AN ABSTRACT FOR THE THESIS OF

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Title: Challenges to Re-Embedding Food Systems: Tracing the Decline and Revival of a Farmers' Market on the Edge

Abstract approved:

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A number of researchers view farmers' markets as an appropriate vehicle for re-embedding food markets into communities (O'Hara & Stagl, 2001, Feenstra, 2002, Lyson, 2005). Amidst astounding growth in the number of farmers' markets in the United States in recent decades, many markets struggle and fail. Recent research suggests that farmers' markets, especially new markets, have high failure rates. This thesis seeks to understand farmers' market failure by examining a well-established market in distress. Because the market had not yet reached the point of failure and efforts at revitalization were underway, it provided a unique research setting. Based on multiple sources of data, including ethnographic interviews, participant observation, and an analysis of the market's current and historical records, this research presents a holistic accounting of the specific interactions and processes that have taken place with this farmers' market since its early days. The market experienced a decline in both customer and vendor numbers, as well as in its overall scale. A number of factors contributed to the market's problems, including management issues, difficulty recruiting and aligning vendors and customers, and community level influences such as a declining downtown business sector and inadequate city support for the market. These factors created a vulnerable market, and environmental issues in 2005 moved it into crisis. The market's efforts at revitalization are documented, revealing the challenges smaller markets with few resources face. Data collection was essential in both understanding and monitoring this market. Community embeddedness emerged as crucial to sustaining and reviving this farmers' market, which lacked it for a variety of reasons relating to regional, community-level, and internal issues. Recommendations relate to finding a consistent site manager from the community who can work on educating the community and building collaborations with private and public organizations.

Challenges to Re-Embedding Food Systems: Tracing the Decline and Revival of a Farmers' Market on the Edge

by

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Mary K. Murray, Author

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Amidst rapid growth in the number of farmers' markets nationwide, some farmers' markets struggle to remain open. This research presents a case study of one farmers' market in distress. The research traces the market's decline and crisis and documents its efforts to revitalize. The goal of this research is two-fold. First, by gaining insight into the circumstances of decline and revitalization for one farmers' market, I hope to provide valuable information on the process of farmers' market distress and decline that will be useful to other farmers' market managers and contribute to the academic literature on farmers' markets. Second, based on multiple sources of data, including ethnographic interviews, participant observation, and an analysis of the market's current and historical records, this research presents a holistic accounting of the specific interactions and processes that have taken place with this farmers' market since its early days.

The overarching goal of this research is applied and pragmatic. Applied anthropology generates knowledge directly useful in practical situations. It does not necessarily generate new anthropological theory (Ervin, 2005). Further, the use of theory in this research, as is often the case among applied anthropologists, is pragmatic, and borrows from other social science disciplines in an effort to directly relate theory to the problem at hand (Ervin, 2005).

Manuscript Format

Instead of following the traditional thesis format, with chapters containing the literature review, methods, results, discussion, and conclusions, this thesis is organized in manuscript format, ultimately producing two manuscripts supported by a comprehensive literature review and a brief general concluding chapter. Each manuscript focuses on a specific aspect of the research and presents the pertinent literature, methods, results, discussion, and conclusions.

Because of the nature of the manuscript format, there is repetition between the chapters. For instance, the literature discussed in the comprehensive literature review will also be included in each of the two manuscripts. Also, the background information that introduces the research site and setting is repeated in order to add the necessary context to each manuscript. The methods sections of the two manuscripts are also very similar, with one focusing on methods related to tracking the decline and the other on documenting the revitalization.

Thesis Outline

There are five chapters to this thesis, the first being this introduction. The second chapter presents a discussion of the background literature that contributes to the situation of farmers' market decline and revitalization. Beginning with literature related to globalization and the agro-food system in general, the chapter gradually narrows its focus, leading into sustainable agriculture, food system localization, and eventually farmers' markets and their success and failure. The literature review introduces the conceptual theme of embeddedness that serves to frame this research, based on a discussion of “disembeddedness” and “re-embeddedness” with respect to the agro-food system. This theme of embeddedness is present throughout the thesis and serves as the framework for analysis in each of the manuscripts, emphasizing the crucial linkage between farmers’ markets and communities.

Chapters three and four are presented as two distinct manuscripts. Chapter three presents a discussion of the decline of the farmers’ market, while chapter four presents a discussion of its revitalization process. Each manuscript contains the pertinent background and related literature, the appropriate methods, followed by findings, a discussion, and conclusions relevant to each of the two topics.

Chapter five is a brief general conclusions chapter serving to tie together both manuscripts, summarizing the main findings and conclusions.

Following chapter five is a list of the references cited throughout the thesis. Last are appendices presenting supplemental data that was not included in the manuscripts, including expanded details on some of the methods and additional data.

CHAPTER II: THE PATH TO RE-EMBEDDING FOOD SYSTEMS

This chapter contains a broad review of the literature related to this research. The chapter begins with literature on globalization relevant to the agro-food system, followed with a discussion of sustainability and alternatives to the global paradigm, and ending with a discussion of localization and farmers' markets. The conceptual theme of embeddedness is introduced here based on the processes of globalization and localization as they relate to food systems. More specific literature related to farmers' market decline and revitalization will be discussed in chapters three and four respectively.

Globalization

Giddens (1990) describes the process of globalization as "the intensification of world wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa" (p. 64). Some characteristics of globalization include the expansion of global capitalist relations of production and commodity relations, the creation of universal standards of production, consumption, and social and political processes, and the integration of domestic markets (Koc, 1994; Koc & Dahlberg, 1999). Further, globalization encourages the elimination of barriers to trade, the creation of a global division of labor, and the concentration of control over financial resources and research capabilities (Bonnano, Busch, Friedland, Goveia, & Mingione, 1994).

While the process of globalization has certainly brought about positive improvements throughout the world, Koc and Dahlberg (1999) note the three most visible negative impacts of the current institutional and social trends toward globalization:

1. An increasing exploitation of large segments of society;
2. increasing exploitation of the natural environment;
3. an increasing loss of national, state, and local political power as concentrations of economic and corporate power increase, with a corresponding reduction of democratic power and social controls (p. 112).

Similarly, O'Hara and Stagl (2001) note that the negative impacts of the growing trend toward globalization have been "increasingly homogenous production methods, consumption patterns, built environments and patterns of social organization as well as the concomitant loss of social and biological diversity" (p. 534).

These impacts are cause for concern among some researchers regarding the industrial, social, and political costs globalization as well as the shrinking role of the government in regulating the economy and shaping social programs (Koc & Dahlberg, 1999). The negative impacts accompanying globalization call into question the stability and social survival for many societies (Koc & Dahlberg, 1999), especially given the lack of institutional capacity to reduce inequalities and address the growing demand for increased popular participation in decision-making processes (Bonanno, 2004).

A number of researchers point out the paradox inherent in the process of globalization. The soaring financial markets and technological breakthroughs that seduce the middle, upper, and ruling classes of the world are accompanied by the condemnation of growing segments of the world to marginalization, with the latter taking the blame for their "assumed inability to take advantage of the new and abundant free-market based opportunities" (Bonanno, 2004, p. 44). Koc (1994) notes that "development and underdevelopment, and integration and marginalization remain as contradictory, but central tendencies in a global economy" (p. 112). In terms of marginalization, the paradox of globalization emerges in the way that increased socio-economic polarization has emerged concurrently with the disappearance of the class issue from social, political, and economic debates (Bonanno, 2004).

Globalization and the Agro-Food Sector

According to Bonanno (2004), the agro-food sector is one of the most globalized among all economic sectors. Despite some significant regional and local components inherent to the agro-food sector, many agricultural and food products are either globalized commodities themselves or are controlled by globalized corporations (Bonanno, 2004). Although agro-food systems have been "global" for centuries, this process has intensified in recent decades (especially during and after the post-WWII era) due to the spread of green revolution technologies, the rise of transnational corporations (TNC's), the expansion of global financial capital and international agreements, and the development of international transportation and communication systems (Koc & Dahlberg, 1999, p. 112).

The globalization of agriculture has meant that all three of the "classical components of production," namely land, labor, and capital, have experienced a shift toward the global (Friedland, 2004, p. 5). In order to accomplish this shift, food markets must figure out ways to overcome their traditional spatial restraints (O'Hara & Stagl, 2001). The solution has been to organize into multinational processing companies and increase food transportability through food processing and biotechnology (O'Hara & Stagl, 2001). Feenstra (2002) characterized the dominant, global agricultural system as being "highly energy and capital-intensive, globally integrated, and increasingly economically consolidated" (p. 100). Indeed, global agricultural markets are characterized by global alliances of networks of firms, also known as "vertically integrated monopolies" (O'Hara & Stagl, 2001). Hendrickson and Heffernan (2005) research the concentration ratios of the top firms in specific food industries, finding that in some industries, such as the beef industry, the top four firms control 83.5 percent of the industry. In other industries such as broilers and turkey, the top four firms control more than 50 percent of the industry, and in food retailing the top five firms control 46 percent of the industry (Hendrickson & Heffernan, 2005).

O'Hara and Stagl (2001) cite four characteristics that have accompanied the emergence of global network structures in agriculture:

1. Industrialization and concentration,
2. spatial and temporal independence,
3. dependence on symbols, particularly money, and
4. reliance on expert systems (p. 536).

As a result of these accompaniments to the globalization of agriculture, we see the elimination of context specific interpretations and evaluations and a disappearing reliance on local knowledge, which leads to standardization of food systems in the form of uniform operations (O'Hara & Stagl, 2001). In effect, "systems adaptability is replaced by standardized efficiency" (O'Hara & Stagl, 2001, p. 539).

Koc and Dahlberg (1999) go further to say that the globalization of agriculture brings about not only a spatial and temporal separation between social actors and agencies within the food system, but also a functional separation based on the varying interests within the food system, compartmentalizing the food system into various sectors and processes. This has necessarily led to the increased industrialization of the food system in order to keep up with the globalizing scale (Magdoff et al. 2000). This industrialization, with its vertically integrated factory-style production systems, has impacted both producers and the animals on which many of them depend, reducing many farmers to the role of mere laborer and separating animals from the land that produces their feed (Lewontin 2000).

As with globalization in general, again we see the paradox inherent in a globalizing food system based on capitalist agribusiness (Magdoff, Foster, & Buttel, 2000). This is the disparity between the "productive capacities of capitalism and the quality of life it delivers" (Meiksins Wood, 2000, p. 39). With overall production levels increasing, we experience an astounding increase in world food supplies alongside a dramatic increase in world hunger and malnutrition, especially among developing or low-income nations (Koc & Dahlberg, 1999; Magdoff et al., 2000). Allen (1993) notes this paradox as well in her assertion that we have both nutrition and malnutrition, and abundance at the cost of environmental destruction. As Koc and Dahlberg (1999) note, "the prevalence of hunger in wealthy countries with large food surpluses indicates that food security requires not just availability but also accessibility of food" (p. 113). The undermining of local and traditional systems that has accompanied globalization has eliminated the efficient and accessible production and distribution methods inherent to many local systems (Koc & Dahlberg, 1999). Perhaps best summed up by Meiksins Wood (2000), the "ethic of improvement" inherent to the global, capitalist agricultural system in which "production is inseparable from profit" is also the ethic of exploitation, poverty, homelessness, irresponsible land use, environmental destruction, and mad cow disease (p. 39).

Trends toward the globalization of agriculture increasingly contribute to the reduction of the future food options of the world's many societies and cultures, in undermining cultural and biological diversity, thus making them dependent on large and unstable institutions (Koc & Dahlberg, 1999). A number of researchers have pointed to the negative social and cultural impacts resulting from the globalization of agriculture, including the loss of local knowledge and cultural diversity (O'Hara & Stagl, 2001), the loss of farmers and farmland (Henderson, 2000), the impoverishment of rural and local communities and economies (Araghi, 2000; Henderson, 2000; Feenstra, 2002), and the disintegration of the social and spiritual fabric of communities (Feenstra, 2002).

These same researchers and others have also pointed to the negative environmental impacts of a global agro-food system, including decreasing biodiversity (Altieri, 2000; Henderson, 2000; O'Hara & Stagl, 2001), the destruction of small-scale and subsistence agriculture (Friedland, 1994), and erosion and pollution (Friedland, 1994; Henderson, 2000; Magdoff et al., 2000).

Feenstra (2002) notes that many of the social and environmental problems that have accompanied the globalizing food system stem from the disconnections it imposes between people and their source of sustenance. These disconnections separate people from land, from food producers, and even from the taste and quality of food itself (Feenstra, 2002). These disconnections relate to Giddens' (1990) concept of "disembedding" that is often used as a way to explain the effects of the process of globalization (p. 21). Giddens (1990) uses this concept of disembedding to describe the process of "lifting out" of social relations and other forms interaction from the local context and their "restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space" in a more globalized context (p. 21). As Giddens (1990) notes,

> The advent of modernity increasingly tears space away from place by fostering relations between 'absent' others, locationally distant from any given situation of face-to-face interaction. In conditions of modernity, place becomes increasingly *phantasmagoric*: that is to say, locales are thoroughly penetrated by and shaped in terms of social influences quite distant from them. What structures the locale is not simply that which is present on the scene; the 'visible form' of the locale conceals the distanciated relations which determine its nature (p. 19).

Allen (1999) discusses the occurrence of disembeddedness when she says, "The history of US agriculture is one of a distinct and purposeful 'disembeddedness' of production and consumption" (p. 120). O'Hara and Stagl (2001) demonstrate the specific ways in which markets, and in this case food markets, are not only spatially and temporally disembedded in a process where space becomes "empty space" and time becomes "empty time," but are also disembedded from national institutions that might have had power over them (p. 538). They also point to the resulting social and cultural disembedding, which leads to a loss of civic engagement and communication systems, which in turn leads to social de-stabilization and the loss of socio-diversity. Further, they argue that disembedded markets make communication across different systems levels impossible, resulting in a global economy that might not hear the warning signals of local environments and social systems. They conclude, "The resulting disconnect from context specific physical, biological, and social conditions calls the long-term sustainability of global markets into question" (O'Hara & Stagl, p. 549). Similarly, Feenstra (2002) argues, "the long-term sustainability of the current food system is in question" (p. 100).

Koc and Dahlberg (1999) offer an appropriate conclusion to this section when they argue, "the externalities of globalization are increasingly becoming the 'internalities' of all localities and regions rather than just those historically most exploited" (p. 115). They assert that the stakes are "greater than ever" and call for "reform across all sectors of industrial society" (p. 115). However, as they point out, "it is in the arena of the world's many food systems that we may well find the clearest manifestations of both the need for, and the paths to reforms that offer the prospect of more healthy, sustainable, just, and equitable societies" (p. 115).

Sustainability and Food Systems

O'Hara and Stagl (2001) point out that growing concerns regarding food quality and the effects of food production on the environment and public health are "stark reminders of human dependence on the natural systems that provide our most basic needs" (p. 534). They argue that food markets remind us that a focus on efficiency in the production, allocation, and distribution of food, when viewed as the outcome, does not alone provide an adequate basis for decision-making. What should be the basis, they argue, is the ability to maintain these systems over the long run (O'Hara & Stagl, 2001).

According to Koc and Dahlberg (1999), a broad set of responses to the impacts of globalization that are related to sustainability issues can be found in the "flourishing of local environmental groups and activities" (p. 113). What underlies most of these responses is "a serious questioning of whether the 'progress' of globalization is worth the ‘price’” (p. 113). Bonanno (2004) offers similar explanations regarding the impacts of the environmental agenda on the culture and practices of today’s society. He argues,

> Core items of the environmental agenda—e.g., protection of natural resources, sustainability and ecological equilibrium—are fundamental elements of contemporary discourses and represent new sensitivities which are now constitutive components of today’s culture (p. 40).

Further, he asserts,

> The environmental movement’s success in bringing its agenda to the fore is particularly relevant for the agricultural and food sector. Here, issues about food quality, environmentally sound production practices, environmentally oriented research and quality of consumption occupy center stage in contemporary debates (p. 40).

According to Bonanno (2004), issues regarding food production and consumption have never been so closely scrutinized by the public than today.

Decades ago, Margaret Mead described the ways in which the global shifts in agriculture have destroyed food’s significance as that which nourishes us. The resulting commodification of food has resulted instead in food’s significance as that which determines economic prosperity (1970). Mead asserts that a globalized food system could not exist if food, as something we need for nourishment, had not been separated from food as a cash crop, a commercial enterprise as opposed to a basic maintenance endeavor (1970). Similarly, Friedmann (1993) regrets the effects of what she terms “the turning of food to gold” (p. 227). According to Friedmann, “commodified food, which is increasingly global in the sourcing of raw materials and the marketing of food products, is not sustainable socially or ecologically” (p. 227). So what is sustainable?

One outcome of the 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development is a tangible definition of sustainability in terms of development. According to this report (commonly known as the Brundtland report), sustainable development can be defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 43). Thinking along similar lines regarding sustainability in the agricultural system, Ikerd (2002) defines sustainable agriculture as, "an agriculture capable of meeting the needs of the present while leaving equal or better opportunities for those of the future" (p. 27).

Going further, Allen's (1993) collection entitled *Food for the Future* contains a number of papers that speak to the need for integrating the social with the natural in sustainable agriculture. Allen (1993) argues,

> The effort toward a sustainable reconstruction of agriculture has privileged environmental priorities and natural science approaches while ignoring social priorities and approaches, despite the fact that social and ecological problems are inseparably connected in food and agriculture systems. Unless we closely examine people's relations with each other, in addition to those between people and nature, we foreclose our ability to bring about the deep structural changes on which sustainable agriculture ultimately depends (p. 1).

Clayton and Radcliffe (1996) concur, describing sustainable development as being able to understand and shape interactions between natural and socio-economic systems. Alteiri (2000) stresses a similar point when he says, "ecological change in agriculture cannot be promoted without comparable changes in the social, political, cultural, and economic arenas that also constrain agriculture" (p. 90). He argues that sustainability is not just about crop and soil interactions, but requires a more interdisciplinary focus to incorporate the needs of communities and bioregions (Altieri, 2000).

Dahlberg (1993) describes the functional separation within the structures of our food system as demonstrated by the very language we use to describe it, including production, distribution, preparation and preservation, use and consumption, and recycling and disposal. It is this separation and fragmentation combined with the fact that it is no longer a system based on natural cycles and variability, he argues, that forms a weakness in sustainable agriculture: “[sustainable agriculture] does not recognize that in the longer term, it can be successful only to the degree that other portions of the food system and the larger society also become more sustainable and regenerative” (p. 81).

According to Altieri (1993), the four top priorities for a sustainable agricultural development strategy (for both developed and underdeveloped nations) should be:

1. Reduction of poverty;
2. ecological management of productive resources located in fragile ecosystems;
3. food security and self-sufficiency;
4. transforming rural poor communities into social actors capable of determining their own development (p. 200).

Altieri asserts that these priorities are being ignored by most top-down development approaches (1993). As a solution, O’Hara and Stagl (2001) cite Wallner’s concept of “Islands of Sustainability” (p. 550). This concept advocates a more bottom-up approach to sustainability in which regions are encouraged to strive to live according to their carrying capacity. O’Hara and Stagl (2001) incorporate this concept in noting food systems’ particularly important role in providing viable examples for re-embedded and more sustainable market alternatives. Henderson (2000) argues that the grassroots movement for a sustainable food and agricultural system is gaining momentum, noting that many proponents of sustainable agriculture see local control of food production as basic to sustainability and the survival of democracy.

Localization

A number of researchers equate a more localized scale of agriculture with sustainability (Kloppenburg, Hendrickson, & Stevenson, 1996; Koc & Dahlberg, 1999; O'Hara & Stagl, 2001; Bellows & Hamm, 2000; Feenstra, 2002; Ikerd, 2002; Lyson, 2005). Feenstra (1997) argues that the development of local food economies is a logical and appropriate way to revitalize communities. According to O'Hara and Stagl (2001), a more localized scale of food systems, as an alternative to the dominant agricultural model which is more globalized, provides a "vehicle for re-connecting and re-embedding food markets into their physical, spatial, social, and ethical context" (p. 545). Koc and Dahlberg (1999) agree in their assertion that strengthening local food systems is important as a way of providing new models for more sustainable and just food systems.

O'Hara and Stagl (2001) assert that "a growing number of alternative food markets and local producer/consumer networks have emerged over the past ten years" and that this trend toward localization "shifts the focus back to the context specific ecological and social factors global markets tend to externalize" (p. 534). At the root of these alternatives, they suggest, is the desire to re-establish both direct links between producers and consumers and control over an increasingly distant and anonymous food system (O'Hara & Stagl, 2001). Unlike global markets, local food markets give growers a choice over what and how to produce, as well as providing consumers access to food they trust to be healthier and less harmful to themselves, their families, and the environment (O'Hara & Stagl, 2001).

In Feenstra's (1997) in-depth review of literature on local food systems, she provides a complete overview of the historical context of the development of local food systems in the literature, including political, cultural, and ecological analyses by authors such as Lappe (1975), Hightower (1973; 1976), Berry (1977), Gussow (1978), and Kneen (1993). She also traces the literature that develops the concept of a "foodshed," including Getz (1991), Hendrickson (1993) and Kloppenburg et al. (1996). She later recounts relatively recent research related to regional food system studies, including research on seasonal diets, marketing and consumer studies, urban food system studies, and manuals for gathering data on local food systems (Feenstra, 1997). This in-depth review of the literature provides us with a strong foundational basis of literature from which to progress with studies of local and regional food systems and foodsheds.

Feenstra (2002) also provides us with a workable definition of a "community food system", based on the definition used in her work at the University of California Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (SAREP):

> A collaborative effort to build more locally based, self-reliant food economies-one in which sustainable food production, processing, distribution, and consumption is integrated to enhance the economic, environmental and social health of a particular place (p. 100).

The goals of a community food system include:

1. Improved access by all community members to an adequate, nutritious diet;
2. a stable base of family farms that use more sustainable production practices;

3. marketing and processing practices that create more direct links between farmers and consumers;
4. food and agriculture-related businesses that create jobs and recirculate financial capital;
5. improved working and living conditions for farm and other food system labor, and
6. food and agriculture policies that promote local food production, processing, and consumption (Feenstra, 2002, p. 100).

Lyson (2000; 2004; 2005) incorporates all of these goals into his concept of “civic agriculture,” which he defines as “a locally-based agricultural and food production system that is tightly linked to a community’s social and economic development” (2000, p. 42). Lyson (2005) also incorporates the concept of embeddedness when he refers to civic agriculture as “the embedding of local agricultural and food production in the community” (p. 92). Lyson (2005) argues that applying this framework to local agricultural enterprises can have positive impacts on a community’s health in a number of ways; socially, economically, politically, and culturally. Using these concepts of ‘community food system’ (Feenstra, 2002) and “civic agriculture” (Lyson 2000; 2004; 2005) as part of a conceptual framework for localized agriculture, we can now discuss the potential of such an endeavor and examine some of the cautionary advice in the literature.

Feenstra (2002), in describing the characteristics of community-based or localized food systems, describes them as “more environmentally sound, more economically viable for a larger percentage of community members, and more socially, culturally, and spiritually healthful” (p. 100). According to her, these alternative systems tend to be more decentralized, place-based, and democratic, encouraging more direct connections between all parties in the food system, particularly between farmers and consumers (Feenstra, 2002).

However, a recent article by Born and Purcell (2006) cautions against the "local trap," or an automatic assumption that there is anything inherent about any scale, including the local scale. They insist instead that "there is nothing inherent about any scale" (Born & Purcell, 2006, p. 195), asserting that the outcomes of any food system are contextual and depend on the "actors and agendas that are empowered by the particular social relations in a given food system" (p. 196).

In analyzing the assumptions behind these two very different stances on local food systems, it is first important to clarify the role of localization within the existing globalizing food economy. Bellows and Hamm (2001) describe local food systems as being characterized by a 'reactive' posture, arguing that a more locally-based production system "generates its primary appeal in points of friction between local consumer wants and political identity, on the one hand, and the generic face of standardized, or 'globalized' products, on the other" (p. 274). Similarly, Allen (1999) describes localism as "a form of resistance…providing a defensive position against homogenizing effects of globalization (p. 119). Heffernan and Constance (1994) speak of an "increasingly bipolar food system," characterized by the mass system of mega markets connected to a few transnational corporations on the one end, and local and regional farmers' markets, CSA's, and other "non-integrated niches" on the other (p. 48). However, other researchers (Hinrichs, 2003; DuPuis & Goodman, 2005) claim that this relationship between the local and the global is not simply a bipolar, or mutually exclusive relationship.

Hinrichs (2003) points to the problems with the local vs. global binary mode of thinking and effectively demonstrates the ways that the global and the local are not mutually exclusive, but from an ecological systems perspective are actually inter-related and mutually conditioning through connections and feedback. Further, Hinrichs warns that the spatial relations of “local” may not always correspond to specific social or environmental relations, and demonstrates the ways in which food system localization can assume more complex forms than the opposing terms “global” and “local” can imply (2003). She cautions, “making ‘local’ a proxy for the ‘good’ and ‘global’ a proxy for the ‘bad’ may overstate the value in proximity, which remains unspecified, and obscure more equivocal social and environmental outcomes” (Hinrichs, 2003, p. 35). She highlights the need for the term “local” to be flexible enough to fulfill the diverse nutritional and cultural needs of particular populations, and cautions that while positive aspects can and do come from more localized contexts, local interactions are not void of intolerance and unequal power relations (Hinrichs, 2003).

Hinrichs (2003) also characterizes two broad tendencies within localization, *defensive localization* and more *diversity-receptive localization*, and asserts that understanding these distinctions and considerations is essential to the localization movement. She quotes Wolfgang Sachs and his notion of “cosmopolitan localism” in her discussion of the need to turn away from defensive localization toward a more diversity-receptive localization, which would see the local as embedded within a larger national or world community and recognize that “local” is not static (2003, p. 37). The interests of “local” are contextual and need to be open to change. The goals of “local” should not only seek to strengthen a community, but should also reflect a consideration for the multi-faceted world in which we live. While place should be emphasized and appreciated, the relativity of all places should be remembered. Thus, the concepts of cosmopolitan localism and diversity-receptive localism help to blur the boundaries between local and global, embedding the local within the global instead of enforcing opposition between the two. With this in mind, instead of creating the need for opposition and secession, food system localization can encourage acceptance of the diversity and globalism that increasingly define our world (Hinrichs, 2003).

Bellows and Hamm (2001) argue a similar point when they conclude, “a food system cannot operate in an independent local vacuum, but is integrated within global systems. It incorporates both ‘more alternative’ and ‘more conventional’ members and processes” (p. 281). They advocate applying the terms “more local” and “more global” because the two systems do not operate as separate units (Bellows & Hamm, 2001, p. 272). They argue that ‘local’ lacks a universal meaning or reference, but that localizing a food system in terms of making it “more local” allows for the balance to be altered toward less reliance on global systems (Bellows & Hamm, 2001, p. 272). Along the same lines, they assert that in order to negotiate diverse demand and uneven access, “cooperative community decision-making” must integrate both alternative and conventional local voices (Bellows & Hamm, 2001, p. 275). The realities of building and strengthening local food systems necessitate an integration of dichotomies such as “local and non-local” and “conventional and sustainable” in order to account for the fact that these food systems develop in a context of “local and non-local scales while using alternative and conventional practices alike” (Bellows & Hamm, 2001, p. 275).

Another important point in the localization debate stresses that the goal of agricultural localization is not to eliminate all trade, but to reduce unnecessary trade

(Kloppenburg et al., 1996; Bellows & Hamm, 2001; Hinrichs, 2003). Kloppenburg et al. (1996) discuss the difference between self-reliance and self-sufficiency, noting that self-reliance is preferable in reducing dependence but not denying the necessity or desirability of external trade. Bellows and Hamm (2001) agree that flexibility in sourcing is desired because "complete reliance on local production is usually neither feasible (e.g., New Jersey grows few bananas) nor sensible (because of environmental disruptions such as floods and drought) in the short or long term" (p. 273).

Expanding on these ideas, DuPuis and Goodman point out the ironies and contradictions involved with social change, emphasizing that the localization movement is socially homogenized and exclusionary—that is, engaged by mostly white and middle-class people (2005). It becomes necessary to remember that ideas regarding the right ways of living and eating vary by race, class, gender, and age. People dedicated to food system localization must encourage a process that is democratic and representative, allowing for a diversity of values to be accurately represented (DuPuis & Goodman, 2005). They also caution against the "commodification of territoriality," whereby "local" becomes a value and therefore a commodity to protect and exploit (DuPuis & Goodman, 2005, p. 364). They assert that instead of being fixated on the idea that "local" is intrinsically more just, based on a set of imagined norms, we should be interested in how to make local food systems more just (2005). Further, the development of a just local food system should be process based, not standards based (DuPuis & Goodman, 2005). Thus, instead of creating a local food system that can be aligned with standards and norms and pre-determined qualities, we should attempt to stimulate the political process necessary in order for decisions about the food system to come about democratically in a given place (DuPuis & Goodman, 2005).

Similarly, a number of researchers (Allen, 1999; Anderson & Cook, 1999; Koc & Dahlberg, 1999; Bellows & Hamm, 2001) warn that in many cases localized production systems often feed already secure rather than food insecure populations, reinforcing and sometimes magnifying existing inequalities and disparities and ignoring the larger causes of food insecurity. Thus, efforts at ensuring the democratic participation of all community members in building localized agricultural systems become paramount. Perhaps best encompassing all of these considerations is Bellows and Hamm's (2001) assertion, "Increasing local food production carries both advantages and social complications such as displaced and unsustainable labor outcomes, unequal participation in the benefits, and more and less environmentally sound production practices" (p. 281). According to them, any efforts to build and strengthen food systems locally should be analyzed in terms of their capacity to promote local autonomy and sustainable development (Bellows & Hamm, 2001).

It is also necessary to engage in a discussion of scale in terms of political action toward sustainable agriculture and local food systems. I previously discussed O'Hara and Stagl's (2001) incorporation of Wallner's concept of "Islands of Sustainability" and the importance of regional, bottom-up alternatives to current top-down approaches to sustainable development. However, they note that these regional, bottom-up alternatives must complement larger-scale institutional efforts toward global sustainability goals (O'Hara & Stagl, 2001). Similarly, Allen (1999) claims that the tendency to think of sustainability in sectoral, regional, or national terms is limiting because the logic of sustainability cannot be understood apart from world forces. Allen (1999) reviews David Harvey's concern that placing too much emphasis on the local might eclipse the potential for political engagement and action across larger geographic scales. She asks the question, "Is globalization, as a concept and practice, the problem or is the problem the specific economic forms embedded in the global economy?" (Allen, 1999, p. 122). Thus, a number of researchers agree, as Born and Purcell (2006) conclude, that paying particular attention to all scales of potential action is crucial to achieving justice and sustainability in local food systems.

Farmers' Markets

Despite their concerns, Born and Purcell (2006), among a number of other researchers (Lyson, 2000; Andreatta, 2002; Feenstra, 2002) agree that farmers' markets represent one important local scale strategy for building and strengthening local food systems. Koc and Dalhberg (1999) describe the broad set of responses to impacts of globalization as including "efforts to create local farmers' markets as a way of building/strengthening local markets" (p. 113). O'Hara and Stagl also include farmers' markets as an important part of the trend toward re-embedding and re-connecting food markets to their "physical/spatial, social, and ethical context" (p. 545).

Farmers' markets continue to grow across the U.S., from 1,755 markets nationwide in 1994 to 4,385 in 2006 (United States Department of Agriculture [USDA], 2006). The benefits of farmers' markets to local communities and small farmers—economically, socially, environmentally, and culturally—have been well established in the literature (Lyson, Gillespie, & Hilchey, 1995; Feenstra & Lewis, 1999; Bullock, 2000; Lyson, 2000; La Trobe, 2001; Kambara & Shelley, 2002; Hinrichs, Gillespie, & Feenstra, 2004; DeLind, 2006). With farmers' markets, value is placed on strengthening communities by supporting local farmers and the local economy, and fostering social interaction and human connection. One important feature of a farmers' market is encouraging support and interaction around food, and face-to-face contact between producers and consumers (Hinrichs, 2003).

Several researchers have conducted investigations into farmers' markets in an attempt to better understand the reasons for their popularity. Much of the research to date has focused on analyzing the motivations and attitudes of vendors and customers and the interactions between these groups in an effort to understand the rationality behind the farmers' market phenomenon. Some studies have highlighted the role of social learning and innovation (Hinrichs et al., 2004) and the significant role of market management in shaping the dynamics of markets (Andreatta & Wickliffe, 2002). Other research has been focused on farmers' market structures, characteristics, and growth over the past century. Notable among these are Hughes and Mattson's (1992) profile of farmers' market vendors and market organizational differences, Brown's (2001) documentation of farmers' market growth trends in the twentieth century, and Tiemann's (2004) research regarding the varying characteristics, appearances, and functions of farmers' markets. In Brown's (2002) comprehensive overview, she catalogues farmers' market research over the last few decades related to consumers, vendors, and the economic and social impacts of farmers' markets, concluding that the amount of available literature is limited, leaving ample room for further research.

Other researchers also point to needs for further research related to farmers' markets. Andreatta and Wickliffe (2002) assert, "there is much to be gained from furthering our understanding of the cultural dimensions of the agro-food system and strengthening the community of local farmers and consumers," later noting the importance of maintaining successful farmers' markets (p. 174). Johnson (1996), Payne (2002), and Stephenson, Lev, and Brewer (2006; 2007) call for specific research related to why some markets fail. Brown (2002) asks the question: "Why are farmers' markets successful in a developed market economy where consumers and farmers have many options for buying food?" However, recent research describes high failure rates among farmers' markets in Oregon, especially among new and young markets (Lev, Brewer, and Stephenson, 2006; Stephenson et al., 2007). Feenstra (2002) notes that community food system endeavors are "few in number, unevenly distributed, often small-generally involving less than the majority of a community; they are precarious and many fail to sustain themselves over time" (p. 100). This is an area that is not well understood. There are few empirical studies related to the struggle or failure of farmer's markets amidst the rapid growth in the number of overall markets. Research focusing on market decline, failure, and revitalization is essential to ensure that farmers' markets remain a viable, local strategy toward sustainable food systems. A detailed discussion of the specific literature related to farmers' market decline and revitalization will be presented in the introductory sections of chapters four and five, respectively.

CHAPTER III:
"A TURN FOR THE WORSE: TRACING THE DECLINE OF A FARMERS' MARKET ON THE EDGE"

Abstract

Amidst astounding growth in the number of farmers' markets in the U.S., many markets struggle and fail. This research seeks to understand farmers' market failure by examining a well-established market that experienced distress. The situation was unique in that the market had not yet reached the point of failure. The process of decline and distress is depicted through market records and interviews. A number of factors contributed to the market's problems, including management issues, difficulty recruiting and aligning vendors and customers, and community level influences such as a declining downtown business sector and inadequate city support for the market. The market became vulnerable over time and environmental influences in 2005 triggered a crisis. Community embeddedness emerged as crucial to sustaining this farmers' market.

Introduction

Farmers' markets are one of the foundations of a growing trend toward food system localization. In addition to being a leading source of locally produced food, they are heralded as an important way to rebuild communities by connecting farmers and consumers (Hinrichs, 2000), nurturing local economic development (Lyson, 2000), and forming new social relationships and networks (Feenstra, 2002). The number of markets nationwide continues to rise, from 1,755 in 1994 to 4,385 in 2006 (USDA, 2006). After decades of decline during the mid-twentieth century, resurgence in the number of farmers' markets began in the mid-1970s, stimulated by "counterculturalism" and " a new wave of environmentalism" (Hinrichs, 2000) and encouraged by favorable public policies (Brown, 2001). This resurgence continues with the aim of providing outlets for small-scale local producers to sell products directly to local consumers (LaTrobe & Acott, 2000).

However, not all markets are enjoying the same level of success. Indeed, amidst the rapid increase in the number of farmers' markets, many markets are failing (Stephenson et al. 2007). This case study traces the decline of one local farmers' market in hopes of understanding more about why, when many markets are successful, many others are not. While not a case study of farmers' market failure, by analyzing the circumstances surrounding the decline of a market, insights into potential reasons for market failure can be gleaned. Further, this case study moves beyond the macro-level data on market failure to provide a picture of the local-level processes behind farmers' market distress.

Currently, there is an increasingly large amount of popular writing (Schlosser, 2001; Halweil, 2004; Pollan, 2006) and academic research (Bonanno et al., 1994; O'Hara & Stagl, 2001; Shiva & Bedi, 2002; Magdoff et al., 2004; Nestle, 2006) related to the flaws in the current globalizing and consolidating agro-food system. This literature describes how the dominant food system has resulted in a number of drastic changes in the way food is produced and consumed. Several researchers describe the process of "disembedding" associated with the dominant agro-food system and its tendencies toward global sourcing and commodification (Giddens, 1990; Allen, 1999; O'Hara & Stagl, 2001). Disembedding refers to the disconnections that are imposed between production and consumption (Allen, 1999). These disconnections occur between functional aspects of the food system (Dahlberg, 1993; O'Hara & Stagl, 2001), and within localities themselves as social relations are 'lifted out' of their local contexts and reconfigured across indefinite space and time (Giddens, 1990). O'Hara and Stagl note, "the resulting disconnect from context specific physical, biological, and social conditions calls the long-term sustainability of global markets into question" (p. 549).

With the sustainability of the dominant food system in question, the perceived need for a more sustainable food system has led to the increasing popularity of practical and theoretical food localization research. The literature regarding food systems localization has evolved steadily over the years. Today it is based not only on resistance to the industrialization and commodification of the food system (Mead, 1970), but also on desires of reconnecting ourselves to food and using food as a way of revitalizing communities (DeLind, 2006). A theme to this literature has been recreating the food system from the ground up (Kloppenburg et al., 1996). However, some are moving away from advocating transcendence of the global food system toward the realization that the food system in general needs to be made more sustainable at all levels, locally, nationally, and globally (Born & Purcell, 2006). The local-global binary has been called into question and the interconnectedness and mutual conditioning between the local and the global have been acknowledged and embraced (Bellows & Hamm, 2001; Hinrichs, 2003; Born & Purcell, 2006). Despite the disagreements over whether localization should be viewed as a means or the end goal of sustainability and whether there are inherently sustainable qualities to a more localized scale, there is general agreement that successful farmers' markets are desirable, and indeed vital, as local, small-scale strategies toward increased food security and a more sustainable food system (Andreatta & Wickliffe, 2002; Feenstra, 2002; Lyson, 2005; Born & Purcell, 2006).

The benefits of farmers' markets to local communities and small farmers—economically, socially, environmentally, and culturally—have been well established in the literature. Lyson et al. (1995) found that farmers' markets are important contributors to local economies in that they facilitate low-risk business start-ups while providing goods and services that may not be readily available through formal markets. Hinrichs et al. (2004) note that farmers' markets have a longstanding role as sites for community interaction and small business development. Small farmers also benefit from farmers' markets. Kambara and Shelley (2002) observed that farmers markets are the principal direct marketing channel used by small farmers in California.

Several researchers have conducted investigations into farmers' markets in an attempt to better understand the reasons for their popularity. Much of the research to date has focused on analyzing the motivations and attitudes of vendors and customers and the interactions between these groups in an effort to understand the rationality behind the farmers' market phenomenon. Some studies have highlighted the role of social learning and innovation (Hinrichs et al., 2004) and the significant role of market management in shaping the dynamics of markets (Andreatta & Wickliffe, 2002). Other research has been focused on farmers' market structures, characteristics, and growth over the past century. Notable among these are Hughes and Mattson's (1992) profile of farmers' market vendors and market organizational differences, Brown's (2001) documentation of farmers' market growth trends in the twentieth century, and Tiemann's (2004) research regarding the varying characteristics, appearances, and functions of farmers' markets. In Brown's (2002) comprehensive overview, she catalogues farmers' market research over the last few decades related consumers, vendors, and the economic and social impacts of farmers' markets, concluding that the amount of available literature is limited, leaving ample room for further research.

Other researchers also point to needs for further research related to farmers' markets. Andreatta and Wickliffe (2002) assert, "there is much to be gained from furthering our understanding of the cultural dimensions of the agro-food system and strengthening the community of local farmers and consumers," later noting the importance of maintaining successful farmers' markets (p. 174). Johnson (1996), Payne (2002), and Stephenson et al. (2007) call for specific research related to why some markets fail. Brown (2002) asks the question: "Why are farmers' markets successful in a developed market economy where consumers and farmers have many options for buying food?" However, recent research describes high failure rates among farmers' markets in Oregon, especially among new and young markets (Lev et al., 2006; Stephenson et al., 2007). Feenstra (2002) notes that community food system endeavors are "few in number, unevenly distributed, often small-generally involving less than the majority of a community; they are precarious and many fail to sustain themselves over time" (p. 100). This is an area that is not well understood. There are few empirical studies related to the struggle or failure of farmer's markets amidst the rapid growth in the number of overall markets. Research focusing on market decline and failure is essential to ensure that farmers' markets remain a viable, local strategy toward sustainable food systems.

Recent research from Oregon investigated the circumstances surrounding failed farmers' markets (Lev et al., 2006; Stephenson et al., 2006; 2007). Stephenson et al. (2006; 2007) report that despite a relatively steady increase in the net number of markets, from 38 in 1998 to 68 in 2005, a more complex situation of opening and closing was actually occurring among markets in Oregon. During this period from 1998 to 2005, a total of 62 new markets opened while 32 markets closed. Thus, simply reporting a net gain of 30 markets obscures a high incidence of market closure.

Stephenson et al. (2006; 2007) identify five related factors that characterized some of the markets that failed in Oregon during the period between 1998 and 2005. These were: 1) small market size (5 to 30 vendors[1]), 2) high need for additional products, 3) low administrative revenue, 4) volunteer or low-paid manager, and 5) high manager turnover. Further, of the 32 markets that closed in Oregon between 1998 and 2005, Stephenson et al. (2006) report that nearly 47 percent did so after their first season, and 94 percent closed after four or fewer years in operation. There were only two older markets that closed during this span from 1998 to 2005, and these were in operation for 11 and 22 years respectively. Lev et al. (2006) compare the failure rates among Oregon markets during this time frame (1998-2005) with those of small businesses, concluding that the rates were roughly similar, especially when comparing new markets to new businesses.

According to Stephenson et al. (2006; 2007), a central problem for farmers' markets is acquiring sufficient resources. All of the five factors they cited as characteristic of failing markets are related to the amount of resources a market can access. As they note, there is a circular issue at work here in that small markets with insufficient customer numbers have difficulty attracting many vendors. This results in a product shortage, which perpetuates the customer shortage. Because of the low

[1] Stephenson et al. (2007) offer a research-based framework for comparing farmers' markets in terms of size, including four size categories: Micro (5-8 vendors), Small (9-30 vendors), Medium (31-55 vendors), and Large (56-90 vendors).

revenue generated from small markets with few vendors, it becomes difficult to pay a salary to managers. Lacking a paid manager, in turn, makes it difficult for the market to pursue opportunities to attract more customers and vendors. These issues feed a downward spiral and impact a market's ability to survive (Stephenson et al., 2007).

While the research above provides a starting point for explaining the phenomenon of market failure, it leaves much unexplained. Knowing the characteristics of these failed markets is crucial to understanding their situation. However, knowing what the conditions are that result in these characteristics or that lead markets into the downward spiral of small size and insufficient revenue would be helpful for ensuring the success of markets. Without definitive evidence, Stephenson et al. (2007) suggested that when larger, formerly more successful markets begin to struggle, the number of vendors participating will drop off until the market becomes a small market. In other words, although markets that fail are generally small, they may have become smaller during a period of decline.

Thus, the process of farmers' market failure is complex and raises a number of questions. What causes a successful market to struggle? Is it simply an aspect of a free-market economic system that some markets will fail while others thrive? As Lev et al. (2006) note,

> Although failed markets are an unpleasant experience for their organizers, vendors, and customers, the 'churning' within the overall market sector…the opening of new markets at the same time that others are closing, should be recognized as having positive aspects as well since weaker more poorly performing markets are disappearing while potentially stronger ones are opening (p.11).

Given this manner of thinking, we might ask whether it is reasonable to expect every community to be able to support a farmers' market of its own. Stephenson et al.

(2006) find that many of the markets that failed were in communities with an adequate population for supporting a farmers' market, even a market of moderate size. So why are markets successful in some communities but not others? What are the factors that lead to the decline of some farmers' markets? These are important questions that need to be addressed in future research. This research sheds light on some of these issues.

Building on findings related to farmers' market failure in Oregon and the factors involved in market closure (Lev et al., 2006; Stephenson et al., 2006; 2007), this research presents a case study of one market in distress in hopes of explaining the circumstances of decline that could potentially lead to failure. By documenting the process of decline of one local farmers' market, the Albany Farmers' Market, that does not easily fit with the above reported characteristics of failed markets, we hope to gain a better understanding of the reasons that might be contributing to this type of problem. This paper presents the story of the market's decline, an established market (opening in 1978) that has fluctuated between small and medium size over the years. Through an examination of vendor, customer, and management perceptions of the market's past and present, as well as market records from past and current years, this research describes the processes that move a market from stable to struggling. It also points to the ways in which perceptions can become reality, especially with respect to the success or failure of an enterprise.

Feenstra (1997) argues that "the way food is grown, distributed, and eaten profoundly affects the environmental, social, spiritual, and economic well-being of the community" (p. 28). This statement represents the holistic approach of the political-economic-ecological-cultural-food systems framework incorporated in this research.

As Wendell Berry notes, eating is an agricultural act, and the way we eat determines to a great extent the way the earth is used (Berry, 2002). In incorporating this idea into research on farmers markets, concepts such as community food systems (Feenstra, 2002), food system localization (Hinrichs, 2003), and civic agriculture (Lyson, 2000) lend important conceptual structure for situating farmers' markets within a realm of community and political action, promoting ideals of citizenship and environmentalism (DeLind, 2002) and advocating for a balance between social and economic goals.

The Market

The Albany farmers' market was selected as the focus of this case study based on the characterization by its manager and board of directors as having been near collapse during the 2005 season. Exploring the situation of market decline and failure for affected markets is difficult after the market has permanently closed. This market presents a unique situation in that the decline had not yet reached the point of failure. My fieldwork with the market occurred during 2006, the season following the crisis year.

The Albany farmers' market is a 29-year-old market, purported to be oldest continuously operating open-air farmers' market in the state of Oregon (R. Landis, personal communication, April 2006). During its early years in the early 1980s, it was one of "about a dozen" farmers' markets in Oregon (Theimann, 1983). In 2005, it was one of sixty-eight markets statewide (Stephenson et al., 2007). The market operates every Saturday from mid-April to mid-November. Since the market's opening day in 1978, it has remained in the same location in downtown Albany, a riverfront parking lot adjacent to the Albany Senior Center. It would currently be classified as a "small size" market according to the classification system developed by Stephenson et al. (2006), with generally less than 30 vendors, however it has been larger in the past.

The market is one of three area markets associated with the same market organization, "Corvallis-Albany Farmers' Markets." The organization, which holds approximately 140 voting members who are all farmer/vendors, is operated by a market manager, who is advised by a board of directors consisting of ten vendors. The board meets monthly with the market manager to discuss, set, and enforce the policies, regulations, and financial matters for the three markets. The organization primarily allows direct marketers of agricultural products from a six-county area, excepting a limited number of restaurant and processed food vendors. Although the market manager is responsible for all three markets, she personally oversees the two markets in Corvallis (one on Wednesdays and one on Saturdays), while the Albany market is overseen by part-time site managers who rotate the 32 market days. The organization is grassroots and depends largely on vendor stall fees for its operating budget.

According to the latest available census (US Census, 2000), the city of Albany has approximately 40,000 residents. Compared to other nearby communities (Corvallis, Eugene, Portland), Albany is often described by interview respondents from Albany and elsewhere as "blue collar," "meat and potatoes," and "working class." According to Stephenson and Lev (2004), Albany depends largely on manufacturing industries, including exotic metals and wood products, and therefore has a high percentage of manufacturing jobs. It is also less affluent than its neighboring city of Corvallis (Stephenson & Lev, 2004). About 18 percent of the population of Albany has a Bachelor's degree or higher, while 15 percent of the population did not complete high school (US Census, 2000). Further, Albany residents tend to have more conservative voting patterns than other nearby communities (Stephenson & Lev, 2004).

Research Methods

This research was conducted using a case study approach as outlined by Yin (1994). Specific advice for organizational case studies was taken from Hartley (2004). The case study approach allows for the incorporation of both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Using multiple methods of research fosters triangulation in the data and, in terms of organizational case studies, allows for a more holistic accounting of the interactions and processes that have taken place within this market organization over the years (Hartley, 2004). The goal with the mixed methods approach was to enhance the ability to build inferences about what has happened with this market over time and under what circumstances, increasing the validity of the findings.

Observational, ethnographic, and quantitative data were gathered over a period of 11 months between January and November of 2006. Research funding through Oregon State University Extension Small Farms Program supported my work with the market from January through September. Additionally, I was employed by the market association as one of three site managers for the Albany market’s 2006 season. Of the 32 Saturdays when the market operated, I participated in 12 market days as a site manger and an additional 12 market days for observation and interviews with vendors and customers. I attended a total of 24 markets out of 32 occurring in Albany’s 2006 season. In addition, I attended a number of board, membership, and community meetings related to the market, and also attended other nearby farmers' markets for interviewing and observation. This direct participation through employment and active engagement with the market provided a unique opportunity for participant observation and a platform for data collection.

The qualitative methods included ethnographic interviews, participant observation, and a focus group. Ethnographic interview data were collected from a total of 70 people related in some way to this particular farmers' market. This included 12 past vendors, 20 current vendors, 26 customers, two past site mangers, one current site manager, the current market manager, six board members (who were either current or past vendors themselves), and two community leaders. Participation in these interviews was voluntary and proceeded after informed consent was obtained. Interviews were recorded by hand and interview notes remain confidential.

Participants were selected based on purposive (current vendors, market management), snowball (past vendors), and convenience (customers) sampling, methods described by Bernard (2006). Interviews were unstructured and ranged in length from 5-10 minutes (for most of the customer interviews) to one to three hours (for all other interviews), and were mostly conducted at farmers' markets, although some were conducted during farm visits, some in public meeting places, and a few by phone. Participants were asked to discuss their associations with the market and their perceptions of the market in terms of the past and present. In addition to the above-mentioned interviews, I developed and maintained close relationships with a number of key informants for the duration of the study, including vendors, customers, managers, and board members. Finally, a focus group was organized to include seven key informants in an effort to ensure the validity of the analysis and interpretation of the interview data.

The quantitative data includes vendor, customer, and stall data from the 2005 season and available records from past market seasons (as far back as 1998) kept by market management. Vendor and stall counts were recorded and compiled for each market day from 1998 to 2005 using current and past market records, and available customer counts were also compiled.

The ethnographic interview data were analyzed using a combination of grounded theory and content analysis approaches. The grounded theory approach incorporated here is based on the original grounded theory method advocated by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and more recent work by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Content analysis was conducted as outlined by Bernard (2006). The combination of these two methods allowed for both the emergence of themes from the interviews and a more specific analysis of interview data directly related to the market's decline. The focus group following the analysis acted as a two-way information channel, first by presenting the findings to the participants, then by asking participants to offer their interpretation of the data (Bernard, 2000).

The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive analysis techniques such as graphic displays, tables and summary statistics (Bernard, 2006). These techniques provided a numeric depiction of the market's situation from 1998 to 2005, allowing for graphic representations of the market's transformation over time. In this instance, seemingly small changes have a significant impact on the market. Therefore, some of the graphs are presented within their approximate data range to more clearly illustrate the impact of these changes.

In interpreting the research findings, it is important to note the limitations and delimitations of this study. First, because many of the respondents were selected based on convenience sampling methods, there could be a bias in terms of participant self-selection. It is likely that the customers and vendors who agreed to be interviewed did so because they had strong feelings about the market and its situation. This may limit the breadth of views expressed in the ethnographic interviews. In an attempt to counteract this potential bias, my analysis relies not only on interview data, but also on information available from market records. However, a management shift in the late 1990s makes it difficult to collect precise data (such as vendor and crowd counts) from market records prior to 1998. Therefore, much of my historical description of the market relies on the perceptions of involved customers and vendors, as recorded in the ethnographic interviews. Finally, given the case study approach of this project in describing the decline of one market, the ability to generalize is not a goal of this research, however the assumption is that the situation for this market might have many similarities to the situation for other declining markets. The goal of this research is to generate some insights and guidance regarding the process of market decline, not to test existing hypotheses[2].

Findings

I. The Early Years: 1980's

"It was just wall to wall vendors here back then...those were the good days."

–Long time Albany Vendor

[2] For additional detail on research methods, see Appendix A.

The Albany market began operating in 1978, founded by a group composed mostly of vendors, in an effort to promote the use of local food and farm products. The city of Albany was chosen over nearby Corvallis (where many of the founders lived) based on an impression of having fewer regulatory barriers. The market's founders, with little experience in managing farmers' markets, learned as they went, creating new rules when necessary. They thought the market would do best with a self-governing principle. The market probably operated more like an open marketplace in the early years—just show up and sell.

Of the customers and vendors interviewed who were associated with the market during the 1980s and early 1990s (five customers, twelve vendors), all of them remember these days as "hoppin';" "the good ol' days" when vendors could sell out and customers could get everything they needed at great bargain prices. Getting good deals on produce is said to have been one of the early values of this farmers' market, as was likely the case for many farmers' markets of the 1980s (see Sommer et al., 1980 for data on California markets).

Indeed, a common story told about the vendors in the 1980s was of the large processed vegetable farmers who would bring truckloads of produce to the market when the canneries were full and had turned them down. One vendor remembers,

> When they were here, there was so much excitement! It brought a lot of people down here who were thrilled about filling up their bags with really cheap green beans. Bargains like that really brought in instant crowds back then.

Many vendors recall a parking lot full of "mostly old guys with pick-up trucks selling bushels of green beans and corn off their tailgates, wheeling and dealing with customers with cigarettes dangling from their lips." According to a number of customer and vendor reports, the market had an abundance of both vendors and customers. A customer reports, “Oh yes, back then we used have this lot full and these two [adjacent, currently empty] lots full, too! There were a lot of vendors here back then!” Accordingly, a picture in the city’s newspaper from 1986 depicts quite the bustling scene at market day (“Mingling At,” 1986).

Newspaper articles from the time report that the market started out small each season, with just a handful of vendors at the beginning, but by the height of summer probably accommodated around 35 vendors (“It’s the Best,” 1984), and perhaps, as one journalist reported, even up to 50 vendors in some months (“Mingling At,” 1986). Despite the apparent success of this early market in terms of bustling crowds and dozens of vendors, there was trouble ahead. The self-governing principles of the early market management inevitably led to tension and turmoil, which came to a head in the mid 1990s.

II. The Transition

> “From hearing other people talk, it [the Albany Farmers’ Market] went through a period of time of having a power struggle. Who was going to run the market, who was the big boss, and who could make decisions regarding who was allowed to sell their wares. And there was a lot of discussion around this and a lot of hard feelings.”
>
> --Albany City Official

Sometime during the mid-1990s, dissatisfaction with the Albany market was growing among farmers’ market vendors in the area. Many vendors I interviewed discussed the exclusionary practices of the management at that time, which was said to be very strict about which and what type of vendors were permitted to sell at the market. Competition between vendors selling the same type of products was not encouraged, so that only a limited number of each type of vendor was permitted.

Also, vendors were growing frustrated with the lack of formal rules for space allocation. Although the management claimed to have a first-come, first-served policy, the reality was that vendors were protecting spaces for one another, so that even someone arriving at three o'clock in the morning to reserve their space would eventually be made to move by other vendors.

Meanwhile, another market organization had formed in 1991 and was operating a Saturday Farmers' Market in nearby Corvallis. The manager reports taking in a number of vendors that either were not allowed into the Albany market or were frustrated by the lack of fairness in space allocation there. Many vendors were also complaining to the city about their frustrations with the Albany market management, so much so that the city decided to turn over the problem, along with the market permit, to the Albany Downtown Association director. After a series of meetings involving vendors and board members of both market organizations (Albany and newly formed Corvallis Saturday), a fairly unanimous decision was reached that the organization running Corvallis Saturday should take over responsibility for the Albany market (and also the Corvallis Wednesday market, a second market run by the previous Albany market management). Thus, vendors and board members were absorbed and the Corvallis-Albany Farmers' Markets Association (CAFM), a three-market enterprise (managing two markets in Corvallis and one in Albany), was created in 1998. The Albany Farmers' Market began the 1998 season under new management that prided itself on having well documented, more inclusive rules.

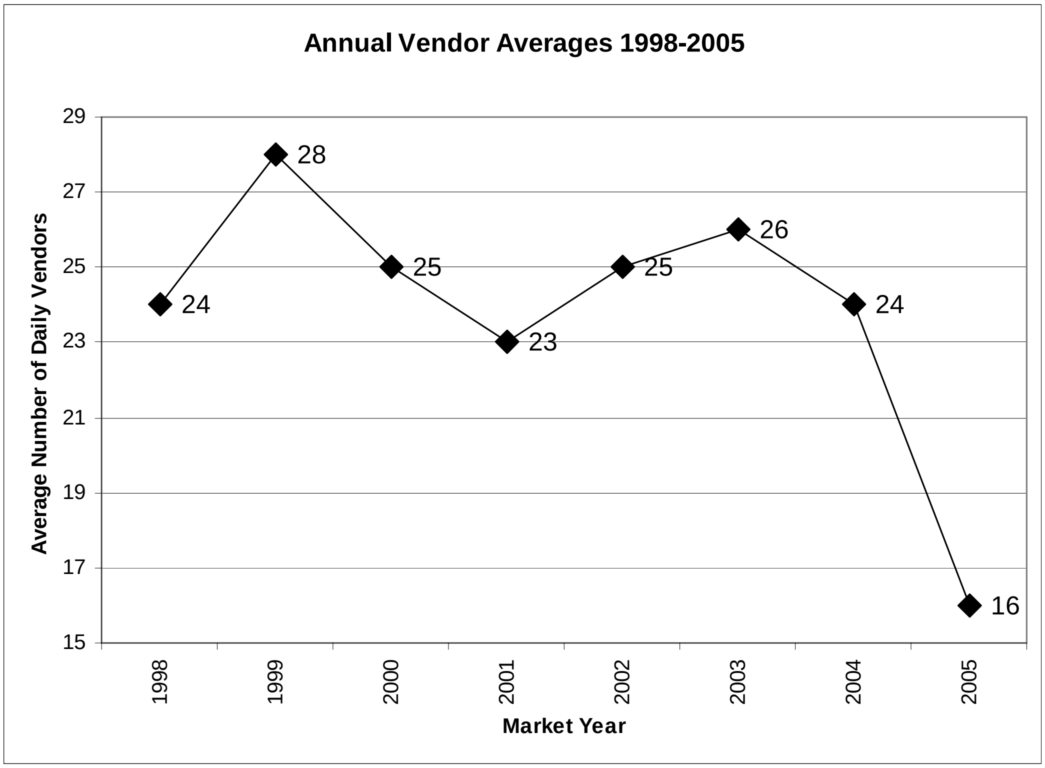
III. Tracing the Decline

"We didn't have enough space for all the vendors back when we started, and now we have too much space. Back then there were too many, and now there's not enough."
-Long Time Albany Vendor

The previous description of the early years of the market contrasts dramatically with the market's 2005 season, characterized as "the crisis year" by market management. This theme of 2005 being the crisis year for the market emerged in 50 percent of the interviews conducted with current vendors. One vendor summed it up, "Last year [2005] was definitely the worst. I think we had the most vendors leave that year…and it seems like the customers left with them."

Using records for the Albany Market, the number of vendors was tallied for each market day of each season from 1998 to 2006. Looking at average vendor attendance for each year reveals a significant drop in vendor numbers for the 2005 season (Figure 1). Of interest, the spike in 1999 followed the transition in management. Because of the management problems discussed earlier, presumably the market was not experiencing any significant growth in vendor numbers during the time of the previous management. The new management recruited a number of interested vendors that had previously been prevented from participating in the market, and vendor numbers experienced a rise for the 1999 season. However, the increase in vendor numbers was short-lived, and the following season saw numbers similar to what might have been the norm for the market until the drop in 2005.

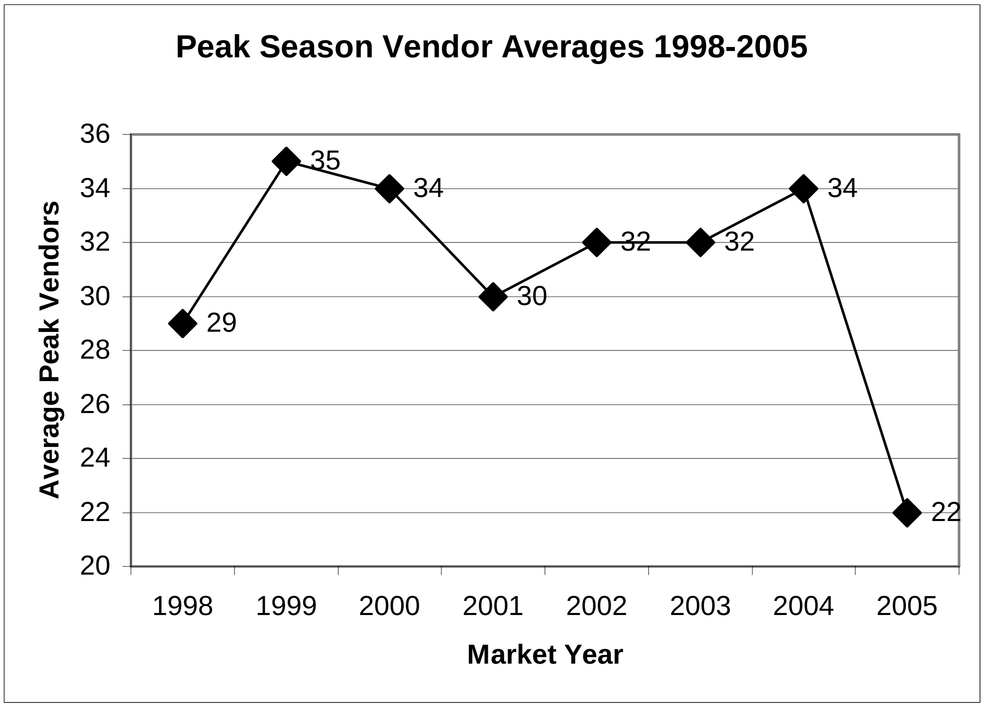
Figure 1. Average number of vendors selling on each market day of each season, by market season year[3].



In order to get a closer look at these annual differences, the "peak season" averages were calculated for each year, 1998-2006. The peak season averages were taken from markets 11 through 18 for each season from 1998 to 2006, which correspond to most of the July and August markets.[4] These months represent a period of abundance in terms of crops and availability of customers (attendance generally drops after school starts). A comparison of peak season vendor averages reveals a similarly shaped decline, with a peak in 1999 and a dramatic drop in 2005 (Figure 2).

[3] The scale reflects the data range (see methods).
[4] The 1998 season began two weeks later than the markets from 1999-2006, totaling only 30 markets instead of 32. Because of this difference, the season's first market was correlated as market 3 so as to be comparable with all other years. The average for 1998 reflects only 30 markets, not 32.

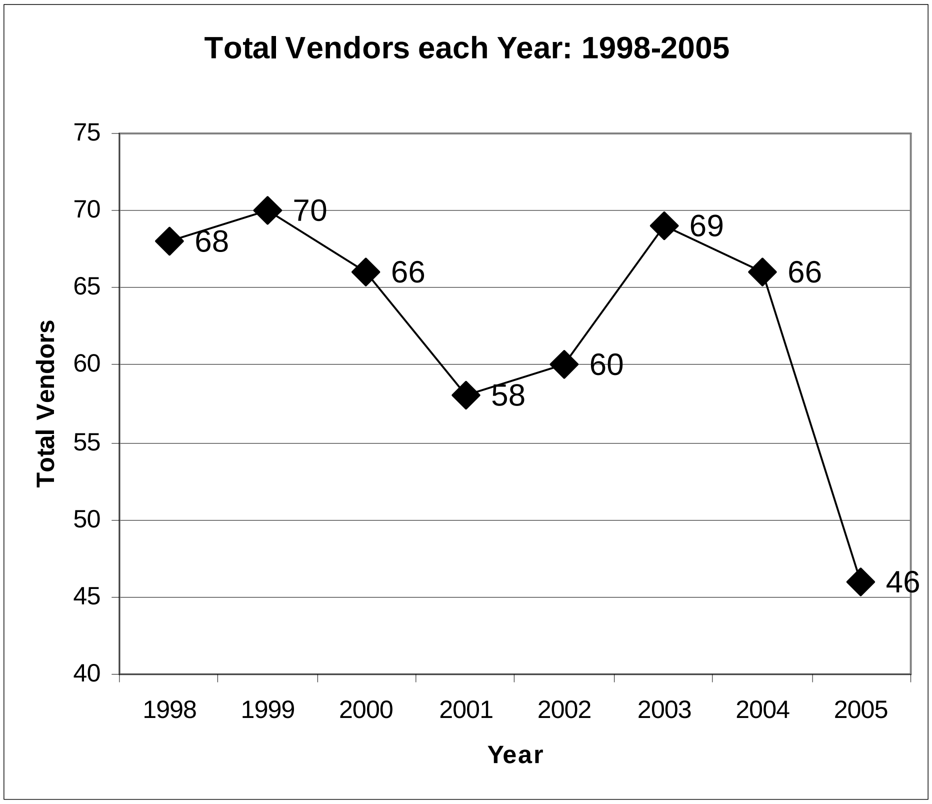
Figure 2. Average number of vendors selling during peak season market days each market year[5].



In addition to analyzing vendor counts for each market day for all available seasons, the total number of vendors selling at least once during each season was calculated (1998-2006). Having a sufficient vendor pool is one way product is diversified throughout the season, which attracts customers. Interestingly, the graph of the "total vendor pool" looks similar to the daily vendor averages for each year, reflecting the slight rise for 1999, then the significant drop for 2005 (Figure 3). It appears that in addition to vendors selling less often that year, the 2005 drop in vendor counts resulted from a decreasing vendor pool. A decreasing vendor pool would mean that less diversity of products was available, which would disappoint customers.

[5] The scale reflects the data range (see methods).

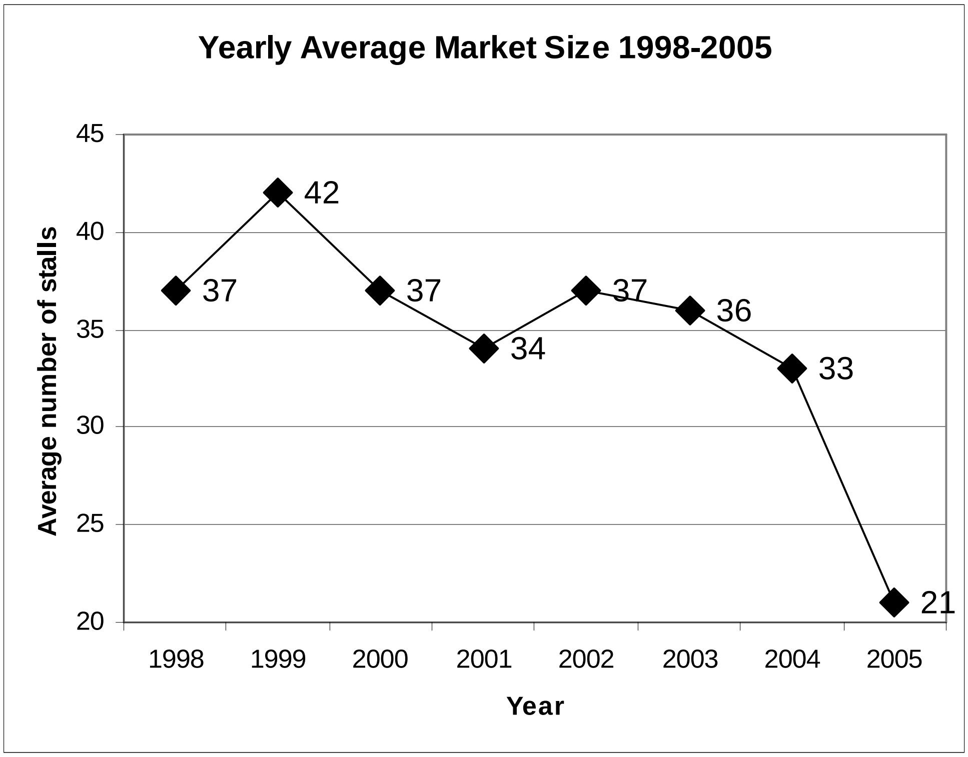
Figure 3. Total number of vendors selling at least once during each season by year[6].



Another way to examine the market's condition over the years is to analyze its scale. Vendors purchase one or more stalls to fit their need for space. Often this is based on the quantity of product a vendor plans to display and presumably sell. This can expand the scale of the market as well as the amount of product available on a given market day. Figure 4 depicts a steadier decline in market size over the years, which seems to suggest that although for some years the vendor numbers were stable or even increasing, the market was decreasing in size. One problem was that larger, "anchor" vendors were being lost and replaced with smaller vendors, likely resulting in decreased product diversity and a shorter period of availability for many products. This graph provides yet another view of the significant drop in 2005.

[6] The scale reflects the data range (see methods).

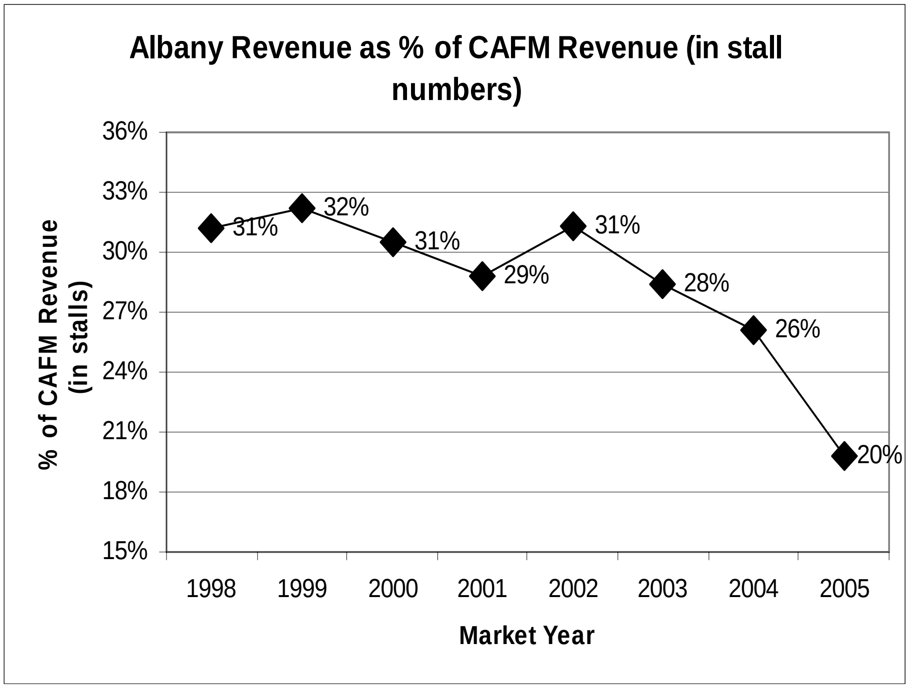
Figure 4. Average number of stalls sold each market day for each year[7].



Since the market's administrative revenue is based largely on fees collected for stalls, it follows that this leads to a decline in the markets' revenue. Transforming the number of stalls sold each year into revenue and comparing this with the total stalls purchased at the other two markets included in CAFM, these numbers demonstrate that Albany consistently provided nearly one-third of CAFM's revenue, only beginning to decline within the past few years (Figure 5).

[7] The scale reflects the data range (see methods).

Figure 5. Albany revenue as a percentage of overall CAFM revenue by year, based on number of stalls sold at each market[8].



In terms of customer numbers, many of the vendors (both past and current vendors) reported that they perceived a decline sometime after the time of the transition in management in 1998. One-vendor reports, "There was a time when this market was packed [with customers]. Three or four years ago, it started declining." And another vendor says, "I think we've lost customers since '99. The customer base is definitely not what it used to be." In fact, peak season customer count comparisons between available counts[9] demonstrate a steady decline in customer numbers since the late 1990's[10] (Figure 6). It is interesting to note that the major decline in customers appears to have occurred much earlier than the decline in vendors. However, since

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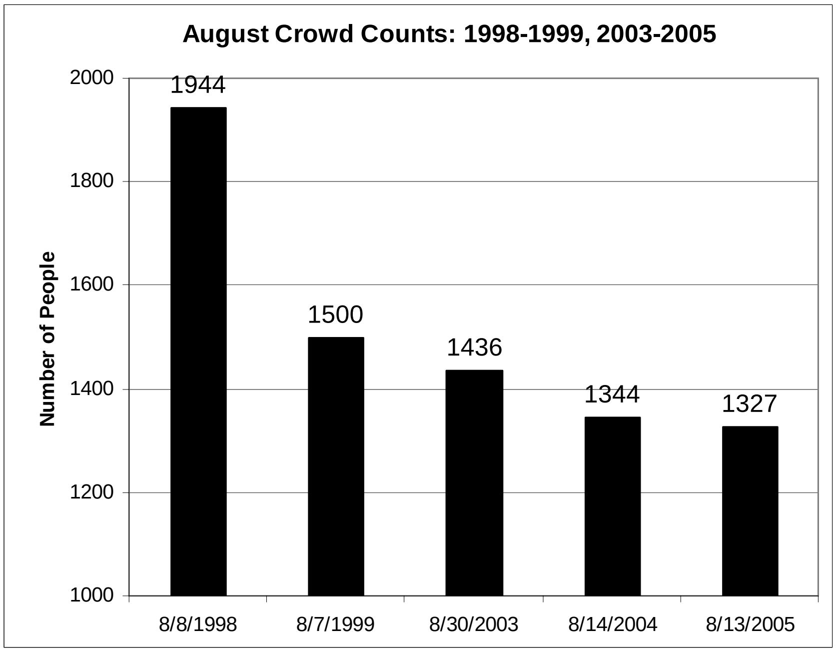
[8] The scale reflects the data range (see methods).
[9] See Appendix A for additional information regarding comparable customer counts from 1998-2006.
[10] It is important to note that while previous years' counts offer a great opportunity for comparison, attendance may be affected by weather or other factors. Also, although collecting crowd count data using Lev and Stephenson's (2002) method is straightforward, there can still be differences in the way individuals might collect the data. All of this should be considered when making comparisons.

precise customer counts pre-1998 are unknown, it is difficult to determine whether the 1998 count is representative of pre-1998 customer numbers or is an anomaly.

Figure 6. Comparable peak season customer counts from a similar time frame each season: 1998-1999, 2003-2005.



IV. Reasons for the Decline

The following issues were highlighted in the ethnographic interviews as having contributed to the market's decline and crisis.

1. Transition Issues

In thinking about the market's situation in the mid 1990s leading up to the transition of 1998, some felt that the market's problems began during this time. Based on the problems discussed earlier related to the exclusionary practices of the previous management, the vendor dissatisfaction with the Albany market that began during this time is likely to have had long-lasting negative impacts on the market, despite the change in management. The following comment from a community representative sums up this line of thinking,

> There were a lot of problems back then [in the early 90's], before the merger. There was a guy running it who was causing problems. It was a horrible management problem. It was definitely one of the things that hurt the market. I think the downfall started with that guy.

Further, after the transition in management, one manager became responsible for three markets, two of them occurring on the same day of the week and in different communities. Since the transition, the market management has had difficulty finding a consistent site manager for the market, leading to the situation of having a number of rotating site managers over the years. Also, the site manager position has not included a community outreach component, and most of the managers have not been Albany residents. One major constraint with these issues is the market's limited budget. Some of the participants felt that because of these issues, the market has not received the attention it has needed to ensure community support for the market. One past vendor says, "After that market was inherited, it just continued trailing along and hasn't really been changed in a long time. It's not been given the effort that's needed for the community to take ownership of the market."

2. Not enough "Young Blood"

Another perceived reason for the decline that stems in part from the transition issues is a stagnant market population in Albany with few new customers and vendors added over time. The previous management turned away a number of potential new vendors during the 1990s, and some new vendors who were permitted to join report being treated with hostility by other vendors. One current board member remembers "being told to get lost" when he called to join the market in the early 1990s. Another board member who was allowed to join the market reported being the subject of ridicule, with other vendors sarcastically commenting on how his expensive product might taste.

Many participants reported that the stagnant population of vendors at the Albany market was also an aging population of vendors. One vendor says, “There were a lot of older vendors here when I started [17 years ago]. They’ve either retired or died. There’s not enough new ones to replace those that left.” And another, older vendor laments, “Sometimes I think we should not get too friendly with the vendors here now, because everyone that becomes a friend either dies or leaves!” And later, “today we met three people—all vendors—who used to be here. One said she really misses it. She got older and decided she couldn’t take it anymore. A lot of the old timers we knew either died or quit!”

Participants also pointed to an aging customer population to explain the decline in customers. One long-time vendor reports, “It’s always been an older group of customers in Albany.” Another vendor who attends a number of markets in the state describes the Albany customers in comparison, “This is more of an elderly market. There are a lot more older people here than in my other markets.” A survey done by the market in 1999 revealed that 74 percent of market customers were middle aged or older (Corvallis-Albany Farmers’ Markets [CAFM], 1999). This group of aging customers in Albany might play a significant role in the decline of customers over the years.

3. Competition from other Markets

A major contributor to the stagnant vendor population in Albany was certainly increasing competition from other markets in the area. Many attribute the decline of the middle to late 1990s to the fact that the Corvallis Saturday market (begun in 1991), Albany's sister market, continued to acquire vendors and customers for their growing market, held on the same day as the Albany market and only 12 miles away. Thus, a sister market became a competitor. One board member says, "I think that since the Corvallis market really took off, it's just sucking people outta there [Albany]." A vendor who sells at both markets notes, "As Corvallis Saturday has grown, this market has diminished. Just like on a teeter-totter. There used to be people [customers] who would come here every week. Now when I go to Corvallis with my husband once in a while, I see them there. And of course, they're ashamed because they *are* from Albany."

Yet another common way of explaining the decline of the market blames the rapid growth in the number of farmers' markets statewide. One vendor says, "I think this area has gone way overboard on the number of markets." And another, "One of the problems is that markets are growing—popping up everywhere." As mentioned in the initial description of the market, in less than thirty years the number of markets in Oregon has grown six times, from around a dozen markets in the early 1980s (Theimann, 1983) to 68 markets in 2005 (Stephenson et al., 2007). Even since 1998, the number of markets in Oregon has nearly doubled. It is certainly plausible that one factor in the market's decline has been a greater selection of more profitable markets from which farmers can choose.

4. Difficulty Aligning Vendors with Customers

Likely related to the transition issues, stagnation problems, and increasing competition from other markets, a number of participants recognized the difficulty the market has experienced in aligning vendors and products with the needs and desires of customers. This difficulty is exemplified in a vendor loss occurring during the late 1990s, less evident in the quantitative data but emerging in the ethnographic interviews. Many of the past vendors I interviewed left the market during the late 1990s, just after the transition in management. Of the 12 past vendors I interviewed[11], six of them left during this time, and all of these left to sell in nearby Corvallis. The rest of the past vendors I interviewed left during the past five years (except one who sold only for one year during the mid-80's), and all but one of these currently sell in Corvallis. Thus, of the 11 vendor operations that used to sell in Albany but no longer sell there, nine of these operations currently sell in Corvallis, one has since retired, and one is no longer selling at farmers' markets. Interestingly, most of these past vendors are vegetable growers (8 of 11 operations), and all but one of these vegetable growers are either certified organic or advertise "no spray." The one past vendor who is not organic and does not advertise "no spray" incidentally has some of the lowest prices at market and is the only vendor among all the past vendors interviewed who reported being quite successful in Albany, but had to quit the market for health related reasons. The rest named a number of reasons for leaving Albany, all related to poor sales and little interest or support for the price of organically grown produce.

In fact, both current and past vendors recognize that although organic products represent a niche that is attractive to some customers, Albany is generally not a good

[11] Two of these vendors represent the same business.

market for organic products. This is summed up in the following comment by a current vendor, “We’re offering a lot here at this market—there’s everything that anybody would want. But the major organics have gone to Corvallis. It’s a high-priced market over there compared to here. Here, customers expect to get a bargain.” The city official I interviewed had this to say about organics,

> There’s a lot of organic stuff down there that’s priced at a price that—well my reaction is, that’s fine if somebody wants to pay that much for it, but I don’t see any reason why it should be so high. They’ve got tomatoes and beans and stuff raised organically—I can’t see it being double or triple what I can get at the store.

A 1998 customer survey at this market showed that 43 percent of Albany market customers surveyed reported that they did not care about organic produce when given a choice, as compared with only 21 percent and 17 percent at Corvallis Saturday and Corvallis Wednesday markets respectively (Lev & Stephenson, 1998). Interestingly, only 14 percent of Albany customers surveyed said they always choose organic, regardless of price. The remainder of customers said they would choose organic if it were less expensive or the same price (25 percent) or if it were only a little more expensive (18 percent). In other words, 68 percent of customers surveyed either do not care about organic or would only choose organic if it were less than or equal to the price of conventional produce, and more than half of the remainder of customers reported not wanting to pay too much more for organic.

5. Community Level Influences

Contributing to the difficult situation for this market are two important community level influences. A number of participants pointed to a decline in the city’s downtown business sector and a lack of city support for the market to explain the external environment it has struggled with over the past decade or two. Referring to the decline in downtown activity, one vendor says, "Downtown used to be the main part of town. First Street was full of stuff. But when they started building supermarkets and malls outside of town people stopped coming down here." Indeed, when the city's mall opened in 1988 a few miles from downtown, a number of retail stores left the downtown area, which is only recently beginning to recover from the loss of businesses.

In addition to a declining business sector downtown, there has not been an overwhelming amount of local (city) governmental support for the Albany Farmers' Market over the years. Consider the following comments made by a prominent city official, in office for more than a decade, regarding the Albany Farmers' Market,

> I think it's great that there's a place for sellers to go and sell their wares, and for people to go down and buy these things. But to say that the prices have to be so high because that's their only income for the year is looking at it from a skewed line. They could sell commercially or they could sell at market. If they have to go that high on prices, that means they need more product. Bigger volume. I mean, I've always looked at farmers' markets as the outlet for the hobbyist. It's not their sole income, it's for pleasure, hobby, or to augment their income…I have seen prices down there that are totally out of line with what we can get elsewhere…If you told me, hey, come down to the farmers' market this Saturday, I'd say, Why should I come down there? For the average person, they'll think, why should I go down there—why not go to Fred Meyers, Albertson's, Safeway? What's down there that I can't get someplace else?

Later, referring to the city's relationship with the market, the same official said,

> The city doesn't have anything to do with the market. I don't even know who runs it. I'd have no idea how to even contact the person who runs it.

When asked whether the city should have anything to do with the market, the official responded,

> No. Beyond a place or space, the market should be run like any other business. Run by whomever. The city should not tell them how to do it or direct them in doing it or help them when it's not working out.

6. Environmental Influences

Given the combination of issues that have been discussed, many then blamed a terrible growing season in the Willamette Valley for the market's crisis in 2005. The spring of 2005 was an unusually wet season that persisted until June, thus delaying planting for a number of crops. While this may have affected other markets in the area, it is apparent that they did not suffer the degree of decline experienced at the Albany market. The weather problems could have contributed to Albany's decline in that vendors selling at multiple markets would have had to make decisions regarding which markets to participate in based on their much more limited supply of produce. Thus, in a bad crop year, more profitable larger markets would have been favorable to smaller ones, and Albany being a smaller market would not have been a priority market.

According to market records, there were a total of 30 vendors in 2004 that did not return to the market in 2005, a huge loss for a small market like Albany. Of these 30 non-returning vendors, ten resulted from retirements and ten switched to the Corvallis Saturday market. Of the remaining ten, two vendors quit selling at markets altogether in favor of other forms of direct marketing, some had health or work issues which prevented them from doing markets in 2005, and some did not reappear for unknown reasons. Albany had not been the primary market for many of the vendors who left for Corvallis, which would also support the perception that the bad crop year contributed to the market's decline. Interestingly, of the 30 that did not return in 2005, seven have since returned (these were absent in 2005 for a variety of reasons, including health, family, vacation, and work issues). Despite the varying reasons, 2005 does represent a year of significant vendor loss at the Albany Farmers' Market, and it appears to have been triggered at least in part by environmental influences.

However, amidst overwhelming consensus of 2005 as a crisis year for the market, not all vendors personally experienced the crisis of 2005, nor did they feel the effects of the market's decline. For some vendors, 2005 was actually a very successful year because they sell unique products (honey, baked goods, etc) with few or no competing vendors. This points to an interesting phenomenon with farmers' markets. Overall market problems tend to affect different vendors differently, and not all vendors suffer. Sometimes, the baker makes bank while the market goes bankrupt, as reflected in this vendor's comment, "Last year was a huge year for me because I was the only baker." Another unique vendor says, "People say there's a decline over the past four to five years, but I personally didn't feel it. But I have no competition." For still others, declining vendor numbers becomes an opportunity: "One of the problems at that market was that there were no baked goods like there used to be. We'd lost all our bakers. So starting the bakery has really helped us. And that business is just getting bigger and bigger." However, even among these few vendors who seemed to be benefiting from the market's problems, there was recognition of the market's overall decline and crisis.

Discussion

This research has provided an understanding of both the physical nature of a farmers' market in decline in terms of changes in customer and vendor counts, and insight into the combination of factors influencing the market's decline and crisis. Declining customer counts and a declining market scale over the years contributed to this market's increasing vulnerability, and a drop in the vendor counts marked the 2005 year of crisis. The decline was influenced by a number of interacting factors, beginning with problems associated with the transition in market management and compounded by vendor losses to Corvallis and other nearby markets, difficulty recruiting new vendors and customers, lack of city support for the market, declining participation in Albany's downtown area, and a group of vendors who did not fit with the food buying patterns of the Albany community. Eventually all of these issues cycled through to affect the vendor and customer numbers in a downward spiral of decline described by Burns and Johnson (1996) and Stephenson et al. (2007). The trigger in 2005, a difficult spring planting season, contributed to moving an already vulnerable market to crisis by forcing farmers to choose between multiple markets, leaving Albany without a critical mass of vendors and customers.

Stephenson et al. (2006) acknowledge, "There may be combinations of issues unique to each of the markets" that ultimately lead to the "downward spiral" (p. 20). In a later analysis (Stephenson et al., 2007), the same researchers outline a number of potential factors contributing to market failure as discussed in the introduction, including small size, high need for more produce, low administrative revenue, low or no salaried managers, and high manager turnover. All of these factors were present in the situation for the Albany Farmers' Market to some extent. However, many of the factors they describe relating to management structure and turnover, administrative revenue, and available market resources are endogenous to a particular market's situation. Interestingly in this case, the same market organization is operating a very successful market alongside the struggling Albany market. Factors such as management and administration can become confused when dealing with multiple market organizations with some successful and some unsuccessful markets. In fact, it is likely that the reason this market did not fail in the late 1990s is due to its ability to rely on resources from the other two more successful markets in the three-market organization. However, as explained, the transition and its resulting management configuration might not have been as effective in the long run for sustaining this market.

Based on survey research and secondary data, the findings of Stephenson et al. (2006; 2007) outlining the characteristics of failed markets in Oregon rely heavily on information gleaned from new and young markets that failed. There is very little data to provide insight on established markets experiencing a decline. Some of the general characteristics of this market during its phase of decline were:

1. Management Issues:

This market may have never fully recovered from its management problems during the early to mid 1990s. As discussed earlier, Stephenson et al. (2007) found that one factor associated with markets that fail is high manager turnover. Further, they note that over-worked managers are one important risk factor leading to failing markets. In addition to high turnover among the site managers for the Albany market, the job description has not included a focus on community outreach. The expectation by the board of directors that one market manager could operate three markets in two very different cities, including community outreach, might have been unfeasible.

2. Declining market participation:

In response to an aging customer and vendor population at the market, the management experienced difficulty attracting a sufficient number of new vendors and customers. The Albany market has been steadily declining in scale over the years, with vendors attending less often, bringing and displaying fewer items, and in some cases leaving the market to sell at other more profitable markets. Further, larger, “anchor” vendors that left were replaced with smaller vendors, decreasing product diversity and availability for many products. It follows that comparable customer counts from the Albany Farmers’ Market show a steady trend of decline, and the market experienced difficulty meeting customer expectations in terms of products and pricing.

3. Community level influences

In addition to the issues surrounding management and recruitment, there were a number of community level influences that were undoubtedly affecting the Albany Farmers’ Market. For one, there was little public support for the market, expressed by the sentiments of a prominent city official who did not recognize the value of a farmers’ market to the community. Also, a declining downtown business sector significantly reduced community participation in the downtown area, with what was once a bustling retail district becoming less and less visited by the Albany community.

These characteristics, when taken together, provide us with a picture of the factors contributing to the decline of this market over the years, and might serve to alert other markets of impending problems. In terms of explaining the circumstances that lead to the situation of decline and community disengagement for some farmers’ markets, the problem becomes more complex. In this context, the concept of re-embedding lends an important guideline to this research. Specifically, an end goal of embeddedness makes the connection between a market and its community a central focus (Feenstra, 1997; O'Hara & Stagl, 2001; Lyson, 2005). This concept illuminates farmers' market success and failure by establishing that a farmers' market cannot be successful without this embeddedness in its community. Applying this to the situation for the Albany Farmers' Market, it becomes apparent that the level of community support for this particular market is lacking, as demonstrated by decreasing market participation and its 2005 crisis year. By all accounts, in the 1980s this market was firmly embedded in its community, producing a good fit between its vendors and customers. So what has led to the situation of disengagement?

There are a number of broad level influences on farmers' market success. The political-economic environment influencing the success of farmers' markets includes the extent to which there is local, state, and national governmental support for farmers' markets and small farmers in general. It can be argued that international trade is much more supported in terms of public resources than is local trade. However, these influences are present for all farmers' markets, both successful and struggling. In order to understand the contributing factors to this particular market, it is necessary to examine more local-level influences.

Economically speaking, it could be that part of the situation in Albany is simply free enterprise at work, and that some farmers' market failure is to be expected as noted earlier (Lev et al., 2006). Perhaps some market failure is even healthy, as it encourages the same level of competition that governs other business ventures in the entrepreneurial system, resulting in stronger markets overall. There is certainly evidence for this in vendors' reports of the seeming unpredictability of sales. As one vendor says, "I like to say things go steady by jerks. You just never know." Are farmers' markets just another small business trying to survive in the world of big industry? In fact, most farmers' markets in Oregon are operating under some form of state or federal non-profit status. Most of them are relying on very little funding to make their operations work, and few of them, if any, are reaping profits. Perhaps they would fit better into the non-profit box than the small business box if one were interested in classifying their failure in relation to the larger economic system. Alternately, when recognized as a service to the community, farmers' markets can be organized and supported by city or county governments, essentially becoming a public program, thereby becoming more sustainable markets. Thus they could be analyzed in terms of civic programs, especially for those that rely on city or county governmental funding.

There are also a number of socio-cultural issues that could be contributing to this market's decline. For example, a study by Stephenson and associates in 2004 found similar and fairly high levels of support between Albany and Corvallis for locally produced agricultural products. One main difference was in how much the respondents were willing to pay for these local products. In Corvallis, 57 percent of consumers were willing to pay at least 10 percent more for local products, versus 43 percent of Albany consumers. This and other differences led the researchers to conclude that Albany residents connect with local food products via the purchase and preservation of bulk goods, whereas Corvallis residents were more connected with local food in terms of food cooperatives and community-supported agriculture. For a community of consumers interested in buying bulk for preservation, today's farmers' markets may pose a price challenge. Whereas in the past vendors may have given bulk discounts, deals like these are difficult to come by in many markets today. Albany residents are more likely to continue to visit farm stands and perhaps grow their own food. This idea of customers looking for a bargain in Albany might be one major factor in the decline of the market. Produce prices have changed a lot since the 1980s, and so have farmers' markets. The customer population in Albany might not be willing to accept the premium prices that many farmers' markets increasingly offer.

Another related issue that could be affecting the success of the Albany market relates to income levels. As one vendor says,

> There are two classes of people that come here [the Albany Farmers' Market]. For one, those from North Albany and elsewhere, people of substance, money is of no importance. The other, well, let me put it this way. My husband will come home tonight from Corvallis Saturday with maybe five WIC coupons. I'll have maybe 40 from here.

Albany is an important market serving a large population of low-income residents. Albany families' median income was a full $7,000 less than that of Corvallis families for 1999 (US Census, 2000). With less disposable income, this community might indeed be less able to support the premium prices that characterize many farmers' markets.

In fact, according to research by Lyson and Guptill (2004), direct marketing forms of civic agriculture such as farmers' markets are more likely to be found in counties with higher median family incomes, and median family income is higher in counties where direct marketing predominates. They point out that civic agriculture has expanded into places populated by well-educated and affluent residents. This represents a very recent shift in the values underlying many farmers' markets. Consider Lyson's thoughts from 2000, "Farmers' markets provide low-cost, direct contact between farmers and consumers and are an effective first step for communities seeking to develop stronger local food systems" (p. 44). Farmers' markets were traditionally places where customers could find bargains on locally produced food. And up until very recently, they continued to be considered low-priced outlets for local food. However, as values have shifted and the importance of supporting the livelihood of small farmers—as a full time career—has become more widely recognized, farmers' markets are increasingly becoming outlets for premium-priced, often sustainably produced products, in demand by well-educated, prosperous consumers. The rapidly shifting value system underlying farmers' markets is likely making it difficult for many markets supporting lower-income clientele to survive.

Thus, the Albany market is a unique market in that, compared to other nearby markets, it serves a number of lower-income residents who continue to seek local produce at affordable prices. If it could be made successful and still retain its ability to serve this segment of the population, it could serve as an important model in light of the current debates over localization and affordability (Hinrichs, 2003; Dupuis & Goodman, 2005; Born & Purcell, 2006; Guthman, Morris, & Allen, 2006). This becomes a very important consideration for market management when recruiting vendors and customers for the market in terms of what kind of market is being developed and sustained.

This brings the discussion back to the internal market factors leading to the circumstances of decline. There is certainly literature highlighting the central role of market management in the success of farmers' markets (La Trobe, 2001; Andreatta, 2002; Stephenson et al., 2007). What stands out in this case is that, as mentioned earlier, the Albany market may be different from what seems to be emerging as the premium produce norm among many farmers' markets (Cross, 2000), and deserves special attention to the type of market that is being created and sustained in terms of recruitment and market climate so that it accurately reflects the surrounding community.

Tiemann (2004), in his characterization of the different types of farmers' markets in the U.S., highlights an extremely important yet often neglected point: not all communities, therefore markets, operate according to the same basic values and principles. Tiemann found two main categories of farmers' markets in the U.S., indigenous markets and experience markets. According to Tiemann, indigenous markets tend to be smaller, more informal markets with older customers and vendors and generally low prices. Most of the vendors are part-time farmers or retired, and many customers are shopping for bulk produce for canning and freezing. The economic function of these indigenous farmers' markets, according to Tiemann, is "to provide low-priced, seasonal produce to people who grew up in households with large gardens but who no longer garden themselves"(2004, p. 48). Experience markets, in contrast, tend to have more attractive and less informal displays, more sophisticated produce, and much bigger crowds than indigenous markets. The vendors and customers tend to be younger, the prices higher, and for many vendors at experience markets, farming is their main source of income. Experience markets are places to meet and be seen and enhance social status (Tiemann, 2004, p. 51). These opposing characterizations offered by Tiemann (2004) are particularly useful with respect to explaining the situation for the Albany market. By placing these two characterizations at opposite ends of a continuum, a wide spectrum becomes available in terms of the types of markets from which managers, organizers, and community members can choose as models, depending on what seems to fit the specific community.

Given this wide range of characteristics that farmers' markets in this country inhabit, it is important for the organizers and managers of farmers' markets to constantly ask the following questions: What kind of market is being created? What kind of market is desired? What kind of market best suits the community? What should be cultivated and how? In Albany's case there are a number of factors that distinguish the community, and should therefore distinguish the market, from the nearby and very successful Corvallis Saturday Farmers' Market. This is likely to be the case for many markets in the U.S. Of course, a large part of this equation depends on the local ecology, and what kinds of farms (i.e. organic, conventional, etc.) are operating in the market's area.

One vendor, when asked why they sell in Albany and not Corvallis, replied, "I'd rather be a big fish in a medium sized pond than a little fish in a big pond." Vendors at the Albany Farmers' Market are choosing it for very specific reasons. Smaller growers who cannot compete with the larger farmers who attend the larger markets need a market that fits their scale. Customers reported a preference for the Albany market because of its "small town" or "cozy" atmosphere. One customer said, "This market has more of a small town feel than a fancy gourmet feel like Corvallis. It seems more like a swap meet where you come to get good deals on food. Corvallis feels more like a festival." As Hughes and Mattson (1992) note, "markets in more densely populated areas probably will have a higher percentage of farmers and other full-time producers and smaller markets will have more retired, working, and other vendors," which according to them is based on the fact that "farmers' sales are generally not a sideline but an integral part of farm earnings" (p. 10). In fact, an interesting characteristic of many Albany vendors is that few are full-time farmers. Take, for example, the words of one vendor, "Last year was tough for a lot of people. But I don't do it for a living, so it doesn't affect me as much." Interesting to note, this vendor also offers some of the lowest produce prices at the market. By encouraging more part-time or hobby gardeners at this market, the market might be better able to meet the demands of the community of Albany in terms of pricing. This relates to the findings of Andreatta and Wickliffe (2002) in their study of a North Carolina market, who point out "the need for market managers to understand how their decisions may affect the success of the market by establishing a context that satisfies consumers' and farmers' expectations" (p. 175).

Strategies like this one might be essential in order for smaller, more informal markets to survive in the midst of the urban-market magnetism described by Burns and Johnson (1996). Stephenson et al. (2006) advise, "organizers should carefully assess both whether there is sufficient population to support a market and whether there are sufficient farmers and/or market gardeners to support a market" (p. 20). However, market managers also need to keep a careful and constant focus on recruitment in terms of creating a market that suits, and indeed reflects the community it is supporting. In this way farmers' markets can truly become embedded in their surrounding communities. And as Tiemann (2004) points out, there are certainly a variety of characterizations from which to learn from as organizations strive to create markets than can successfully serve their communities.

Conclusion

Despite the rapid growth in the number of farmers' markets, many are declining and experiencing crises. This market in particular provided an opportunity for an in-depth examination of the circumstances of decline. Physically, the number of customers attending the market since 1998 has been declining. Vendors, presumably adapting to the decreasing customer base, began attending the market less often, bringing and displaying fewer items, and in some cases seeking more profitable markets at which to sell. Vendors leaving the market were often replaced with smaller vendors, further contributing to the market's declining scale. The end result was a drastic decrease in both the scale of the market and the total number of vendors selling at the market. There were a number of interacting factors contributing to this market's vulnerability. These included lingering issues related to the transition in management in 1998, including a difficulty recruiting and aligning vendors with customers. Combined with community level influences such as a lack of city support and a declining downtown business sector, as well as a significant increase in the number of farmers' markets in the region, the market ceased to be firmly embedded in the surrounding community. As the market experienced a decrease in scale and participation due to these issues, it became more vulnerable to external triggers, such as the difficult planting season experienced in 2005 that moved the struggling market into crisis.

Farmers' markets cannot succeed without being embedded in their communities. In areas where there are challenges to embeddedness, markets may experience problems and organizers and managers will need to be vigilant. The Albany Farmers' Market experienced a number of both internal and external challenges to embeddedness. This community presents economic and socio-cultural challenges to a successful farmers' market. Successfully embedded markets require vendors, customers, and managers to come together, understanding each other and what the needs are. It takes all three of these groups to achieve a successfully embedded farmers' market, with a market that reflects its community, profitable for the right types of vendors while meeting the needs and expectations of supportive customers. An important lesson is that collecting and keeping track of data can help markets become aware of impending problems, and can assist them in understanding and mitigating the needs of vendors, customers, and the community.

CHAPTER IV:
"IN SEARCH OF EMBEDDEDNESS: REVITALIZING A FARMER'S MARKET ON THE EDGE"

Abstract

Amidst astounding growth in the number of farmers' markets in the United States in recent decades, many markets struggle and seek revitalization. This chapter examines one farmers' market's efforts to revitalize, revealing the challenges smaller markets with few resources face. Establishing community embeddedness emerged as crucial to reviving this farmers' market. This has been difficult to achieve for a variety of reasons related to both the community itself and the market's management configuration. Data collection can be a useful tool for markets with scarce resources that need to better target their efforts.

Introduction

Despite an increasingly globalized and fragmented food system, the number of farmers' markets nationwide continues to rise. Amidst the rapid growth, some markets struggle to stay open. Yet little research is available to guide market managers through the process of farmers' market revitalization. This chapter focuses on the revitalization efforts of one farmers' market experiencing distress. The goal is to gain insights into the process of revitalization to learn lessons that might translate to other markets with similar problems.

Giddens (1990) describes the process of "disembedding" that occurs as a result of globalization. Several researchers use this concept to describe the disconnections associated with the dominant agro-food system and its tendencies toward global sourcing and commodification (Allen, 1999, O'Hara & Stagl, 2001). These disconnections occur between producers and consumers, between functional aspects of the food system (Dahlberg, 1993, O'Hara & Stagl, 2001), and within localities themselves as social relations are 'lifted out' of their local contexts and reconfigured across indefinite space and time (Giddens, 1990). As a response to the disembedded nature of the current food system, a number of researchers are advocating a return to a more localized scale of agriculture linking food production with consumption on a local or regional level (Kloppenburg et al., 1996; Allen, 1999; O'Hara & Stagl, 2001; Hinrichs, 2003; Lyson, 2004).

Direct marketing strategies such as farmers' markets are key components of local level production and consumption. While there are disagreements regarding whether localization should be viewed as a means or the end goal of sustainability and to what extent scale is important (Born & Purcell, 2006), there is general agreement that farmers' markets are desirable and vital components of a more sustainable food system (Andreatta & Wickliffe, 2002; Feenstra, 2002; Lyson, 2005).

The number of farmers' markets nationwide continues to rise, increasing from 1,755 markets in 1994 to 4,385 in 2006 (USDA, 2006). Farmers' markets serve as the primary sales outlet for a number of small farmers (Kambara & Shelley, 2002). Further, farmers' markets contribute to local economies (Lyson et al.,1995; Hinrichs et al., 2004) and provide spaces for community interaction and connection (La Trobe, 2001, DeLind, 2006). However, as Feenstra (2002) notes, community food system endeavors including farmers' markets are "precarious and many fail to sustain themselves over time" (p. 100). The precarious nature of farmers' markets is evidenced by recent research discovering high failure rates among farmers' markets in Oregon (Lev et al., 2006; Stephenson et al., 2006; 2007).

Few studies have been published related to strategies for improving the success of farmers' markets in distress. Atkinson and Williams (1994) discuss some key considerations for successful farmers' markets, including public or private ownership and property issues, the necessity of having a wide variety of vendors with a good range of products, and advice on the layout and physical structure of markets. However, they do not address markets in crisis. While they advise that updating old markets can be a complex process, they do not offer recommendations for specific actions that markets can take toward revitalization, other than to say that actions should be professionally planned.

Among the popular literature related to making farmers' markets more successful, Corum and associates (2001) address three components of farmers' markets: vendors, starting and managing markets, and engaging the community. However, even this literature does not sufficiently address how to deal with a declining market struggling to remain open. This literature is useful in starting and developing a farmers' market, when there is ample time for planning. But during a time of decline or crisis, markets are in need of some basic guidelines to steer them through the process of revitalization.

Torrence (1989), a market manager from Virginia, wrote about her experiences revitalizing the Lynchburg farmers' market in the 1980's. Her article presents useful information stressing the importance of city support for markets, carefully targeted special events to draw people in, and community input in revitalizing markets. The Lynchburg market received $1.5 million from the city in 1985 to revitalize the market. The funding alone did not solve its problems, but when combined with a number of special events, careful vendor recruitment, and constant input from a community advisory committee, the market's revenue increased four times what it had been prior to the revitalization and was continuing to increase at the time of publication in 1989.

An interesting area within the literature on farmers' markets addresses markets in low-income communities. An area of focus is how to make these markets more successful. This material can be broadly applied to farmers' markets in general. Fisher (1999) published a study that provides general recommendations for how to successfully operate farmers' markets in low-income communities. He makes an important point when he says,

> 'Success' is a difficult concept to describe in this context. Rather than define some markets as successes and others as failures, it is more accurate to envision success in terms of a continuum. Factors to be accounted for in this 'success-line' include longevity, sales figures, and whether the market meets the needs of the farmers and the community (Fisher, 1999, p. 9).

Fisher (1999) offers the following five guidelines for operating successful low-income farmers' markets:

1. Low-income markets generally need to be subsidized. These subsidies may take the form of *Farmers' Market Nutrition Program* coupons, or the patronage of middle-income consumers. Market organizers may also subsidize low-income market management with proceeds from wealthier markets.
2. Community organizing is an essential component of any successful market in a low-income community. Providing the community with a sense of ownership is key to institutionalizing the market.
3. Low-income markets should tailor their product mix to focus on basic foods at affordable prices.
4. Farmers should consider hiring sales staff from the neighborhood especially in cases where they do not speak the prevailing language of the market's consumers.
5. Transportation may prove to be a significant barrier for market operation. Market organizers should consider developing transit programs to increase the market's trade areas (Fisher, 1999).

Based on Fisher's concepts, the USDA (2002) conducted a case study tracing the improvement of a farmers' market in a low-income neighborhood in Washington, D.C. The findings from this study emphasized the importance of Fisher's (1999) work, and added the importance of location and publicity to Fisher's five guidelines.

Building on literature presented above, this research presents a season of data on one farmers' market experiencing distress and undergoing revitalization. By documenting the process of revitalization for one market, I hope to contribute to the literature available regarding the revitalization of farmers' markets and specific actions that can be taken to address problems within a market. By examining the current season, as well as interviewing customers, vendors, managers, and community representatives, this research takes a holistic approach to understanding the circumstances of farmers' market revitalization and highlights the specific strategies undertaken by one market.

Research Methods

This research was conducted using a case study approach as outlined by Yin (1994). Specific advice for organizational case studies was taken from Hartley (2004). The case study approach allows for the incorporation of both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Using multiple methods of research fosters triangulation in the data and, in terms of organizational case studies, allows for a more holistic accounting of the interactions and processes that are taking place within this market organization (Hartley, 2004). The goal with the mixed methods approach is to enhance the ability to build inferences about what is happening with this market and under what circumstances, increasing the validity of the findings.

Observational, ethnographic interview, and quantitative data were gathered over a period of 11 months between January and November of 2006. Research funding through Oregon State University Extension Small Farms Program supported my work with the market from January through September. This work had a dual purpose of collecting data for the market and assisting the market in its revitalization efforts. Additionally, I was employed by the market association as one of three site managers for the Albany market's 2006 season. Of the 32 Saturdays when the market operated, I participated in 12 market days as a site manger and an additional 12 market days for observation and interviews with vendors and customers. I attended a total of 24 markets out of 32 occurring in Albany's 2006 season. In addition, I attended a number of board, membership, and community meetings related to the market, and also attended other nearby farmers' markets for interviewing and observation. This direct participation through employment and active engagement with the market provided a unique opportunity for participant observation and a platform for data collection.

The qualitative methods included ethnographic interviews, participant observation, and a focus group. Ethnographic interview data were collected from a total of 70 people related in some way to this particular farmers' market. This included 12 past vendors, 20 current vendors, 26 customers, two past site mangers, one current site manager, the current market manager, six board members (who were either current or past vendors themselves), and two community leaders. Participation in these interviews was voluntary and proceeded after informed consent was obtained. Interviews were recorded by hand and interview notes remain confidential.

Participants were selected based on purposive (current vendors, market managers, and board members), snowball (past vendors), and convenience (customers) sampling, methods described by Bernard (2006). Interviews were unstructured and ranged in length from 5-10 minutes (for most of the customer interviews) to one to three hours (for all other interviews), and were mostly conducted at farmers' markets, although some were conducted during farm visits, some in public meeting places, and a few by phone. Participants were asked to discuss their associations with the market and their perceptions of the market. Participants were also asked to discuss any thoughts or recommendations they might have regarding the market's future. In addition to the above-mentioned interviews, I developed and maintained close relationships with a number of key informants for the duration of the study, including vendors, customers, managers, and board members. Finally, a focus group was organized to include seven key informants in an effort to ensure the validity of the analysis and interpretation of the interview data.

The quantitative data includes vendor, customer, and stall data from the 2006 season as well as records kept by the market's management from past market seasons (back to 1998). Vendor and stall counts were recorded and compiled for each market day of 2006 using current market records. Customer counts and customer survey data were conducted based on the Rapid Market Assessment (RMA) methods described by Lev and Stephenson (2002) and Lev et al. (2004). The RMA methods outline a process of collecting crowd counts and customer survey data that is highly suited to the farmers' market environment. Using this method, adults entering the market are counted in ten-minute intervals during each hour of market operation. These ten-minute totals are then multiplied to get hourly estimates, and the hourly estimates are added together to get market day estimates. Customer counts were conducted every other week throughout the entire 2006 market season. Customer surveys were conducted using Dot Surveys, one aspect of an RMA. Dot Surveys are a self-service method of surveying that asks a limited number of questions displayed on easels. Respondents indicate their answers on posters attached to the easels using colorful, round self-stick labels or "dots." Customer surveying was conducted in July of the 2006 market season.

The ethnographic interview data were analyzed using a combination of grounded theory and content analysis approaches. The grounded theory approach incorporated here is based on the original grounded theory method advocated by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and more recent work by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Content analysis was conducted as outlined by Bernard (2006). The combination of these two methods allowed for both the emergence of themes from the interviews and a more specific analysis of interview data directly related to the market's revitalization efforts. The focus group following the analysis acted as a two-way information channel, first by presenting the findings to the participants, then by asking participants to offer their interpretation of the data (Bernard, 2000).

The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive analysis techniques such as graphic displays, tables and summary statistics (Bernard, 2006). These techniques provide a numeric depiction of the market's 2006 season as well as a graphic display of customer survey results. In this instance, seemingly small changes have a significant impact on the market. Therefore, some of the graphs are presented within their approximate data range to more clearly illustrate the impact of these changes.

In interpreting the research findings, it is important to note the limitations and delimitations of this study. First, because many of the respondents were selected based on convenience sampling methods, there could be a bias in terms of participant self-selection. It is likely that the customers and vendors who agreed to be interviewed did so because they had strong feelings about the market and its situation. This may limit the breadth of views expressed in the ethnographic interviews. In an attempt to counteract this potential bias, my analysis relies not only on interview data, but also on information available from market records. Also, given the case study approach of this project in describing the situation for one market, the ability to generalize is not a goal of this research, however the assumption is that the situation for this market might have many similarities to the situation for other struggling markets. The goal of this research is to generate some insights and guidance for farmers' markets struggling to revitalize, not to test existing hypotheses[12].

The Market

The focus of this case study is the Albany Farmers' Market in Oregon. This market experienced a season of crisis in 2005 and presented a unique research opportunity because the crisis had not yet reached the point of failure, and revitalization efforts were underway. Thus, this market provided an opportunity to explore the circumstances surrounding the revitalization of a farmers' market in distress.

[12] For additional detail on research methods, see Appendix A.

The Albany farmers' market is a 29-year-old market, purported to be oldest continuously operated open-air farmers' market in the state of Oregon. During its early years in the early 1980s, it was one of "about a dozen" farmers' markets in Oregon (Theimann, 1983). In 2005, it was one of sixty-eight markets statewide (Stephenson et al., 2007). The market operates every Saturday from mid-April to mid-November. Since the market's opening day in 1978, it has remained in the same location in downtown Albany, a riverfront parking lot adjacent to the Albany Senior Center. It would currently be classified as a "small size" market according to the classification system developed by Stephenson et al. (2007) [13], with generally less than 30 vendors, however it has been larger in the past.

The market is one of three area markets associated with the same market organization, "Corvallis-Albany Farmers' Markets." The organization, which holds approximately 140 voting members who are all farmer/vendors, is operated by a market manager, who is advised by a board of directors consisting of ten vendors. The board meets monthly with the market manager to discuss, set, and enforce the policies, regulations, and financial matters for the three markets. Although the market manager is responsible for all three markets, she personally oversees the two markets in Corvallis (one on Wednesdays and one on Saturdays), while the Albany market is overseen by part-time site managers who rotate the 32 market days in Albany. The organization is grassroots and depends largely on vendor stall fees for its operating budget.

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[13] Stephenson et al. (2007) offer a research-based framework for comparing farmers' markets in terms of size, including four size categories: Micro (5-8 vendors), Small (9-30 vendors), Medium (31-55 vendors), and Large (56-90 vendors).

According to the latest available census (US Census, 2000), the city of Albany has approximately 40,000 residents. Compared to other nearby communities (Corvallis, Eugene, Portland), Albany is often described by interview respondents from Albany and elsewhere as “blue collar,” “meat and potatoes,” and “working class.” According to Stephenson and Lev (2004), Albany depends largely on manufacturing industries, including exotic metals and wood products, and therefore has a high percentage of manufacturing jobs. About 18 percent of the population of Albany has a Bachelor’s degree or higher, while 15 percent of the population did not complete high school (US Census, 2000). Further, Albany residents tend to have more conservative voting patterns than other nearby communities (Stephenson & Lev, 2004).

The Albany Farmers’ Market tends to have a high number of small and medium sized growers who have come to Albany specifically to avoid the competition in the bigger markets of the area. One vendor notes, “I’d rather be a big fish in a medium sized pond than a little fish in a big pond. For small and medium sized growers, this can be better than competing with the big vendors at the Corvallis market.” Albany also has many part-time growers and many growers with spouses who work outside the home. There are few full-time farms selling at the Albany Farmers’ Market. There are also a number of ethnic vendors at this market who are known to bargain with their customers.

Current vendors who attend other markets reported that the Albany Farmers’ Market was very different from the other markets they attend. Many vendors noted that the Albany market has a lot of very loyal, mostly regular customers who tend to be older in age. According to some vendors, they receive much higher numbers (one reported eight times more) of WIC and Senior vouchers than at other markets. For instance, one vendor noted,

> The clientele is very different here than from other markets we've done. Lot of people aren't as appreciative as some of the other markets. Here people are always griping about prices, not enough produce, vendors, and so on…and there's a lot more elderly here. It's one of the bigger WIC [Women, Infants, and Children Nutrition Program] markets I've seen. It's a more older people market. And you don't see a lot of that middle class sector. It's different.

Vendors also reported that customers at this market tend to be looking for bargains, and are mostly interested in getting similar produce to what they can find in the local grocery stores. One vendor pointed out, "It's an older group here in Albany. They're used to their potatoes white, their broccoli green, their green beans green, and their onions white. And nothing else."

Findings

The following section presents the story of the revitalization efforts engaged in by the market organization during the 2006 market season. As mentioned previously, I served two roles for the market. One was to collect data that could be useful to the market in examining their situation and potential directions for future action. This data served to inform, monitor, and evaluate the revitalization efforts of the market. My second role was to work with the market management on implementing revitalization strategies.

Having recognized the crisis during the 2005 market season, the market had begun its efforts at revitalization prior to my involvement. The market's efforts targeted the following areas:

- Vendor recruitment
- Customer recruitment
- Community involvement
- Improving manger-vendor communication
- EBT (Electronic Benefits Transfer)
- Market site relocation and change in operating hours

The data that I collected to inform, monitor, and evaluate the market's revitalization efforts included:

- Twice monthly crowd counts
- Weekly vendor counts
- Customer survey data

The revitalization strategies I implemented, informed by the data collection, consisted of:

- A neighborhood coupon leafleting
- A direct mailing

I. The Market's Efforts

After widespread recognition of 2005 as a year of crisis, the market organization began serious efforts to revive the Albany market. The market was fortunate to have two other markets within its organization, one being highly successful, from which to glean resources. The market also had strong support from its board members, many vendors, and some customers, who all were committed to making the market a success.

One major task the market manager and board members were engaged in at the time of my arrival was stepping up customer and vendor recruitment for the market's 2006 season. The market was concerned with taking a balanced approach to this, hoping to grow the vendor population and the customer population evenly.

In addition to recruitment, a number of board, vendor, and community meetings were organized before the start of the 2006 season by the market management specifically to discuss ideas for the market. Those involved in the meetings included concerned citizens and faithful market customers, vendors, and members of the downtown association. The meetings were well attended and a number of ideas emerged and were successfully put into action. These ideas included creating a seating area in the market for customers and offering a weekly prize drawing for customers.

Another more significant decision on the part of the market management based on input from these meetings was to create a new logo for the Albany market. Previously, the three markets shared a logo and a name: “The Corvallis-Albany Farmers’ Markets.” However, it was apparent based on input from the community meetings that the Albany market should have its own identity. The decision was made that in publicity announcements, the name “The Albany Farmers’ Market” should be emphasized over the more general “The Corvallis-Albany Farmers’ Markets.” A new logo was designed for advertising and publicity purposes in an effort to make it clear to the community that Albany had its own farmers’ market.

Because the market manager was not regularly present at the Albany market, a weekly vendor newsletter was implemented in order to improve communication between management and the market’s vendors. The site manager distributed this newsletter to vendors each market day.

Another project targeted by the market was to make it possible for market vendors to accept federal food stamps, now dependent on a system called electronic benefits transfer (EBT) which requires additional equipment and labor on the part of the market managers in order to be operational. Because at least 16 percent of market customers surveyed in 2006 were from low-income areas of the city, EBT availability at the market became one strategy for bringing in more customers and increasing customer spending. And, based on the findings of Guthman et al. (2006), EBT is an important way of supporting low-income customers at farmers' markets. As mentioned earlier, some vendors report receiving up to eight times as many WIC coupons at this market as compared with other nearby markets, and since food stamp usage for the county is 92 percent of eligibility[14] (Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force, 2005), accepting food stamps could potentially bring in many new customers.

Finally, a major project the market management was engaged in was planning for a relocation of the Albany market. As mentioned earlier, the Albany market has occupied the same site since it opened in 1978. Many vendors who are also Albany residents feet that the location of the market no longer made sense. This sentiment is best summed up by a current vendor who grew up in Albany, "Downtown used to be the main part of town. First Street was full of stuff. But when they started building supermarkets and stuff outside of town people stopped coming down here." The current site does indeed lack visibility, situated off the beaten track and just outside of the business area. Although it is on the riverfront, which provides nice ambiance for the market, many vendors feel that a move would greatly increase their visibility and thus enhance the market's ability to attract the new customers and vendors they desperately need.

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[14] According to the Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force (2005), out of 17,727 individuals in Linn County that are eligible to receive food stamps, an average of 16,241 individuals, or 92% of those eligible, actually participate in the program each month.

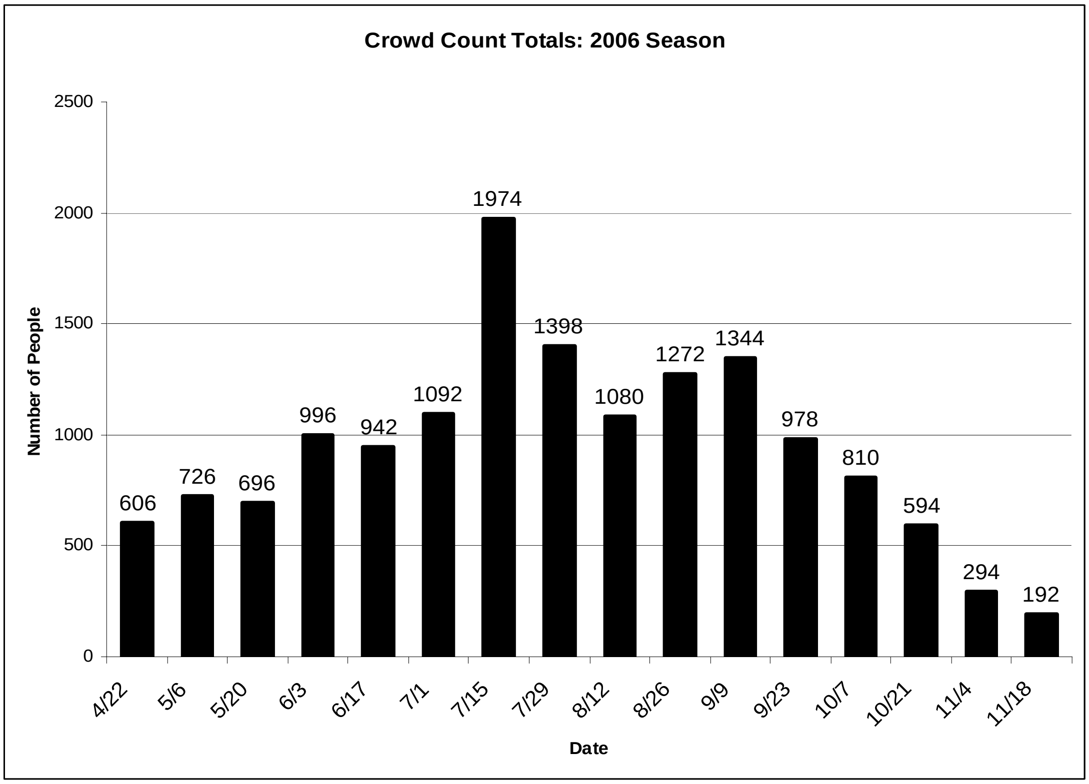
II. Data Collection

In order to support the market's efforts at revitalization, during the 2006 season I collected bimonthly customer counts, weekly vendor counts, and customer survey data

Customer Counts

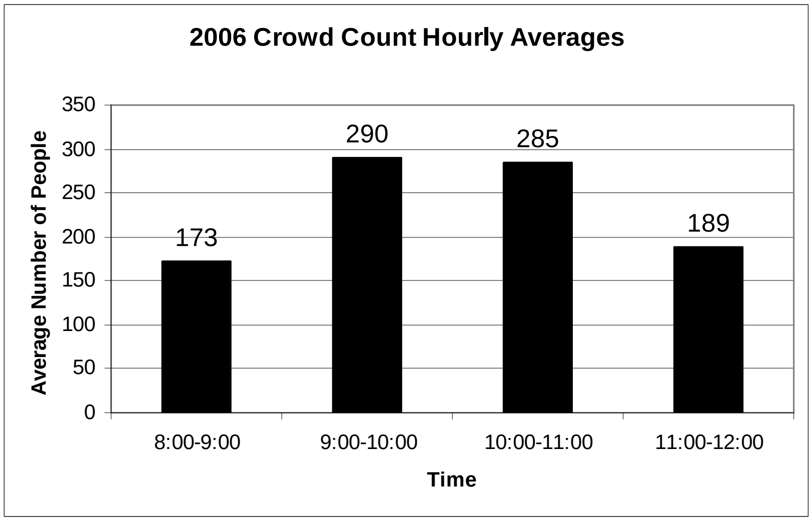
In an effort to both monitor attendance for patterns of growth and decline and evaluate the impacts of the promotional efforts I implemented (leafleting and direct mailing), customer counts were conducted every other market day, approximately twice per month, throughout the 2006 season, totaling 16 crowd counts for the season. As expected, the counts reflected the availability of products and the influence of seasonal weather, with fewer customers during the beginning and end of the season and the highest numbers during the peak market months of July, August, and early September (Figure 7). Interestingly, the highest count was on July 15th, the day after a front-page, full color photo and article about the Albany farmers' market appeared in the city's newspaper.

Figure 7. Crowd count totals for 2006 season.



Because the market was considering changing the hours of the market, I also calculated the average hourly attendance based on the crowd count data I collected. On average, most customers attended the market between the hours of 9 a.m. and 10 a.m., closely followed by 10 a.m.-11 a.m. (Figure 8). Fewer came for the last hour from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m., and the fewest attended during the first hour of the day, from 8 a.m. to 9 a.m. This data helped to influence the change in hours of the market from 8 a.m. until 12 p.m. to 9 a.m. until 1 p.m.

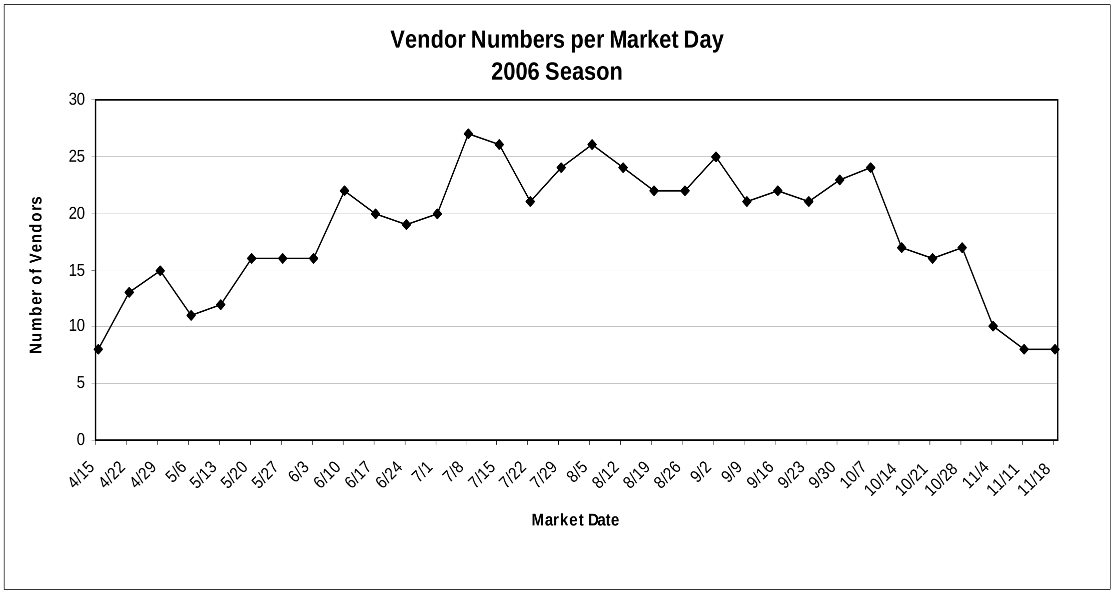
Figure 8. Hourly averages based on all 2006 crowd counts.



Vendor Counts

In order to understand vendor patterns and seasonal periods of growth and decline, I tracked weekly vendor attendance counts. As expected, and similar to the crowd count data for the season, vendor counts reflect fewer vendors during the beginning and end of the season, reaching the highest numbers during peak production season (Figure 9). However, it is interesting to note that vendor numbers at the beginning of the season grow steadily, while numbers at the end of the season drop off fairly abruptly.

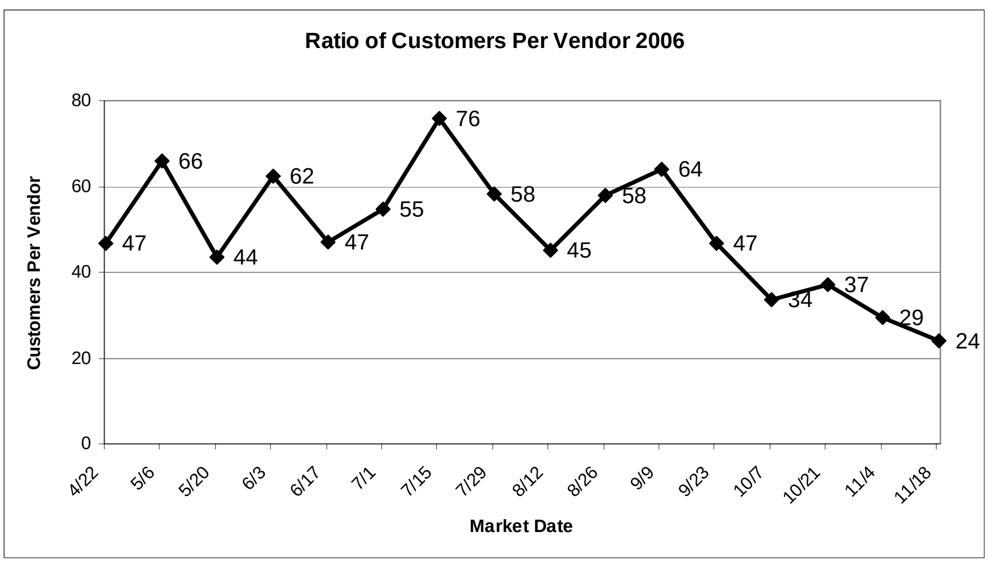
Figure 9. Vendor counts from each market day of 2006.



There is little literature examining customers per vendor ratios. One publication suggests having six vendors per 100 customers (Hofmann & Dennis, 2007), a ratio which seems to be quite low. Others estimate that more customers per vendor are better and suggest one vendor per 50 customers might be a more appropriate ratio (L. Lev, personal communication, December 2007). While there is no consensus on a "rule of thumb" determining the appropriate customers per vendor ratio, one assumption might be that the more customers available to each vendor, the more successful the vendor will be. Obviously having too few customers per vendor would make it difficult for each vendor's profitability. However, a market could reach a point at which it would have too many customers per vendor (i.e. not enough vendors), which might lead to a loss of customers, which in turn could lead to a loss of vendors. This would begin a circular cycle that many struggling markets experience. A healthy ratio of customers to vendors is influenced by the types of products available, the spending habits of customers, and the "culture" of the market as a venue for quantity purchases or a single meal. For example, a vendor selling a unique product like honey would still benefit from few customers per vendor, whereas vendors selling produce would need higher numbers of customers per vendor to get their share of the business.

It is interesting to note the analysis from Albany's 2006 season. Figure 10 shows that the beginning of the season experienced much higher customers per vendor ratios than the end of the season, and as with the daily vendor numbers, the numbers drop off abruptly in October and remain low until the end of the season. Achieving and maintaining a healthy balance of customers per vendor is essential to sustaining farmers' markets, and more research is needed in this area in order to understand what the healthy balance is for different markets.

Figure 10. Customers per vendor for each market day in 2006 that customer counts were available.

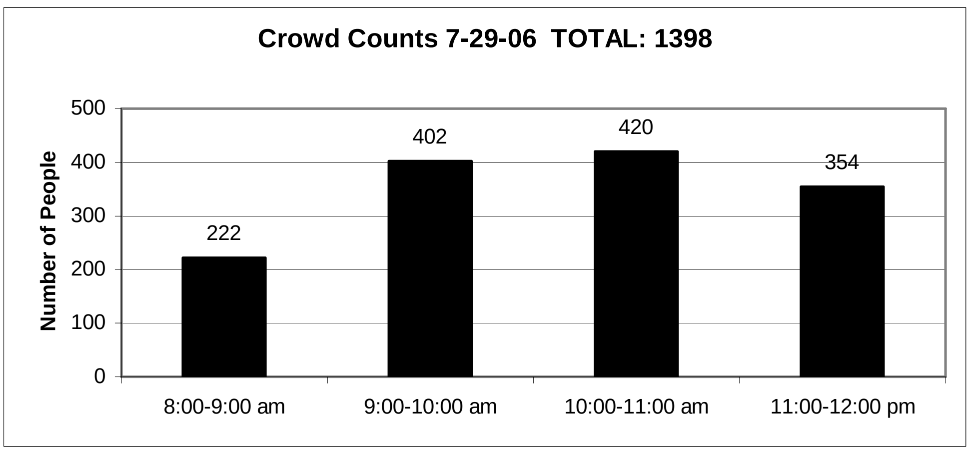


Customer Survey: Rapid Market Assessment

In order to understand more about the customer population, a Rapid Market Assessment (RMA) was conducted on July 29th, 2006, according to the methods outlined by Lev and Stephenson (2002) and Lev et al. (2004).

One aspect of a RMA is customer counting. The total attendance on the day of the RMA was estimated to be 1398, with the majority of customers (59 percent) shopping between 9 a.m. 11 a.m. (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Crowd count results by hour, July 29th 2006.



The other aspect of RMAs are Dot Surveys. Dot Surveys are a self-service method of surveying that ask a limited number of questions (usually four) displayed on easels. Respondents indicate their answers on posters attached to the easels using colorful, round self-stick labels or "dots." For this survey, questions were shaped by vendor curiosity about the customer base and the need to identify where customers live for a market promotion project.

The first question of the Dot Survey, developed to inform the leafleting promotion, presented the customers with a map of the city of Albany divided into twelve neighborhoods. Space around the edges of the map was available for customers who were not from neighborhoods in Albany. The map was taken from the city of Albany's GIS maps and is entitled "Neighborhoods" (City of Albany, 2006). Respondents were asked to put a sticky dot nearest their house, or in the north, south, east, or west areas beyond the map to indicate that they were from outside of Albany.

One fourth of the respondents (25 percent) reported being from outside of Albany, seventeen percent were from the neighborhood labeled 'North Albany', thirteen percent were from South Albany, and 5 percent were from each of West and East Albany. Interestingly, the neighborhoods directly surrounding the market (Willamette, Central Albany, and Jackson Hill) only brought in 13 percent of the customers, with Central Albany at 7 percent and Willamette and Jackson Hill each at 3 percent. This suggests that it is unlikely that most of the customers at the market that day walked from their downtown homes.

Although the neighborhood designations are not exactly aligned with census tracts, a rough comparison indicates that the majority of market customers were from higher income areas of the city. Not counting the respondents from outside of Albany, a full 23 percent of customers that day were from the highest income area of the city, North Albany. The second highest percentage of customers from within Albany, 17 percent, was from the second highest income area of the city, South Albany. Only 16 percent of the respondents were from the three lowest income areas of Albany combined[15].

The second question asked customers to indicate how long they have shopped at the market. The choices offered were: "first day," "first season," "two to four

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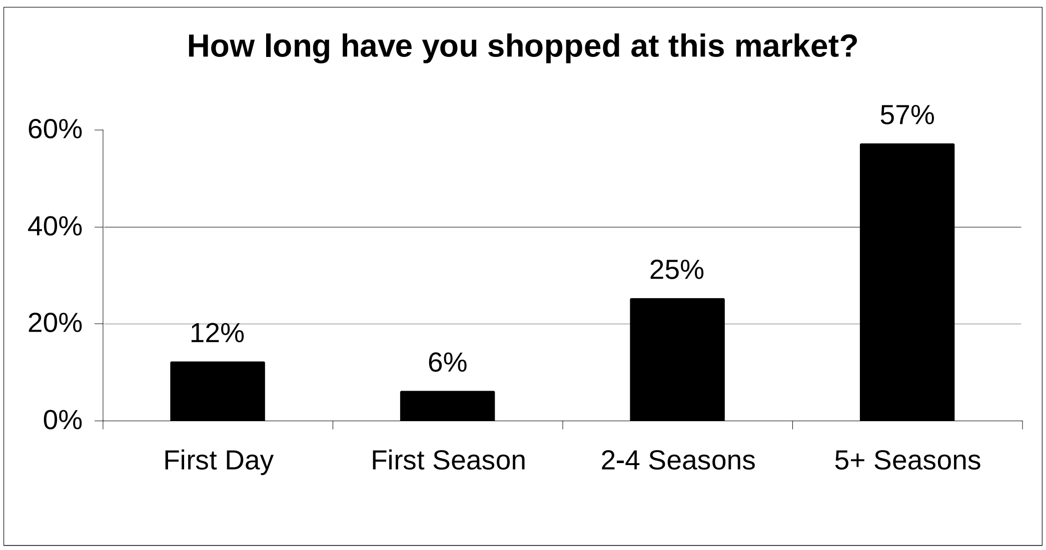
[15] According to Census data (2006), the highest income area of the city, North Albany, has a median family income of $70,633. South Albany's median family income ranged from $51,442 to $59,635, while the three lowest income areas range from $32,093 to $40,920.

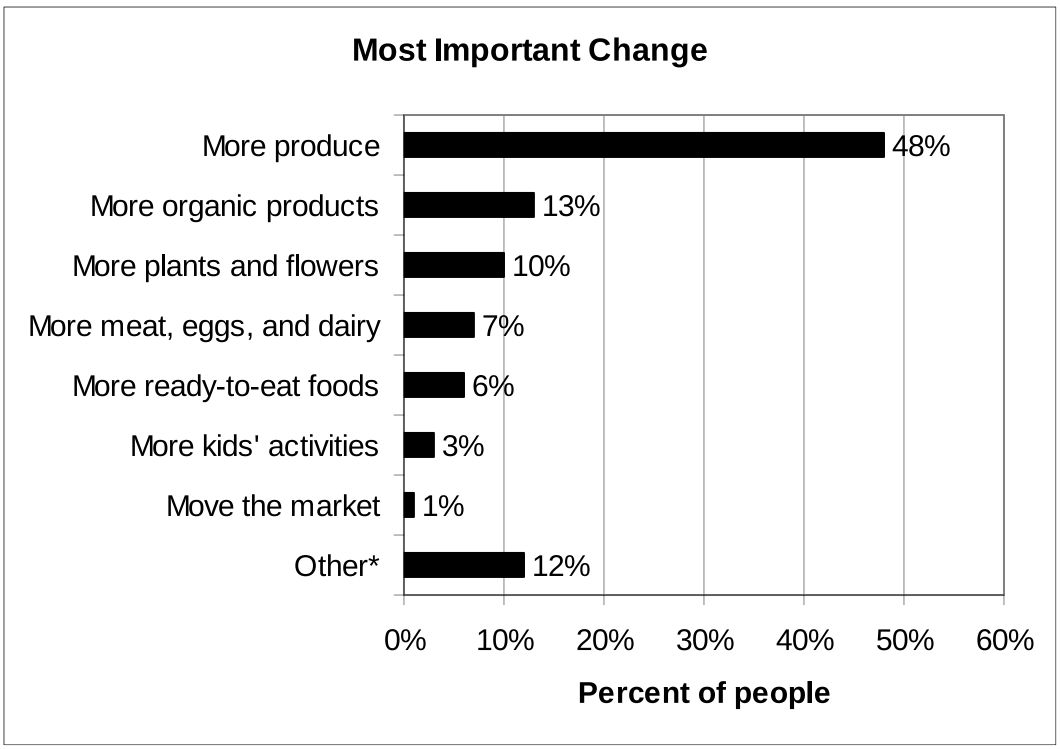
seasons," and "five or more seasons." Figure 12 shows that the majority of respondents, 57 percent, reported that they had been shopping in Albany for five or more seasons. Combining the 'two to four' and 'more than five categories' shows 82 percent of the customers reported having shopped at the market for at least two seasons, while 18 percent reported being new customers (either their first season or their first day at the market).

Figure 12. Dot Survey results indicating number of seasons customers have been shopping at the Albany Farmers' Market.



The third question asked customers what the most important change to the market would be that would cause them to shop more and/or buy more. The responses (and response options) are shown in Figure 13. Almost half (48 percent) of the respondents reported that having more produce at the market would cause them to shop more and/or buy more, indicating a high need for more products at the market. Thirteen percent of respondents answered that having more organic products would cause them to shop more often or buy more products, indicating a small niche the market should consider. "Move the market" was a choice requested by market organizers and vendors in order to gauge customer interest in moving the market. Interestingly, only 1 percent of customers chose ‘move the market.’ While interview data reflected that many customers were unaware of the problems with the market, and were happy with the market as it is, many vendors thought that moving the market would be a benefit and would bring more customers. This exemplifies the potential point of tension between customers, vendors, and managers in relocating farmers’ markets.

Figure 13. Dot Survey results indicating the most important change to the market that would cause customers to shop and buy more.



*This category had some write-ins. They were: crafts, music, good artisan breads, open longer, covered market, and repave for wheel chair and stroller access.

In order to gauge the amount customers are willing to spend on products at the market, the last question asked customers, “On average, if an item costs $1.00 in the grocery store, how much would you be willing to pay in the farmers' market for a similar product?" Table 2 shows the majority of customers, 61 percent, were willing to pay more for locally produced products, while 39 percent reported wanting to pay a price less than or equal to grocery store prices.

Table 1. Dot Survey results indicating the amount customers reported being willing to spend at the farmers' market for an item that costs $1.00 in the grocery store.

Amount Willing to Spend	$0.50	$0.75	$0.90	$1.00	$1.10	$1.25	$1.50	$2.00
Percent	1%	8%	6%	24%	15%	29%	14%	3%

However, it's important to note that the average price consumers were willing to pay was $1.15 (as compared with $1.00 at the grocery store). The only comparison available for this data is from the Corvallis Saturday market in 1998, when the same question was asked. That survey reported that 80 percent of customers surveyed were willing to pay a premium for locally produced products, at an average price of $1.29 (Lev & Stephenson, 1998). Since these data were collected almost a decade ago, it is reasonable to expect that the average price customers in Corvallis would be willing to pay could be higher. Thus, although customers in Albany were willing to pay more, overall, they aren't willing to pay too much more.

III. Strategy Implementation

As previously mentioned, two strategies that I implemented in collaboration with market management during the summer of 2006 were door-to-door coupon leafleting and a direct mail campaign. The first of these two strategies, door-to-door coupon leafleting, was implemented during the peak of the 2006 season (July and August). The plan was to distribute leaflets containing farmers' market coupons to three neighborhoods and the city's shopping mall.

The neighborhoods were selected based on an analysis of customer survey results discussed earlier. Three neighborhoods were chosen for leafleting, one higher income area with low market participation (HL), one higher income area with high market participation (HH), and one low-income area with low market participation (LL). The goal was to analyze coupon redemption by neighborhood to see if there were any differences in redemption rates based on known market participation and income levels. Because the city's shopping mall was being considered as a potential site for market relocation, it was included in the leafleting efforts in an attempt to gauge the interest of mall customers in the farmers' market. The coupons were color coded to indicate where they were distributed. The coupons offered $2 off a purchase of $4 or more, and were valid for the four Saturdays in August. In the neighborhoods, coupons were distributed to homes by foot in an effort to reduce costs. At the mall, a table was set up with the market's display board as well as a number of promotional and informational materials about the market and the products available by season. As customers walked by, I asked them whether they wanted a farmers' market coupon.

In the end, out of 657 coupons distributed, 24 coupons were redeemed at the market, for a total response rate of 3.3 percent for this campaign. When analyzed by group, each neighborhood had roughly the same coupon redemption rate (Table 3). It is important to note that at the mall, out of 118 coupons offered directly to mall customers, only 57 coupons were accepted. Thus, there was about a 50 percent refusal rate with the coupon distribution at the mall. The other three neighborhoods each received 200 coupons, with an unknown refusal rate.

Table 2. Coupon Redemption Rates by place distributed.

Place Distributed	**Number of Coupons Distributed or Attempted**	**Number of Coupons Redeemed**	**Redemption Rate**
HL	200	8	4.4%
LL	200	7	3.5%
HH	200	7	3.5%
Mall	118	2	1.7%
TOTAL	**718**	**24**	**3.3%**

According to the Direct Marketing Association's 2005 Response Rate Report, the overall average response rate for the direct mail campaigns included in their research report was 2.77 percent. On the surface it would seem that this coupon campaign, with a response rate of 3.3 percent, was fairly successful. But based on a more careful reading of the Response Rate Report (2005), it seems that there are a number of factors involved in judging the success of a direct marketing effort, including the cost of the campaign, the resulting gain to the organization (in terms of increased revenue and traffic), and the response rate. In other words, the response rate itself is not an accurate determinant of the success of a campaign. Further, according to a senior marketing manager for Kodak, the response rate isn't nearly as important as "conversion" to sales (Fielding, 2006). For example, a campaign could have a very low response rate of 0.5 percent, but could have generated enough sales to more than make up for the cost of the campaign and thereby would be judged as a success. One source noted that many companies find that their revenues from direct mail campaigns can be up to double the initial costs (Fielding, 2006). Conversely, a campaign could have high response rates but could have been so expensive that the responses did not pay for the campaign.

Perhaps most importantly, though, the "response" desired from each mailing is increased revenue to the organization. Consider the second strategy implemented: a direct mailing to 1,000 households. A full color postcard went out advertising upcoming events at the market and offering them the chance to win a basket of market products at a $30 value. To measure the success of the mailing, recipients were asked to bring the card to the market to enter the drawing. However, customers who forgot their cards were still allowed to enter. Further, since the market was already offering a free drawing each week, customers who did not receive a card in the mail were also allowed to enter the drawing. In the end, only one person returned their postcard. However, this does not necessarily mean that the response rate was 0.1 percent. Because people could have received the card and come to the market without it, still entering the drawing, it is impossible to calculate a response rate for this strategy. There were significantly more drawing entrants that week than in previous weeks, but then again, the prize was a $30 bag of market products instead of the usual $5 gift. Given that there was no real way of measuring the result of the campaign other than in attendance counts, which did not reflect a rise on this day compared with the previous count[16], there is really no way to be sure whether the $500+ spent on the campaign was worth it or not. Thus, direct mailing for the sake of advertising alone, which was essentially what happened in this case with the 'free drawing,' is not easily measurable. One can never know the success of the campaign in terms of either the response rate or the amount of money it generated (return on investment) unless there is a special, traceable offer specific to the recipients. Without offering something

[16] See Figure 7 depicting crowd count totals. The special drawing described here was held on September 23rd.

measurable—coupons, special sales, discounts, etc., the campaign will not be measurable or cost-effective.

Additionally, in the case of farmers' markets, the situation with coupons becomes problematic. For example, the coupon leafleting saw a total response rate of 3.3 percent. However, the market paid for the labor and the printing, and covered the discounts offered on the coupons, yet the market did not reap direct profit based on these efforts as did the vendors. Since increasing customer traffic does not directly translate into increased revenue for the market organization (although it might eventually cycle through to improve vendor participation), it might make more sense in the case of a coupon campaign for the vendors to finance the coupon offers (i.e. the farmer is paying for the discount amount offered on the coupons, not the market organization). The vendors will then be able to tally how much they spent covering the coupons against how much they profited from the coupons, and that would be one way of judging the success of the campaign.

VI. 2006 Evaluated

Improvements were certainly documented for the combined revitalization efforts of 2006. In the end, the market's recruitment efforts resulted in a total of 22 new vendors for the 2006 season. Thirteen of these new vendors for 2006 were new to the Albany market altogether, while nine of them had sold in Albany in previous years but had been absent for at least one season before 2006. With ten vendors having left the market between 2005 and 2006, the 2006 season experienced a net gain of 11 vendors (two vendors consolidated into one) over the 2005 season, an obvious improvement for such a small market.

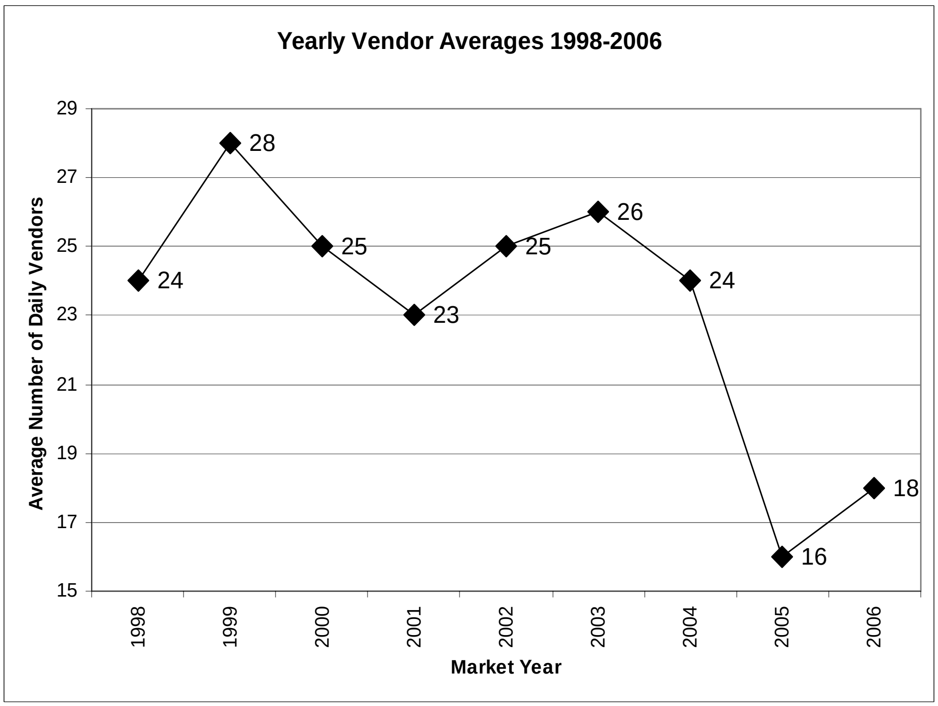
Many participants expect that the new logo created for the market will help to create a community specific identity for the Albany market that will contribute to its uniqueness in contrast with the other two Corvallis markets.

Noticeably absent from the market's efforts, however, were local governmental representatives. In fact, referring to the city's relationship with the market, a prominent city official said in an interview, "The city doesn't have anything to do with the market. I don't even know who runs it. I'd have no idea how to even contact the person who runs it." When asked whether the city should have anything to do with the market, the official responded, "No. Beyond a place or space, the market should be run like any other business. Run by whomever. The city should not tell them how to do it or direct them in doing it or help them when it's not working out." Thus, despite concerted efforts to rally the community around the revitalization efforts at the Albany Farmers' Market, a major player, the City of Albany, was missing.

At the time of this writing, the management is planning for a new site beginning with the 2007 season, with new hours to better align with the hours of downtown businesses. The new site is still downtown, but situated on a busy thoroughfare leading into town from the south. This move has great possibilities for improving the market's situation. Interestingly in this instance, the City of Albany did provide support to the market, accommodating them in the City Hall parking lot and working to ensure their needs were met.

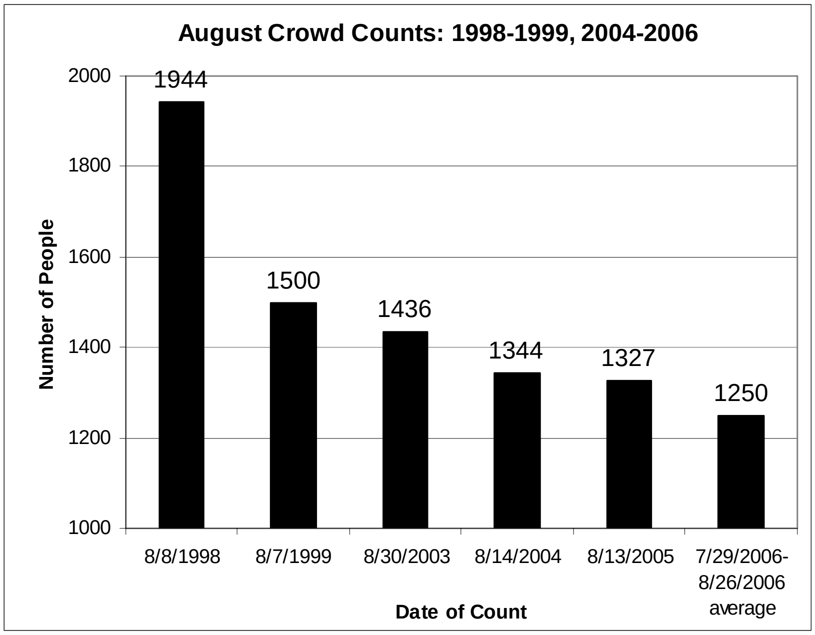
The question of whether the market has been put back on track for the long term remains to be answered. As demonstrated by the average vendor numbers, things have improved during the 2006 season (Figure 14). However the numbers remain significantly lower than previous years. According to the customer count comparisons, the customer population in Albany continued to decline even with the 2006 season (Figure 15).

Figure 14. Average number of vendors selling on each market day of each season, by market season year[17].



[17] The scale reflects the data range (see methods).

Figure 15. Available peak season customer counts from a similar time frame each season: 1998-1999, 2003-2006[18].



However, the dominant perception among vendors, customers, and management was that 2006 was much improved over the previous year of crisis. One vendor reported during the peak season, "Last Saturday definitely had 'the buzz'—you know, when you can't hear the vendors across the way from you because there are so many people in between. I haven't heard the buzz at that market in years." Another reports, "This year is definitely better than last year. I'm seeing lots of new faces and it seems busier than in previous years." Finally, a long time vendor noted, "I have noticed a decline over the past three to five years. Last year I think we saw the bottom and now we're coming back up."

For the minority of customers who recognize the market's distress, many report that 2006 is much better than the previous year in terms of product selection and

[18] 2006 count reflects an average of three counts in an effort to ensure a more accurate reflection of approximate market attendance for this time frame. The three counts were 1398, 1080, 1272 for the three markets in this time frame.

market size. So regardless of what the numbers say, vendors and customers perceive 2006 to be a significant improvement over 2005. As many markets attract both vendors and customers through word of mouth, the perceptions of improvement are certainly playing a role in the market's revitalization. In fact, it might be the perceptions themselves that serve to revive the market, an important point for market organizers.

Discussion

Stephenson et al. (2006; 2007) identified five related factors characterizing failed markets in Oregon between 1998 and 2005. These were: 1) small market size [5 to 30 vendors], 2) high need for additional products, 3) low administrative revenue, 4) volunteer or low-paid manager, and 5) high manager turnover. Demonstrating all of these factors, with fewer than 30 vendors on average, a reported need for additional products, low and declining revenue, a low-paid, overworked manager, and a high turnover among its site managers, it should be considered a feat that the market was able to reverse its path toward failure. However, while the 2006 season demonstrated improvement, there is still much work to be done to ensure long-term success.

One commonality among many of the publications addressing market start-up or revitalization is a stress on the necessity of community engagement (Torrence, 1989; Fisher, 1999; Corum, 2001). Adopting an end goal of community embeddedness would make the connection between the market and the surrounding community a central focus (Feenstra, 1997; O'Hara & Stagl, 2001; Lyson, 2005). Re-embedding this market into its community, socially, politically, and economically, will continue to be a challenge to the market's management. However, embeddedness is a two-way street requiring not only the market's engagement of the community, but also the community's engagement of the market.

Community organizing to ensure support for a market is crucial so that the community takes a sense of pride and ownership in the market. Torrence (1989) discussed the importance of having a community advisory committee contributing to the process of revitalizing the Lynchburg, VA farmers' market. This level of collaboration with community members would be ideal for the Albany market. Further, in the story of the Lynchburg's market revitalization, the city spent $1.5 million dollars on the project. The level of city support for the Albany market is ambiguous at best, with one city official rejecting the notion that the city should support and collaborate with the farmers' market at all, while another public entity allows the use of its parking lot for the market's new location. A firm commitment from the city of Albany to support the market, both financially and with other resources, would be valuable in ensuring its sustainability. Community support could also be improved by increased collaborations with local businesses and organizations, including offering them advertising in exchange for offering the weekly prize or sponsoring a booth, as was done in the Lynchburg revitalization project discussed earlier (Torrence, 1989).

Fisher's (1999) guidelines stress the importance of market staff being consistent, and being an "insider." Given the amount of organizing necessary to embed a market in its community, it makes the most sense that the manager for this market also be an "insider," someone who is from Albany and better understands the community. This sentiment was also represented in my interviews, with one customer saying that having a manager for the Albany market who lived in Albany would go a long way toward ensuring community support for the market. Currently, the Albany market is managed by a number of site managers (usually three per season), overseen by the market manager, who rotate the market days during each season. However, since 1998, there have been a total of 15 different site managers rotating the shifts, many of which have not been Albany residents. This exemplifies the challenges inherent to grassroots organizations with scarce resources that must prioritize how their resources are used. However, with a market in crisis, one of the top priorities should be securing consistent management, preferably someone from the community who can take on much of the community organizing from an informed perspective.

Further, in a reluctant community like Albany that has not openly embraced its farmers' market, educating the community will be a crucial step toward garnering its support. One vendor noted that even market customers do not always understand the principals and mission of the market, often questioning whether the farmers have actually grown the products they are selling. Thus, having an insider who can work on cultivating and educating the community and garnering public and organizational support for the market could make a large difference in terms of its embeddedness in the community.

As this research has demonstrated, collecting and analyzing seasonal market data can be very useful for market organizers in general, but especially for markets with limited resources in decline or undergoing revitalization. An analysis of weekly, bimonthly, or even monthly crowd counts, both by day and by the hour, can be helpful in terms of understanding peak season times and peak times of day. Similarly, an analysis of vendor counts can help to point out weakness areas throughout the season, or even saturation areas during peak season. A more in-depth analysis of product type would provide further information on weakness areas or areas for product improvement.

As discussed, comparing customer data to vendor data for a market season can help market organizers find a healthy balance in terms of customers per vendor ratios. Many markets experiencing difficulty can easily get caught in the downward, circular condition of either not having enough customers per vendor or having too many customers per vendor. In either case, loss of customers and vendors can be the result, and in most cases the loss of one results in the loss of another, and without intervention the cycle can continue indefinitely until the market eventually has to close. This is an area that needs more research, and could be expanded on to understand successful ratios for unique (i.e. honey) and non-unique (i.e. summer produce) vendors. Understanding healthy customers per vendor ratios, even if it is market specific, could contribute greatly to sustaining and strengthening markets in distress.

Rapid Market Assessments (Lev & Stephenson, 2002; Lev et al., 2004), such as the one described here, can also be very helpful to market organizers. As long as the questions are crafted in such a way as to ensure appropriate and understandable response choices, much valuable information can be gleaned from customer dot surveys at market. In this case, the information on neighborhoods helped market organizers to understand more about their customer base, in terms of where most of their customers were coming from. Further, because the neighborhood map utilized in the survey could be compared to census tract information, the market was also able to learn something about the general income levels and other demographics of their customers. When this information is coupled with a question on spending such as the one used here, a more complete picture of market customers' pricing needs can be achieved. This can help market organizers in vendor recruitment, and can also help vendors with pricing and expectations. Based on the responses from the price question used in my survey, vendor recruitment can be better targeted to meet each of the price categories at each of the percentages reflected in the responses. While 39 percent of respondents reported wanting to spend the same or less at the farmers' market as they would at the grocery store, 61 percent reported being willing to pay more for produce at the farmers' market. But overall, customers were not willing to pay too much more. About 15 percent more was the average. Knowing this about a market can help managers and vendors suit a market to the community.

Finally, questions regarding products or other interventions that might improve the market are obviously helpful in understanding which products customers would like to see more of, and which products are not so much in demand. This is also very important information for market managers in terms of vendor recruitment and existing vendors' product expansion efforts. For example, if customers report wanting more restaurant-style foods, perhaps a current vendor could be encouraged to offer sandwiches or breakfast pastries.

Data collection and analysis may prove to be critical for market managers seeking to improve their markets. Understanding customers in terms of demand, spending, and shopping frequency, as well as understanding vendors in terms of frequency and product type, can be essential to market organizers in terms of strengthening markets in distress. However, as demonstrated in the evaluation of the leafleting and direct marketing strategies, well-planned, targeted efforts that can be effectively evaluated will be crucial to markets with limited resources. Understanding a market and its community through data collection is one important step toward understanding the target audience.

Conclusions

Revitalization efforts for the Albany Farmers' Market included baseline data collection such as customer and vendor counts, customer assessments, vendor recruitment, community meetings, a new logo and name, new market amenities, leafleting and direct mail campaigns, all during the 2006 season. Additionally, projects were begun including offering EBT and a new market location. While vendor numbers showed an improvement over the 2005 crisis year, customer numbers continue to decline. However, there is certainly a perception of improvement among both vendors and customers, which may serve an important function in the market's revitalization.

The Albany Farmers' Market faces a number of challenges in its efforts at revitalization, all related to embedding the market in its community. Challenges external to the market, such as the overall growth in the number of farmers' markets and a reluctant community, will continue to affect small markets such as Albany. The market also faces internal challenges, such as meeting customer and vendor expectations and finding a consistent manager for the market who can operate from an insider's perspective. In overcoming these challenges, cultivating community and public support for this farmers' market will be crucial. However, this research on a pragmatic, grassroots response to crisis demonstrates the limitations of theory, in that it does not explain for this market or the community how to achieve embeddedness. Rather, it is something they are struggling to figure out on their own.

CHAPTER V: GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

This research has demonstrated the challenges inherent to re-embedding food systems into localities. While the number of farmers' markets in the U.S. grows rapidly, many markets struggle to stay open. By analyzing the circumstances surrounding the decline and subsequent revitalization efforts of one farmers' market, insights into the factors influencing its distress were identified. This case study went beyond the macro-level data on market failure to provide a picture of the local-level processes behind a farmers' market in distress.

Through an examination of the circumstances surrounding the decline of the Albany Farmers' Market, a better understanding was achieved regarding the physical nature of market decline in terms of changes in customer and vendor counts over time. The market experienced declining participation among customers and vendors over the years, and was steadily decreasing in scale. For a number of reasons, including management transition issues during the late 1990s, difficulty recruiting and aligning vendors and customers, increasing competition from other markets, and a lack of city and community support, the market became vulnerable to failure. Vulnerable, the market succumbed to triggering events during the 2005 season, moving the vulnerable, declining market into crisis. Significantly, the condition of decline did not happen overnight, but was the result of a combination of factors interacting over a period of time.

The initial revitalization efforts of the market were successful. These efforts prevented the market from reaching the point of failure, an impressive feat. Vendor counts are on the rise, and many participants perceive vast improvement. The outlook for long-term success remains unknown but continuing. The data collected regarding some of the revitalization strategies implemented reveals that many efforts, such as a direct mailing, can be difficult to monitor and can be costly. A well planned effort to ensure a good investment and measurable results is crucial to revitalizing markets in distress, especially considering that many of these markets will be operating on limited resources. Understanding, educating, and marketing to a targeted audience are also essential to markets with scarce resources.

In examining the market's decline and crisis, it is apparent that one missing component over the years based on the management configuration was a consistent presence in the community on the part of the market's management. Another missing component was much of the community itself, including city support and strong connections with private community organizations. Because of a combination of factors, including some internal to the market and others on community and regional levels, the market ceased to be embedded in its surrounding community. Research demonstrates that embeddedness is vital to ensuring healthy, successful farmers' markets.

While the revitalization process has demonstrated the limitations of theory, in that in the end communities must determine how to achieve embeddedness on their own, a few recommendations emerged based on the situation for this particular market. Important steps toward embedding this market include securing a consistent manager for the market who is an insider to the Albany community, garnering public and private support for the market within the community, educating the community on the value of farmers' markets, and understanding the needs and expectations of vendors and the customers to produce the best fit between the market and the community. However, for this market to be truly successful, the community needs to respond to the market's efforts by embracing the market.

Questions remain regarding why some communities overwhelmingly support their farmers' markets, and others are reluctant, requiring more work and persuasion on the part of market organizers. What is the role of communities in sustaining farmers' markets? Is it true that only affluent communities can sustain farmers' markets? What is the role of the markets' management? Market vendors and customers? It remains unclear where the ultimate responsibility lies, but clear that all play a role in embedding and sustaining a farmers' market in the community.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: DETAILED INTERVIEW METHODS

Participant Selection

Participants were chosen using nonprobability-sampling techniques, a technique appropriate for in-depth case studies (Bernard, 2006). Market managers, board members and current vendors were selected for interview based on convenience sampling methods (Bernard, 2006). All of the site/market managers for whom contact information was available were interviewed[19], and more than half of the current board members were interviewed, depending on who was available and had time for the interviews.[20] Current vendors were interviewed based availability during market days or outside of the market. Approximately one-third of all vendors[21] selling during the 2006 season were interviewed. Customer interviews were conducted based on both random and convenience sampling as described by Bernard (2006). For the customer interviews, I interviewed individuals at random as they left the market. Finally, past vendors were chosen for interview based on network or snowball sampling methods (Bernard, 2006). Key informants and other past vendors offered names of past vendors, especially those present before the transition in management in the late 1990's. In addition to the above mentioned interviews, I developed and maintained close relationships with a number of key informants for the duration of the study, including representatives from all stakeholder groups: vendors, customers, managers, and board members.

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[19] One current site manager was not interviewed based on her close knowledge of the research project.
[20] It is important to note that most of the interviewing took place between June and August of 2006, the busiest time of year for many of the research participants.
[21] I interviewed 20 current vendors out of 57 total vendors who participated in the market at least once during the 2006 season.

Interview Themes

All of the interviews focused on the following main themes:

- The person's associations with the market and how this came about (i.e. customer, vendor, management, and so on)

- Their perceptions of the market in terms of the past and present (i.e. what was it like when you started attending? How has that changed over time? What is it like now?)

- Thoughts or recommendations they might have regarding the market's future.

In addition to these general themes, a number of sub-themes applied to certain groups. These sub-themes are listed in Table 1 according to stakeholder group.

Table 1. List of sub-themes for ethnographic interviews.

Present Vendors	• Length of time they've been a vendor • Length of time they were with Albany market • Reasons why they are no longer in Albany market • Perceptions of Albany market—past and present • Strengths and weaknesses of market • What could be done to improve the market
Customers	• Length of time they've been coming to market • Reasons why they come to the market • Perceptions of market—past and present • Strengths and weaknesses • What could be done to improve the market
Market Management/Board Members	• Length of involvement in market management • Length of involvement in Albany market management • Reasons why they are interested in market management • Perceptions—past and present • Strengths and weaknesses • What could be done to improve the market
Community Leaders	• Perception of market-past and present • Level of support for market • Are they market customers • What would improve the market

Coding

The ethnographic interview data were analyzed using a combination of grounded theory and content analysis approaches. The grounded theory approach used in this research is based on the original grounded theory method advocated by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and more recent work by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Content analysis was conducted as described by Bernard (2006). The combination of these two methods allowed for both inductive coding, or the emergence of themes from the interviews (grounded theory) and deductive coding based on the need for a more specific analysis of interview data directly related to the market's decline and revitalization efforts (content analysis).

Interview data were coded using a multi-stage coding procedure. First, data were coded using "topic" and "descriptive" coding techniques (Richards, 2005) in order to organize and group the data into meaningful categories. Following this process, analytical coding revealed broader themes (Richards, 2005). In vivo coding was used as a technique to ensure that the themes were emerging directly from the text (Bernard, 2006).

The results from the qualitative data analysis were then compared with the quantitative data that were available from market records. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive analysis techniques such as graphic displays, tables and summary statistics (Bernard, 2006). These descriptive techniques provide a numeric depiction of the market's situation from 1998 to 2006, allowing for graphic representations of the market's transformation over time. From these representations the market's decline in terms of vendor and customer numbers becomes visual. In the ability to cross-reference the interview data with the data available through market records, the validity of the qualitative analysis was enhanced.

APPENDIX B: DETAILED CROWD COUNT INFORMATION

Available crowd counts from previous years and 2006 were compared according to similarly timed counts during each season[22] (i.e. June counts were compared with June counts and August counts were compared with August counts). In order to maximize the reliability of the 2006 comparison, count results from the three closest market days to the previous years' count dates were averaged and the 2006 count reflects this average. While the beginning season (June) crowd counts do not show a stark decline (see Figure 1), the striking data is in the peak season counts (August) (see Figure 2). As you can see from the August counts, the peak season previously had much larger crowds and the decline since 1998 has been steady over the years.

[22] It is important to note that while previous years' counts offer a great opportunity for comparison, attendance may be affected by weather or other factors. Although collecting crowd count data is straightforward (using methods outlined by Lev and Stephenson 2002 and Lev et al. 2004), there can still be differences in the way individuals might collect the data. All of this should be considered in the comparisons.

Figure 1. Comparable crowd count data for June months[23].

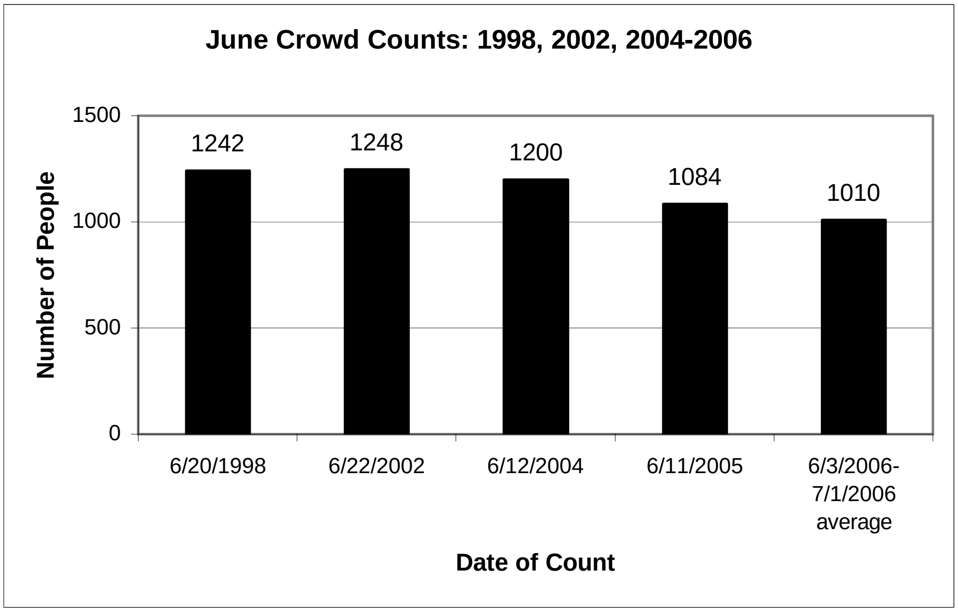
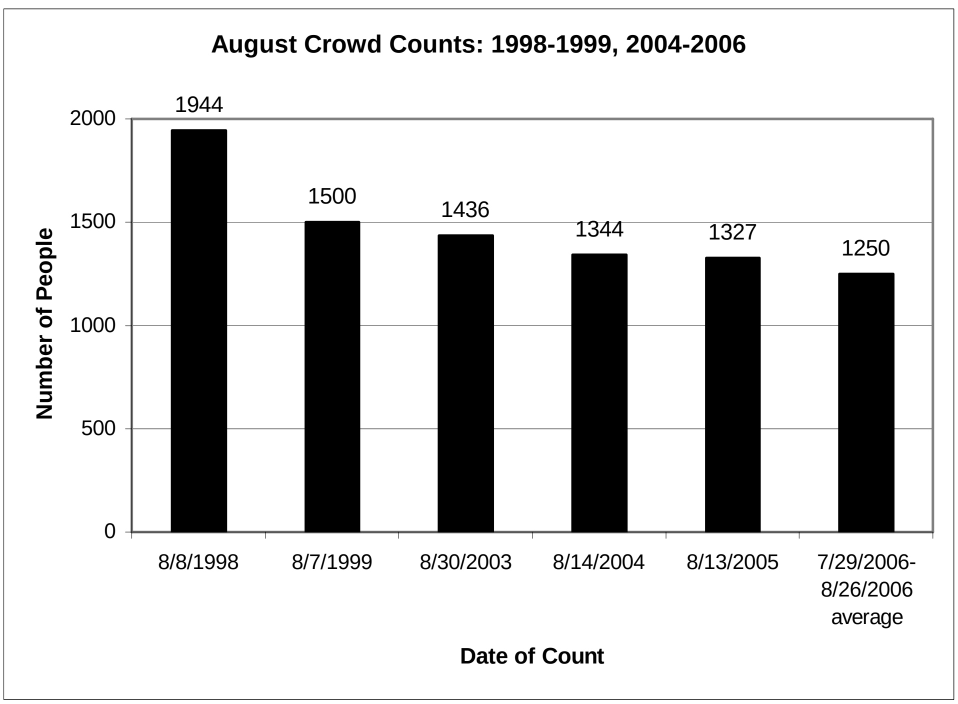


Figure 2. Comparable crowd count data for August months[24].



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[23] 2006 June average of 1010 reflects totals of three nearest counts: 996 on June 3rd, 942 on June 17, and 1092 on July 1st.

[24] 2006 August average of 1250 reflects totals of three nearest counts: 1398 on July 29th, 1080 on August 12th, and 1272 on August 26th.

See Table 2 for all available crowd counts for years other than 2006.[25]

Table 2. All available crowd counts for the Albany Farmer's Market for years other than 2006.

	1998	1999	2002	2003	2004	2005
June	6/20=1242	X	6/22=1248	X	6/12=1200 6/26=1296	6/11=1084
July	7/11=1698	7/24=1716	X	X	X	7/30=1384
August	8/8=1944	8/7=1500	X	8/30=1436	8/14=1344	8/13=1327
September	X	X	X	X	X	9/17=899 9/24=817
October	X	X	X	X	X	10/29=260

[25] As noted in Chapter 4, 2006 counts were conducted every other market day throughout the season, with a total of 16 available counts. Data for 2006 is available on page 87.