

Food Distribution Research Society 2018 Student Food Marketing Challenge

Strategic Development of a Regional Marketing Campaign for Farmers Markets in the Greater Washington D.C. Area

Lurleen Walters and Elizabeth Canales (FDRS - Student Programs)
Nick Stavely (Community Foodworks), Marian Weaver (Farmers Market Coalition), and
Darlene Wolnik (Farmers Market Coalition)

Overview

This case focuses on a regional marketing effort led by farmers' market leaders in the Greater Washington D.C area (GWDC), in partnership with Community Foodworks (CFW), and with the support of the Farmers Market Coalition (FMC). CFW is a non-profit organization based in Washington D.C., and it operates a network of farmers markets and other food access programs based at those markets. FMC is a nonprofit organization based in Miami, Florida, but with several staff in the US capitol region. FMC is dedicated to strengthening farmers markets across the United States.

The geographical area of focus for this marketing challenge is the GWDC region. Farmers markets in this region vary in size, location, and institutional mission, structural capacity, and the resources available to them. Some of them operate as Independent Market Organizations, and other markets are managed under an Umbrella Organization, that is, a larger food or public organization (e.g., farmers markets operated by CFW). Some farmers markets are capital constrained, while others have higher capacity for running programming and events.

Irrespective of their organizational structure, all markets have one or more typologies (e.g., festival markets, neighborhood niche markets, food access and security, activator markets), which demonstrates the variability of missions and operations within and across markets. These types of market organizations can differ in their structural capacity and how they market their mission to the community. Markets lacking in capacity are in greater need of support, and their inclusion in a regional promotional effort could be of benefit to them.

Challenges Encountered: Farmers' markets face internal and external market competition. The increase in the number of farmers markets and the lack of coordination has increased competition for the dollar share of direct-to-consumer purchases. There has also been an increase in the offering of fresh and locally produced products by other players in the food industry, who have capitalized on the local foods movement. An additional external force is the lack of regulation around the definition of "local" and what a "farmers market" is, which allows competitors to use this language for marketing purposes.

Efforts: The clients are working on the establishment of a local network of markets, the Greater Washington Farmers Market Association (GWFMA), to provide a cohesive structure to build

capacity for farmers markets operating in the region, and a framework to coordinate marketing efforts. They have also identified the need to develop a regional umbrella marketing campaign in the GWDC area. The goal of this regional marketing campaign is to help farmers markets communicate their message, attract, and retain customers while also increasing the availability of fresh and locally produced products in the region.

The Competition Challenge:

The challenge consists of proposing a strategic plan for the development and execution of a regional marketing campaign for farmers market in the Washington metropolitan area. This marketing campaign should be general enough such that it can be replicated by markets in other regions, but should also include specific recommendations for the different market typologies operating within the local context considering that each market has a unique customer-base and growth opportunity. The strategy recommendations should include the following aspects and recommendations:

- 1) Strategy for GWFMA to best develop a regional promotion campaign, and ensure that area farmers markets of different typologies and capacities can all effectively implement the campaign.
- 2) Strategy for competing with other stores and organizations that are involved in local produce sales.
- 3) Effective branding and messaging recommendations.
- 4) Recommendations on how the proposed marketing campaign can be replicated in other regions (e.g., how it can be adapted and adopted based on the local context).

The recommended strategy should address considerations about the competitive climate, particularly as it relates to inter and intra market competition in the local foods sphere (e.g., grocery store chains and other players offering local foods). Recommendations should also address differences in farmers markets' structural capacity, mission, location, and location-related demand factors.