Farmers’ Market Managers’ Roles and Compensation

Summary of Research Findings

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This study aims to identify sectoral trends in farmers’ market managers’ roles and compensation to inform the set-up of new farmers’ markets and to work towards standards for current managers. 50 managers from farmers’ markets across the Greenbelt participated in a survey in January 2013, which was the basis of this study. The participating farmers’ markets represent a range of market organizational structures, responsibilities and compensation. This report presents statistical analysis drawn from the survey results as well as a qualitative analysis of managers’ thoughts and reflections.

Sectoral Breadth and Farmers’ Market Types
While each farmers’ market is different, the survey responses suggest certain common types of markets, according to organizational structure:

- **Vendor associations**: Most managers are unpaid, perform regular weekly farmers’ market tasks but limited extra activities, and consider the time commitment expectations and compensation adequate.

- **Municipal farmers’ markets**: Managers are paid salary for a greater role and feel adequately compensated. Most perform tasks beyond basic weekly tasks, and have staff assistance in addition to the manager.

- **Not-for-profit farmers’ markets**: Managers receive a range of forms of compensation, most of which are considered inadequate for the time required. They have volunteers but no other staff.

- **Umbrella not-for-profit (eg, a university) farmers’ markets**: Managers are paid in various ways, most of which are considered adequate. Most employ additional staff, and many do not initiate extra tasks beyond weekly market duties. Management requires more time than is expected by managers’ employers.

- **BIA Farmers’ markets**: Market management is generally part of a greater role, is supported by additional staff, and feelings about the adequacy of compensation and of expected time commitment are mixed.

- **Community group (eg, a Friends of the Park group) markets**: Most managers are unpaid and feel inadequately compensated but consider the expected time commitment to be adequate. Most are unable to take on extra tasks beyond weekly market duties, and many have some volunteer support.
Managers’ Tasks

Common weekly and seasonal tasks were identified across farmers’ market types (see table, right). Farmers’ markets with limited resources often also had limited tasks. Primarily, these markets would exclude secondary tasks such as website and social media updates, and professional development. The majority of managers indicated that their tasks are not defined in a job description or that the job description does not adequately represent their work.

Managers’ Pay

The largest category of managers is unpaid for their work, and smaller numbers of managers receive honoraria, salary for a greater role, or are paid by the hour. The average hourly rate of paid managers is $15. Managers of municipal or BIA farmers’ markets earn the highest pay per hour for market management as part of a greater role, and managers of vendor association, or community group, markets receive the lowest pay. Overall, managers work an average of 18 hours per week.

Adequacy of Compensation and Time Commitment

While managers who receive pay generally consider their wage to be adequate, many note that the job requires more hours than is expected in the position description. The expected time may be adequate for weekly basic tasks but not for additional tasks such as organizing events, fundraising and promotions. Some managers work twice the number of required hours, and while this is often out of enjoyment, some managers feel undercompensated.
Implications and Next Steps

The results and analysis presented in this study raise a number of questions.

- To what extent does the amount of time a manager commits correlate to the success of a farmers’ market?

- Are vendors, market boards, or those who pay managers aware of the extent of the role the manager plays within the farmers’ market?

- Should managers receive a higher standard of pay? What is the capacity for renegotiating manager compensation rates with managers’ employers? Would vendors be willing to pay higher table fees, and would this ensure the sustainability of farmers’ markets? Is other funding required?

- Will current managers or their successors be less willing to continue devoting more time than they are compensated for as the sector develops?

- How can third party organizations such as the Greenbelt Farmers’ Market Network offer support to bridge the gap between market capacity and necessary tasks? How can third party organizations support managers to mediate change, encourage collaboration, or offer mentorship?

Addressing Inadequate Compensation

While these questions may require further examination, the question most in need of immediate action is how we can improve the situation for those who feel their role is inadequately compensated. Ensuring that the actual time committed by managers matches the time they are expected to commit will require action from managers, farmers’ market organizations, and potentially third parties, yet larger scale sectoral change should also be investigated. Three suggestions about best practices and future action emerge from this analysis:

1. Appropriate and detailed job descriptions help minimize manager over-commitment or under-compensation
2. Managers are most successful when they make strategic decisions about which tasks they pursue and can establish partnerships and support
3. Conversations among farmers’ market managers, those who pay managers, and those who support markets should continue in order to develop sectoral standards based on the market organizational types

The long-term success of farmers’ markets depends on the ability of managers to perform their tasks effectively and enjoyably. Particularly as the sector develops, action will be necessary to ensure resilient and thriving farmers’ markets.