Vantage Point
Farmers Market
Port Huron, Michigan

2016 Impacts
INTRODUCTION

In 2006, the Michigan Farmers Market Association (MIFMA) was formed to provide a central resource for farmers markets and the farmers and vendors that sell at farmers markets, working toward a mission of advancing farmers markets to create a thriving marketplace for local food and farm products. MIFMA defines a farmers market as a public and recurring assembly of farmers or their representatives selling direct-to-consumer food and products which they have produced themselves. In addition, the market may include a variety of vendors as determined by market management. A farmers market is organized for the purpose of facilitating personal connections that create mutual benefits for local farmers, vendors, shoppers and communities.

Over the last 10 years, the number of farmers markets in Michigan has doubled, from 150 in 2006 to more than 300 in 2016. This growth can be attributed to the wide range of benefits farmers markets provide their communities including, but not limited to, acting as the center of a thriving regional food system, supporting food and farm based businesses, serving as a community gathering place, increasing healthy food access, and protecting farmland and the environment.

Michigan markets are central to strong regional food systems because they promote farm vitality and provide communities of all sizes direct access to farmers and their products. Michigan farmers markets operate as incubators for unique and varying food and farm businesses. By fostering a mutually beneficial relationship between customers and farmers, farmers markets give small businesses a unique outlet to develop a customer base and increase profits. Low-income areas can also be reinvigorated through exposure to diverse products found within these markets, especially to a wide variety of fruits and vegetables which are often difficult to access in underserved areas. Benefiting from one of the most diverse selections of local agriculture in the nation, Michigan farmers markets expose communities to an ever-changing selection of products throughout the year.

Farmers markets generate economic benefit not only for the farmers and small businesses that participate, but also for neighborhood and nearby businesses, as well as the surrounding region. Farmers markets attract shoppers to a downtown or commercial area where they will often linger and make additional purchases during their shopping trip, thus spreading economic impact throughout the community. Farmers markets also distribute impact through a community by supporting small businesses, which are more likely to purchase goods and services from local or regional suppliers for the inputs they need.

1 MIFMA definition of a farmers market: http://mifma.org/aboutus/
By creating a thriving marketplace on a weekly basis, farmers markets also foster community development. Farmers markets create an active public space that offers community members a unique experience to gather, interact, and build relationships. As a community gathering place, markets can shape growth, foster development, and strengthen communities.

Michigan farmers markets also expand access to local, nutritious foods which affects the health of the entire community. MIFMA strives to ensure all residents have access to locally grown, fresh, nutritious food. In 2006, only three of Michigan’s farmers markets accepted the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). In 2016, 157 farmers markets in Michigan, just over half of all markets in the state, accepted SNAP. In addition to SNAP, customers have the opportunity to utilize many different food assistance benefits at Michigan farmers markets, such as Double Up Food Bucks, WIC Project FRESH, Market FRESH for Seniors, and Hoophouses for Health. Accepting a variety of food assistance benefits allows markets to serve a wide and diverse customer base and provides an inclusive environment for community members. When food assistance benefits, such as SNAP, flow through farmers markets, federal and philanthropic dollars circulate through local communities and benefit local businesses.

Farmers markets also help to protect Michigan agriculture, farmland, and greenspace. Farmland is protected and well cared for when farming is profitable. Supporting farm vitality helps keep and restore farmland to production, as well as enabling farmers to utilize management practices that protect the environment and incorporate and care for greenspace.

While the benefits of farmers markets are diverse and expansive, the economic impact of Michigan farmers markets has not been measured or documented. For this reason, MIFMA identified the need for standardized, accurate data collection at a local and state level in order to recognize and document the contributions farmers markets make to Michigan’s food and agricultural industry.
Successful farmers markets reflect on the benefits they provide, measure their impact, and share the outcomes. Having strong data leads to strong markets. Strong markets measure various impacts to share with vendors, customers, community partners, and other local stakeholders. The impact farmers markets have on their communities is significant. When a market is focused on attracting visitors, facilitating a thriving local marketplace, and administering various food assistance benefits, measuring and communicating about their impact is often an overlooked and undervalued investment of time, energy, and resources. Strong farmers markets understand the importance of identifying important metrics, utilizing sound measurement instruments and practices, being accurate and timely with measurement, and tracking metrics over time. Initiating this kind of thoughtful and comprehensive approach to data collection at farmers markets will help markets evaluate and share their impact.

For these reasons, MIFMA conducted a pilot project in 2016 with funding from a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Business Development Grant (RBDG). Through this pilot, MIFMA sought to assess the economic contribution farmers markets make to Michigan’s rural communities. The pilot project supported seven farmers markets in six rural communities in collecting data and assessing economic contribution. Each of these participating communities is considered rural according to the following USDA Economic Research Service definition: a nonmetropolitan area, based at the county level, which includes a combination of open countryside, rural towns (places with fewer than 2,500 people), and urban areas with populations ranging from 2,500 to 49,999 that are not part of larger labor market areas (metropolitan areas).²

Participating communities benefited from this project by gaining access to data they could use to inform future decisions. Area small businesses also benefited by learning how the farmers market contributes to their independent stores’ consumer attendance and sales. Participating markets benefited by collecting data that can demonstrate the market’s impacts on the community and can be used to inform future decisions about expansion, the addition or enhancement of facilities, and/or to identify and evaluate new opportunities.

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Data was collected over the course of the 2016 farmers market season in a variety of ways including: customer surveys, a pre- and post-season vendor survey to summarize season sales and trends, a daily vendor sales log, and data collection by market managers to document daily trends such as customer counts and vendor attendance.

Market managers who participated in this study faced many barriers including hesitation from farmers and vendors to report sales, taxing weather conditions, cumbersome reporting requirements, and limited staff time available for this project. To make strides in assessing the impacts of their markets, most managers had to overcome a lack in budget resources and staff time to collect useable information. The participating farmers market managers understood the value of the data being collected and took the time to make it a part of their daily operational duties.

Valuable records are attained by making data collection part of ongoing market operations. Utilizing the information gained from data collection helps to enforce market operations by showing what outside factors may be effecting market dynamics. Data collection also informs management strategy by identifying where energy should be focused. This helps market managers be strategic about the limited time they have to offer.

METHODOLOGY

Throughout the 2016 market season, market managers were asked to collect data through a farmers market profile, two connected Excel workbooks (one for master data entry and one to track vendor sales), a vendor profile survey, vendor sales slips, visitor/customer survey, and a visitor count log.

Vendors were asked to take a pre-season vendor profile survey that asked for information about acreage owned and/or leased, distance traveled to the market, products offered, and in which farmers markets they participate. Vendor sales were tracked each market day by collecting vendor sales slips. Sales slips accounted for cash, credit/debit, and food assistance program sales. Although these were required pieces of data, reporting was inconsistent due to lack of participation from all vendors. Market managers also tracked vendor attendance, volunteer hours, and visitor counts. Visitor surveys were also distributed throughout the market season to capture feedback from unique customers. The number of customer surveys to be collected was determined by using estimated annual visitor attendance and a survey sample calculator with a confidence level of 95% and a confidence interval of 10. Farmers market visitors were asked about what transportation method they used to reach the market, their zip code, the amount of money spent at the farmers market and at surrounding businesses, products they were purchasing, and frequency of visits to the market.
MARKET PROFILE

Vantage Point Farmers Market

**Sponsoring Organization:** Acheson Ventures

**When:** 8 a.m. - 2 p.m. Saturdays, May – October; 8 a.m. - 2 p.m. Tuesdays, June-October

**Where:** 51 Water Street, Port Huron 48060

**Style:** Pop-up in parking lot/sidewalk

**County:** St. Claire

**County Population:** 159,875

**Website:** [www.porthuronmarket.com](http://www.porthuronmarket.com)


**Market Management:** Full-Time, Year-Round Staff (split between the Vantage Point Farmers Markets and the Maritime Center)

**Market Manager Status:** Certified Market Manager

**Number of Market Days Data was Collected:** 35

**Total Number of Market Days Throughout Season:** 48

**Average Number of Vendors Per Market Day:** 20

**Total Number of Vendors Throughout Season:** 39

**Average Number of Visitors Each Market Day:** 3,585 visitors on Saturday; 1,970 visitors on Tuesday

**Types of Currency Accepted:** Cash, Check, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

3 Double Up Food Bucks

4 WIC Project FRESH (WIC FMNP)

5 Market FRESH (Senior FMNP)

6 Hoophouses for Health

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3 SNAP EBT: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, a nutrition assistance program administered by the United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service to help low-income people and families to buy the food they need for good health. Benefits are distributed on debit-like Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards and transfer to retailers through an electronic system. [www.fns.usda.gov/snap/](http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/)

4 Double Up Food Bucks: A SNAP incentive program developed by Fair Food Network that doubles the value of SNAP benefits spent at participating markets and grocery stores. [www.fairfoodnetwork.org/projects/double-up-food-bucks/](http://www.fairfoodnetwork.org/projects/double-up-food-bucks/)

5 WIC Project FRESH: Federally recognized as Women, Infants, and Children Farmers Market Nutrition Program (WIC FMNP). A program providing participating WIC clients with coupons to purchase eligible, locally grown, fresh, unprepared fruits and vegetables at authorized farmers markets. [www.michigan.gov/mdhhs](http://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs)

6 Market FRESH: Federally recognized as Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (Senior FMNP). An educational program providing senior participants with coupons to purchase locally grown, fresh fruits and vegetables at participating farmers markets. [www.michigan.gov/marketfresh](http://www.michigan.gov/marketfresh)

7 Hoophouses for Health: A program designed to increase access to Good Food for vulnerable families while at the same time expanding the Good Food infrastructure and season extension capacity of Michigan farmers. [www.hoophousesforhealth.org](http://www.hoophousesforhealth.org)
MARKET DESCRIPTION

The Vantage Point Farmers Market is operated by Acheson Ventures as a 501(c)(3). The market is run by a Market Manager and Assistant Market Manager. Founded in 2007, the Vantage Point Farmers Market provides the city of Port Huron with a local gathering place where customers can buy nutritious, local foods.

The Vantage Point Farmers Market is located on the banks of the St. Clair River. This location provides visitors with a unique and exciting atmosphere. The market has a diverse customer base and gives visitors access to outdoor activities. For example, visitors can enjoy watching freighters go by, fish in the river, or go inside the Maritime Center and learn about the Great Lakes. The Vantage Point Farmers Market is also located along the river walk, allowing customers alternative routes to the market that also provide access to nature preserves and an interactive environment.
**VENDORS**

The Vantage Point Farmers Market brings together a variety of farmers and small businesses from along the eastern border of Michigan. The Vantage Point Farmers Market is open to producer-only vendors.

- Through the course of the 2016 season, 39 vendors attended the Vantage Point Farmers Market. These small businesses represented a broad range of product types, offering 36 different SNAP eligible food items.
  - Value Added Products: 15 Vendors (38%)
  - Produce: 14 Vendors (36%)
  - Crafts and Services: 6 Vendors (15%)
  - Meat and Fish: 3 Vendors (8%)
  - Plants and Flowers: 1 Vendor (3%)
- Total Number of Individuals Employed Through Vendor Businesses: 135
  - Year-Round Employees: 86
  - Seasonally Employees: 49
- Total Acres Owned or Leased by Farmer Vendors\(^8\): 1,575 acres
  - Owned: 1,240 acres
  - Leased: 335 acres
- Total Acres of Farmland in Production by Vendors: 1,575 acres
- Average Number of Miles Vendors Traveled to the Market: 20 miles
- 5 Farm Vendors are Considered Beginning Farmers as They Have Less Than 10 Years of Farming Experience
- 5% of Vendors’ Businesses are Owned by Individuals Under the Age of 35
- Average Number of SNAP Eligible Products Available Each Market Day: 36

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**135 employees are supported by our vendors’ businesses.**

Small businesses create new, meaningful employment opportunities.

**20 miles**

average distance food travels from farm to our market.

That’s fresh!

**1,575 acres**

of farmland in production by our vendors.

America loses an acre of farmland every hour to development.

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\(^8\) This number represents acres of land owned or leased by farm vendors who reported owning or leasing land in the vendor pre-season survey.
VISITORS

An average of 2,780 people visited the Vantage Point Farmers Market each week, resulting in approximately 101,280 total visits throughout the season. The market attracted customers from all over Michigan; however, 48% of the 173 visitors surveyed came from Port Huron’s zip code (48060). Along with serving Port Huron’s local community, an additional 43% of the 173 visitors surveyed came from within St. Claire County. Outside of Port Huron, Vantage Point Farmers Market visitors came from 23 different zip codes around the country, including three from outside Michigan. The market is attracting people to the downtown area and supporting area vibrancy. Eighty percent of those surveyed came to the area specifically for the market, and 52% plan to do additional shopping, eating, or other activities in the area on the day they visited the market.

- Estimated Average Visitor Count Per Market Day: 2,775
- Estimated Annual Visitor Count: 101,280
- 90% of Visitors Used a Personal Vehicle to get to the Farmers Market
- 86% of Visitors Purchased Produce
- 27% of Visitors Purchased Value-Added Products
- 24% of Visitors Purchased Meat and Seafood
- 58% of Visitors Shop at the Market Frequently (weekly or more)
- 52% of Visitors Planned to do Additional Shopping Eating or Other Activities in the Area
  - Based on spending estimates made by visitors completing a survey, an estimated $1,780 is spent by farmers market visitors in the surrounding community the day of the market.11

52% of visitors plan to spend money at neighboring businesses on market days. Local businesses benefit from customers drawn to the area on market days.

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9 This number does not represent unique visitors. The average number of visitors was calculated by taking monthly visitor counts periodically throughout the market day according to the Rapid Market Assessment protocol developed by Oregon State University. [www.smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/](http://www.smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/)
10 This number represents the percentage of people who reported buying food in a specific category through the customer survey, who claimed buying produce, value-added products, meat and seafood.
11 This number represents the estimated dollar sum from customers who reported spending a specific dollar amount in the area on the day they were surveyed at the farmers market.
SALES

From the 174 customer surveys collected during the 2016 market season, the following metrics were also analyzed: average customer purchases, visitor frequency, and products customers purchased. To help understand the overall sales at the market, visitors were asked to report the amount they were spending or planned to spend at the market that day. By comparing the vendor documentation of sales and the customer reports of purchases, a better understanding of the sales conducted at the Vantage Point Farmers Market can be demonstrated.

Throughout the season, customers reported spending anywhere between $0 to $125 on a market day, with an average of $27 per market visit. The median amount customers reported spending was $20. The amount customers more frequently reported spending was also $20. Customers who came to the market also reported shopping at businesses outside the market. Through surveys, customers indicated they spent between $1 and $150 at other area businesses, with an average of $26 spent in the area surrounding the market per customer.

Based on visitor surveys, a snapshot of spending at the market and other nearby businesses can be created. In future seasons, the market plans to collect additional sales data directly from vendors in an effort to further quantify the spending and community impact of the market.

- Estimated Total Annual Sales (inference based on reported customer spending)\(^\text{12}\): $2,734,560
- Cash Sales (by vendors reporting sales): 78% of total sales
- SNAP Benefits: 8% of total sales
- Double Up Food Bucks Incentives: 8% of total sales
- Market FRESH (Senior FMNP): 6% of total sales
- WIC Project FRESH (WIC FMNP): <1% of total sales
- Estimated Total Annual Sales (based on vendor daily reporting): $264,540

Sales data was collected through vendor reports and customer surveys. Vendors who sold at the Vantage Point Farmers Market were asked to fill out a daily sales slip and provide it to the market manager. Over the course of the season, the market manager recorded how many vendors were present each market day and how many of those vendors reported their daily sales. On average, about 46% of vendors at the market would report sales daily.

\[\text{\$2,734,560 in estimated sales}\]
\[\text{directly to the vendors’ local farms and businesses.}\]
\[\text{Returning 3x more of their sales to the local economy than chain retailers.}\]

\(^{12}\) When evaluating customers who reported spending between a range of dollar amounts, the exact midpoint was used for reporting.
SUMMARY

The 2016 pilot project conducted by MIFMA sought to assess the economic contribution farmers markets make to Michigan's rural communities. At the end of the pilot project, it was evident that farmers markets impact their community in many ways, including but not limited to, acting as the center of a thriving regional food system, supporting food and farm based businesses, and serving as community gathering places. The pilot project allowed for impacts to be measured over a market season and for the results to be used to aid market managers in future decision making.

Measuring impacts at the market level strengthens the entire Michigan farmers market community. By conducting the 2016 program, MIFMA has begun to form standardized data collection processes that can be utilized by any/all Michigan farmers markets. Utilizing standardized data collection processes also allows for data to be equitably compared between markets and for data to be aggregated from several markets in order to show impacts at a county, regional, and/or statewide level. This kind of data can be a powerful advocacy tool for market managers in their local community, as well as for a statewide farmers market association, like MIFMA, that advocates at a state and federal level for programs and policies which support farmers markets and the farmers and vendors that sell at farmers markets.

In addition to identifying a variety of benefits from this data collection process, the 2016 pilot project also identified several challenges with this type of record keeping and impact measurement. Confusion regarding reporting requirements, the availability and investment of staff time to gather data, and cooperation from vendors were all challenges experienced by participating markets. Feedback from market managers encouraged MIFMA to find efficient, streamlined data collection tools for farmers markets. This need lead to the adoption of use of the Farmers Market Metrics Portal13.

In partnership with the national Farmers Market Coalition, MIFMA launched the Farmers Market Metrics Portal in 2017. The Farmers Market Metrics Portal is a web-based tool used by market managers to track and communicate farmers market data. This tool allows market managers to easily input daily data, track market vendors, and communicate impacts to their community.

The use of the Farmers Market Metrics Portal allows Michigan farmers markets to collect standardized data and measure impacts in a user-friendly environment. Standardizing these processes will allow MIFMA to understand the scope of impacts that farmers markets in Michigan have on jobs, tourism, agriculture, food access, and the economy.

Looking forward, MIFMA’s goal is to help Michigan farmers markets understand the importance of data collection and to demonstrate how collecting and sharing data can benefit their markets. Utilizing the Farmers Market Metrics Portal will allow markets to collect data independently while creating a common place to keep all Michigan farmers market data and an efficient way of measuring impacts of farmers markets across the state. The portal will allow farmers market managers to identify yearly trends due to consistent data collection each season.

Farmers markets have significant and meaningful impacts on their communities that reach far beyond vendor shopper sales and interactions, but the quantifiable data to support those impacts has always been lacking. Thanks to this project, the data gathered and the tools and resources developed, MIFMA hopes to build an even stronger case for farmers markets in Michigan and the tremendous impact they have on their local economies and the social wellbeing of their communities.

13 The Farmers Market Metrics Portal was developed by the Farmers Market Coalition (FMC). In partnership with FMC, MIFMA and participating Michigan farmers markets have access to this portal. https://farmersmarketcoalition.org/programs/farmers-market-metrics/
About the Michigan Farmers Market Association

The Michigan Farmers Market Association (MIFMA) was started in 2006 as a statewide association to promote local food consumption in Michigan by connecting more farmers to consumers through farmers markets. Today, MIFMA works with its membership to maintain its mission and attain its vision.

**Mission:** MIFMA advances farmers markets to create a thriving marketplace for local food and farm products.

**Vision:** MIFMA places farmers markets at the forefront of the local food movement and works to ensure all residents have access to healthy, locally grown food and that Michigan farmers markets receive policy support.

This work was performed with funding from a USDA Rural Development Business Grant and a Specialty Crop Block Grant. This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer.