



DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

Economic Development Division

m e m o r a n d u m

TO: Laurel Lunt Prussing, Mayor

FROM: Elizabeth H. Tyler, FAICP, Director, Community Development Services

DATE: February 4, 2010

SUBJECT: **Market at the Square 2009 Annual Report**

Introduction and Background

Farmers' markets continue to enjoy extreme popularity throughout the United States. According to the United States Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service figures for 2009, farmers' markets grew in number from 4,685 to 5,274 – an increase of 13%. Illinois claims nearly 300 of those markets, and while there is no official ranking of farmers' markets in Illinois, Urbana's **Market at the Square** is widely considered to be one of the best and largest producer-only markets in the state.

Market at the Square is one of Urbana's strongest attractions. It is a large, popular special event running every Saturday for a total of 28 weeks, drawing people from both Urbana-Champaign and the surrounding area. It serves as an incubator for local business activity, and is home to nationally-recognized, award-winning food producers. While its economic impact is difficult to quantify, it is undeniably significant. Farmers' markets, including the Market at the Square, are an integral part of a viable, sustainable community, and the presence and visibility of Market at the Square contributes enormously to Urbana's identity and sense of "place".

The 2009 season for Market at the Square began on Saturday, May 2, 2009 and ended on Saturday, November 7, 2009, running for a total of 28 weeks. 2009 brought several new additions, among them an additional Market week, increased programming for children, and many new participants. The following summary analyzes the year's data regarding Market participants, operations, programming, marketing, and financial expenditures, and identifies aspects of the Market requiring evaluation for 2010.

Discussion

Market at the Square Participants

The Market's participants include vendors, community groups, and performers. Each season, every participant receives separate guidelines and applications to complete prior to participating at the Market. Guidelines and applications are modified each year to improve clarity and to respond to any outstanding issues from the previous season. [See Attachment 1]

The Market's participants also include patrons, who are the economic and social force behind the Market.

Vendors

There were 177 **registered** vendors for the 2010 season. Five of those vendors opted not to participate after registering, placing the total **participating** vendors at 172, an increase of 8% over 2008. Of the registered vendors, 43% percent had never participated in the Market before 2009. Weekly vendor attendance at the Market averaged 73 vendors in 2009, up from 65 in 2008. The Market date with the highest vendor attendance was August 1, 2009 (95), and the lowest vendor attendance was recorded on July 4, 2009 (46). An average of 160 spaces per week (out of approximately 190) were used. Overall, vendor participation has remained quite steady for the last four years, but 2009's increase indicates a resurgence of interest in the Market on the part of local growers and entrepreneurs.

Similar to previous years, just under half of participating vendors were from the Urbana-Champaign area, with remaining participants originating from Urbana-Champaign's satellite communities and other areas throughout Illinois. Some traveled significant distances to participate at the Market, with several produce vendors coming from Southern Illinois.

Vendors are separated into two main categories, **growers** and **non-growers**. Growers are subcategorized as **produce vendors** (40 participants) and include fresh fruit and vegetable producers, meat/dairy/honey producers, fresh flower producers, and live plant producers. New vendors are inspected by the Director before they participate; existing vendors are inspected when a complaint or question (by either a patron or another vendor) is lodged regarding questions related to the origin of a vendor's items. Non-growers are subcategorized as **prepared food vendors** (21 participants) and include bakers, candy-makers, ice cream vendors, and other prepared foods designed to be consumed on- and off-site. **Art and craft vendors** (111 participants), the other component of the non-grower category, include artisans and crafters who produce items such as photography, clothing, woodwork, pottery, furniture, soaps, and more. Art and craft vendors remain the vendor category with the highest number of participants, with 65% of the Market's vendors fitting into this category.

Vendors were, as in years previous, charged \$15 per space per week. Vendor revenues in 2009 totaled \$47,725, a nearly 11% increase over the 2008 total of \$43,018. According to records, the vendor fee has not changed in at least eighteen seasons. While fees were originally set at an affordable level to encourage participation, the costs incurred related to running the Market, including insurance, programming costs, City services, and upkeep of infrastructure, have increased. As a result, vendor fees are proposed to increase to \$20 per week in 2010 in order to accommodate these increasing costs. [See Attachment 2, Charts A, B and C]

Community Groups

The row of community groups at the north end of the Market is a valuable resource for the Urbana-Champaign community, both for the groups publicizing their efforts and for patrons who are looking for ways to contribute, volunteer, or otherwise engage in the community. A record-high 77 groups registered for space at the Market in 2009, a 7% increase over 2008's 72. Additionally, several weekends during the peak season – June through September – were sold out. Over all, groups worked well together and were responsive to requests by Market staff and the Director.

Weekly participation by community groups in 2009 averaged out to 18 groups per week using an average of 27 spaces per week. Occasionally, more space was allotted at both the east and west ends of the row in order to better accommodate groups or special events by groups, such as giveaways, reading to children, etc. Walnut Street, which is blocked off during the Market, was also occasionally used. A total of \$4,864 in fees was collected from community groups in 2009, up from the \$4,436 collected during the 2008 season. [See Attachment 2, Chart D]

Performers

Performers remained a popular component of the Market experience. 2009's performers ranged in scope from folk and bluegrass and indie rock acts to spoken word, balloon sculpture, and traditional busking performances. A total of 36 performers registered in 2009, down from 40 in 2008.

Although performers are not required to pay fees to participate at the Market, they are required to follow the guidelines related to performers and to fill out an application prior to performing. Performers are required, for example, to perform without amplification, and in 2009, all performers adhered to this guideline. There were very few conflicts between vendors and performers, and occasionally performers set up too close to each other. Both situations of this type were easily resolved, with minimal intervention by the Director. [See Attachment 2, Chart E]

Patrons

Patron attendance increased once again at the Market, with an estimated total of 175,000 visitors in 2009, a 9% increase over 2008's estimated total of 160,000. Averaged across a 28-week season, the Market drew an estimated 6,220 patrons per weekend, a 5% increase over 2008's average weekend attendance of 5,900. Peak season (July and August) drew the most people; staff estimates over 10,000 patrons visited the Market on July 25, 2009, representing a record crowd.

Patron feedback was collected on Market days by City staff both at the City tent and as the Director and other staff made rounds. The Director also fielded phone calls during the week. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, particularly regarding the increased number of programming initiatives for children, special events, vendor product mix, the quality of performers, and the accessible, social nature of the event.

In 2009, the Director worked with the City's Legal Division in the off-season to create fair policies covering pets, smoking, and sexual harassment as a result of concerns expressed by Market employees and patrons. Guidelines regarding pets were posted on the Market's City webpage and handed out to patrons bringing pets into the Market, and full versions of the policies regarding all three of these issues were available to patrons on request (all participants received full versions as part of their application materials). As a result, there were very few situations requiring the Director's intervention. However, despite clarification of the Market's policy regarding the presence of pets at the Market in 2009, and despite the lack of reported incidents involving pets, complaints by patrons continued, primarily involving the presence of dogs at the Market, citing sanitary and safety reasons. Conversely, there were several complaints regarding the lack of amenities available for dogs at the Market by dog owners. Smoking by vendors and other patrons at the Market became much less of a problem as the no-smoking policy was outlined on the Market's City webpage and in person, when necessary. [See Attachment 3]

There continues to be significant interest in Market at the Square from outside the area. Individuals and groups contacting the Market frequently ask questions regarding operations and infrastructure as they may consider starting a new market or improving an existing one. There has been major interest in Market at the Square's successful use of social media platforms, especially Facebook and Twitter, to attract and retain patrons. In addition to giving several trade media interviews in 2009, the Director was invited to speak at conferences in Springfield, IL and St. Joseph, MO, about this topic.

Operations

Operations are the behind-the-scenes engine of Market at the Square. In 2009, operations included the Director's day-to-day tasks during the season, such as processing applications, assigning vendor and community group space, accepting vendor payments, accounting, scheduling staff, purchasing necessary supplies, producing educational materials for Market patrons, planning Market programming, and implementing the marketing plan. Operations also include on-site tasks at the Market for both the Director and Market staff, such as setting up and

managing the City's booth, vendor/community group/performer placement, general Market supervision, guideline enforcement, and assisting all participants with any issues or problems that may arise.

A new seasonal Market staff position, Assistant to the Director, was created for the 2009 season. This position is similar to the existing Market Aide position, but requires more hours and increased responsibility. In 2009, the Assistant helped with Friday afternoon preparations for the Market, including traveling to the storage facility for materials, naming/numbering spaces in Lot 10X, and preparing materials for the Market. The Assistant also worked on Saturday, assisting the Director with showing vendors to assigned spaces, unlocking utilities prior to the Market, and setting up the City's booth presence at the Market. The Assistant also helped manage all Market teardown activities, including returning some materials to storage and hauling equipment back to the City building. In 2010, in addition to 2009's duties, the Assistant will be partially responsible for on-site management of Market day programming. The Market continues to employ an Aide on the days the Assistant is not working, as well as a groundskeeper each Saturday.

Programming

The Market's nutrition/farm-linkage programming for young children, **Sprouts at the Market**, continued in 2009. This programming was co-developed by the Director and a volunteer, University of Illinois dietetics student Jennifer Hewitt in 2008. The goal of the programming is to provide opportunities for children to taste fresh produce or other whole foods in season and to receive nutrition information about these foods while simultaneously meeting the farmer/producer responsible for the food. In 2009, two more Sprouts events were added, bringing the total to four events for the season. These events were held in May, July, August, and October and were quite successful, averaging 44 participants per event, with July's event drawing 63 participants. Several more vendors participated, donating food and/or time to the project. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive from all participants, including farmers. Sprouts at the Market was also advertised on television using funds from a \$7,500 grant award from the Illinois Department of Agriculture, was featured on WCIA's morning show during the season, and was discussed on WILL-AM's "Afternoon Magazine" program.

Additionally, the Market offered two book-signings during the 2009 season. The first signing was with Joe McFarland, whose book, *Edible Wild Mushrooms of Illinois*, was published by the University of Illinois Press and released in May 2009. The second was with Terra Brockman of The Land Connection, an Illinois non-profit dedicated to preserving farmland. Her book, *The Seasons on Henry's Farm*, was published in September 2009 by Agate Surrey. Both signings drew good crowds.

Other programming included collaboration with the Urbana Free Library, U-Cycle, and the Urbana Public Arts Commission, as well as special events around holidays. [See Attachment 4]

Marketing

In 2009, Market at the Square continued to utilize both traditional and less-traditional marketing tools to attract and retain Market patrons.

Traditional marketing tools included print advertising, radio advertising and underwriting, a page on the City website, posters and handbills, banners, merchandise, press releases, and media coverage. Television advertising, funded by a \$7,500 grant from the Illinois Department of Agriculture, was also used to advertise the Market's Sprouts at the Market programming for two weeks ahead of each of the four Sprouts events. Market staff partnered with UPTV staff to create these 15-second long advertisements, and the ads ran successfully on WCIA-TV and several cable channels geared toward children (Nickelodeon, Cartoon Network, and Discovery Channel).

Less-traditional marketing included internet-based social networking tools, such as Facebook, Twitter, a Market weblog, and Flickr (a photo hosting site). These tools are low- or no-cost, and are very popular and effective. Facebook, in particular, has been a very successful tool for the Market; as of this writing, 1,500 people receive regular updates from the Market. Each tool reaches a different audience, and all are effective ways to heighten the Market's profile in the community. [See Attachment 5]

Financial

Primary expenditures for the Market in 2009 included marketing, supplies, and staff. In addition, each season there are many Market tasks and services that are performed by the City and its staff. These include, but are not limited to, vehicle use and maintenance, legal and clerical services, utility expenses, phone/fax expenses, web/email expenses, sandbags, and trash barrels. The Market reimburses the General Fund each season with a flat fee for this overhead. This fee is determined by the Comptroller and will likely increase significantly in 2010 due to increased operating costs for the Market.

Overall income for the 2009 Market, including vendor participation fees, community group participation fees, grant income, and merchandise, totaled \$61,768 – a 20% increase over 2008. Overall expenses for the Market, including part-time staff, marketing expenditures, insurance, and supplies, were \$45,126, an increase of about 20% over 2008. An increase in the amount of insurance the Market carries and an investment in new street banners for the Market are in large part responsible for this increase in expenditures. Expenditures related to staff and supplies were down from 2008. Solid financial management over the years has resulted in a budget carryover for the Market, which will be invested, when appropriate, on Market infrastructure, programming, and/or marketing, as the need arises. [See Attachment 2, Charts F and G]

Planning Effort

In response to several of the Market's regular, full-season vendors during the 2009 season and the Urbana City Council's goals, Market staff, along with City Planning staff, will be conducting a strategic planning exercise for the Market in the months leading up to the 2010 season. The steering committee, made up of vendors, members of the public, University faculty, representatives from Urbana businesses, and City staff/elected officials, will be meeting once a month for three months to plan three separate public input sessions, which will be facilitated by City Planning staff. This planning exercise is designed to create Market mission and vision statements, set goals for the Market's future, and to give the City a blueprint from which to operate the Market for the next several years. The exercise is in line with City Council Goal #5, Environmental Sustainability, Strategy J: "Promote production accessibility and affordability of local farm and artisan products". [See Attachment 6]

The committee hopes to have a finished document by June 2010.

2010 Market Season Improvements

There are two major improvements to the Market planned for 2010, with other improvements to follow. They are:

Electronic Benefits Transfer/LINK card

Accessibility to the Market for all citizens of Urbana and surrounding communities will bring more people to the Market and to Urbana. One effective way of increasing fiscal access to the Market will be the acceptance of SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as "food stamps") by the Market. In Illinois, SNAP benefits are distributed via a debit card called the LINK card. The plan is for the Market to accept the card for the desired amount and distribute that amount in tokens for use at produce/food vendor booths within the Market. The City will then reimburse produce/food vendors on a weekly basis. This program, jointly developed by the Market Director and the City's Finance Department, is currently scheduled to launch on May 1, 2010. The Market will continue to work closely with the Eastern Illinois Foodbank, Champaign-Urbana Public Health District and the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program/WIC to encourage low-income residents to shop at the Market.

"Eat Here"

Market at the Square was recently awarded \$15,000 by the Illinois Department of Agriculture to promote "Eat Here", a new educational initiative created to inform Market shoppers about the benefits of eating locally-sourced fruits and vegetables and to encourage shoppers to add the Market to their weekly list of places to buy food during the 2010 Market season.

The Market will host small events once per month during the Market season to raise awareness

about “eating here”, but the big push will be in advertising and marketing. Television, radio, and newspaper outlets will be utilized to market this initiative, as well as brochures, street banners, and possibly merchandise. In addition, this traditional marketing effort will be leveraged by the use of social media, with “Eat Here” having dedicated Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Other Improvements

Operations

Several small improvements in the Market’s day-to-day and on-site procedures will make a significant difference in the Market season’s flow and will allow more time to be spent on programming, marketing and promotion, and other Market-boosting activities. These improvements include:

- Review and redevelop Market guidelines and procedures as needed
- Continue work with City of Urbana Legal Division, Champaign-Urbana Public Health District, and other agencies to clarify and improve policies regarding health permits, insurance, and tax information
- Work with Public Works on ways to increase electrical service to vendors requiring it
- Recruitment of more produce and prepared food vendors
- Allow local wine and beer producers as vendors

Programming and Marketing

It is anticipated that augmentation of programming initiatives and development of a more targeted marketing campaign for the Market will result in increased numbers of participants, increased participant buy-in, and further support of the Market. The following ideas are under consideration for 2010:

- Expand the “Sprouts at the Market” programming to six scheduled events
- Continue to increase City- and partner-centered special events (e.g., Urbana Free Library, U-Cycle, Public Arts Commission, MTD/ZipCar, University of Illinois Extension, and others)
- Continue use of social networking tools to reach out to current and potential patrons
- Redirect Market advertising dollars to maximize return on investment (e.g., increasing the amount of local, targeted web advertising for special events)

Conclusion

The 2009 season for Market at the Square was a success. The Market Director and staff are always open to feedback, questions, and ideas for continuing this success into the 2010 season and beyond.

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Attachments:

1. 2009 Market Map and Regulations
2. Market at the Square Charts for 2009
3. Market at the Square New Policies
4. Examples of Market at the Square Programming
5. Examples of Market at the Square's Marketing and Branding Activity
6. Market at the Square Strategic Planning Information