCIAL MOTIVATIONS TO ACCEPT FOOD ENTITLEMENT PROGRAM COUPONS

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ABSTRACT

THESIS: Sharing the Harvest: A Qualitative Study of Farmers’ Market Managers’ and Vendors’ Social Motivations to Accept Food Entitlement Program Coupons

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Farmers’ markets are venues that can reflect the activity and composition of the hosting community. Within certain guidelines, WIC, FMNP, and SNAP can be utilized at participating farmers’ markets. My study examines how farmers’ markets managers and vendors decide whether to accept food entitlement program coupons, especially comparing the decision-making process between participating and non-participating markets. The influence of community ties and addressing local hunger needs in the decision-making process and the level of cooperation in making that decision are also investigated. Fourteen semi-structured interviews with managers and vendors of eight Midwestern farmers’ markets were conducted. Findings indicate that farmers’ markets with goals to improve local food security and that are collaborative and seek to build consensus, knowledgeable about food entitlement programs while also holding them in positive regard, and exhibit strong interpersonal relationships between market actors and community residents display greater tendencies to accept food entitlement program coupons.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Farmers’ markets are economic settings yet they are also social venues for the hosting community, bringing people together for food, music, art, charitable activities, and other interactions with a focus on the local environment. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (2010), a farmers’ market is defined as “an association of local farmers who assemble at a defined location for the purpose of selling their produce directly to consumers.” Existing research on farmers’ markets tends to primarily examine those direct economic transactions that occur between producer and consumer while less research explores the social connections that also transpire (Brown 2001; Hinrichs, Gillespie, and Feenstra 2004; Alkon 2008; Guthman 2008b; Tiemann 2008). The activity and structure of farmers’ markets can reflect those of the larger community, providing opportunity to study communities’ social exchanges, levels of social capital, and social cohesion, and experiences with inequality (Zukin 2008; Carolan 2005; Trauger 2009; Forrest and Kearns 2001; Kawachi et al. 1997; Druckman 1998; Conrey et al. 2003; Galvez et al. 2007; Guthman 2008b; Turrell 1998).

Federal food entitlement programs attempt to address experiences with inequality partly by offering low-income populations access to farmers’ markets. The Special Supplemental Nutritional Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and the Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program (FMNP), which is administered within WIC, are federal entitlement programs with specific requirements in terms of who is eligible to receive benefits and how the benefits can be used in food purchases (USDA 2010). The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps) is a broader program that provides low-income households with
electronic benefits to be used like cash for food purchases at accepting food sources including, more recently, farmers’ markets. Previous studies examined a number of economic, logistical, and health- and nutrition-related components regarding farmers’ markets, ranging from the administration details of WIC, FMNP, and SNAP to access to nutritious foods, especially relating to the health outcomes of low-income individuals and communities (Alkon 2008; Guthman, Morris, and Allen 2006; Guthman 2008b; Pati et al. 2010; Heflin and Ziliak 2008; Rank and Hirschl 2005; Herman et al. 2008; Martin et al. 2003; Conrey et al. 2003; Gerbasi 2006; Wilensky 2004; Tolma et al. 2007; Bhattarai, Duffy, and Raymond 2005; Winter 2004; Moore and Diez Roux 2006; Ghirardelli 2010). Overall, these studies showed the low-income population as having more negative health outcomes when compared to the general population, due to their having limited access to a healthy, nutritious diet as a result of their socioeconomic disadvantages. More specifically, these existing studies primarily examined how the benefits and challenges of WIC, FMNP, and SNAP affect the recipients. However, little research exists in regard to farmers’ market managers and vendors beyond the economic benefits of the food entitlement programs, leaving an opportunity to study any social impact the programs potentially have on the farmers’ markets and market actors. Farmers’ markets are not only an economic venue; they are inherently social as well, which indicates the necessity in studying the social nature of the markets alongside the economic transactions (Tiemann 2008; Trauger 2009).

My study examines how farmers’ markets managers and individual vendors decide whether to accept food entitlement program coupons and compare the decision-making process between markets that do and do not accept these coupons. Specifically, this study analyzes the extent to which social factors, such as community ties and addressing local hunger needs, influence the decision-making process. Further, I investigate the level of cooperation that exists between the farmers’ market managers and individual vendors in making this decision. Gaining this perspective of the social exchange that the food entitlement programs represent will add to
the current academic literature specifically on farmers’ markets, but also more broadly on community studies, rural sociology, and urban development. Instead of employing a purely economic approach to these programs, my study uniquely examines the social motivations that explicitly or implicitly guide the decision-making process. Through in-depth interviews, I examine eight separate farmers’ markets to analyze the social dynamics behind their decisions rather than simply the economic factors. Understanding how the market managers and vendors make the choice to accept food entitlement coupons provides insight to how they view the low-income population that uses the coupons and whether they elect to engage with that population through economic or social interactions.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Exchange

Blau (1964) explained how basic social exchange is performed between two parties: one party does a service for the other and that party is expected to express gratitude as well as to return the favor in the future when an opportunity presents itself. If the receiving party does not show gratitude, then he is deemed unworthy of future assistance. However, if he reciprocates as expected, then there is an incentive for the first party to continue to help him, which strengthens the social bond between the two parties (Blau 1964). Magdol and Bessel (2003) added that while social exchange theory traditionally rested upon the assumption that the relationship between the two parties existed in a face-to-face context, our current global diffusion allows for social exchange to occur between parties who are communicating via long-distance (i.e. telephone, electronic communications). However, they did not discuss what role, if any, that setting or physical place may play in the exchange. Farmers’ markets may be able to facilitate (or prohibit) unique social exchanges between individuals in a way that those same individuals may not experience outside of that particular setting.

Generally, within these exchanges, there are elements of power and dependence, including possible mutual dependence between parties. Druckman (1998) added that social exchange is often found to be more influential in economics than in other social sciences, perhaps due to the use of monetary units in the exchanges. The use of social exchange, though, is found in non-economic social interactions as well and it is also true that there can be overlap between the two types of interactions. In both cases, economic and non-economic, there are two broad
time-related perceptions on exchange: short-term episodic moves and countermoves as well as long-term relationship building and maintenance (Druckman 1998). Farmers’ markets are venues that can contain each incarnation of these social exchanges: economic and non-economic, short-term and long-term. The non-economic social exchanges are a primary focus within my study. Examples of these exchanges that frequently occur in a farmers’ market setting are the swapping of recipes or produce preparation tips and the recounting of gardening stories that allow vendors and attendees to learn from each other’s experiences. Farmers’ markets are a unique component of public space (Alkon 2008; Connell, Smithers and Joseph 2008; Hinrichs, Gillespie, and Feenstra 2004). The lack of corporate structure allows for more freedom and interaction between the producer and consumer during the social exchange process. However, the goals of farmers’ market managers will generally align with the economic security of the vendors over the benefits to the consumers, if the interests are ever pitted against each other (Guthman 2008b). Guthman (2008b: 679) presented the views of one market manager: “Small family farmers need to get a good price for their produce. We are not in the position to pick up the difference.” On the other hand, Hinrichs, Gillespie, and Feenstra (2004) pointed out that the local “embeddedness” of the farmers’ markets is one of the main factors of economic viability. The sense of connection to the farmers and the food is generally observed in the loyalty of farmers’ market attendees who become regular customers (Alkon 2008). That connection is an example of how the social exchange can be at once economic and non-economic in nature; the non-economic social bonding is what motivates the consumer to continue economic transactions with the farmer. Furthermore, a farmer’s market that accepts food entitlement program coupons as a form of payment expands the population of people who can engage in these social exchanges.

Research focusing on the experiences of the attendees revealed that they also have economic reasons to participate in this social exchange, while simultaneously receiving economic and non-economic benefits from visiting farmers’ markets (Sommer, Wing and Aitkens 1980;
Additionally, it is observed that the attendee can be in the position of power rather than one of dependence, especially if the attendee is more educated than the farmer and is from the middle- or upper-class (Hinrichs 2000). While studies have indicated that vendors of farmers’ markets each have their own unique reasons for selling their produce or products—some based on the financial need to make a living while others can be equated to social justice—the focus is typically on the economic benefit. A more specific illustration is in a study that showed how the FMNP alone has resulted in the support of over 12,000 farmers with more than $17.5 million in sales (Conrey et al. 2003). This is a clear indication of how food entitlement programs can benefit farmers’ markets and individual farmers economically. However, there is a lack of research on any social impact—beneficial or harmful—that accepting WIC, FMNP, and SNAP coupons may have on farmers’ markets and vendors. Gaining a better understanding of social factors that are associated with deciding to accept program coupons is important to know more fully because, as previous studies demonstrated, markets would clearly choose to participate if they considered only economic reasons. How farmers’ markets perceive these social factors has not been previously explored. My study seeks to address this question by examining interview data collected from farmers’ market managers and vendors, focusing on the decision-making process regarding their participation in the programs.

*Social Capital and Cohesion*

Social capital can be thought of as a collective resource, a feature of social life that allows people to act in concert to pursue shared goals for mutual benefit (Mohan and Mohan 2002; Kawachi et al. 1997). Putnam (2000) further explained that some forms of social capital are bridging (inclusive and used for “getting ahead”) and others are bonding (exclusive and used for “getting by”), and either of these forms can be exercised by all people out of choice or necessity. Previously, Bourdieu posited that social capital was only an asset of the privileged
class and this new perspective broadened the scope of those able to access it (Alfred 2009). The poor and working class are likewise able to tap into social capital resources, particularly for bridging purposes as grand as the civil rights movement and as local as youth service groups (Alfred 2009; Putnam 2000). Much like other forms of capital—economic, human, and cultural—social capital can be used with ill-intentions, but both bridging and bonding social capital can have strongly positive social effects and benefits (Putnam 2000).

Social cohesion, on the other hand, is different from social capital in that social cohesion can be simply described as community solidarity (Mohan and Mohan 2002). Examinations of social cohesion has allowed for the re-emergence of neighborhoods and communities as important settings which shape social identity and life chances, especially those relating to the challenges of low-income people in poor neighborhoods (Forrest and Kearns 2001). It is possible to view social cohesion at various farmers’ markets as what Hinrichs, Gillespie, and Feenstra (2004) called “local embeddedness”: “Considering embeddedness in terms of actual social interactions is also relevant for understanding the entrepreneurial significance of farmers’ markets” (Hinrichs, Gillespie, and Feenstra 2004: 37). In Alkon’s (2008) study of two farmers’ markets in California, one of which is in the urban area of West Oakland, the market managers and vendors express a concern for their environment—the places in which they live, work, and play—and their intention is to provide access to organic fruits and vegetables to the predominantly African-American population residing in that community. The desire to connect with their community and promote social and environmental justice adds a new aspect to the farmers’ market that goes beyond economic activity and exemplifies social cohesion (Alkon 2008). Similarly, in Southeast Ohio, vendors at a farmers market express their motivation to participate in the market for more than economic reasons; the market “builds and reinforces social networks on which they have come to rely” (Gerbasi 2006: 4-5). Seemingly, there is an increase in social cohesion in both of these communities as they rally to support those who are
economically disadvantaged, but it is also hypothesized that, in general, the growing income inequality in societies has decreased levels of social cohesion (Kawachi et al. 1997).

Levels of social exchange, as well as social capital and social cohesion, vary from community to community. The general claim Kawachi et al. (1997) made regarding the decline of these social elements while larger gaps in income emerge is easily observed in the context of neighborhood food accessibility and health outcomes based on the quantity and quality of food sources (Galvez et al. 2007; Michimi and Wimberly 2010; Diez Roux 2001; Yen et al. 2007). Social exchange, capital, and cohesion can be helpful in examining the concepts of food security, accessibility of food, and food deserts. Furthermore, federal food entitlement programs (WIC, FMNP, and SNAP) aim to lessen the challenges experienced by those suffering from income inequality and, more recently, the benefits from these programs are able to be used at certified farmers’ markets.

**Food Security**

Food security has the following widely-accepted definition from the United States Department of Agriculture:

Food security for a household means access by all members at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Food security includes at a minimum (1) the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, and (2) an assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways (that is, without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing, or other coping strategies) (USDA 2010).

One of the most important features of this definition is the focus on access to food and, as access to food is largely related to economics, whole communities may experience differing levels of food security (Kezis 1998; Conrey 2003; Liu et al. 2006; Galvez et al. 2007; Alkon 2008; Zenk et al. 2009). The definition also begins to highlight the role of society in an individual’s acquisition of food. If one were to violate the socially acceptable ways of obtaining food, then that person would potentially violate one of the tenants of the social exchange process; for example, if one were to steal food, others in the community may be less inclined to aid that individual in the
future (Blau 1964). Farmers’ markets exhibit a more specific application of society’s role in food accessibility within local communities. As attendees continue to shop at these venues, the markets will thrive. Yet, without the presence of the markets, the food sources within the community could be limited to those which are not local, providing an example of the mutual dependence and exercise of social capital which strengthens communities. The acceptance of food entitlement programs at farmers’ markets could be considered another component within this stated mutual dependence and use of social capital.

Food insecurity is the term used to describe the conditions of individuals, households and, more recently, communities that report concerns about the adequacy of their food supply (Tolma, John, Garner 2007; USDA 2008). In the USDA’s food security supplement to the annual Current Population Survey (CPS), a variety of phrases are used to gauge the frequency and severity of household food insecurity. Based on the most recent CPS data, 14.6 percent of U.S. households experienced some form of food insecurity, with 5.7 percent classified in the most severe category of having very low food security (USDA 2008). Partially explaining these results from the CPS data is that individuals with lower socioeconomic status (SES) have a greater percentage of expenditures of their income on food than do those of higher SES (Sommer, Wing, and Aitkens 1980; Bourdieu 1984; Allen and Sachs 2007; Tolma, John, and Garner 2007; Powell and Chaloupka 2009). Individuals and households that experience food insecurity, therefore, are much more likely to have low income levels and struggle to make sufficient and healthful food purchases. The experience of those with very low food security can be alleviated to some extent by exercising social agency through utilizing social networks for assistance, such as WIC, FMNP or SNAP.

Accessibility of Food

Accessibility of food is markedly different than availability. According to Marion Nestle (2002:1), food insecurity exists in the U.S. even as “the U.S. food supply is so abundant that it
contains enough to feed everyone in the country nearly twice over—even after exports are considered.” If there is availability of food as Nestle claims, then the accessibility and distribution of food must be the issues most related to food insecurity within our borders. Given this assertion, it is possible to surmise that accessibility is not equally distributed among communities.

There are two aspects to accessibility: physical and economic/social. The physical aspect includes the location and types of food sources whereas the economic/social aspect includes having the resources to purchase food or qualifying for assistance to aid in food purchases. Physical proximity to, and the types of, food sources is strongly correlated to particular health outcomes (Galvez et al. 2007; Michimi and Wimberly 2010; Diez Roux 2001; Yen et al. 2007). Communities with access to farmers’ markets and stores with fresh fruits and vegetables—particularly when they are within safe walking distance of no more than a mile from one’s residence—are associated with positive health outcomes, while communities that rely on convenience stores and fast food restaurants as primary food sources tend to have more negative health outcomes (Galvez et al. 2007; Diez Roux 2001; Yen et al. 2007; Wells and Laquarta 2010). Having the economic and social access (e.g. coupons and information) to farmers’ markets through WIC, FMNP, and SNAP can also be a factor in whether the low-income population increases their fresh fruit and vegetable intake.

Food Deserts

In terms of physical access to food, it is becoming increasingly difficult for the urban poor to be near physical sources of food as many supermarkets are leaving the inner-cities and relocating to suburban areas (Alkon 2008; Galvez et al. 2007; Swanstrom, Dreier, and Mollenkopf 2002; USDA 2009). These areas, as well as some rural regions, are being coined as food deserts, although there is still some theoretical debate as to what the term actually means due to the lack of a firm definition being proposed (Shaw 2006; Morton et al. 2007; Guthman 2008).
The criterion most commonly agreed upon that makes a region a food desert is residents living more than one mile from a supermarket or large grocery store (or more than ten miles if in a rural area). Frequently, additional factors, such as residents having low income or lacking car ownership, are also considered in the definition of a food desert (USDA 2012). Communities that are labeled as food deserts lack food sources—conventional (i.e. supermarkets) or alternative (i.e. farmers’ markets)—and suffer from high levels of food insecurity. My study includes four farmers’ markets that are located in (or are within one mile) of a food desert census tract, according to the ERS USDA Food Desert Locator (2012).

Interestingly, however, Shaw (2006) posited that food deserts should be classified based on the reason behind their existence. She stated that the phenomena of food deserts are not only because supermarkets choose to leave these areas of their own accord but that the diets of those in the community are based on their selection of unhealthy foods and preference to not eat fresh fruits and vegetables. If this is the case, she believed that would make the reasons behind the existence of some food deserts different than if it were simply the food sources leaving (Shaw 2006). She neglected to mention the social ties to the community that large supermarkets seem to lack and also failed to acknowledge the importance of local food systems—exemplified by farmers’ markets—in combating food desertification. While it is true that individuals are responsible for their food purchases, Nestle (2002: 2) countered by explaining how “many of us believe that we choose foods for reasons of personal taste, convenience, and cost; we deny that we can be manipulated by advertising or other marketing practices.” What this indicates is the strong structural influences our nation’s food system has on our individual diets. If there is high visibility of advertisements for junk food, sodas, and fast food restaurants, then individuals begin to adopt those items into their diet much more easily than healthy, fresh, and organic foods which do not have heavily funded advertisement campaigns (Nestle 2002). As more and more individuals purchase food in this patterned way, the need for supermarkets decreases and they
relocate to places that demand higher quality foods, thus perpetuating the cycle of food desertification.

Social cohesion could possibly reduce the spread of food desertification in these areas, by residents either becoming politically active in retaining needed supermarkets and keeping unwanted ones away or by filling the gap in the food system themselves by organizing community gardens, food banks, or establishing farmers’ markets. It is no coincidence that food deserts are in areas of concentrated poverty where individuals may be receiving WIC, FMNP, or SNAP benefits; recipient households must have an income at or below 130% of the federal poverty standard in order to qualify for assistance (Bhattarai, Duffy, and Raymond 2005). Food deserts that do have a farmers’ market require closer examination and it is, therefore, important to study the motivation behind market decisions whether to accept these benefits at their venues.

*Federal Food Entitlement Programs*

Income inequality has been shown to be strongly correlated to the society’s level of mortality and, despite not yet fully understanding the underlying mechanisms leading to this correlation, there are hypotheses that speak to the underinvestment in human capital, health care, and other health-promoting factors (Kawachi et al. 1997). Federal entitlement programs attempt to address income inequality for households. SNAP is the longest-tenured food assistance program in the United States, although it has undergone several changes in its history, starting in 1964 as the Food Stamp Program. The history of the program has been the subject of several studies and additional studies have had more focus on the outcomes associated with SNAP. In particular, studies have examined health-related outcomes, both mental and nutritional, as well as the relationship between maternal health literacy and children participating in the program (Pati et al. 2010; Heflin and Ziliak 2008). Furthermore, the likelihood of children who were raised in households receiving SNAP benefits doing so in their adulthood is studied from a life course perspective (Rank and Hirschle 2005).
Relatedly, research has examined the diets and health outcomes of women who participate in WIC (Herman et al. 2008; Davis, Cook, and Cohen 2005; Diez Roux 2001). Herman et al. (2008) showed that low income is associated with lower intake of fruits and vegetables, suggesting that targeted subsidies would increase fruit and vegetable consumption of the WIC participants. As the costs in implementing these subsidies are greater than policymakers are willing to absorb, other initiatives have been created instead to help increase the fruit and vegetables in the diets of this population, such as the FMNP.

The use and awareness of FMNP varies from state to state as some states have funded the program since its establishment and others just completed the first year in 2010. Further, the amount that participants receive in coupon form can range from $10-30 per year, based on federal and state funding. While the program is still considered a net economic gain, the goals of improving the health of women, infants and children are beyond the scope of the current funding (Conrey et al. 2003). In addition to the challenges of low funding, the burdens of participants using their coupons include the logistics of getting to the markets (transportation, location, hours, etc.), unfamiliarity with and lack of information about farmers’ market foods, and other personal economic challenges of low income families with small children (Conrey et al. 2003; Guthman 2008b). Of all the FMNP coupons that have been issued, redemption rates hover around 52 percent (Guthman 2008b). However, Conrey et al. (2003) suggested that the redemption rate of FMNP coupons is not necessarily a strong indicator of the program’s effectiveness; moreover, they suggest that the three main components that are critical to the program’s success are educating WIC participants, improving the accessibility of markets by WIC participants, and improving market quality of the farmers’ markets. More importantly, and less discussed in previous studies, is the potential for farmers’ markets to be focal points of social cohesion by promoting food entitlement benefits and being a source of education when the state agencies fail to reach those segments of the population that are impacted most by the income inequality. In
this case, both market managers and vendors can take on an informal role of community educator and make a considerable impact on the health and nutrition of market attendees—particularly those of low-income households—further deepening the ties of the market to its community.

However, while there are opportunities for such social cohesiveness, there are social aspects to farmers’ markets that lock out segments of the population while simultaneously benefiting others. For example, Guthman (2008b) described a “dearth of color” in the participants of farmers’ markets. She referred to a study showing 74 percent of farmers’ market customers were white, while only 14 percent were African American, six percent were Hispanic, and five percent were Asian, indicating that there could be unspoken social boundaries that prevent inclusiveness and diversity at these venues. Similarly, a separate study showed that the age category with the largest number of attendees was from 45 to 54 (22 percent); the household income bracket of $60,000 (21 percent) was more than twice the number of the general community, based on census data; and more than two out of three attendees recorded having a bachelor’s degree or higher level of education (Kezis et al. 1998). Findings such as these show a narrow population that attends farmers’ markets and, seemingly, this population is not in need of food entitlement programs. The question to be asked is whether the farmers’ markets are making efforts to be inclusive to all segments of the population or if they are catering to a niche crowd. Examining what goes into the decision-making process of whether farmers’ markets choose to accept WIC, FMNP, and SNAP coupons as payment may help answer that question.

Prior literature regarding theoretical concepts such as social exchange, social capital, and social cohesion has practical applications in farmers’ market studies generally and in my current study specifically. Having an understanding of the mechanisms of social exchange that take place at farmers’ market venues can allow for a more critical examination of the social factors that influence how markets decide whether to participate in food entitlement programs. Likewise, finding the exercise of social capital in farmers’ markets and observing the level of social
cohesion of the hosting community provides further clarity in knowing what is of most saliency when farmers’ market managers and vendors choose to accept WIC, FMNP, and SNAP. It needs to be stressed that social exchange, social capital, and social cohesion are strongly interrelated and overlapping concepts; while each of them can be discussed individually, it is quite common to see these concepts in play simultaneously in the social milieu, farmers’ markets notwithstanding. In addition to the theoretical foundation, previous literature regarding inequality and communities, particularly as they relate to access to food, helped further emphasize the need for continued studies of farmers’ markets and their role in alleviating some of the negative consequences felt by vulnerable populations. Food security concerns, overall accessibility to food sources, and the erosion of the food landscape to whole areas becoming food deserts indicates flaws in the nation’s conventional food system and a need for new solutions. Farmers’ markets are but one piece to a larger, renewed approach of focusing on local, healthful, and sustainable food sources. However, the utilization of the federal food entitlement programs—WIC, FMNP, and SNAP—provides much needed muscle in making local food systems viable. The reviewed literature regarding inequality and communities explored issues of food access from a primarily economic perspective. My research is able to fill a gap in current research by examining many of these issues but with a focus on social dynamics. As such, I investigate what social motivations exist for farmers’ market managers and vendors in participating in WIC, FMNP, and SNAP. To that end, my study analyzing how farmers’ market managers and vendors decide whether to accept food entitlement program coupons as a form of payment adds to the understanding of the role of farmers’ markets in meeting the needs of vulnerable population.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Population

The population of this study consists of farmers’ markets in a Midwestern state and was located via two websites. The first is the website LocalHarvest.org, a national informational web-based resource for local and organic food sources. Local Harvest, founded in 1998, has been used for locating farmers’ markets in previous academic research (Guthman, Morris, and Allen 2006; Guthman 2008b). The markets are responsible for posting an entry on Local Harvest’s website, thereby making it a voluntary public listing. Information found within a market posting can include: the name of the market, its location, its hours of operation, contact information and/or market website, and a short summary of the market along with reviews from consumers. LocalHarvest.org lists 138 farmers’ markets in state of my study and served as a starting point for locating farmers’ markets. However, it has its limitations, such as including listings of markets that are outdated and market postings with partial or incomplete information. Because of the limitations of LocalHarvest.org, its list was cross-referenced with a second list.

The Midwestern state’s Department of Health website has a link which lists similar information as LocalHarvest.org for 151 farmers’ markets, however, it shows only those markets in the state that accept food entitlement program coupons. Because the nature of this study is to explore both markets that do and do not accept food entitlement programs, the Department of Health website’s list also has its limitations. The two sources are not mutually exclusive in their lists and also exhibit overlap, but neither list can stand alone as each lack the full information
needed in order to define the population. Thus, it is necessary to use both websites as they combine to fully outline and detail the population of farmers’ markets considered for this study.

Sample

The farmers’ markets were selected through a purposive sampling strategy, as the study required knowledge of the markets’ acceptance of food entitlement programs prior to the interviews. Markets were originally classified into two groups, those accepting food entitlement programs and those that do not, and from each grouping four markets were selected. Each market selected was required to have clear contact information to reach the market manager directly, either via email, website, or phone. The number of markets meeting these criteria—clearly listing whether or not they accept benefits while also having direct contact information for the market manager—was less than a quarter of the total population. Once selected, an emailed invitation to participate in the study was sent to the market manager. General email invitations briefly introduced the researcher and provided an overview of the study. Undelivered emails due to invalid email addresses removed the market from consideration. If the manager did not reply within one week, a second email was sent and, if there was no reply to the follow-up email, then the market was no longer eligible. All market managers in the study were reached via email or directly on the market’s website. Some of the market managers who replied to the initial invitation were unable to follow up with coordinating schedules and were not included in the study. The resultant eight market sample for the study were ones that met all of the above criteria whose market managers were the first four in each of the two classification groups to reply with scheduling their interviews.

Interviewees

Interviewees included market managers and vendors of the eight selected farmers’ markets. Within each market, the market manager was interviewed and, via snowball sampling, an individual vendor was invited to participate. The snowball sampling consisted of asking the
market manager to recommend vendors that would be most approachable, based on their working
or personal relationship.

The resulting interviewee list included eight farmers’ market managers and six vendors, for a total of fourteen interviews conducted. All eight market managers recommended at least one vendor for each market, but two markets had a vendor decline to participate due to scheduling conflicts and no alternate vendor was provided. Interviews took place from June 7, 2011 to November 10, 2011 and the length of the interviews ranged from seventeen minutes to two hours and five minutes. Three of the fourteen interviews were conducted in person and the rest were performed over the phone.

Data Collection

Immediately prior to the interviews, a brief questionnaire was administered to the interviewees to collect data regarding basic market history and composition, market managers’/vendors’ history with farmers’ markets, and general attendee information. The data collected from the surveys was primarily used to report basic descriptive information of the markets and was also used for occasional follow-up questions during the interview to allow for elaboration. Separate questionnaires were crafted for market managers and for vendors but similar questions on each guide; questionnaires for market managers asked about the market as a whole while vendor questionnaires had items relating to both the market and their booth, specifically.

Interview schedules were tailored to the role of the interviewee whether the individual was a market manager or a vendor. Questions that were asked during the interviews related to topics such as how closely the market managers work with vendors, what forms of payment the market accepts, and a description of the local community in which the market is located, including the perceived role of the farmers’ market within the community. These, and other questions asked, allowed for data to be collected relating to the research questions of how
farmers’ markets and individual vendors make the decision to choose whether they will accept food entitlement program coupons and what level of cooperation exists between the farmers’ market managers and individual farmers in making that decision. Both questionnaires and interview data are kept confidential and are presented in the results as associated with one of the eight markets, “Market 1” through “Market 8,” and whether the interviewee was a manager or vendor at that market. Individual interviews were conducted and digitally recorded in order to allow for verbatim transcription, coding, and analysis.

Data Analysis

In addition to the coding and analysis of the interviews, the responses from the survey questionnaires were examined. This information was particularly useful in understanding what facilities are present at the farmers’ markets, but it also allowed for basic descriptive information to be collected. The results from the questionnaires are presented in Table 1 to provide ranges of responses in order to avoid any potentially identifying information.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Communities Hosting Farmers’ Markets, Including Acceptance of WIC/FMNP/SNAP. (2010 Census Data http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/index.html).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mkt 1</th>
<th>Mkt 2</th>
<th>Mkt 3</th>
<th>Mkt 4</th>
<th>†Mkt 5</th>
<th>Mkt 6</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Females (%)</td>
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<td>Does Not Accept WIC/FMNP</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

†Markets are county markets, not tied to a specific city/town

*2010 Data from Stats Indiana
(http://www.stats.indiana.edu/dms4/new_dpasp?profile_id=314&output_mode=1)

**2009 Data from Indiana Department of Health
(http://www.in.gov/isdh/files/WIC_Enrolled.pdf)

Upon completion, each interview was transcribed verbatim by the researcher using Microsoft Word and, after identifying initial codes in the transcript files, the list of initial codes was imported into Microsoft Excel for further coding and analysis. After the initial codes were imported, coding of the transcribed interviews was carried out using the constant comparative method. In order to initiate the constant comparative method, analysis for this study began with what Strauss (1987) discussed as open coding. Open coding is the initial type of coding which is carried out through close scrutiny of the interview data in order to produce concepts that seem to fit the data. An application of this would be to create codes out of the data, rather than placing data into pre-existing codes. For this study, transcripts of the interview data were examined and then coded via open coding initially without interpretation as to allow for the analysis of the
tentative codes. Next, codes were continuously reviewed within interviews and between interviews to ensure consistency and appropriateness. The emergent themes that served as broad categories in which multiple codes were grouped together also went through a constant comparative process in order to check for codes and data belonging in suitable themes. The value of this process is in its ability to force the analyst to break apart the data in an analytical fashion rather than carry over preconceived notions into the data (Strauss 1987).

Markets (a market manager and, if applicable, a corresponding vendor) were compared to each other on the basis of the emergent themes in order to understand the overall decision-making process of farmers’ markets accepting food entitlement programs. Ultimately, the markets studied fell into one of three categories: do not accept any food entitlement program coupons; accept only WIC and FMNP coupons, but not SNAP; or accept all three forms of food entitlement program coupons. This categorization also emerged from the interviewing process, as initially only two categories existed: accept or do not accept. The third category is essentially a split of the original acceptance category while the do not accept category remained intact.

There were a number of effective interview questions that resulted in data which coalesced into themes during analysis. Among the opening questions asked was, “What are your goals (for your market/booth)?” Another key set of questions asked included: “To what degree do you incorporate vendors in making market-wide decisions? How are they included?” “Is there a market committee or any such group that includes vendors? How do the vendors become a part of that committee?” “How closely do you work with the market manager and any committee in making your vendor decisions?” Interviewees were also asked an initial question of “What forms of payment do you accept?” and, after the first responses were given, additional probes were asked regarding the specific payment of WIC, FMNP, and SNAP. And, lastly, interviewees responded to questions such as “What, if any, role does the market play in the community?” “How important is it to you that attendees become educated about your produce/product?” and
“What are your thoughts related to food entitlement programs (WIC, FMNP, and SNAP) as payment?” with comments reflecting their views on interacting with the community. The resulting information from these questions consisted of details of market goals; their decision-making bodies and decision-making processes; the levels of knowledge regarding and attitudes toward WIC, FMNP, and SNAP; and the interpersonal relationships between market actors and members of the community.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

My study examines how farmers’ markets managers and individual vendors decide whether to accept food entitlement program coupons and compares the decision-making process between markets that do and do not accept these coupons. Specifically, I analyze the extent to which social factors such as community ties and addressing local hunger needs influence the decision-making process. Further, my study investigates the level of cooperation that exists between the market managers and individual vendors in making that decision. Through a careful analysis of emergent themes, I was able to find a pattern of certain market characteristics that made them more likely to accept WIC, FMNP, and SNAP. Some of these characteristics include: having a goal of improving local food security, having a decision-making body that had a blend of several roles and employed a consensus-building decision-making process, being knowledgeable about the food entitlement programs while also having a positive attitude toward them, and demonstrating strong interpersonal relationships with community members.

Two of the eight markets in my study have all of these characteristics and are also fully participating markets. A different pair of markets embodies most or all of these qualities, but to a slightly lesser degree than the first two markets, and accepts only WIC and FMNP benefits but do not accept SNAP-based transactions. The four non-participating markets rarely exhibited these characteristics. To that end, market actors that hold these key qualities as core values will be more likely to find that accepting WIC, FMNP, and SNAP benefits to be an valuable element to market success.
**Food Entitlement Programs’ Fit with Farmers’ Market Goals**

The most common goals of the markets in this study were: improving local food security, providing a venue for local producers to sell products, and offering a unique public space for the community. The markets that were full participants in accepting food entitlement program benefits held the goal of improving local food security as a primary goal and found that it to be compatible with accepting WIC, FMNP, and SNAP. On the other hand, the markets that had one of the other two goals were not strong advocates of the food entitlement programs in general and either were partial participants or non-participants.

**Improving local food security.** Efforts to improve local food security are evident with some of the markets in my study, especially the two markets that accept WIC, FMNP and SNAP. Two additional markets that accept only WIC and FMNP vouchers have this goal as well, but did not hold it as their main priority. Managers of the fully participating markets did hold this goal amongst their priorities and were quick to comment about improving the local food shed, particularly the distribution of fresh, local produce to vulnerable populations. According to the USDA, both of these markets are located within, or are on the edge of, a food desert census tract, bringing the issue of food insecurity to the forefront for these markets and thereby making the improvement of local food security a primary goal (Food Desert Locator 2012). The market managers for both Markets 1 and 5 endeavor to get as much food that is locally grown to the public. They also find that accepting WIC, FMNP, and SNAP benefits fit well with this goal of improving local food security. The market manager for Market 1 shared her view regarding her market’s participation in the programs:

It’s a win-win situation if you can bring more business to the market, no matter what form, and to increase the nutritional value opportunities of people who have the WIC benefits.

Since food insecurity disproportionally impacts those of lower SES, accepting food entitlement coupons as a form of payment at farmers’ markets is a direct, concrete, and practical way of
improving local food security. Of the three goals, improving local food security is the one that can be most easily linked to social capital and cohesion; markets with this goal acted to pool resources and build ties to the community by seeking to improve the overall health of local residents.

Providing a venue for local producers to sell products. The goal of providing a venue for local producers was observed at all markets, but there were three market managers who explained this was their primary goal. Broadly speaking, markets that strive toward this goal are not advocates of food entitlement programs as the acceptance of the program benefits does not explicitly help in achieving this goal. Two of the three markets—Markets 2 and 6—do not accept any food entitlement benefits while Market 8 only accepts WIC and FMNP coupons. The goal of providing a venue for local producers includes having a regular event for vendors to be able to come together to sell their goods as well as having a strong emphasis on the quality of the goods sold at the market. Market managers that held this goal highly also commented about their desire to see their venues grow in the number of vendors selling. The manager for Market 2 said he thought providing this space for vendors was probably the biggest purpose of that market. He elaborated:

We got a few people here that are serious vegetable producers who want to have a nice outlook for their produce and that's what this market is.

Focusing primarily on making the market a vendor-friendly venue does not have a direct relationship with the acceptance of food entitlement program benefits and is represented by the pattern of nonparticipating markets.

Market 8 is the market that falls slightly out of the overall pattern of non-participation while having this goal as it is a market that accepts WIC and FMNP coupons. The manager and vendor both commented that market was designed to provide space for local small producers to sell and that it was just as much for the vendors as it was for the customers. Furthermore, it
became evident that the quality of the market reflected strongly upon the vendors; they both explained that they did not want the market to become a flea market and that they wanted only quality, local goods to be sold there. However, Market 8 also associated the goal of providing a venue specifically for local producers to sell their products with the safety of the food they sold. Both individuals equally viewed the success of their market as the branding of fresh, local food as comparable to safe food. While the market actors for Markets 2 and 6 describe their market purely as a venue for serious producers to sell quality, local goods, Market 8 extrapolates that same goal to the safety of the food as well. As such, Market 8 is the only market of these three that participates in accepting WIC and FMNP benefits. Accepting food entitlement coupons is a partial fit with the goals of Market 8 in relation to food safety, but it is not as clear of a fit with the goals of Markets 2 and 6.

Offering a unique public space for the community. Three markets in my study had a goal of becoming a unique community meeting space. Similar to the last goal, the overall observable pattern here is that markets aiming for this goal typically are markets that are not certified to accept food entitlement program benefits. Of the markets sharing the goal of offering a unique public space for the community, Market 4 is the only one that accepts WIC and FMNP coupons as a form of payment while Markets 3 and 7 do not participate in the programs. The individuals associated with the three markets placed emphasis on the local community in the general sense and spoke broadly about what the physical space of the venue contributes to the community. With regard to Markets 3 and 7, the managers and vendors expressed opinions of how their markets contributed to the vibrancy of their community, going as far as to provide descriptions of what the physical spaces in their communities were like before and after their markets’ establishment. For example, the vendor for Market 7 noted that its location in the community was an attractive space but dead before the market opened on Saturday mornings. Several comments were made about how members of the local community seem pleased to be able to
gather at the markets to socialize and meet with their neighbors. Additional remarks by the interviewees referred to the markets being a place that fosters a sense of local culture and history. In essence, the markets are treated as an amenity in the community rather than a necessary component of the local food shed.

In contrast, the manager of the market that accepts WIC and FMNP benefits and shares this goal of creating a unique public space said the venue was very much a thread within the local social fabric and it has a focus on promoting the agricultural history of the community, but she also stressed that this space is to cater to the consumers who want to have the experience of purchasing food at a marketplace-type of setting. Perhaps due to the additional focus on the community’s ties to agriculture, the decision makers of Market 4 may have found accepting WIC and FMNP benefits to be a slight fit with this particular goal. Overall, it can be said that the pattern is that markets that focus on offering a unique public space for the community are markets that do not accept food entitlement benefits as a form of payment as they seemingly placed more emphasis on their markets being solely a local amenity.

It is evident that when the farmers’ market goals are related to food—whether about the efforts to improve food security of the local residents, or even the safety of the food sold at markets or the experience of purchasing local food in a marketplace setting—the acceptance of food entitlement program coupons is a natural fit. Markets that emphasized improving local food security were full participants of WIC, FMNP, and SNAP, while markets that mentioned food as a complimentary piece to one of the other two goals—providing a venue for local producers to sell products and offering a unique public space for the community—currently accept only WIC and FMNP coupons. Markets that had one of the other goals, but did not also have food tied in closely, did not accept the benefits.
Farmers’ Market Board Composition and Decision-Making Process

An examination of how farmers’ markets are structured for making decisions for the overall market should provide insight into how (and what) decisions are made. The decision-making boards have three types of configurations: a blend of vendors and members of the local community; only vendors; or no vendors, only volunteers or city appointees. Relatedly, the decision-making process reflects the composition of the market board. Decisions are made either by consensus-building (blended boards employed this approach), simple voting (vendor-only boards used this method), or by a “top-down,” hierarchical method by market managers (boards without vendor participation typically had this form of governance). Generally, markets that are full participants in accepting WIC, FMNP, and SNAP are those that had blended boards and work to build consensus in making market decisions while markets that do not accept, or partially accept, had vendor- or volunteer-only boards. The two partially participating markets, Markets 4 and 8, have an appointee-only board and a vendor-only board respectively; however, the original manager for Market 8 unilaterally made the decision to get his market certified to accept WIC and FMNP vouchers, which reflects more of the hierarchical decision-making method. Three of the four markets that do not accept food entitlement coupons have the vendor-only board configuration and Market 3 has a volunteer-only board responsible for its decisions.

Blended boards and consensus-building method. Two of the markets in my study operate under this model of having a blended board and building consensus in reaching decisions; they are also the two markets that accept WIC, FMNP, and SNAP. Markets 1 and 5 have very specific criteria they desire for their board members. The criteria are designed to have representation from as many diverse voices at their markets as possible. Having a variety of roles represented allows for a robust decision-making body that is capable of considering a wide range of issues and tapping into a breadth of knowledge that may not be as accessible to a board that is more homogenous in its composition. The knowledge and collective resources that these board
members are capable of sharing are examples of social exchange and social capital within a farmers’ market. Considering that consumers are frequently a key component of these blended boards, the social exchange that occurs between board members means that the exchange is not limited to the manager and vendors, but that consumers are also contributing to the market that they will patron. Social capital is developed and harnessed by the boards as they work to achieve the stated goals of the market and, as consensus is strived for, social cohesion can be fostered due to all voices being heard.

The board for Market 1 has people sitting on the board representing vendors, shoppers, and at-large people (e.g. chefs at locally-owned restaurants). Market 5 follows a similar formula but goes an additional step to include representation from specific types of vendors—including crafters and musicians—as well as community members to serve on its board. The managers for both markets described their relationships with their boards as primarily an observer, each saying they will sit and listen but not contribute or vote on any decisions made. They may contribute on larger market issues, but still they ultimately do not vote on any market matters. Instead, the managers often coax the vendors to engage with them individually or the board and both strive to make vendors comfortable in expressing their opinions. The boards typically have pre- and post-season meeting, but they also will meet throughout the season as needed. Mid-season meetings include occasions in which vendors will approach the manager with a concern and a quick ad hoc gathering will be called to discuss issue raised. The manager for Market 5 noted that it took a great deal of effort to get some of the vendors to open up and speak their mind, but after that practice was seen as highly encouraged, she said that vendors seem to feel empowered because they are directly invested in the success of the market:

They look at leadership as ‘You drive the train and I’m doing what I’m told to do.’ and it’s like, no, I really want the passengers to drive this train. And getting them to open up and speak their mind. And it’s okay! I love it! When they start to open up and realize they have, yes, they have an opinion and it counts and, by golly, we’re going to act on it,
too! It’s very empowering for the vendors because now they own whatever policies or plan is for the future.

Both market managers stated another primary function of their respective boards was to be a resource for the larger vendor community, especially as a sounding board for getting their needs met. The markets highly value the voice of their vendors and that encourages other vendors to want to have a say in how the market is operated. The vendors interviewed for each market provided supportive comments in how the markets were operated, ranging from the high level of comfort they have in working directly with the market manager to the frequency and flexibility of the board meetings to address urgent issues. Markets 1 and 5 have boards that include vendor representation, as well as outside community members, and both markets are full participants of WIC, FMNP, and SNAP programs. The pattern here indicates that the highly collaborative nature of the markets and their respective decision-making bodies speaks to the markets’ sensitivity to the needs of the community and is a factor in their choice to accept these food entitlement program coupons.

**Vendor-only boards and simple voting method.** Half of the markets in my study have vendor-only boards. Three of the four markets with this makeup are non-participating markets and Market 8 accepts only WIC and FMNP benefits. Vendors are considered relatively equal to one another as peers and, as such, a simple voting method tended to accompany the vendor-only board configuration. At first glance, this may seem as though it is an equitable decision-making process; on the other hand, deadlocked votes and market stagnation frequently occurs within these markets. With concerns of markets potentially growing stagnant with vendor-only boards, it is possible to observe how reaching a decision to get markets certified to accept food entitlement program benefits may represent a challenging undertaking. Regarding Markets 2 and 8, the boards are more concerned with perceived vendor quality and competition rather than other issues they could address, such as growth, promotion, outreach, and education. At both markets,
vendors who want to be actively involved in the shaping of the market can volunteer to serve on the board. For its part, the board for Market 8 appeared to encounter some problems in terms of vendor concerns over competition. The market manager is enabled by the board to enact any decisions that are made—rather than acting as the supervisor of the market to which the board reports—and she works to facilitate the board’s decisions as a mediator when other vendors give feedback directed to the board. The vendor interviewed for this market has long volunteered to be on the board but said he feels no pressure to stay or leave his post. The encounters that the vendor shared reflect some of the specific challenges that are present when a board is comprised solely of vendors:

I think, initially, when farmers’ markets stall, ‘Is there ulterior motives from the board of directors?’

For the purposes of this market, the ulterior motive the vendor elaborated upon as he continued is the livelihood of vendors who sit on the board:

Two of the three of them [full-time vendors for whom selling is primary income], we accepted onto the board of directors and I can tell you they have a limited scope on what they feel should be allowed into the market and they constantly concentrate on the number of people selling that particular item…And because we don’t have real data, and we didn’t know how many people were selling bread in 2010. So as of 2011, the board, the big fight was how many do we accept and we didn’t have any history. So we just accepted everyone who makes their own bread, but some people [were saying] ‘I do this for a living and we don’t want more people here competing against me,’ essentially. So that’s where the line got drawn tight where we had to walk that fine line saying, ‘We understand it’s your livelihood, it’s your commitment, but yet, it’s not our responsibility to ensure your financial success.’ So that was a big fight and I imagine as long as you have vendors on the board of directors, you’re always going to have that fight.

In the case of markets like this, it is apparent that the vendors have a myopic view of their array of decisions for the market, therefore having an impact on how they approach making the market decisions. To briefly highlight Market 8 as the exception to this trend of markets not accepting WIC, FMNP, or SNAP, the vendor noted that the original market manager agreed to certify the market to accept WIC and FMNP coupons without further consulting the market’s vendors.

Market 8 is an outlier in this pattern, but it could be debated as to whether the board would have
supported that decision and perhaps that is partly why the manager acted alone in a hierarchical manner. Generally, the trend for markets with vendor-only boards that use a simple voting method is that they do not participate in food entitlement programs and are more often myopic in what issues are addressed by the decision-making body.

Another set of patterns is found within the markets that operate under the vendor-only board configuration. Two markets of the four are under the auspices of their local Chambers of Commerce and they do not accept food entitlement program coupons. For these markets, the challenge of the board is not in working together necessarily, but in having their voice heard and acted upon by the Chamber of Commerce, which may contribute to the lack of interest in participating in food entitlement programs. It is possible to ascertain that vendor-only boards—particularly those under the auspices of their local Chambers of Commerce—may not be open to considering accepting food entitlement program benefits if they continue to be consumed with issues of professionalism and competition.

*Volunteer- or appointee-only boards and hierarchical method.* Two markets—one accepting only WIC and FMNP and the other not participating—have as their decision-making bodies boards that are comprised of only volunteers or city appointees and there is no vendor representation on the boards for these markets. Instead, the vendors rely upon informal ways of influencing the market. Vendors will either communicate ideas and feedback to the market managers—who often act as a liaison between vendors and the board—or directly to the board members who then deliberate amongst themselves to make decisions. The non-participating market utilizes volunteer-only boards for making market-wide decisions and there are dedicated boards for different purposes within the market. Meanwhile, the market that accepts WIC and FMNP benefits is a city-owned entity and its board is a politically-appointed board of directors which handles the macro-level decisions but not the day-to-day operations. In discussing the relationship between the board and vendors at the market, the manager for Market 3 stated:
So with that said, as far as our market, this is no vendor-run market. There are no vendors on our board of directors, no vendors that sit in our meetings.

Both markets have a bureaucratic structure in place for making market decisions with those outcomes being communicated in a hierarchical method, from the volunteer- or appointee-only boards to the vendors. The hierarchical decision-making method is evident by the way in which formal decisions come from the board, pass through the manager, and are conveyed to the vendors. Again, while the two markets employ comparable decision-making processes, Market 4 accepts WIC and FMNP benefits and Market 3 does not accept them. Because they do have similar decision-making processes, perhaps the political nature of the board for Market 4 plays a role in what separates it from Market 3 in electing to participate in these programs. As a result, there is not a clear pattern of whether a market with a volunteer- or appointee-only board would likely accept food entitlement benefits.

In review, the analysis of market board composition and decision-making processes provided key insights into how the decision of whether to accept WIC, FMNP, and SNAP was reached. Firstly, community representation on a board, along with efforts to build consensus, seems to have some bearing on whether a market operates with full acceptance of WIC, FMNP, and SNAP. The inclusivity of these markets (Markets 1 and 5) to have community members give voice to their local market in a formal process indicates, at a basic level, the willingness of the market to support and work with the community. Blended boards facilitate social exchange, build social capital, and deepen levels of social cohesion within the hosting community. Next, the markets that have vendor-only boards appear to have difficulty in expanding the focus of their decisions beyond the basic transactional functions of the venue, specifically professionalism and competition. Occasionally, during the voting process, vendors at these markets engaged in turf wars. Yet, in the markets that were under the auspices of their local Chambers of Commerce, turf wars were not a main challenge but getting the Chamber actively engaged in market matters
seemed to be difficult. The two markets that have vendor-only boards and are associated with their local Chambers do not accept any food entitlement program benefits. A third market with vendor-only representation does not participate either. Market 8 was the only market with a vendor-only board to accept WIC and FMNP and it is noteworthy to emphasize that the decision to accept WIC and FMNP was not made by the board of Market 8 but instead by its original market manager. Lastly, markets that had no vendor representation and a hierarchical decision-making process did not have a clear pattern. Market 3, with its volunteer-only board, does not participate in any food entitlement program and Market 4 accepts WIC and FMNP, with a key difference being the political nature of the board members for the accepting market. In summation, the broader the representation on a market decision-making body and the more highly valued the process of consensus-building are, it appears more likely that the market will be favorable toward food entitlement programs.

Managers’ and Vendors’ Levels of Knowledge Regarding and Attitudes toward WIC, FMNP, and SNAP

The levels of knowledge on WIC, FMNP, and SNAP range widely from market to market and the lack of knowledge was perhaps the biggest hurdle in markets participating in these programs. Shared knowledge is a form of social capital as it is often a crucial element to individuals working together in achieving goals and a lack of knowledge can be a contributing factor in why some goals are not reached or, even, how some otherwise potential goals are not considered. If a certain level of knowledge of a subject is not reached, as in the food entitlement programs, then a decision cannot be made. Attitude also influenced whether additional knowledge of the programs was sought after by market managers and vendors. It can be argued that attitude can be a catalyst or deterrent to social cohesion as a positive attitude can bring individuals together while having a neutral or negative outlook can prevent solidarity or fracture a community.
Figure 1: Graph of Markets' Relative Levels of Knowledge and Attitudes.

This figure represents the visual approximation of markets' levels of knowledge regarding and corresponding attitudes toward accepting WIC, FMNP, and SNAP. The X-axis represents attitudes and the Y-axis represents levels of knowledge. Markets in the first quadrant exhibit high levels of knowledge and hold positive attitudes while markets in the third quadrant display low levels of knowledge and neutral-to-negative attitudes.

Generally, markets that had high levels of knowledge about WIC, FMNP, and SNAP, while simultaneously viewing them positively, were participating markets. Two markets fit this description of being highly knowledgeable and positive toward the programs and they were the fully participating markets. Two other markets had moderate levels of knowledge with neutral-to-positive attitudes and accepted WIC and FMNP benefits but not SNAP. Markets that either had low knowledge or a neutral-to-negative attitude do not accept, with the exception of one market that was highly knowledgeable yet viewed the programs negatively. In the case of that market, attitude drove the decision not to accept WIC, FMNP, or SNAP benefits, not the level of
knowledge. Figure 1 illustrates the levels of knowledge and attitudinal orientation regarding the programs. The plots are intended to serve as the position of the markets relative to the other markets in the study; there is not a quantifiable value of knowledge or attitude. The graph, with its nearly linear form, helps illustrate the general trend of a market having higher level of knowledge typically also having a more positive attitude. Similarly, lower levels of knowledge that were demonstrated by markets were accompanied with neutral or slightly negative attitudes. However, it is not fully clear the time ordering between the two. In some cases, it was evident that a positive attitude led to market actors seeking more information about the programs. In other cases, markets simply did not have enough knowledge to have a positive or negative attitude.

*High levels of knowledge regarding and positive attitudes toward food entitlement programs.* Three markets demonstrated the highest levels of knowledge out of the sample, two of which also had positive attitudes toward food entitlement programs and were fully participating markets. The market managers for Markets 1 and 5 discussed the process of establishing their markets as full participants in the programs. Both venues were among the pioneering markets in the state for accepting food entitlement benefits, indicating that navigating the certification process early in its implementation was necessary for their goals. In order to accept SNAP EBT payments, both markets had to develop an infrastructure and a procedure to become certified yet other markets have found this process too cumbersome to go through. During the course of becoming certified and building infrastructure, it is clear that the market actors for both of these markets were not only very knowledgeable and intrepid in developing these systems, but they were imbued with a strong sense of advocacy for the food entitlement programs. Putting forth this effort shows the markets’ positive attitudes toward WIC, FMNP, and SNAP and, with the steep learning curve associated with the beginning stages, a high level of knowledge was also acquired.
by these markets. Here, the pattern is that markets with high levels of knowledge also have positive attitudes toward WIC, FMNP, and SNAP, ultimately leading to their full participation.

For the participating markets, the managers commented on how they actively promote the acceptance of food entitlement program benefits at their markets and how they appreciate the strong working relationship they have with their local WIC office. In discussing the participating vendors, the managers strongly encourage their participation, using the term “savvy” on more than one occasion. What the managers emphasized were the economic benefit to be gained by participation, but they also explained how accepting the benefits is a constructive way to give back to the community, thus providing an example of how social exchange can occur at farmers’ markets. To that end, vendors in these markets recognize they have a monetary incentive to participate, even though the markets do not directly benefit financially, but all participating market actors perceive an additional purpose to accepting WIC, FMNP, and SNAP. Specifically, the managers’ positive attitude toward the programs are evident when they made reference to the markets’ role in the community and also harkening back to their goals of improving local food security. They understand that the market is not only a place in which economic transactions occur, but that there are opportunities to positively impact their communities through accepting the benefits. Likewise, the vendors made references to serving a greater cause and that, while income was important, they did not approach selling at farmers’ markets as solely a money-making venture, indicating a positive attitude toward programs reaching vulnerable populations. Therefore, the social exchange occurring at the farmers’ markets is facilitated by the high levels of knowledge and positive attitudes the markets display.

As earlier represented in Figure 1, the outlier to the pattern of high knowledge translating to accepting WIC, FMNP, and SNAP is Market 3. Furthermore, Market 3 has a negative outlook toward food entitlement programs which does not fit with the trend of markets having high levels of knowledge while also having positive attitudes. In terms of the level of knowledge, the market
manager explained how he carefully reviewed the paperwork to become certified to accept the programs and that he came to the conclusion that his market should not participate. During his explanation, it was evident that he wanted to portray his fluency in the programs but he was simultaneously defensive about his decision to not accept; he appeared as though he felt he needed to justify his decision in not having his market participate:

We won’t participate [in WIC, FMNP, or SNAP]. Let me explain that. People get very testy when we say, ‘well, we don’t accept WIC.’ And, they say, “well, that is just CITYNAME.” That is really not the case. We are probably the only people who actually read the documents that get sent out to us and the WIC document that comes out to the farmers market managers—I am amazed that any farmers’ market manager would even consider signing it, because what the government did was take a form that works for supermarkets, for supermarket chains, where you have control over everybody concerned and just put, here let’s send this out to farmer’s markets. It makes the market manager who volunteers liable if one of the vendors doesn’t do the right thing with what they are supposed to do with the vouchers. Accepts the vouchers at the wrong time, or doesn’t give the right weight, things of that nature. We’re personally liable. And I’m looking at that and going ‘I’m not going to touch that’ and so we just don’t accept WIC or the other federal programs.

As a follow up, he was quick to say that it was rare that attendees asked if the market accepted the program coupons. Even so, the stance the manager has taken has ostensibly less to do with lack of consumer demand and more with a bureaucratic and legal concern of possible fraudulent activities related to the redemption of vouchers. In any case, it is highly unlikely that Market 3 will change its position to accept WIC, FMNP, or SNAP in the near future, even if consumer requests grew in number, as it is driven more by a negative attitude toward the programs than it is by gaining a greater understanding of them. To that end, the negative attitude the manager of Market 3 held in regard to the food entitlement programs could possibly prohibit social cohesion as there is a lack of inclusivity via the inability of low-income populations to use their benefits at this market or, possibly, it could strengthen the ties of those who are not in need of the benefits and create a stronger bond amongst those of the in-group.

Moderate levels of knowledge regarding and positive attitudes toward food entitlement programs. A shared characteristic amongst the remaining markets is that none of these markets
are certified to accept SNAP benefits. Markets 4 and 8 accept WIC and FMNP paper coupons, but despite their moderate level of knowledge, it became evident that being able to accept SNAP transactions requires an advanced level of knowledge. One way in which levels of knowledge was determined was the occurrences of interviewees responding to questions regarding WIC, FMNP, and SNAP by saying, “I don’t know” or similar phrases of uncertainty, which was particularly the case with markets that had moderate-to-low levels of knowledge. The most common sources of uncertainty for the two markets related to the SNAP EBT application process to get the market certified and a general lack of understanding on the part of vendors who are unfamiliar with the programs or think there is a cost associated with accepting the coupons. However, both markets generally spoke positively about the programs even without a high level of knowledge. The more positive comments about WIC and FMNP were associated to the coupons as additional revenue streams for the vendors, noting that it is the primary reason why the markets participate. The revenue-related comments made by this pair of markets mirrors the fully participating—and more knowledgeable—markets, however Markets 4 and 8 stop short of having the same display of positive support with the absence of comments relating to social responsibility.

Low levels of knowledge regarding and neutral-to-negative attitudes toward food entitlement programs. Regarding levels of knowledge, three markets lacking the most information on WIC, FMNP, and SNAP do not accept food entitlement program coupons, with two of them exhibiting slightly negative views. It is perhaps because of the lack of knowledge on the part of these market actors that they had these attitudes. The managers of two markets shared that their main concern about accepting WIC, FMNP, or SNAP is whether the programs would be popular among attendees. Nevertheless, vendors are initiating conversations during group meetings, even providing the market managers with contacts in order to gain more knowledge on the process of becoming certified. According to the managers, they have yet to follow up on
reaching out to those suggested people. Despite the vendors providing some assistance, the managers often expressed doubt in how the orchestration of participating WIC, FMNP, and SNAP would go. The manager for Market 2 explained:

I want to try to follow up with that [point of contact] so that next year we can try to put that in place if it’s going to be worth…I’m not sure. My understanding is that we will have to have someone there one place where they can turn in those vouchers so they can be reimbursed or whatever. I don’t know if we can do that through our office or if the Chamber of Commerce will have to handle that and whether they will be willing to do that or not.

Again, for the two markets associated with their local Chambers of Commerce, the leadership of the markets appears to be lagging behind the vendors in regard to collecting information about WIC, FMNP, and SNAP. Both managers hinted that the size of the market is a factor in the lack of urgency to become a certified market. The markets may possibly shift to participating in the future, but they seem to be held by inertia. Vendors do tend to have significant influence over these markets—reflecting briefly on their decision-making processes—and it is possible that Markets 2 and 6 may adopt policies to participate in the programs if the vendors continue to pursue that course. However, the slightly negative attitudes and overall lack of urgency to increase the knowledge base on these programs are considerable hurdles to clear if these markets are to accept WIC, FMNP, and SNAP in seasons to come.

The exception to the observed trend of markets with a low level of knowledge also having slightly neutral attitudes toward the programs is Market 7. The market currently does not accept any food entitlement benefits, but the manager advised there have been conversations to get the market certified as soon as next season. The efforts are due mainly to younger vendors seeking other payment options but also because there some customers who are approaching vendors asking if they accept the vouchers. As a whole, Market 7 presented itself as a newer market that was just learning more about the programs and was beginning the process of
becoming a market certified to accept food entitlement programs and indicated a slightly positive attitude toward WIC, FMNP, and SNAP.

Overall, the markets that lacked a certain threshold of knowledge about the programs are not participating markets, but it must be stressed that having an advanced understanding is not a guarantee that the market will begin accepting these benefits. Knowing about the programs and what steps to take to become certified, combined with a positive attitude toward the programs, is what the four participating markets have in common. Fully participating markets had the greatest levels of knowledge and the most positive views on the food entitlement programs, while partially participating markets had moderate levels of knowledge yet they struggled to overcome logistical barriers to becoming full participants. They have positive attitudes as well but not quite as overtly strong as the first two markets. Three of the four non-participating markets had the least amounts of knowledge about the programs, but were not explicitly taking a stand against participating. Two of these markets were generally neutral toward the programs while the third market was slightly positive.

**Interpersonal Relationships within the Community**

Community was a major factor in the decision-making process of markets in the consideration of food entitlement program participation. However, and not unsurprisingly, what community meant to the individuals interviewed varied substantially. More often than not, the markets that accept WIC, FMNP, and SNAP discussed community in terms of interpersonal relationships they had with local residents. Expressions of strong interpersonal relationships are a direct reflection of social cohesion but these bonds are also potential forms of social capital that can be drawn upon as needed. Conversely, non-participating markets typically discussed community in terms of identifying with the community in the abstract; interviewees associated with non-participating markets would state that they were proud of their community, comment on community amenities and events, and acknowledge any ties to local institutions. While making
these comments, though, they failed to make mention of any specific relationships they have cultivated or developed as a result of being a part of the farmers’ market.

**Strong interpersonal relationships.** Three markets in my study displayed strong interpersonal relationships with residents of their local communities and, of these, two markets accept all forms of food entitlement program benefits with the third accepting WIC and FMNP. Two markets are located in university towns and, as a result, have reasonably diverse populations when compared to the rest of the state. Both the managers and vendors of these markets readily appreciate their local universities and referred to them while discussing the community, noting the direct and indirect support they provide. The manager for the third market in this grouping also explained that the market is located in one of the poorer counties in the state and, despite the low socio-economic status of its residents (with many residents also the recipients of food entitlement benefits), a third farmers’ markets is being proposed in that county because of the overwhelming support the local farmers are given. Also regarding the consumers, the manager for Market 1 noted that there has been tremendous growth in the SNAP benefits that come in weekly to the market, attributing this growth to a greater awareness of consumers in their shopping and eating habits. She specifically mentioned how the awareness of buying local is infiltrating the low-income population, which always was a tough demographic to reach.

Market 5 stood out as the one that is most community-focused in my study, showing the strongest interpersonal relationships with members of the community. The manager, in describing the community, expressed a genuine concern for its residents, noting that they are nice and sincere people but often struggle to make ends meet. According to the market manager, the struggle to make ends meet is a clear reason why the farmers’ market is so vital, because in a community without much industry, every vendor is an independent business. The vendor added another way in which the market supports the vulnerable populations in its community; if vendors have leftover produce at the end of the day, they can take it up to the host tent and it will be
donated to the local food pantry. However, in one of the strongest indications of interpersonal relationships, the vendor for Market 5 shared the following:

We made sure that we always kept in mind how humbled we were when we were struggling. So we always make sure, I mean, we don’t want to undercut anyone, so we always get together and make sure to stay within a certain amount of each other, so we aren’t screwing anyone over. But I make sure that if someone wants to come in and buy a bushel of green beans to can for their family that I get it to them for a good price for their trouble. And I have taught I can’t even count how many people to can….It truly is a lost art. You know, and that is something people need to get back to. And in this struggling economy, by helping people with these prices, they’ve also helped us save our home and put food in our mouths.

There is a strong connection to the community from both fully participating markets. They each have a strong emphasis on building the relationships between vendor and customer, but also the market actors want to contribute to the health and vitality of their local communities while also expressing gratitude to the customers who patron their markets. This deep and rich connection is a likely factor in the markets’ having decided to participate in WIC, FMNP, and SNAP. Overall, the markets benefit by elevating their profiles within their community as an inclusive venue for people of all income backgrounds can come to shop for locally-grown produce. As a direct result, both fully participating markets have grown and flourished since their opening.

**Weak interpersonal relationships.** Five markets in my study demonstrated weak interpersonal relationships with local residents, yet expressed pride in being from the community. Four of the five markets do not accept any form of food entitlement coupon and the fifth market only accepts WIC and FMNP. When describing the community, managers often were rather superficial in providing basic demographic information, with the manager of two markets including mention of the local Chamber of Commerce as the founding organization of the venue. Those who were interviewed for two other markets seemed to have a strong community focus but they appeared as though they treat the market as more of an amenity to the community rather than a critical institution. All of the managers stated that the community members seem to be pleased to go to the farmers’ market every week to meet with neighbors and socialize. The success of
Market 3 has motivated the city to design a new space for the market which included features such as water, electricity, and free Wi-Fi. With these observations the manager provided, the market seems to be a place of comfort that the community enjoys but its residents do not depend upon the market for their nutritional needs. The comments made by the manager for Market 3 highlight a connection between market and community that is not based out of necessity but out of luxury; furthermore, any specific interpersonal relationships that were brought up centered on the city’s mayor and other market actors rather than with market attendees. In sum, the markets appear to fulfill a role of being an interesting feature of the community, but not one that necessarily fosters strong interpersonal relationships.

The strength of interpersonal relationships within the community provided some indication as to whether a farmers’ market would accept food entitlement program coupons. Two markets that had the strongest interpersonal relationships accepted WIC, FMNP and SNAP benefits and a third market that also had strong interpersonal relationships with community residents was certified to accept WIC and FMNP coupons as payment. The five markets that had the weakest interpersonal relationships included four non-participating markets, all of which were rather generic in describing their respective communities. For the markets that are not certified to accept program coupons, it is possible to see how interpersonal relationships within the community may not be a strong factor in making market decisions, given the small amount of detail interviewees provided in regard to any connection between market actors and residents of their local community.

All of the resulting characteristics and thematic concepts are interrelated, but their relationships differ based on whether the market is a full participant or a non-participant. The two partially participating markets exhibited too dissimilar characteristics as to be mapped visually; more specifically, these two markets had different goals, different decision-making bodies and processes, and different interpersonal relationships. Perhaps with additional markets
in future studies a stronger pattern would emerge. The following models help demonstrate the weight and relationship of farmers’ market goals, decision-making boards and processes, levels of knowledge and attitudes, and interpersonal relationships according to the level of market participation.

Figure 2: Model Map for Farmers' Markets that Fully Participate in WIC, FMNP, and SNAP.

For fully participating markets, attitude and market goals are the starting point for which an eventual outcome of accepting benefits emerges. A positive attitude and a goal of improving local food security exhibit a two-directional relationship and it is difficult to discern which precedes the other. However, both of these market characteristics feed into high levels of
knowledge about WIC, FMNP, and SNAP possessed by the markets. The high level of knowledge was obtained by a willingness to pursue the information as it was viewed as valuable in improving local food security. The positive attitude also helps foster strong interpersonal relationships between those working at the markets and community members. Having a goal of improving local food security also impacts the markets’ board composition; the blended board allows for many community voices to be heard when addressing local food security issues, rather than having homogenous voices dominating the conversation. The strong interpersonal relationships are also exhibited by the blended board, and the board composition helps nurture the interpersonal relationships. Both interpersonal relationships and the decision-making bodies lead to the decision-making process of consensus building.

However, by contrast, the non-participating markets have a starting point of knowledge and attitude. The low levels of knowledge that the markets have about the programs is connected to their neutral-to-negative attitudes toward the programs, yet again it is difficult to determine which came first. Both the low levels of knowledge and neutral-to-negative attitudes impact the decision-making bodies that are comprised of only vendors. The vendors, working amongst each other, tend to make decisions that relate only to their immediate concerns rather than the overall market or community needs. As such, the process of simple majority vote among the vendors is the resulting decision-making process. The low level of knowledge leads to a goal of providing a venue for vendors; this is not to say that this is not a valid goal, but it is a narrow goal that is not perceived by market managers and vendors to align with the acceptance of food entitlement program benefits. The neutral-to-negative attitudes do not foster strong interpersonal relationships; instead, there are weak connections to members of the community present in these markets. And, finally, as the goals are only pertaining to the vendors, that is another reason the interpersonal relationships are not strong, as the vendors are not looking outward when making
goals for the markets, and as a result, the markets do not accept food entitlement program benefits.

Figure 3: Model Map for Farmers' Markets that Do Not Participate in WIC, FMNP, and SNAP.

Farmers’ market managers and vendors were able to make the decision whether to accept WIC, FMNP, and SNAP by weighing social factors such as market goals, decision-making bodies and processes, knowledge and attitudes, and interpersonal relationships. Social influences such as these are as much of a part of the decision as are economic reasons. In summary, farmers’ markets with goals to improve local food security and that are more collaborative and seek to
build consensus, are knowledgeable about WIC, FMNP, and SNAP while also holding them in a positive regard, and exhibit strong interpersonal relationships between market actors and community residents display greater tendencies to participate in accepting food entitlement program benefits as a form of payment.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Implications

The importance in increasing our understanding of how farmers’ market managers and vendors decide whether to accept food entitlement program benefits rests within both policy and social realms. Food policymakers and advocates could potentially use this information in order to be more successful in communicating with market managers and vendors regarding WIC, FMNP, and SNAP participation. Having a more refined and targeted message relating to the benefits the programs have to the shoppers as well as the vendors will potentially yield greater numbers of markets participating, thus leading to more positive nutritional and health outcomes for the local population. Spreading the knowledge of the programs to market managers and vendors in and of itself would be very useful, based on how a large percentage of markets in my study simply did not have enough information to make a decision on whether to participate; however, once markets have that knowledge, it may be more efficient to tailor a message that will resonate strongly with that market. For example, markets that have a goal of providing a venue for vendors to sell their produce, food advocates may be more successful with a message relating to how the acceptance of the benefits will be a new source of revenue with potentially a greater net income for the vendors rather than approaching the market with concerns of the negative health outcomes of vulnerable populations that would be improved with greater access to fresh produce. In this case, the income of local farmers is of greater saliency to those farmers’ markets than the food security or health of the consumers, so the advocates can appeal to the issue that is of most importance to those markets. As food advocates learn more about their local markets, especially
the underlying characteristics and decision-making processes, this potentially could allow for
more success in garnering the interest of the farmers’ markets in participating in WIC, FMNP,
and SNAP. Of further note, if larger numbers of farmers’ markets begin to go through the
certification process to be able to accept WIC, FMNP, and SNAP benefits, it may be a signal to
the state and federal agencies that more resources could be funneled to support these markets
specifically and the food entitlement programs generally. Therefore, the understanding of how
markets make their decisions regarding WIC, FMNP, and SNAP participation will allow for food
advocates to better target their message to open up access to the program recipients, and
potentially demonstrate a greater need or demand for these programs to be expanded and better
funded from government agencies.

Sociologists can increase their understanding of the concepts of social exchange, social
capital, and social cohesion by exploring some of the findings of my study and other farmers’
markets studies generally. In analyzing the data provided from managers and vendors, there were
multiple instances of these social concepts that are applicable to a farmers’ market setting. As
earlier stated by Magdol and Bessel (2003), long-distance relationships also provided evidence of
social exchange—though not as strongly as the exchanges that were made in person—and their
finding built upon older assumptions that social exchanges were predicated on face-to-face
interactions. Although the face-to-face interaction is typically credited with providing the
richness of the social exchange, it may be worth considering the role of place in that social
exchange as well. According to Cresswell (2004:37), it is possible to think of place as socially
constructed, but “places are constructed by people doing things and in this sense are never
‘finished’ but are constantly being performed.” Therefore, I posit that in my study that the place
(i.e. a certified farmers’ market) is the facilitator of the social exchange between vendor and
shopper using food entitlement program benefits. Farmers are able to be economically connected
to shoppers by simply selling their produce to a distributor and a shopper using program benefits
to make a purchase at a grocery store, but no social exchange ever takes place. On the other hand, a shopper could visit the farmer at his farm to interact face-to-face but the shopper would not be able to use his or her benefits directly with the farmer. It is because of the place—a certified farmers’ market that is able to accept those benefits—that a richer social exchange can occur between a vendor and a program recipient; they are able to conduct an economic exchange but it is also possible for them to create a social bond. It is not only the social connection between two parties themselves, but the place in which that happens that fosters social exchange can have meaningful impact or even be the foundation of that exchange. Further still, place can also be a source of social capital and a contributing factor to social cohesion. Farmers’ markets that were fully participating in WIC, FMNP, and SNAP demonstrated the inclusivity, breadth, and diversity that are beneficial to the development of high levels of social capital and strong social cohesion. The variety of voices that are invested in the success of the farmers’ market are exercising their social capital and show social cohesiveness because of the place of the farmers’ market. Sociology can draw from geography and place studies to approach the concepts of social exchange, social capital, and social cohesion in a new way, with my study being a possible example.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The nature of qualitative research lends toward having unique limitations without damaging the integrity of the study at hand. For instance, my study examined markets in a Midwestern state, yet farmers’ markets in other regions of the country could provide similar, or be a variation on these, results. On a similar note, the differences between rural and urban markets were not fully addressed and are likely to factor in the decisions to participate in accepting WIC, FMNP, and SNAP benefits. Previous discussions regarding food deserts in both rural and urban areas highlight the issue of food insecurity and the need for food entitlement programs for the low-income populations residing in either sparsely- or densely-populated areas.
Four of the markets in my study are in urbanized areas, according to the Census; these markets are in cities with more than 50,000 residents (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). Three of these are certified markets and one of which accepts WIC, FMNP, and SNAP. As such, only one of the four remaining markets accepts any food entitlement program benefits, although it was a fully participating market. Promising future research could explore whether there are any factors related to region or population density that affect a farmers’ markets decision-making process on accepting these benefits.

Another limitation is the effect of institutional memory. Half of the market managers in my study were in their first or second year in that role. Their perspective of how decisions were made prior to their arrival may not be as informative as those of the managers who were at least partially if not fully responsible for making the decision to certify the markets. I attempted to negotiate that challenge by gathering more details from the vendors of those markets who had newer managers; in three of those four markets, seven years was the shortest tenure held by two of the vendors with the third vendor in her eighth year at that market. To that end, vendors were able to help provide some continuity of institutional memory, keeping information available for new and current market actors. Relatedly, a future examination of the networking of farmers’ markets and the flow of information between markets may be a useful and important study to undertake. This is especially true since my study indicated that the lack of knowledge regarding WIC, FMNP, and SNAP was an insurmountable hurdle to becoming a certified market. During the interviews, a fascinating phenomenon happened multiple times in which interviewees referred to ways in which other markets operated, and often the markets that were referred to were within my study without the interviewees’ knowledge. Market managers frequently appeared to hold themselves in comparison with either neighboring markets or otherwise comparable markets (in terms of size, longevity, or diversity). Vendors tended to also express a desire to discuss other markets they were familiar with, either from doing business at those markets or from word of
mouth by other vendors they knew. However, despite this constant exercise of social proof among various market actors—i.e., the size of vendor booths, venue amenities, featured events—some information did not flow as fluidly as others, such as how to establish markets in accepting benefits. For example, Market 6 is not located very far from Market 1 (perhaps less than a 30 minute drive), but the individuals associated with Market 6 were working to collect information from scratch regarding how to get their market certified to accept food entitlement program benefits, while Market 1 has long been a fully participating market. It is not even necessary that the transmittal of information of this nature be conducted in person between markets; the possibility of virtually networking to share this sort of information is much more likely and vastly more accessible. However, this is less of a study than it is a request for the implementation of a policy that facilitates the flow of information between markets. Whether the networking would be best suited to be managed by markets themselves, or by government organizations (Departments of Agriculture, for example), or in some other capacity would need to be determined by additional future studies.

A limitation of this study was also the approach of viewing farmers’ market managers and vendors as the only parties responsible for shaping their markets. As such, I found that other individuals or organizations contributed to the decisions and trajectory of the market as well, but my study did not account for these other parties. Future studies should take into account these additional contributors in the markets’ decision-making process. In particular, the local Chambers of Commerce were unanticipated, yet influential, components in the operation of two of the eight markets in my study. In both cases, however, the Chambers were not fully engaged in promoting the markets or providing steady leadership for the venues. Markets’ affiliation with the Chambers seemed, instead, to be a limiting factor in terms of the size, scope, and focus of the markets. Ostensibly, Chambers of Commerce have the mission to support local businesses; nonetheless, as the manager of Market 5 stated, each of the vendors at a farmers’ market is an
independent small business. Without the full support of the Chamber, the markets incubating these small businesses may not be equipped to give them the backing they need in order to be successful. Suggested studies related to this topic would be to create a sampling frame of all farmers’ markets that are under the auspices of their local Chambers of Commerce and both qualitative and quantitative approaches can be employed to see if there are any further instances of this trend and measure any negative impact that may be present in that relationship. If a broader pattern exists of local Chambers of Commerce not placing their full support behind—or potentially hindering the success of—farmers’ markets that are under their organizational umbrella, then it may be appropriate to suggest that that relationship is not mutually beneficial and may even be harmful to the prosperity of the market.

Finally, my study did not intend to closely investigate the personal characteristics of the market actors. One characteristic that emerged in my study as having a possible impact on whether a market would become certified to accept food entitlement benefits was the gender of the market managers. Future explorations of gender dynamics and the decision-making process may reveal interesting insights to the management of farmers’ markets. The results of my study indicated the two markets that had blended decision-making bodies and utilized a consensus-building method both had women as market managers. The market managers for both markets are not the original founding managers for the venues, but the markets have historically had female managers since their establishment. Another pattern that seems noteworthy, three of the four non-participating markets were managed by men; this may be of importance to study in the future as WIC, in particular, is a federal entitlement program that is directed toward assisting low-income women. If male market managers are not sensitive to the needs of vulnerable populations within their communities, especially low-income, female-headed households, then farmers’ markets are potentially an inaccessible resource to these individuals. On the other hand, four of the five female-managed markets accepted the benefits, with the one exception to this pattern
being a market that had a manager acting in her first year. It was not of particular scope of my study to explore this relationship between gender and market decision-making styles, but there are possibilities of multiple studies relating to gender and market management styles.

Studies regarding farmers’ markets will be simultaneously valuable to food policymakers as well as sociologists, as the venues provide rich grounds to observe many social concepts in play while also having direct impact on the livelihood and health of many individuals and communities as a whole. Exploring the ways in which market managers and vendors make decisions to accept food entitlement program benefits is a specific example of how social exchange, social capital, and social cohesion can overlap and interact to create an environment to potentially improve the nutritional opportunities and health outcomes of vulnerable populations. Prior to my study, little research has been conducted regarding the internal governance of how decisions are made for farmers’ markets. My study serves as a preliminary examination on this topic and can help guide future studies that may more fully delve into this understanding of farmers’ market decision-making processes.
REFERENCES


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Smoking: Focus Group Results from Economically Distinct Neighborhoods in a Mid-sized U.S. City.”


APPENDICES

Appendix A: Farmers’ Market Description Survey for Market Managers
Appendix B: Farmers’ Market Description Survey for Vendors
Appendix C: Interview Guide for Market Managers
Appendix D: Interview Guide for Vendors
Farmers’ Market Description Survey for Market Managers

You are invited to participate in this survey regarding basic farmers’ market history and market composition. If you agree to take the survey, you may stop at any point you wish. This survey should take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. Upon completing the survey, if you wish to continue, a semi-structured interview will take place. Thank you for your time and participation!

1. How long has this farmers’ market been operating? ______ years

2. Has this market always operated in the same location?
   - Yes
   - No.

3. Does this farmers’ market have any of the following facilities available? (Please choose “yes” or “no” for each option provided).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facilities</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electricity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone Lines</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor Seating</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indoor Seating</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restrooms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheelchair Accessibility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Booth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Please specify)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Is this a grower-only market or is resale permitted?
   - Grower-only
   - Resale
   - Combination of Resale and Grower

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE
5. Which of the following forms of marketing is used to promote this market? (Please choose “yes” or “no” for each option provided).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marketing</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper Ads</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio Commercials</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Direct Mail</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posters/Flyers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road Signs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Corporate Sponsorships</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Please provide below):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. In your opinion, do you think the attendees MOSTLY treat this market as a place for basic grocery shopping or as a place for luxury grocery items?

- [ ] Basic grocery shopping
- [ ] Luxury grocery items

7. How long have you been the market manager at this market? ____ years

8. Approximately, how far away, in miles, do you live from the market? __________

9. Do you earn an income to be the market manager?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

PERSONAL DEMOGRAPHICS:

10. What is your age (in years)? ____

11. What is your sex?

- [ ] Male
- [ ] Female

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE
12. With which ethnicity(ies) do you most identify? (Choose all that apply).

☐ African-American  
☐ Asian-American  
☐ Caucasian  
☐ Hispanic, non-white  
☐ Native American  
☐ Other (Please specify): _______________________________________________________

Thank you for your participation in this survey! Your responses will be helpful in providing background information about this market and your experiences as a market manager. If you have any additional comments or questions about this survey or for the researcher, please feel free to use the space on the below.
Farmers’ Market Description Survey for Vendors

You are invited to participate in this survey regarding your experiences in working at farmers’ markets. If you agree to take the survey, you may stop at any point you wish. This survey should take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. Upon completing the survey, if you wish to continue, a semi-structured interview will take place. Thank you for your time and participation!

1. How long have you sold at farmers’ markets in general? _____ years

2. How long have you been a vendor at this farmers’ market? _____ years

3. Do you currently sell at more than one farmers’ market?
   - [ ] Yes
   - [ ] No.

4. Approximately, how far away, in miles, do you live from the market? __________

5. Is selling at farmers’ markets a primary source of income for you?
   - [ ] Yes
   - [ ] No.

6. Approximately how many attendees visit your booth per week? __________

7. Approximately how many of these attendees actually make purchases? __________

8. Approximately how much do you earn in sales in a week at this market?
   - $___________

9. In your opinion, do you think the attendees treat your product as a basic grocery need or as a luxury grocery item?
   - [ ] Basic grocery need
   - [ ] Luxury grocery item

PERSONAL DEMOGRAPHICS:
10. What is your age (in years)? ______

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE
11. What is your sex?

☐ Male
☐ Female

12. With which ethnicity(ies) do you most identify? (Choose all that apply).

☐ African-American
☐ Asian-American
☐ Caucasian
☐ Hispanic, non-white
☐ Native American
☐ Other (Please specify): _____________________________________________________

Thank you for your participation in this survey! Your responses will be helpful in providing information about experiences of vendors at farmers’ markets. If you have any additional comments or questions about this survey or for the researcher, please feel free to use the space on the below.
Questions for Market Managers:

- Does this farmers’ market have a mission statement?
  - If yes:
    - What is it? Can I obtain a copy?
    - Were you a part of creating the mission statement?
    - Where is the mission statement displayed?
    - Have any vendors, attendees, or the general public made comments to you or other market members about the mission of the market?
    - To what extent do you feel the market successfully embodies its mission?
    - What conversations have you had with vendors about the mission of the market?
- What goals does the market have in terms of the number of vendors and overall size of the market?
- How closely do you work with the vendors?
  - Are you “hands-on” in dealing with their transactions at the booths?
  - To what degree do you incorporate vendors in making market-wide decisions? How are they included?
  - Is there a market committee or any such group that includes vendors? How do the vendors become a part of that committee? Volunteer? Requirement?
  - Are vendors encouraged to bring questions and concerns to you as the market manager or is there another process that is used?
- Are there any vendor booths dedicated to information or education regarding nutrition, cooking, or general health?
  - If yes:
    - Who operates those booths? Are they credentialed?
    - How successful would you say those booths are, in terms of the number of attendees visiting and the way the information is distributed?
    - Please describe the average attendee in terms of age, sex, ethnicity, and income that would visit this type of booth?
  - If no:
    - Is it something that is being or will be considered for the future?
    - Have there ever been any requests to have such a booth at the market?
    - Do you think the market would benefit from having this type of booth?
- What forms of payment does the market accept?
  - What level of cooperation exists between vendors and the market manager/committee in making this decision?
  - Is it a market-wide decision or based on individual vendors?
    - If market-wide, are there any options for vendors to work outside the market’s accepted forms of payment?
    - If the vendors decide individually, do they have to notify the market as to what they are accepting as payment (especially if it is a non-cash/personal check form of payment)?
    - What are the factors that are considered for accepting these forms of payment?
What is the most common form of payment?

Are individual farmers responsible for any risk of payment accepted (bounced checks, counterfeit bills, etc.) or does the market provide any support for the vendor?

Have there been vendors or consumers that express concerns about the accepted forms of payment? Have the accepted forms of payment encouraged or disrupted business?

Would you consider additional forms of payment?
- If yes:
  - What kinds?
  - Are there any barriers preventing that from happening?
- If no, why not?

Would you consider having another market session at a different time and day of the week in order to meet needs of attendees?
- If yes, what factors would you have to consider in making that decision?
- If no, why not?

How would you describe the community in which the market is located?

Do the attendees primarily coming from the immediately local community, or do the attendees come from other communities to this market?
- If from local community:
  - Do you think the market needs to reach out beyond the local community, or is it better to serve the needs of those nearest to the market?
  - If you did have people from other communities attending, how would it impact this market?
- If from other communities:
  - What about your market draws people from other communities?
  - What do you think are possible reasons that there are not more people from the local community attending the market?

Have you managed other markets?
- If yes, how the other markets different or similar to this market?
- If no, to what extent do you work with other markets while managing this market?

How do sponsors (corporate, government, charitable, other) of the market become involved and what is their level of involvement?

How do you keep a count of how many attendees you have at the market?

Do you have an idea of how many attend the market for other reasons outside of making purchases? Other reasons for attending the market besides making purchases?

Wrap up
- What else would you like to discuss about this farmers’ market, and your experiences in working with the vendors, attendees, and the local community?
- What questions or concerns do you have about this interview or project?
Questions for Vendors:

- What got you started in selling at farmers’ markets?
  - What do you enjoy about being a vendor at farmers’ markets?
  - What are some of the challenges?

- How did you choose to get involved with this farmer’s market?
  - Did the local community play a role in selecting this market?
  - What steps did you have to take to become a vendor?
  - Would you consider the process to become a vendor easy or difficult?

- How closely do you work with the market manager and any committee in making your vendor decisions?
  - How often do you meet with the market manager/committee?

- Do you feel encouraged to go to the market manager/committee with questions, concerns, or opinions?
  - If yes, do you do so?
  - If no, why not?

- Does the market manager/committee come to you to obtain your opinion or feedback on market-related issues?
  - If yes, do you give your input when asked?
  - If no, is that a concern to you?

- What forms of payment do you accept?
  - How do you decide what forms of payment to accept?
  - How included does the market manager/committee make you feel in making this decision?
  - What is the most common form of payment you receive?
  - Does the market provide any support for you if there is a fraudulent payment made, such as a bounced check or counterfeit bills?
  - Have there been attendees concerned about the accepted forms of payment? Have the accepted forms of payment encouraged or disrupted business?
  - Would you consider additional forms of payment?
    - If yes:
      - What kinds?
      - Are there any barriers preventing that from happening?
    - If no, why not?

- Generally, how much time do you spend with each individual attendee during a transaction or for answering questions?
  - Do you spend less time with someone if they are not clearly indicating a purchase will be made?

- What kind of patterns or trends have you noticed in the attendees since you have been a vendor at this market?
  - Have the types of people attending stayed the same or changed?
  - Has the demand for products stayed the same or changed?

- How would you describe the local community where this market is located?
• Do you think more of the attendees at the market (or those that you see at your booth) come from the local community or do they come from other communities?
  o If from local community:
    ▪ Does the market reach out beyond the local community, or is it better to serve the needs of those nearest to the market?
    ▪ Would you support the market in encouraging people from other communities to shop at this market?
  o If from other communities:
    ▪ What do you think it is about this market draws people from other communities?
    ▪ Why are there not more people from the local community attending the market?

• How important is it to you that attendees become educated about your produce/product?
  o If important:
    ▪ What ways do you try to provide that education?
    ▪ Would you support the market in having a booth that is dedicated to nutritional education?
  o If not important, why isn’t it?

• What do you primarily sell? Do you consider your produce/product as a basic need or a luxury item?

• What makes a market day a successful day for you?

• Wrap up
  o What else would you like to discuss about this farmers’ market, and your experiences with selling here, working with the market manager(s), attendees, and the local community?
  o What questions or concerns do you have about this interview or project?