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## Welcoming and Inclusive Farmers Markets: A Community of Practice to Encourage Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion


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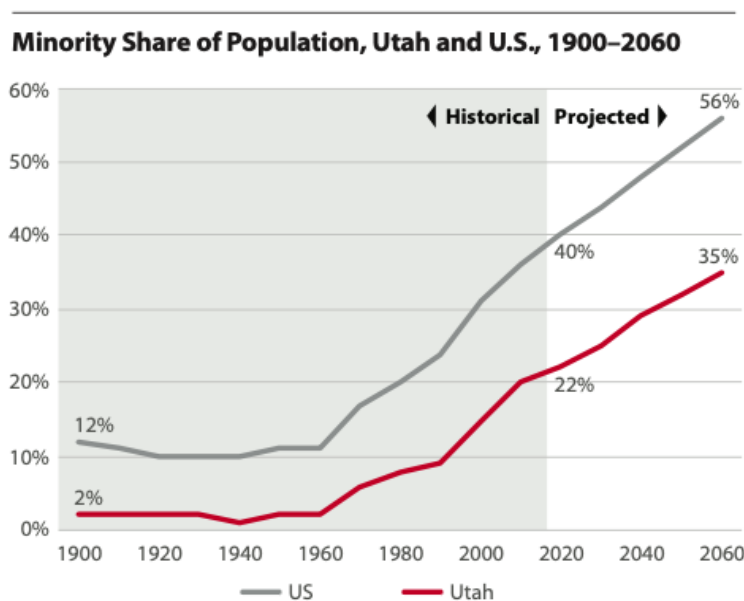
### Abstract

*Farmers markets, as vibrant hubs for community connection and stimulus to the local economy, often have staff, vendor, and customer demographics that are predominantly white. The Utah Farmers Market Network (UFMN) convened a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Community of Practice with market managers statewide to assist markets in becoming more welcoming and inclusive of historically excluded populations.*

### Introduction

Farmers markets play a vital role in supporting communities by providing gathering spaces and fostering local agriculture and economic development (Alonzo, 2017). However, market demographics are predominantly white across staff, vendor, and customer populations, posing high barriers to entry for people of color (Alkon & McCullen 2010). As indicated in Figure 1, diversity within the state of Utah is steadily increasing. It is projected that one in three Utahns will identify as nonwhite by 2060 (Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute, 2021).

*Figure 1: Minority Share of Population*



Note: Minority includes those identifying as something other than Non-Hispanic White Alone  
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau; Perlich 2002; Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute

Unfortunately, minorities in Utah have unfavorable health and wealth disparities compared to their white counterparts (Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute, 2021). The Utah Governor's Office posits, "women, people of color, and LGBTQIA+ communities in Utah have unique historical, socio, cultural, and economic barriers preventing them from participating fully in our state" (One Utah, 2021, p. 2). As a result, the Utah Farmers Market Network (UFMN) prioritized exploring how farmers markets could be more welcoming and inclusive to all individuals regardless of racial background. The UFMN also sought to generate a greater level of interest and concern among managers of farmers market on equity and inclusion.

### **Response**

The UFMN used USDA funding to convene a virtual Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Community of Practice (CoP). The goal was to explore how markets could be more welcoming and inclusive to historically excluded populations. The CoP was co-facilitated by the UFMN coordinator and the network's Diversity Assistant, and supported by Utah State University (USU) faculty and researchers throughout the planning and implementation stages.

Between May and November of 2021, members of seven (7) Utah farmers markets convened at least twice monthly to explore basic DEI concepts and create personalized DEI Strategic Plans for their markets. The CoP participants collected baseline data using tools created by the co-facilitators for the purposes of measuring inclusivity. This data was then compared to data collected by co-facilitators and USDA Census data. Each market established at least three personal, market, and/or organizational goals that were strategic, measurable, ambitious, realistic, time-bound, inclusive, and equitable (Management Center, 2021).

### **Target Audience**

The CoP's target audience were low-income and SNAP recipients from historically excluded and oppressed groups such as Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC), women, religious minorities, and LGBTQ+ individuals. The actual participants of the CoP were eight farmers market managers ( $N = 8$ ), representing seven (7) Utah markets. Each manager applied and were selected on the basis of their current understanding of DEI, learning readiness, and ability to commit to the CoP. Markets were compensated \$1000 to participate in six (6) out of eight (8) 90-minute sessions, which included three (3) to five (5) hours of preparatory work by each participant. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of participants received the full stipend.

Figure 2: Image of Cole Eisenhour's "You Belong" from the grounds of Farmers Market Ogden



Photo credit: Jaclyn Pace

## Results

Evaluation results indicated 100% of the eight (8) participants who completed the CoP had an increased understanding of the demographic makeup and lived experience of the target audience. Many participants reported a more developed frame of reference concerning issues of DEI, which permeated their personal and professional lives. For example, one participant stated, "I feel like I have a whole new lens - I now see things in a different light and am aware of injustice happening around me." Another reported, "I did not realize how many barriers there are, and have been, for those who are marginalized and how it affects every interaction they have throughout their days and lives."

Participants have committed to implementing interventions within their farmers markets and organizations in an effort to be more welcoming and inclusive. Some examples of the goals set by farmers market managers include rewriting mission statements to include DEI principles, recruiting more diverse job candidates, updating social media to reflect the current diversity of their community, and improving wheelchair accessibility at their market.

Participants also commented on the sense of community the CoP fostered and reported an appreciation for the accountability around continuing equity work in their field. Another participant shared, "This is one of the most beneficial things I have signed up for in my four-year

career as a market manager. Not only has it helped me in my current role, but it will help me in years to come as DEI is at the forefront of many initiatives.”

During UFMN’s annual Market Manager Forum in early 2022, three (3) members of the CoP presented on a panel to share their experiences. There was an active discussion between panelists and audience members during the presentation, after which 100% of the managers ( $n = 8$ ) who attended this session reported that they found the DEI panel beneficial.

### Public Value and Next Steps

The markets that participated in the CoP now have a variety of tools they can use to deepen their personal understanding of DEI and implement changes within their market organizations and their physical markets. Current and future vendors, customers, and staff will benefit from the DEI interventions by these farmers markets.

The UFMN team is currently designing inclusive welcome signage that will be available to farmers markets managers who participated in the CoP (see figure 3 for example). A DEI best practices document is also being created, along with a number of reports. The network plans to seek more funding to support another CoP, collect data on long-term impacts to the participating markets, and conduct a longitudinal study of changes in diversity (vendors and patrons) across Utah’s farmers markets.

Figure 3: Example of Inclusive Messaging at Farmers Markets



Inclusive Welcome Signage designed by Jaclyn Pace, Regan Emmons & USU Marketing

All seven markets that participated in the DEI CoP have committed to centering DEI in their policies and procedures and have chosen to lead the CoP during network transitions. One participant noted, “I think a group like this can be started anywhere it just needs some brave leadership and guidance. I'm grateful for this opportunity and to have deepened my understanding of DEI in the farmers market context.”

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