



# MEASURING MICHIGAN FARMERS MARKETS

## PROMISING PRACTICES FOR VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT, TRAINING, & RETENTION

Volunteers can have a significant role at your farmers market, donating their time and expertise to help fulfill the needs of the market. **Most market managers will need to rely on volunteers, support staff, or other organizational partners to gather good data at their market.**

**Volunteers can be utilized to collect data during the market day and possibly even outside of the market day helping to enter the data collected into a central database or spreadsheet.** The following steps and promising practices will help you recruit, train, and retain volunteers to help with your data collection efforts.

### 1. Volunteer Recruitment

Before beginning to recruit volunteers, it is first recommended to **create your data collection plan and identify what metrics your market will collect.** Knowing what needs to be accomplished will help you identify the number and skill level of volunteers needed. Ideally, this should be done prior to the market season to give yourself enough time to plan and recruit.



Using your data collection plan, determine how many volunteers you'll need each market day based on the data collection activities that will be happening and the tasks you need support with.

**Determine how many volunteers you'll need each market day based on the data collection activities that will be happening and the tasks you need support with. Possible tasks include:**

- ▶ PERFORMING VISITOR COUNTS
- ▶ COLLECTING VISITOR SURVEYS
- ▶ TRAINING/MANAGING VOLUNTEERS
- ▶ MONITORING VENDOR ATTENDANCE
- ▶ DOCUMENTING PRODUCT DIVERSITY
- ▶ ASSISTING IN DATA ENTRY (after the market)



Suggested Day	Date of Count	Number of Support Staff Needed	Date Completed
Normal Market Day			
3rd Market Day			
Event or Busy Day			
3rd to Last Market Day			

Resources Needed:  
• [Visitor Count Clicker Worksheet](#) and a clicker for each staff member

Notes:

An example for planning visitor counts and visitor surveys can be found in the following [Metrics Worksheet](#).

Once you've determined how many volunteers you need, the dates you need them, and the tasks they will be performing, it is time to start recruiting!

# EXAMPLES OF WHERE TO FIND LOCAL VOLUNTEERS:

- Business partners and market sponsors
- Local banks and credit unions and their staff
- Friends and family of your market's farmers and vendors
- Market customers and local food enthusiasts
- Local high school/college students
- National Honor Society students
- Local 4-H and FFA clubs
- Local service organizations/nonprofits (such as Lions and Rotary Clubs)
- Faith-based communities



Volunteers may also be customers and market supporters who are invested in seeing the market succeed. Volunteer positions may be a great way for market sponsors and community nonprofits to further highlight their organizations in a more informal way.

Distribute your message through your market's traditional marketing channels, by asking community organizations to help you spread the word, and through your own networking at the market and at other local community events.

Volunteers may be individuals who can only attend once or are willing to come to every market. Additionally, some may be only able to help on market days, while others desire flexibility to complete tasks on their own time. **Each volunteer or volunteer group's potential interests, skills, availability, and motives for volunteering should be considered when recruiting and selecting volunteers for each data collection task needed.**

For example, a volunteer who can only attend one market day would be a great fit to collect visitor counts while a committed volunteer may be able to help the market manager train new volunteers each week.

## PROMISING PRACTICES:

### START EARLY

Begin outreach to potential volunteers before the market season begins. However, don't be surprised if certain volunteer groups can't commit too early. For example, high school and college students may not be able to commit until they've secured their jobs or internships for the summer.

### CREATE AND SHARE A VOLUNTEER JOB DESCRIPTION

Develop a job description of the expectations and responsibilities of each volunteer role. This doesn't need to be long, but should give volunteers an idea of what you are looking for and what will be expected of them! Setting expectations upfront can help mitigate issues down the road.

### HIGHLIGHT THE BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING

Volunteers want to add value! Share the need and the impact the volunteer will have on fulfilling the mission of the market during your recruitment efforts!

### DEVELOP A VOLUNTEER INTEREST FORM

This is an easy way for volunteers to be able to express their interest and help you match the right person to the right task. Interest forms could include an online Google form, a form on your market's website, or in-person paper signups at the market.

**DON'T BE AFRAID  
TO ASK!**

**Individuals won't know  
your organization  
needs volunteers until  
someone asks them!**



## 2. Volunteer Training

Good volunteer management starts with consistent communication. Once you've secured volunteers, send them information about **what task they'll be performing and the dates/times they've committed to**. It is also a best practice to send volunteers a **reminder e-mail the day before their shift** with the arrival time, shift length, and where they should meet you, along with any other important day-of reminders such as what to bring and/or wear like comfortable shoes and sunscreen.

Secure and assign  
volunteers

Debrief on task expectations and  
volunteer shift date/time

Send a reminder  
email

Prior to the start of each volunteer shift, meet with volunteers to walk through what task(s) they'll be completing, **any directions to complete the task successfully**, and provide them with the supplies needed to complete their assigned task(s). Let volunteers know where to find you after their shift to turn in their data and supplies. Onboarding training may also be a good time to collect any volunteer waivers your market may require including an emergency contact for each volunteer.

Provide directions and  
supplies for tasks

Inform volunteers about  
end-of-shift duties.

During volunteer training, it is important to share your market's rules and regulations as volunteers should be expected to abide by any relevant market rules during their shift.

### PROMISING PRACTICES:

#### HAVE A VOLUNTEER SIGN-IN SHEET

Sign-in sheets will help you keep track of any volunteer hours needed and serve as an attendance record for reporting community service hours and to have on hand in case something happens in which you need to know who was at the market on a specific day.

#### IDENTIFY A VOLUNTEER LEADER

Consider making an experienced, committed volunteer a "Volunteer Leader" to help with new volunteer training and check-ins with volunteers during the market day. This will help ease the burden on the market manager during a busy market day.

#### PROMOTE CROSS-TRAINING

If a volunteer is not performing well, try pairing them with a more experienced volunteer who is doing the same task. This may be especially helpful in collecting visitor surveys as volunteers may not be as comfortable approaching market shoppers and can learn best practices from others.

#### PROVIDE FEEDBACK

Take time to check in on how a volunteer's shift went and any challenges you can help them work through. Provide feedback needed to help them complete their tasks more successfully in the future and let them know what they are doing well. Be specific and emphasize success!



### 3. Volunteer Retention

Once you have secured volunteers, **it is important to work to keep them coming back**, reducing some of the time needed to recruit a full set of new volunteers each season and to train new volunteers. There will always be some level of turnover, however, building relationships and recognizing your volunteers will help keep your retention levels up.

**Working to build volunteer relationships and understand their reasons for volunteering will help you build trust and learn how each volunteer is motivated.**

Some individuals may be volunteering because they want to form relationships and want to work closely with others while others may want to make a difference **where sharing the value of their contribution may help keep them motivated**. For example, if a volunteer is helping to collect visitor surveys, share the number of surveys needed to meet your market's goal, the progress the volunteer has made in reaching that goal, and how the data will be used to further your market's mission.

#### TAKE TIME TO LET YOUR VOLUNTEERS KNOW WHEN THEY ARE DOING A GOOD JOB!

- **This can be an informal recognition such as saying thank you and that you appreciate their work or sending a card or email.** If budget allows, you may consider providing hot coffee on an especially cold morning or honoring volunteers at an end-of-season market dinner.
- **Recognition can be more formal as well.** Recognize volunteers in press releases, newsletters, or on social media highlighting the value they brought to your market. Not only are you recognizing your volunteers, but someone may read the mention, feel motivated, and reach out to volunteer next season!

## PROMISING PRACTICES:

### COLLECT FEEDBACK

Take time to listen to volunteers' comments, their ideas, and ways for improvement. They bring a new perspective to the market and to the task they are performing. Their ideas should be given respect and consideration.

### PROVIDE BREAKS

Give your volunteers needed breaks during their shift allowing for time to stay hydrated, rest, and shop at the market. While that may mean giving them a coffee break during the market day, it may also mean giving them a break from the job they are doing.

### ENSURE A VOLUNTEER'S TIME IS WELL UTILIZED

If someone volunteers once and feels like they were not needed or did not make a valuable contribution to your market, they are not likely to volunteer again or to recommend to others that they also volunteer.

### DIVIDE THE MARKET INTO SHIFTS AND ROTATE TASKS

Especially if you have a long market day, **consider breaking the day up into smaller shifts** to make the time commitment easier to incorporate into a volunteer's busy schedule. Someone can always volunteer for more than one shift if they want to stay longer! **Also rotating volunteer tasks during the market can help a volunteer stay engaged and have a good experience.** If customer surveying becomes discouraging, having them shift roles to inventorying product offerings can be a welcome transition.

### FOSTER TEAM SPIRIT

Provide volunteers with identifiers such as t-shirts, name tags, or aprons as a way to feel like part of a team and stand out from market shoppers.

**STAY IN TOUCH!**  
Communication is key.  
If you forget about  
your volunteers, they  
will forget about you!



517-432-3381



480 Wilson Rd., Room 172  
East Lansing, MI 48824



mifma.org

