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**Inclusive, Accessible, and Successful: Is it Possible?**  
**A Case Study Analysis of How to Curate an Enduring**  
**Justice-Centered Farmers Market in Lewiston, ME**



A Senior Thesis

Presented to The Faculty of the Environmental Studies Program

Bates College

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

By Annie Conway

Lewiston, ME

April 20, 2023

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## **Abstract**

Food Security is the physical and economic access to safe, sufficient and nutritious food at all levels of society to ensure a healthy and happy lifestyle for all people; this theme intersects with other topics such as food justice, food deserts, and food sovereignty. In the United States, 11.4 % of the population receives Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Benefits (SNAP) while in Maine, 12.1% do and in Lewiston, this number more than doubles, with 24.4% of the local population receiving SNAP benefits. Thus, Lewiston, Maine provides an interesting locale to understand how the national, regional, and local food system impacts local communities. This paper examines the role that the Lewiston Farmers Markets plays in feeding the local community and sustaining local agriculture. In the face of the COVID 19 pandemic and in part due to a major location change, the Lewiston Farmers Market has experienced periods of instability in its attempt to address food insecurity. To understand how to maximize the market's impact, I conducted a case study analysis on three markets in New England cities with varying similarities and differences to Lewiston. Ultimately, I am curious what characteristics the Lewiston Farmers Market might be able to embody to reach its maximum potential. In partnership with Sherie Blumenthal of St. Marys, Ben Daley of Chirp Creek Farm, Mahamed of New Roots, Jessica Bonifas of The Market @ Mill No. 5, Jinger Hallowell at the Brunswick Winter Market, and Cara Mitchell at Farm Fresh's Providence market, I explore these topics to eventually make a recommendation for Lewiston.

## Introduction

Coming into college in 2019, I knew very few things. Of that, included: I want to be a politics major and I love lacrosse. As I prepare to graduate in a month, it is still unclear why I wanted to be a politics major and to my surprise, I quit the lacrosse team. Throughout high school, I was able to take a few classes that felt genuinely stimulating, both of which were rooted in the news and current events. My favorite, Humanities Research, was taught by an English teacher who invested individual time and energy towards every student in our 12 person class. When I look back on the work I completed in this class, all of the topics I picked related to community development. Yet, at my upper-middle class high school in Westchester, NY, there wasn't much discussion about majors that exist beyond those that led you to finance or law school, thus I disregarded these interests. My freshman year, in Sam Boss's FYS: A Local Lens on Global Issues, I started to make note of the topics that intrigued me; a process that led me to realize that a lot of these mimicked my interests in high school, such as street art, city revitalization, and gentrification. I realized I had a strong interest in city systems and sustainability. I declared my major as Environmental Studies after we completed a reading on Maine Food Systems; I learned about food deserts, food insecurity, and every piece of jargon that I use later on in this paper, for the first time. I have always loved to cook, bake, and eat, and I quickly saw how this connected to my desire to engage with the communities I am in.

Thus began my enduring interest in food justice. The summer after my sophomore year, I had the opportunity to work as a barista at a cafe run by a food-justice non-profit in San Francisco, *Farming Hope*, which provides food based employment opportunities for formerly incarcerated or houseless individuals. As a barista, I worked alongside

individuals in their program, interacted with a variety of individuals in the Mission in SF, and learned about the ins and outs of nonprofit planning. Last summer, I was an intern with *Growing To Give* in Brunswick, ME; GTG is a grow to donate farm, meaning that all of the produce they sell is distributed to local food banks, food pantries, and sharing tables. I owe a lot of credit to this summer, for it largely inspired this paper. I was intrigued by the different means of food distribution that exist to address food insecurity in a given area. The farm was one model, in which food was produced and distributed by volunteers made up of a population that, for the most part, experienced food security; there were no interactions between the individuals benefiting from the food and those growing it, providing limited grounds for furthering nutrition and agricultural knowledge. Conversely, one day after work, I visited the Lewiston Farmers Market, as I was living in Lewiston and commuting to Brunswick, and had the first hand experience of seeing Lewiston's various demographics represented at the market talking with the farmers from whom they were getting their food. From this moment on, I knew I wanted to write my thesis on the role of Farmers markets in the food system. Upon completion of preliminary research, I focused on the Lewison Farmers Market (LFM), and the role it serves in a city as unique as Lewiston.

At the point I am writing this introduction, I can confidently state that my overall theme/goal felt largely ambiguous until nearly the end. What has ultimately emerged is a multi-chapter thesis that is the result of partnerships, conversations, and general observations; this paper provides an analysis of the Lewiston Farmers Market, including its strengths and opportunities for growth, and conducts a case study analysis on 3 different markets to understand why farmers markets are appealing, what leads to vendor



turnover, what are indications of a successful market, and ultimately, what solutions the LFM can adopt to address its recent challenges. This thesis opens with a literature review outlining the nature of the American food system, including key terms such as: food justice, food desert, food security, food sovereignty, Supplemental Nutrition Access Program (SNAP) and Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) benefits. After establishing this framework, I provide an overview of what a farmers market is, and how it can address these issues. Within these sections, I introduce the papers, reports, and assessments that are central to my research, such as the *Local Foods, Local Places Action Plan* and the *Lewiston/Auburn Community Food Assessment*. I then narrow in on the state of food in Maine, Androscoggin County, and Lewiston. After establishing the framework that is necessary to understand the analysis I will conduct later, I finally begin to lay the framework for the Lewiston Farmers Market with information I gathered from talking with Sherie Blumenthal, from the St. Mary's Nutrition Center; Ben Daley, of Chirp Creek Farm; and Mahamed from New Roots Farm Cooperative. With their breadth of information, I was able to understand that the Lewiston Market is unique in its capacity to address food insecurity, yet, since 2021, the market has endured a period of hardship due to Covid and location change. At this point, I dive into a case study of 3 farmers markets in cities similar to Lewiston: Lowell, MA, Brunswick, ME and Providence, RI. The thesis concludes with an analysis of each market in an attempt to recommend changes the Lewiston market could make to ensure permanence within the community and be successful for everyone involved.

Throughout this paper, the questions that have guided my research and thought process are: Why are farmers markets so popular? What incentives do people have for

shopping at a farmers market? How do farmers markets address food insecurity? Why do some markets succeed and others fail? What has the greatest influence on a market's capacity? What are the different types of farmers markets? How does a market's location or the space it occupies affect a market? Most importantly, what are characteristics of an enduring, inclusive, accessible and profitable market?

## **Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

Food justice and similarly, food security, are inherently intersectional matters that affect the individual and the community. Farmers markets are considered a community-based approach to dealing with these issues by increasing access to fresh, local produce and initiating farmer-patron relationships. Within my literature review, I hope to portray farmers markets as actors within the food system and within local communities. These components are the result of examining who farmers markets serve, how accessible they are, and in what ways they replicate class and culture.

My literature review will consist of an overview of food related environmental justice topics followed up by a look into how these issues play out in Maine, and lastly, in the context of the local Lewiston/Auburn community. As my literature review comes to a close, I hope to have provided the reader with the context to define food security in the United States and understand it in the context of Maine so that I am able to portray farmers markets as a supplementary community based approach to the traditional food system.

### **Food: Security, deserts, and Sovereignty**

To begin, it is important to establish that food insecurity is not the same thing as hunger. Food security, as stated by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, occurs “at the individual, household, national, regional and global levels [and is achieved] when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (1996 World Food Summit). The four pillars included within are:

physical availability to food, economic and physical access to food, food utilization, and stability (The World Bank). Food security can be further divided into four categories pertaining to the level in which people experience it: high, marginal, low and very low (USDA 2022). Low and Very low are indicators of food insecurity; very low food security involves the reduction of food intake to the degree that an individual develops the physiological feeling of hunger. Ultimately, hunger is an outcome of high food insecurity. While hunger may be a more pressing issue, food insecurity should not be overlooked for it precedes hunger; more people globally are food insecure and are thus at risk of experiencing hunger. In order to reflect the urgency of both categories, the USDA introduced the labels of low and very low food insecurity in 2006 as opposed to the original, food insecurity without hunger and food insecurity with hunger (USDA 2022). According to 2021 data, the national average for experiencing food insecurity in the United States was 10.2%; 3.8% of the 10.2% is made up of individuals experiencing very low food security (USDA 2022).

The experience of food insecurity affects an individual or a household's ability to live life in a complete and fulfilling manner; food insecure "households spent less on food, reporting poor and worsening diet quality and more limited access to meat, fresh vegetables and fresh fruit. Food insecurity was linked to higher rates of obesity, diabetes, asthma and other chronic conditions. Food-insecure respondents reported more stress, anxiety and depression" (Drewnowski 555). Topics concerning food tend to be highly intersectional, making it important to understand the issue in the context of housing, gender, class, and race inequalities. High levels of food insecurity are oftentimes a result of a family or individual living in a food desert. Food deserts refer to the "large

proportions of households with low incomes, inadequate access to transportation, and a limited number of food retailers providing fresh produce and healthy groceries for affordable prices” (USDA 2012). In these areas, there tends to be an influx of “unhealthy retail food stores and fast food restaurants” creating “obesogenic neighborhoods” (Harris et al.100). Thus, health becomes a factor dependent on one's socioeconomic status, race, and ability to perform in the market economy.

It is important to establish that the greatest predictor of food insecurity overall is poverty. This is a limiting factor, but is not the sole actor in determining food security; oftentimes, food insecurity is the result of compounded influences, increasing and decreasing susceptibility. According to the USDA Economic Research Service, “other factors, such as high food prices, income inequality, and the unequal distribution of food within countries and households, also affect food insecurity rates” (USDA 2019). This study was conducted on a global scale and “uncovered significant heterogeneity in the determinants of food insecurity across countries with different levels of economic development”(USDA 2019). These findings suggest that income, including loss of income, is one of the greatest predictors of food insecurity (Harris et al. 105).

The Environmental Justice Movement has introduced new terminology to understand the unequal and inequitable distribution of food throughout the world; while mere access to food is the most urgent concern within the realm of food related topics, environmental justice leaders also bring up concerns relating to food sovereignty which is the right for people to have power over their food systems and the right to “decide what [that] should look like” (Patel 2). While seeing the importance of addressing food sovereignty within a world where hunger prevails may initially seem impossible, scholars

argue that “through food sovereignty... food security might be achieved and undernourishment eradicated” (Patel 2). Solutions to these issues fall within the framework of food justice. Food justice seeks to provide an alternative lens in which we can imagine the industrial food system, which is often the result of market ideology, class and race (Gottlieb X). Ultimately, I bring up these topics because I believe that farmers markets play a role in addressing each of these aspects.

### **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs (SNAP) and Women, Infants and Children (WIC)**

Federal and local governments have implemented a variety of services and programs in an attempt to subsidize inequalities that currently exist within the food system. SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), previously known as food stamps, is the largest “food assistance program in the U.S. providing financial resources for food purchases to more than 40 million low-income Americans each year (U. S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, 2017). SNAP benefits are redeemed using an EBT card, which functions like a debit card and is provided to qualifying individuals; it can be used at most grocery stores and certain farmers markets. The overall goal of the SNAP program is to “supplement the food budget of needy families so they can purchase healthy food and move towards self-sufficiency” (USDA FNS, 2023). In order to qualify for SNAP benefits, families and individuals must meet the following parameters: gross monthly income and net income at or below 130% of the poverty line and assets must fall below certain thresholds (USDA FNS, 2022). With such strict eligibility requirements, naturally, many people, sometimes those most in need, do not qualify for SNAP assistance; this includes, “individuals who are on strike, all people without a documented immigration status, some students attending college more than half

time, and certain immigrants who are lawfully present” (USDA FNS, 2023). On top of those who merely don't qualify, obstacles exist that hold eligible individuals back from receiving benefits, such as the need to have an address, proper forms of identification, social stigma, and language barriers (CFA 2013, 21).

SNAP is an example of a relief program that targets hunger at the onslaught and food sovereignty and justice in the aftermath. SNAP benefits “can be used for any type of food, regardless of nutritional quality” (Dimitri 2014, 2). Thus, families oftentimes are still prone to the inverse health impacts that food deserts and food insecurity create. In an effort to combat this limitation and in the realm of food justice, grassroots organizations have implemented community programming which “aims to address diet quality by providing financial incentives for the purchase of fresh produce” (Dimitri, 2). Individuals using SNAP/EBT benefits, most commonly at farmers markets, will receive coupons to match what money is used on fruits and vegetables. The overall goal is to change purchasing habits (Dimitri, 2). Established in 2014 but enhanced in 2019, the USDA added the *Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive* (FINI) program under the farm bill to the SNAP program. FINI is made up of three components: incentives for fruit and vegetable purchasing, produce prescriptions that encourage consumption through education and financial incentives, and technical assistance and evaluation (USDA FNS). These programs encourage consumers to financially benefit from healthier lifestyle choices by instilling the skills necessary to do so.

The second most common form of food assistance that pertains to my research is Women, Infant and Children (WIC) benefits. It focuses on the “diets of limited-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women, as well as infants and

children up to the age of 5 who are found to be at nutritional risk” (CFA, 22). SNAP beneficiaries are automatically eligible for WIC benefits (Carlson, 1). While SNAP benefits have only just started to highlight the importance of “good food”, these characteristics have always been a large part of WIC, which also provides health care referrals and nutrition education (USDA FNS). WIC supports what is known as “Cash Value Benefits (CVB) for fruits and vegetables”, which is basically extra money for more nutritious items (Maine CDC 2023). According to recent reports, WIC is a cost-effective way that the federal government can support healthy livelihoods and encourage economic and social mobility. While WIC is a short-term supplemental program, it is future oriented. The early years of life are times of immense physical and psychological development and “it has long been recognized that children living in poverty lag behind other children” (Carlson, 2). As has been previously established, poverty is directly linked to food insecurity. Thus, institutions, such as WIC that target food, nutrition, and income related disparities prove to be incredibly effective by “strengthening the foundations of physical and mental health, with lifelong consequences for educational achievement, economic productivity, health, and longevity”(Carlson, 4). In 2019, “43 percent of all infants in the United States were eligible for WIC” with “Ninety-eight percent of eligible infants” participating in the program (USDA FNS, 2019). After the early years, the percentage of eligible individuals participating decreased; on average, of all 11 million individuals eligible for WIC benefits each month, 57% participated in the program (USDA FNS, 2019). While participation may decrease as children get older, overall, statistics indicate that WIC is a very successful program.

### **Food Security in Maine**



In order to understand the state of food in Lewiston, Maine, it is necessary to refer to the Community Food Assessment and subsequently, the “Good Food Council”. Both the assessment and the council define *Good Food* as food we want to eat that provides us with nutrients, fits our cultural and religious beliefs, supports local businesses, and is ethically grown (CFA 2013, 1). The Community Food Assessment, which took place in 2013 and sought to understand the food landscape and resources of the area; the document established the ideology, and defined, *good food*. The CFA’s main focuses included, “where food resources are, how people access them, and what barriers exist to that access” (Good Food Council). Proving the interconnectedness of the issue, the Community Food Assessment was a project initiated by the Good Food Council and St. Mary's Nutrition Center in partnership with the Harvard Center for Community Partnerships, the Downtown Education Collaborative, and students and faculty from local colleges. Today, the Good Food Council seeks to ensure that the reports findings are put towards actual community-based action.

Another organization assessing the state of food insecurity in Lewiston from a national scale is Feeding America. Feeding America has been collecting data since 2011 to better understand the state of food insecurity at a local level. The information they’ve gathered has been compiled into an interactive map which shows the food insecurity rate, by county or district, across the country. Using certain filters, one can examine the data

based on age group and race. Figure 1 shows the 2020 data for Androscoggin County.

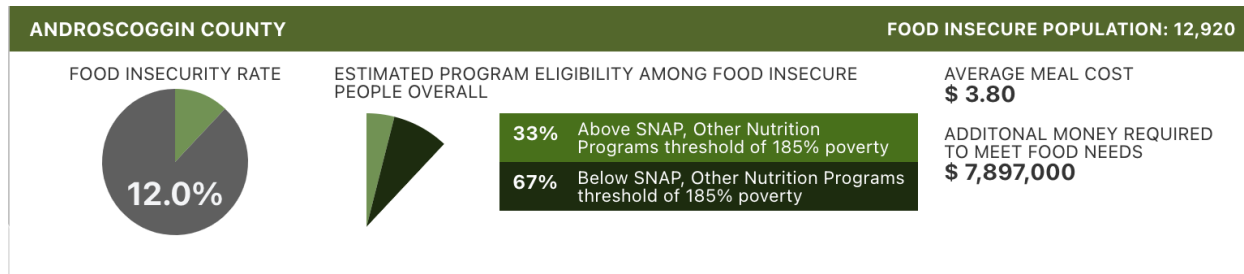


Figure 1: Mind the Meal Gap, 2020, Feeding America.

According to the study, 33% of Lewiston residents are eligible for SNAP benefits, compared to the state average of 10.4% (Mind the Meal Gap, 2020). Montello Elementary School is located outside the urban downtown of Lewiston; According to the 2013 Community Food Assessment, 79% of enrolled students were eligible for free or reduced lunch. In 2020, 19.1% of children under the age of 18 in Androscoggin county were food insecure. In order to understand these statistics, it is necessary to examine Lewiston's complicated history.

Until the end of the twentieth century, Lewiston was mainly populated by immigrant groups of European descent including: Irish, French-Canadian, Protestant New Englanders, Greeks and Central/Eastern Europeans (Maine Memory Network). The large mix of cultures present in the city proves to be a point of challenge as well as strength; the cultural makeup of the area seeps into the institutions, food, and customs that define the community; hockey is incredibly popular, there is a large Greek festival, and the Basilica is the oldest parish in the area for the French Catholics (Lewiston Maine.gov). The construction of canals and mills in the 1800s enabled the rapid growth of textile and shoe manufacturing, incentivizing new immigration to the city. Amidst agriculture pastures and farmland, new means of economic profit arose. Lewiston experienced

periods of economic growth and prosperity until the early 1960s, when mill based industries experienced a rapid decline. This time period ultimately created a city with poor housing, high unemployment, and high rates of poverty; today, 16.3% of the Lewiston population lives below the poverty line (US Census). Lewiston was stuck in a state of despair for a while after the mills closed until an unlikely population of immigrants came to the area: Somalis. In 2001, more than 1000 Somali refugees moved to the city. This new population spurred the city's economy, filled vacant housing, and mirrored a time in which crime began to decrease (Clements 1). Until recently, the future of the farming industry in Maine was perceived to be economically irrelevant, resulting in a cultural disinterest in the sector. Refugees have successfully redefined Lewiston/Auburn by reinvigorating the state's agricultural economy. Moving from Africa to Maine presents an array of challenges, including lack of access to culturally appropriate foods. By investing in Maine's farming identity, they not only created a niche market for themselves, but simultaneously solved many of their own food sovereignty problems by growing the foods most relevant to them.

At the onset of the Community Food Assessment, the poverty rate was 22.5%. While this percentage has steadily decreased, it is still far greater than the state average of 11.5% (US Census). And, for as long as poverty exists, an onslaught of food security concerns remain. This decline in poverty, can in part, be attributed to the new population that has settled in Maine, causing an impromptu revitalization of the area. In order to address the new population of Mainers as well as the underlying inequalities that have been historically present in Lewiston, numerous NGOs and non-profit community based

ventures have appeared in the area in an effort to kick-start the local economy and provide individuals with the tools to be self-sufficient in the long run.

The Community Food Assessment, used the parameters defined by the USDA as a starting point to base their research off of with the ultimate goal of assessing how Lewiston, an urban community in Central Maine, may vary from these norms on the basis of education, social networks, social capital, household income, unemployment, and gender (USDA 2019). The CFA builds on these parameters by stating the groups most at risk for limited access to “*good food*” are: “single parent households, households without a car, and people in households with income below 150% of the federal poverty level” (CFA 2013, 8). In Lewiston specifically, this manifests in “parents with young children, refugees and immigrants, seniors, the disabled, and adolescents/young adults” (CFA 2013, 33).

Harris et al’s case study attempts to understand which of these factors are more or less influential. The results found that in Lewiston, the majority of the expected predictors did have an influence on the level of food security, yet some perceived indicators, such as urbanization, had no effect (Harris et al.). The expected predictors mentioned are the same as ones as earlier. In Lewiston, high levels of urbanization “did not significantly predict its food security status” (Harris et al 108). These findings tend to be in opposition to national studies which show that “there is a relationship between urbanization and poverty on the one hand and food insecurity on the other” (Harris et al., 108). This is not to say that urbanization is not a predictor of food insecurity in general, it merely implies that food insecurity is widely distributed throughout Lewiston because poverty is not contained in the urban neighborhoods. Thus, poverty is a necessary but not

sufficient indicator of food insecurity in Lewiston, rather, it is “the nature of the household that predicts food insecurity” (Harris et al., 108).

In order to understand the food system in Maine and get a greater understanding of possible solutions, it is important to also understand the current obstacles facing at-risk demographics. This is in regards to food access as well as food assistance programs. According to the CFA, lack of vehicle ownership, perceived cost of “healthy food” or culturally appropriate food, language barriers, public transport limitations, and easy access to fast food exacerbate food insecurity (CFA 2013). When 59% of Lewiston residents do not have access to a vehicle and there are no supermarkets within the areas downtown, many residents are forced to shop at “convenience stores or neighborhood grocery stores that are [40%] more expensive and have a limited inventory of healthy food” (CFA 10-37). The study shows that ¾ individuals using the transportation system were traveling to get groceries, and while Lewiston’s CityLink transportation system makes stops at all the larger supermarkets, obstacles relating to time, ease, and cost still persist, as shown in figure 2. These obstacles include: the ability to buy only what one person can hold and a bus schedule that does not run after 6pm and not at all on Sundays, making it inaccessible for daytime workers during the week (CFA 2013,19).

### Obstacles to Getting to the Bus Stop

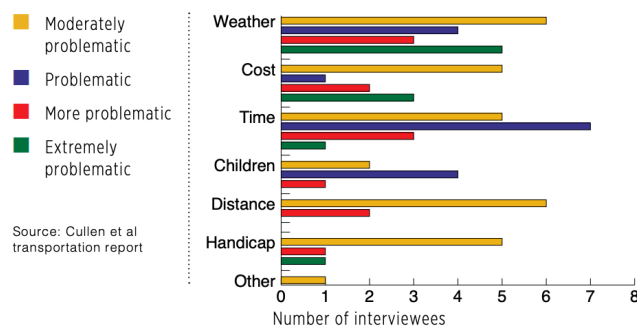


Figure 2: Obstacles to getting to the Bus Stop, Cullen et Al Transportation Report

## Farmers Markets

In 2014, the EPA, USDA and Northern Border Regional Commission established the *Local Foods, Local Places* federal program, which partners with local communities “to reinvest in existing neighborhoods using local food enterprise” and simultaneously “protect the environment and human health” (EPA, Local Foods, Local Places, 2019). In 2019 under the program and in association with St. Mary’s Nutrition Center, the greater Lewiston/Auburn area was selected to receive one of fifteen grants. Each city that is awarded funding has the jurisdiction to decide what projects or initiatives the money is put towards. St. Mary’s Nutrition Center and community partners held a series of community meetings to develop the *Local Food, Local Places Action Plan*, which creates a set of clear guidelines that must be met to achieve the programs overall goals:

- **GOAL 1** – *Strengthen Access To Local Food While Expanding Market Opportunities and Infrastructure for Farm and Food Businesses*
- **GOAL 2** – *Integrate Local Food and Agriculture into City Planning and Economic Development Strategies*
- **GOAL 3** – *Build Food and Agriculture as a Defining Brand for Lewiston-Auburn*
- **GOAL 4** – *Increase Equitable Access, Ownership, and Preservation of Land to Grow Food in Lewiston-Auburn* (Good Food Council of Lewiston/Auburn, 2019).

This action plan builds on principles previously established by the Community Food Assessment in 2013. Ultimately, both plans support Community Food Security (CFS), which “holds community as an indispensable unit of solution to food problems” (Pothukuchi 357). By providing a critique of and alternative means to envision the food system, the CFS movement can “strengthen localities and regions in multiple ways”,

enhance progressive, equity based planning, and connect people and place (Pothukuchi 357). CFS seeks to integrate food and planning. Ultimately, the CFA and the Local Food, Local Places Action Plan acknowledge farmers markets as successful means of Community Food Security due to their ability to “strengthen food access and create... opportunities for local farmers” (EPA, Local Foods, Local Places, 2). Farmers markets directly invest in the local economy, as many farmers markets ensure that products are from the surrounding area. As defined by the USDA, a farmers market “feature[s] two or more farm vendors selling agricultural products directly to customers at a common, recurrent physical location” (USDA AMS). From 1994 to 2019, farmers’ markets have grown at a consistent rate of nearly 7% per year; as seen in figure 3, the greatest increase was seen from 2008 to 2011 (USDA ERS).

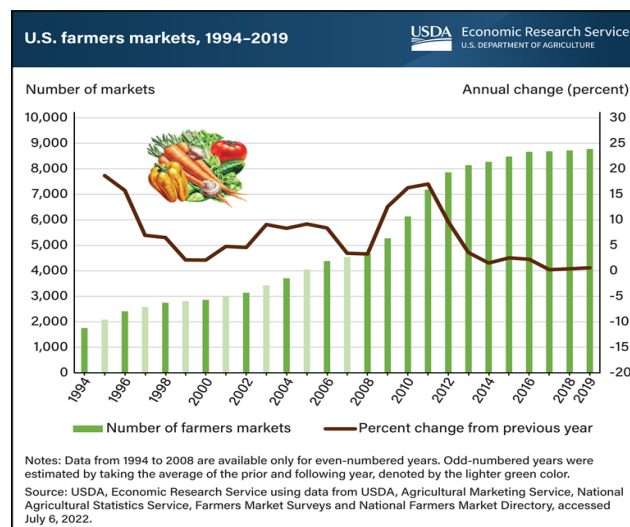


Figure 3: US Farmers Markets, 1994-2019

According to the USDA, farmers markets connect the “rural to urban, farmer to consumer, and fresh ingredients to our diets”; this system is outlined in figure 4 below.

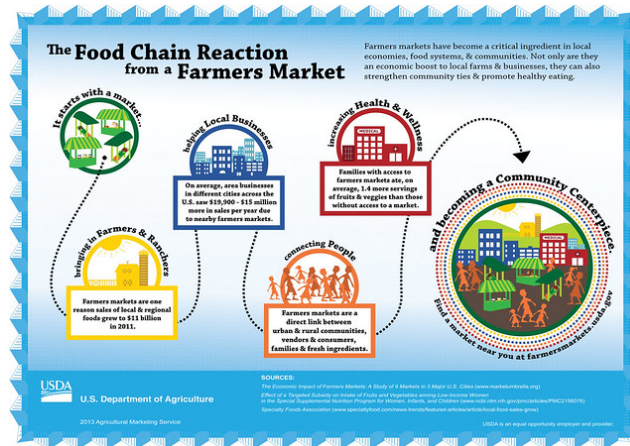


Figure 4: Farmers Markets as Community Centerpieces

Traditionally, food flows into a community in three major ways:

- the market-oriented food system dominated by large corporations
- the charitable food assistance network made up of food banks, food pantries, and soup kitchens
- the federal nutrition safety net with programs targeted at poor children and adults, pregnant women and nursing mothers, and seniors (Pothukuchi 357).

In comparison to these pathways, farmers markets are “characterized by closer regional connections between producers, processors, and consumers” which ensures that more money stays in the local economy (Pothukuchi 357; USDA, 2017). Farmers markets tend to have a spillover effect on the local economy when consumers spend money at nearby businesses and organizations. After conducting a survey, the Farmers Market Federation of New York found that “respondents visiting the Syracuse Downtown Farmers’ Market and Warwick Valley Farmers’ Market reported spending an additional \$9 and \$17 downtown respectively” (Barbour et al. 12). Reinvigorating the local economy also has the mutual benefit of job creation. These benefits are also a manifestation of tourism. As



farmers markets grow an identity they add “a recreational component to food consumption” and become cultural centerpieces that people are willing to invest money and time into (Barbour et al 13).

Additionally, farmers benefit from the markets because money remains inside the local food system and removes “the added costs of shipping, storage and inventory control” incurred by the mainstream food system (Alonzo 2017). Farmers can thus “sell at prices that are mutually beneficial to them and their customers” (Barbour et al. 12). Farmers markets provide visible evidence to patrons that there is local farming, agriculture, and farmers within their community who need their support; ultimately, if there is a farmers market that means that there are farms. The space that is created by these characteristics creates a shopping experience that transcends the boundaries of the food system, allowing us to envision food as a place of community, “where neighbor meets neighbor” rather than a chore. People are talking to the farmer that grew their carrots rather than buying them in a plastic bag at the store. Farmers markets as community centerpieces enter a realm in which food has the possibility to facilitate economic revitalization (Alonzo 2017). The more the local community invests in their market, the better it will become and the more likely people are to return.

Farmers markets fit into the local food movement that is currently rising in popularity. The movement that is manifesting in society is defined by an obsession with organic products, expensive grocery stores, and high end dining experiences; what it fails to consider is sustenance farming, rural agriculture, and low and middle income individuals. For low-income consumers, where “affordability drives their access to local foods”, farmers’ markets are not immediately perceived to be affordable (CFA 42). Yet,

this is not a sufficient reason to dismiss farmers markets as food justice solutions for they can “increase access to nutritious foods such as fruits and vegetables especially in neighborhoods with limited access to other healthy food retailers” (Freedman 488); achieving a farmers market of this kind is dependent upon the intentional implementation of SNAP/WIC benefits at FM and the creation of an inclusive environment, pertaining to atmosphere and accessibility.

### **Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR)**

Since farmers markets occur within community food systems, research conducted on the topic must be rooted in community partnerships. Community Based Participatory Research is rooted in collaboration with community members with the goal of creating something that is beneficial to both parties. Traditionally, this partnership occurs between a community organization and an individual from an academic institution, whether that be a student or a faculty member. Ideally, community members should be involved in all phases of research, beginning with collaboration on the research topic and question.

CBPR was originally created to be used when engaging with vulnerable populations to minimize inequalities; historically, it has been most commonly used in partnership with Native American tribes (Holkup 2004, 1). Since CBPR's goal is to result in actual, enduring change, it provides an enticing alternative to traditional research methods.

According to the National Institute of Health, the main pillars of Community Based Participatory Research include: (1) recognizing the community's identity, (2) building on their strengths and weaknesses, (3) promoting co-learning among research partners, (4) emphasizing relevance of issues proposed by the community, and (5) long term commitment from all involved partners (ibid 2-3). With a methodology of research that is

dependent upon people and communities, which are ever changing, natural challenges exist. NIH outlines some of these which relate “to functioning within a cross-cultural setting, quality and equality of collaborative partnerships, ethics, and methodological issues”. Lastly, there are personal challenges that emerge as well, relating to one's scientific, ethical, and interpersonal beliefs (ibid 5).

## **Rationale**

Current literature surrounding farmers markets focuses on their ability to increase access to fresh food, create a sense of community, and stimulate the local economy. Yet, as my literature review shows, food insecurity is a multifaceted issue that is not merely dependent upon income and wealth, but education, time, culture, and historical positioning. When farmers markets are specifically focused on food justice issues, they can amend many of these ills. While there are examples of farmers markets that seek to address food access, there is fairly limited academic research on this subject.

Additionally, research on what makes a farmers market successful largely pertains to mainstream farmers markets that serve those who can come at their leisure; thus, how can a farmers market that largely relies on SNAP or nutrition assistance customers ensure a certain level of profit, equitability, and simultaneously sustain farmers livelihoods; is there an achievable balance? Using community based participatory research, I hope to find answers to some of these questions, and create linkages where gaps might currently exist.

## **Discussion**

### **Introduction**

The Lewiston Farmers Market (LFM) roughly began in 2004 at Kennedy Park on Tuesday afternoons by farmers and community members who had a desire to revitalize the downtown and make fresh food available and affordable to all. In 2006, the market was taken over by the St. Mary's Nutrition Center in partnership with a market committee. With the help of St. Mary's, the Lewiston Farmers Market was the first in Maine to accept SNAP benefits and piloted the Maine Harvest Bucks program which has become a standard across all Maine Markets. In 2010, upon desire for greater growth and proximity to the urban core, the market moved from Kennedy Park to its highly visible location at the Bates Mill 5 complex. During the 11 year time period that the market was located here, its ability to address food insecurity, cultivate a community gathering space, and spur a following grew immensely. While COVID provided a hit to many industries, farmers markets experienced an initial boost as shopping outdoors was viewed as a safer alternative; thus, the market experienced unprecedented sales and a 116% increase in Maine Harvest Buck redemption, which can be directly tied to SNAP sales and vendor profit. Around this time, St. Mary transitioned a lot of their power over to the newly formed Lewiston Farmers Market Association (LFMA); this included a multi-stakeholder Board of Directors made up of farmers, community members, and local business owners. At this time, the market still receives the support of St. Marys but they are no longer in charge of the market's complete operation. Around this time, the LFM moved again to its current location at Oxford and Lincoln St. near the riverfront.

While I had the ability to work with and interview a variety of individuals in connection to the farmers market, I began my evaluation of the Lewiston Farmers Market by speaking with Sherie Blumenthal, the community programs manager at the St. Mary's Nutrition Center, and treasurer of the Lewiston Farmers Market, where she has been involved for more than 15 years. The research I have been able to conduct with Sherie's help is centered in community based participatory research; I hope that the information I find and results I draw are pertinent and interesting to her, and the rest of the Lewiston Market. With her help, I have been able to envision the past, present and future of the Lewiston Farmers Market and how it fits into the greater food system in Maine. Sherie began our conversation by emphasizing that the Lewiston market is uniquely sponsored and supported by the St. Mary's Nutrition Center, when traditionally, Farmers Markets do not have external managerial and economic support. Rather, Farmers Markets are commonly the result of a collective of farmers or community members, or exist as their own LLC/nonprofit. For example, the Cumberland and Falmouth Farmers Markets are their own non-profits, funded through community sponsors and vendor fees, and run by independent board members.

People tend to associate farmers markets as wealthy, exclusive spaces; in contrast to this, the Lewiston Market plays a very different role in that it is explicitly a food justice operation. This is unique in that farmers markets often seek to increase access to local food and support local agriculture, but don't do the work that is necessary to disseminate systemic inequalities and barriers to access. Because of its direct connection with the St. Mary's Nutrition Center, its location in an eclectic and diverse community, and its central location in the downtown, the LFM actively supports food justice

initiatives and practices that increase access to local, good food for all. Sherie pointed out that the market is strategically positioned to be within a mile of the poorest census tracts in urban maine, making it highly accessible by public transport and foot (US Census 2020; CFA 2013). Ben Daley from Chirp Creek Farm and Mahamed from New Roots, both agreed that while profits are an important reason to sell at farmers markets, both would continue to sell at Lewiston regardless of circumstances because the LFM provides a sense of community, the most food programming, and an opportunity to interact with a diverse customer base.

In 2021, the Lewiston Farmers market was forced to move from their long term location at the Bates Mill to 2 Oxford and 75 Lincoln Street in Downtown Lewiston for their 2022 season. The former location at the Bates Mill was adjacent to both the busy streets of Main and Canal and was highly visible, easily accessible, and trafficked by car and foot. While merely across the street, the new location lacks the luxury of visibility and “free advertising” due to its subdued location on Lincoln St. The move is a result of the remediation of Bates Mill 5 by developer Tom Platz, who is responsible for the revitalization of the historic Bates Mill Complex which now is home to Baxter Brewing Co., Fishbones Grill, Northeast Bank and a variety of other businesses (Platz Associates 2021). The Market’s inconvenient new location has limited its ability to be a community centerpiece and consistently reach an expansive customer base.

To provide context to the information I garnered from speaking with Sherie, I have also reached out to a few Lewiston Market vendors, and other general farmers. After sending introductory emails, I set up quick interviews, either over the phone or on zoom,

to ask some questions about farmers markets in general and what it's like to sell at the LFM (when applicable). To view these questions, refer to Appendix A.

To begin, I reached out to Chirp Creek Farm and the New Roots Cooperative Farm, a collective of Somali Bantus growing culturally appropriate produce in Lewiston. The goal of these conversations was to understand how vendors/farmers perceive the Lewiston Market and its successes, WIC/SNAP benefits, areas in which they feel the market could improve and how the Lewiston market differs from other markets. Additionally, I spoke with Liberation Farms, which operates out of Lewiston and Wales, ME. Liberation Farms functions very similarly to New Roots in the sense of their mission, growing practices, and forms of profiting. Yet, while Liberation Farms operations are centered in Lewiston, they do not sell at the Lewiston Farmers market. Thus, when I spoke with Jacob Morton, the farm coordinator, in addition to my baseline set of questions, I also asked some questions that would help me understand the decision behind not selling at the Lewiston market. To view these, refer to Appendix B.

Initially, Jacob didn't know why Liberation Farms did not sell at Lewiston when proximity is a determining factor in where they decide to sell. Indicative of their care for community relationships, shortly after, Jacob followed up with me and informed me that he had a chance to ask the rest of the staff the questions he could not answer. He revealed that Liberation Farms does not sell at the LFM because "Cultivating Community and possibly New Roots, two organizations similar to us, were/are already vendors at the Lewiston Market, and we didn't want to create competition with them, we've wanted our relationship with them to maintain a spirit of partnership/allyship, even if we are not directly partnering on a specific project" (Morton). This shows the intense care for the

community that the vendors seek to curate at the market. Unfortunately, one could also view this as a restriction of the market's. The desire for justice ultimately overshadows the desire for growth, which can be viewed as a limitation on behalf of vendors who do not have the means for justice to be central to their business. As I will describe in the next section, having a diverse vendor base is key to customer satisfaction; since the market and its vendors are more concerned with access and community, there is a limit to what the market is able to provide.

The market's move in 2021 uncovered new challenges for the market. The Creation of the LFMA concentrated power and responsibility in a committee that was new and inexperienced; while this is not indicative of how successful a market might be, Stephenson views it as an "area of risk" (Stephenson 2006, 18). This risk increases when we consider that the market has had high manager turnover and currently does not have an active manager. A concern throughout Maine is its aging population. For the LFM, this concern exists as many vendors are nearing retirement and exiting the market. While COVID initially led to an increase in market attendance, the pandemic created conditions that pushed many farmers and vendors out of the industry as farming became an unviable means to preserve their livelihood. Lastly, and what I believe is one of the most influencing factors, is the markets move to a temporary home with uncertain development. This move has led to a decrease in patronage as it is less visible, less inviting, and less accessible. As people come to the market's former location, they will not waste time trying to find where it has moved to. This complicates the market's ability to promote themselves as a permanent pillar of the community. Thus, one of the main



things on the LFMA's agenda is the desire to secure a lasting home for the market (Lewiston Farmers Market 2023).

## Case Study Analysis

What makes a market successful? Why do they fail? According to a study conducted in 2008 in tangent with Oregon State University, researchers found 5 reasons why markets fail: (1) small size, (2) low revenue, (3) unpaid or underpaid managers, (4) patron desire for more fresh produce, and (5) high manager turnover. For farmers markets, revenue is the money that a market brings in that is used to run the market; a market cannot profit from any revenue that they bring in. Small size is related to the inability to “attract additional customers because they do not have sufficient vendors but cannot attract additional vendors because they don't have sufficient customers” (Stephenson 188); small markets are unable to offer as much variety within products as larger markets. According to Stephenson, patrons reflected a desire for more fruits, vegetables, fish and meat to make a trip to the market worthwhile (Stephenson 11). For farmers markets, managers are in charge of general functioning, ranging from ensuring cooperation between vendors to conducting the SNAP table to planning for upcoming markets. High manager turnover contributes to the inability to attract more vendors because it proves that there is a lack of consistency within a market and can be an indication of a poorly run operation. Manager turnover is oftentimes linked to a market's inability to pay their manager a living wage. All of these factors coincide in a market's inability to bring in sufficient revenue, which is a clear indicator of a struggling market.

Lewiston’s success as a market is rooted in their food justice based mission. Yet, this also presents challenges relating to the market's ability to succeed in the long term. Of the predictors of failure that I listed earlier, the LFM has experienced many of them: the market has recently lost its manager, it has had high vendor turnover due to COVID,

they are a fairly small market with ~12 vendors and lastly, they have had a decrease in patrons within the past few years. One reason that the Lewiston market has experienced changes in attendance is due to their location change. Sherie Blumenthal stated that if people went to the market's former location and it was not there, people will simply leave rather than attempting to figure out where it may have moved to. Additionally,  $\frac{1}{3}$  of Lewiston's customer base are SNAP users. Thus, in 2022, when the Maine Harvest Bucks program, which provides bonus dollars to spend on fruits and vegetables for SNAP users, was cut from a 100% to a 50% match, the incentive for SNAP users to shop at a farmers market was decreased. For a market composed of many SNAP users, a change like this could have a large impact on the market's overall success. The only downside to this system was expressed by the New Roots Cooperative and is an issue unique to the Lewiston market; the language barrier that was often present created a general confusion among the Somali-farmers in regards to the system causing them to lose out on money that they were entitled to. Ultimately, in order to be an enduring and efficient justice oriented market, the Lewiston Farmers Market needs to ensure that not only is it accessible to low-income individuals and the community, but profitable for vendors alike.

Within this case study analysis, I am interested in markets that fulfill all of these different forms, within areas that have similarities to Lewiston in regards to its demographic, city history, or market mission. Thus, I will be providing an overview and analysis of the Lowell, MA farmers market at Mill No. 5, the Brunswick Winter Market located in the Fort Andross Mill and the Farm Fresh Providence RI market located in their non-profit headquarters. Each market provides a different experience and is rooted in a different mission. Ultimately, there is much the Lewiston market can learn from these

and similarly much that Lewiston accomplishes that these markets do not. I am intrigued by each market's indoor location and what each manager believes is the reason for their market's success. For each of these locations, I asked a set of basic questions to understand the general functions of the market, including who they serve, their goals, where they derive their funding from, and information about their vendors. To view these questions, refer to Appendix C. For each market, I asked questions that were specific to location, market structure, and operation times; the questions for each location can be viewed in Appendix D. Ultimately, for each case study, I hope to provide context to the cities in which the farmers markets are located to justify how they relate to Lewiston, in terms of demographics, an interesting farmers market model, or relevant economic and cultural histories. I will then proceed to provide an overview of each farmers market, focusing on what the markets accomplish and where they struggle to ultimately extract characteristics from each that would benefit the Lewiston Farmers Market.

## **Lowell, MA**

Lowell is often seen as the center of the industrial revolution in the United States due to the high concentration of textile mills that were located there during the early 1800s. The mills introduced new meaning to areas of Massachusetts that were previously dependent upon slave labor by harnessing the city's resources for waterpower (Lowell CFA 15). By transitioning to manufacturing, the Lowell mill system created new opportunities for employment, extending to women, and triggered the formation of urban city centers. This led migration into the city and periods of economic prosperity that extended beyond Lowell to the rest of Massachusetts and New England. Yet, because the mill industry did not produce diversified economies, it could not adapt to the changes in social and market demands. Thus, the mill system was not resilient. The quick economic boom that Lowell experienced was followed by a quick economic collapse once the demand for manufactured goods decreased. The mills began to decline around the 1850s, with the city's first textile firm, the Lowell Manufacturing Company, closing in 1914 (Lowell National Historical Park Handbook). Overtime, the mills, which brought temporary prosperity, shut their doors, leaving large buildings vacant, populations in decline, low levels of education, and a city wrought with economic instability.

While the mill industries themselves may have disappeared, the social systems created by the mills are very much still intact. In 2013, a Community Food Assessment was conducted in Lowell, very similar to that which occurred in Lewiston. The Lowell CFA's goal was to create a picture of the Lowell food system that empowers voices and attempts to pass meaningful policy (Lowell CFA 13). The CFA found that: 50% of current residents are immigrants and refugees, from "Cambodia, Laos, Latin America,

and other parts of the world”, poverty rates are estimated at 17.6%, and 75% of school children are eligible for free and reduced lunches (ibid 15). Considering that the city of Lowell was predicated upon mill related industries, the city's demographics, specifically the socioeconomic status of many of its residents and the large immigrant population, are not surprising.

The CFA report revealed many similar traits between Lowell and Lewiston, indicating the extent the mills influenced city development (Lowell CFA 5). Yet, Lewiston experienced the decline of the mills after Lowell. Beyond the report, the two cities exhibit many cultural, social and economic similarities that are largely attributed to their mill history. As noted above, many people immigrated to Lowell in the heyday of the mills due to the economic and employment opportunities they provided. The cities of Lewiston and Lowell have continued to be defined by these immigrant populations, both in the past and in the present. Immigrants from Africa in Lewiston and Asian and South American countries in Lowell have filled the vacancies left when people departed as the mills closed. Immigrants have played a key role in the revitalization of both cities. In Lowell, immigrants comprise  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the working population and contribute approximately \$66 million in state and local taxes (Dooling 2019); according to the *New American Economy*, refugees in Lewiston have not only revived the agricultural economy that was historically present in the area, but their presence has coincided with a decrease in crime and the first increase in population the city has seen in 30 years (New American Economy 2016).

#### **Lowell Farmers Market at Mill No. 5**

While there are two main farmers markets within Lowell that have attempted to deal with food insecurity in the area, I will be providing an analysis of the farmers market located at Mill No. 5, an old mill space that has been renovated into an indoor streetscape which houses not only the farmers market, but also an old fashioned soda shop, a flea market/bazaar, a coffee shop, and a theater. While historically, Lowell was not a part of the agricultural community that surrounded some areas outside of the city, periods of revitalization became tied to food as issues relating to food security coincided with periods of economic decline. The new demographic of individuals in Lowell ultimately forced the city to reshape its identity surrounding food as immigrants introduced new foods and produce previously unfamiliar to many. While the mill was not renovated with the intention of housing the farmers market, it ultimately emerged as a space that activated the downtown neighborhood by supporting local businesses and highlighting the importance of food in the community. In my interview with Jessica Bonifas, the market's manager, she stated that the farmers market's location in the mill created a "gathering spot" that seeks to "support local farmers and food producers, build the local food economy and increase food access to people in the community".

Mill No. 5 is an intentional operation. In an effort to challenge the traditional development of vacant building spaces into luxury condos, Jim Lichoulas, a developer with a focus on historical preservation and sustainable design, took over the mill with the goal of creating a space by and for the community; these characteristics extend to the farmers market. As a developer, Lichoulas funded the development of the mill space with the afterthought of using the space to host the mill; the market has become a defining factor of the space's vision, as the other businesses are occupied by local restaurants,

vendors and cafes that are startups run by Lowell community members. Thus, “healthy fresh food has become front and center in the Mill’s community design— [its] what brings people to the mill and keeps them coming back” (Hauck 2022).

Currently, the Farmers Market at Mill No. 5 occurs every Sunday throughout the entire year from 10 am to 1 pm. Located on the 4th floor, the market is integrated with the rest of the shops in the mill. Currently, the market hosts 8 weekly vendors that sell the basics one would expect to find at the farmers market: eggs, meat, bread, dairy and produce. On top of that, there are 7 pop-up vendors that rotate on a bi-weekly or monthly basis; they sell products ranging from hot sauce to dog treats.

### **Funding**

The farmers market derives its funding from two main sources. Because the farmers market is run by the mill, the market is a beneficiary of funds that are generated by the mill. Additionally, each week, vendors are required to pay \$25 to secure their spot. Outside of these sources, the market does not receive any additional funding or sponsorship from other organizations, non profits, or agencies. In return, the market provides assistance to the vendors, offering electricity hookups when needed, free parking, tables and chairs, and market employees that help to carry in and out items from the loading dock. Jessica Bonifas believes that the support the market offers their vendors is crucial to distinguish them from other markets and ensure low vendor turnover. By providing a space for new businesses, often those within the food sector, to sell their goods, the farmers market is enhancing local businesses ensuring that more money stays in the local economy. The farmers market also offers incentives that work to achieve this



goal, such as providing vendors with discounts to local shops and businesses in the mill, and posting on social media. The market actively provides a space for new businesses to market their products and see how they are received by customers. Having happy vendors is dependent upon providing benefits that make selling at markets easier and increasing community connectivity; accomplishing these goals is necessary in achieving a successful market.

### **Food Justice Approach**

Historically, farmers markets have been an important way to increase access to local, nutritious food. Yet, without a specific focus on food justice and access, farmers markets can reproduce food inequality by only appealing to the middle to upper class. According to the US census, 17% of Lowell residents rely on food assistance; in my conversation with Jessica, she stated that there are ~50 different languages spoken throughout Lowell. In order to serve the entire community rather than a selective audience, the market has to take implicit and explicit actions; starting in 2022, the market began accepting SNAP and WIC benefits using the welcome table as the main point of sale. This change benefits the community by increasing food access and bringing in greater revenue for vendors within New England and the local economy (since the market only allows vendors within the local area). It has brought an increase in sales by around \$200-300 at the indoor markets and ~\$600 when the market is located outdoors. In order to combat the language barrier, the market provides food nutrition pamphlets in a variety of languages. Recognizing that the market only runs on Sundays, vendors and farmers have gone out of their way to ensure that the food justice mission extends beyond the market's hours of operation. In particular, Justin Chase, the founder of North of Boston,

has helped the market extend their influence. The farmers market allows Chase to meaningfully connect with his customers; in one interaction, an elderly Cambodian-American woman gifted him a bag of culturally specific seeds, asking him to grow crops important to the community of Cambodian-Americans that have played a large role in revitalizing Lowell (Hauck 2023); thus started an expansion of the crops offered at the farmers market to include produce that is reflective of the community in which the market serves. Additionally, Chase also partners with the Lowell Transition Center by providing them with fresh produce and employing people from the center (Jessica Bonifas).

### **Mission Statement**

Implicit action can be seen by the way the market's bylaws and mission affect the market's atmosphere. The set of rules outlined by the market and the mill dictate the types of vendors and businesses that are allowed to sell to ensure that everyone at the market derives meaning from the same point of departure. The market seeks to become a place of community that all people feel welcome at and comfortable spending time in. Building this sense of community extends beyond when the market is held on Sundays; in addition to outreach on the vendor level, the market partners with local non-profits by donating to them and allowing them to table at the market. The market attempts to integrate the community from a variety of angles and thus, provides a space for local musicians to share their music with those spending time at the market. Bonifas states that in tangent with the market/mill's goal, the space welcomes anyone who chooses to visit, regardless if they are able to and choose to spend money there. The farmers market is an indoor streetscape that physically represents the Lowell community by investing in the people,

the local food economy and subsequently decreasing food insecurity and evoking the spirit of Lowell.

### **Indoor Location**

One of the most interesting features of this market is its indoor location. As I have referred to a few times, the market is located within Mill No. 5, the oldest remaining structure of the Appleton Mill Complex built in 1873 for the Appleton Mill Company. While the building was vacant for a period of 50 years, the mill is now a center of food and culture for the city of Lowell. Prior to my conversation with Jessica, I was interested in how the indoor space affected feelings of permanence at the market; in an attempt to keep the conversation neutral, I asked her how the indoor location differentiated the market from other farmers markets, if at all. While the indoor space does offer a lot of benefits to the market, Jessica recounted that there are a few drawbacks as well. The indoor space provides shelter from any weather event that Lowell might experience throughout the year. Located in New England, it is not abnormal for late season snowstorms in April, and blistering cold days in May, when many farmers markets return for the season. Thus, the market is able to continuously support its mission and its farmers regardless of the conditions outside. Additionally, the indoor location allows vendors to have permanent set ups, eliminating the need to set up/down each week. The mill provides electricity, help when loading products in and out of the building and free parking. Additionally, because the mill acts as an event space and hosts a variety of other food and retail stores, the market has the means to host local musicians and performers at the market each week. Within the halls of the market, there is a small stage surrounded by chairs and tables where customers can enjoy their purchases, from both the market and

the nearby businesses, while listening to the music. By including community members from other sectors and operating amidst the other businesses, the market is incorporating a wide range of individuals in the food justice mission.



Image 5: Ruby and the Groove performing at Mill No. 5. Source @FarmLowell on instagram.

The market took to the streets for the first time during the summer of 2022, allowing the market to compare the two means of operation. When outside, vendors must provide their own stall setups and there is limited access to electricity. Yet, Jessica recounted that the switch to an outdoor market during the summer season led to many unexpected perks. Additionally, while the indoor market space has the ability to increase accessibility in regards to mimicking a consistent climate and even, easily mobile surfaces, there have been instances in which the elevators have broken, limiting access to the market, which is located on the 4th floor, to specifically the staircase. Thus, the outdoor market is potentially easier to access by foot, as it is located on the sidewalk at street level. When the market is outside, due to the ability for the community to see it, a block party of sorts is created. As people walk through the market, in the streets of Lowell, the gap between

the places we live, eat, and work is minimized; rather, a space that is reflective of where people live is created.



Image 6: Farmers Market at Mill No. 5, outdoors. Source: @farmlowell on instagram.

The decision to host the market on the street was a temporary solution to the building's elevator being broken. During this first outdoor market, vendors sold out of many products, an unprecedented occurrence. As I mentioned earlier, when the market was outside, it generated more money in SNAP (\$600 vs. \$200/300), thus indicating that the market was reaching more food insecure individuals and was more successfully achieving its overarching goal. Thus, the indoor model provides the vendors with a variety of time saving benefits, yet the outdoor market incentivizes customers' willingness to purchase.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses**

Ultimately, the market at Mill No. 5 is a part of a greater project to revitalize once decrepit and abandoned mill buildings that were reminiscent of the city's industrial past. The market's location in Mill No. 5 merges the two organizations missions, thus positioning the market to play a role in the greater endeavor to revitalize the city of Lowell and conversely, making the mill take on a food justice mission. Outside of these

factors, the market's location in the mill does not necessarily contribute to the market's success, both financially and socially. What I found most interesting about the market at Mill No. 5 was the insight it provided into the importance of creating a sense of community at a farmers market; by connecting the vendors, the customers, the local musicians, and other businesses, the market is making all of these different groups care about food justice; it allows them contribute to the food justice movement in a way that is applicable to their knowledge and industry. Increasing access to local food goes beyond making sure that people have the means to access it; it includes the physical ability to exist in a space, the confidence to communicate one's needs, and the feeling that one is socially understood and included. These are all factors that the Farmers Market at Mill No. 5 successfully accomplishes that is dependent on its location within the mill. Located below is a poster advertising the market. This image visually represents the intersections of spaces and lives that the market seeks to accomplish.



Image 7: Event Poster by The Farmers Market at Mill No. 5, entailing a specific vendor, the time and location, and advertising a family matinee occurring at a business in the mill.

## Brunswick, ME

While Brunswick and Lewiston share many commonalities, including proximity to one another, being home to small liberal arts schools, respectively Bowdoin and Bates, and both being former mill towns, the towns and their ensuing communities are vastly different. Image 8 and 9 below show a side by side comparison of Brunswick’s downtown on the left and Lewiston’s downtown on the right.



Image 8: on the left is Main St. in Brunswick; Source: Down East Magazine. Image 9: On the right is Lisbon St. in Lewiston; @kennethczirkel.

Brunswick’s downtown is often described as quaint and the ideal college town, filled with small boutiques, restaurants, cafes and quirky coffee shops. Conversely, Lewiston has been assigned the racist and xenophobic name the “dirty Lew”. Beyond mere rhetoric, overall, Brunswick has a wealthier, whiter, and older population: 91.8% of the population is white, 20.8% are over the age of 65, and 8.2% of the population lives below the poverty line (US Census 2022). These numbers tend to be in line with the state averages, making Lewiston somewhat of an outlier

Lewiston and Brunswick both have a history that is rooted in mill industries, as seen by the buildings that prominently remain in each city. In 1809 the Brunswick Cotton Manufacturing Company opened the first cotton mill in Maine, the Fort Andross Mill. In 1857 the struggling mill was bought by the Cabot Family of Boston to create the Cabot

Manufacturing Company. Under the ownership of the Cabots, the town rapidly began to expand. People moved into Brunswick from Quebec, tenements were built to house the new population, and even led to the building of the bridge which connects Brunswick and Topsham. At its peak, the mill controlled 30 acres in Brunswick; but, in the early to mid 1900s, the New England Mills began a slow decline. In the 1980s the Fort Andross Mill was purchased by Coleman Burke and Waterfront Maine; after constant renovation, the mill now houses a variety of businesses, restaurants, offices, and most notably, Cabot Mill Antiques and the Brunswick Winter Farmers Market (Bertlesman 2021). While the city was able to grow because of the opportunities the mills created, “agriculture always has played a central role in the life of Brunswick” and that must not be ignored (CPUSC 2022, 5). Since the mid 1900s, the amount of farms in Maine has gradually decreased as land value has gone up, there are fewer markets to sell at, and increased competition with large-scale industrial food production and development (ibid, 4). The decline of both of these industries is central to the identity of Brunswick.

### **Brunswick Winter Market**

The Brunswick Winter Farmers Market takes place every Saturday from 9 to 12:30 pm throughout the winter season. During the winter months, it is the only market, yet during the summer, when the winter market shuts its door, two others emerge, the Brunswick farmers market, hosted on the town green, and the Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust market hosted by Crystal Spring Farms; all three of these markets operate independent of each other.



As noted above, the number of people in poverty in Brunswick is approximately half of that in Lewiston: 8.2% in Brunswick vs. 16.3% in Lewiston (US Census 2022). Food security and nutrition is largely connected to poverty. In Lewiston, 35.96% of the population relies on SNAP while in Brunswick only 13.2% rely on SNAP (CFA Lewiston 2012; Merrymeeting Food Council 2015, 11). Brunswick has a variety of food-centered non-profits that seek to increase the city as well as the coastal regions' access to good food. Besides the farmers market, Brunswick is home to the Mid-Coast Hunger Prevention Program and the Merrymeeting Food Council. While I cannot speak for the mission of the other farmers markets located in Brunswick during the summer, the Brunswick Winter Farmers Market does not make food justice as central to the market's mission as the Lewiston market. Jinger Howell, the president of the market stated that a large portion of customers at the Brunswick market are middle aged, retired, well off individuals; a demographic which tends to mimic the greater Brunswick area. While Jinger passionately stated that the market appeals to everyone with “no restrictions for who can shop”, by not having a target audience, it does not actively try to bring in a more diverse customer base. Additionally, Jinger recounted that during Covid, the market experienced a period of vendor turnover that was unprecedented. Thus, it is difficult to cultivate a vendor base that is ethnically diverse; rather, the market seeks to accept vendors on the basis of what product gap they might fill. It is still important to note that the market still has a thriving SNAP program; during the 2022 season so far, SNAP has brought in \$3,135 in revenue. Prior to this year, each acceptance of SNAP was on a vendor by vendor basis; now, all snap transactions take place at the dedicated market manager table.

Within the market's bylaws, the BWFM states that "the Mission of this organization is to provide a wintertime outlet for local Maine agricultural and related products and to help promote small-scale agricultural and rural enterprise" (Brunswick Winter Market Bylaws 2018). Thus, the market's mission lies in their desire to support local agriculture and farmers rather than necessarily operate as one that targets food insecurity, such as the Lewiston market. On the basis of the town's needs, and the agricultural community that surrounds the Brunswick-Topsham area, it makes sense that this is the mission the market embodies.

### **Vendor-led Model**

The winter market is currently operating within its fifteenth year and credits its long term success to its vendor-led model. While a market can create community on a variety of levels, the Brunswick winter market specifically states that it "seeks to provide a community gathering place that nurtures awareness of the rural agricultural lifestyle... the success of which depends on the cooperation and joint effort of the vendors as a whole" (BWM Bylaws, 2018). Currently, the market has around forty-five vendors that join for the entire season. According to Jinger and the bylaws, new vendors must apply for admission, where they specifically indicate what they will contribute to the market. The existing cohort of vendors and the board, which is made up of vendors, then vote on which members each year will get admitted into the market. This model allows the vendors to curate a selling experience that is specific to their needs and the markets; new vendors must fill a specific role within the market to ensure a variety of product offerings. Jinger recounted that the market experiences low levels of vendor turnover, with the exception being COVID, when many vendors abandoned their agricultural

career in general. Thus, the vendor led model most directly leads to a consistent vendor basis largely due to the fact that their voices are consistently being heard by their peers. And, as noted earlier, a market's ability to succeed is largely attributed to its ability to maintain a consistent and reliable vendor base that has a variety of products to streamline shopping experiences.



Image 10: Goranson's Farm at the BWM

The vendor led model directly impacts where the market derives its funding. Jinger, the market's president, is a volunteer; participation on the board, including the secretary, treasurer, and committee, are all additional time commitments for the market's members. Because no one is getting paid for the work they do with the market, any money that the market curates is used specifically for the market's operation. The market rents the space within the mill, thus, the vendors pay the rent through the fees they pay for the season. For the entire season, each vendor pays \$825 or \$33 dollars per week. Each year, the landlords of the mill have increased the price to rent the space, thus increasing the vendor fee. Outside of this single fee, if a vendor wants electricity hookups, they have to pay an additional \$1.

Overall, farmers markets in general are known for their ability to bring a community together under the pretense of food and the BWM is no different. Similar to the Lowell, Lewiston, and as I will mention later Farm Fresh Market, the heart of the BWM lies in its community. This can be directly seen by the fact that the 45-vendor market is able to be sustained solely by volunteer efforts. Thus, the community that emerges is a conglomerate of all the different people who have a vested interest in the market, including those who attend, work, and support the market. Because of the model of the market and the increase in rent each year, starting during the 2022 season, musicians are treated as vendors and thus have a “stall” fee; knowing how much musicians and artists co-benefit from performing at the market, vendors came together to cover the “stall fee” so musicians would be able to perform for free at the market. Even though it may be a greater expense for the vendors, they are investing in community growth (Barbour et al. 33). Increasing the market's capabilities as a collaborative space for all is co-beneficial, many individuals state that farmers markets are appealing because they re-orient food “as community (instead of commodity)... made possible by human relationships” (Starr 484); people shop at farmers markets rather than grocery stores for these reason. Thus, ensuring a consistent, inclusive and accessible space is essential for the long term success of the market.

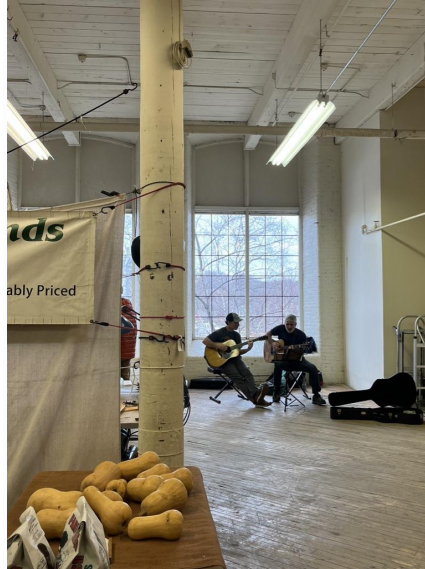


Image 11: Acoustic Music at the Brunswick Winter Market

I was able to attend the market on Saturday March 18th, 2023, and observe the energy and interactions first hand. I got to talk with a few vendors at the market: Merrymeeting Bay Hemp Company and Libellula Olive Oil. While I was only able to speak with the olive oil vendor briefly, it was clear how highly they regarded the market. I got to speak for longer with Chas and Linda Gill, the founding farmers of the Merrymeeting Bay Hemp Co. Their willingness and eagerness to speak with me about their products, farm, and the market speaks to the nature of what community means at the BWM. When I spoke with Ben Daley of Chirp Creek Farm, he stated his desire to sell at the Lewiston Farmers Market regardless of the profits he conjures due to aspects of community described within my analysis of Lewiston. The sentiments recounted by Linda Gill mimicked what Ben felt; Linda said that going to the market and interacting with customers face to face provides them the opportunity to explain their products, offer samples, and connect a story/name to a once inanimate product. She stated that it became especially clear how special this was when Covid limited in-person interactions.

## **Benefits of a Winter Market**

The market plays a key role in ensuring continuous access to local and nutritious food. While many assume that winter hinders farmers ability to grow, new agricultural technology such as greenhouses and hydroponics allows farmers to grow year round; as long as farmers are growing food and working, they are in need of customers to sustain their livelihoods. Winter farmers markets allow immediate access to produce, support for local farmers, and pathways for individuals using food assistance to have consistent access to nutritious food (Letizia). Supporting local farmers ensures the continual presence of agriculture within the local community. The winter farmers market supports sustainable food systems (CFA 2013). Agriculture within communities supports a “good food system”, limits large scale development and gentrification, and ensures money stays within the local economy. Additionally, farmers markets are essential for their ability to provide fresh produce to marginalized communities. The Lewiston Community Food Assessment states one of the main factors that affects how we eat is “how much time we have ” and inconvenience (10). A winter market, that is protected from the outdoors, in a permanent location, and provides year round access to nutritious foods increases the confidence food insecure individuals that their nutrition needs will be met on a more consistent basis; this is opposed to wasting ones time attempting to attend a market that may not be running due to weather or forced to change locations.

One similarity within all of the markets I am examining is their indoor location. For example, Jinger states that the BWM location within the Fort Andross Mill during the winter months plays a large role in its ability to accomplish its goals and succeed; the building has huge windows which bring in light and help curate that outdoor feeling so

familiar to farmers markets, it is adjacent to Topshams small but present business center, and it allows the market to take place regardless of the harsh Maine winters outside. The market is able to offer both vendor and customer parking even while located in the busy downtown area, increasing ease and efficiency. Additionally, because the space solely houses the market, vendors are able to have their tables and stalls set up for the entirety of the indoor season. Thus, each weekend, vendors only need to transport their products into the space, which the mill/market assists in this process by providing carts and access to a vehicle accessible loading dock. While the characteristics that benefit vendors, such as face to face interactions with customers and avoidance of middle-men, may outweigh the difficulties of selling at a market, being able to increase ease is an easy way to ensure a happy vendor base.

Additionally, the market's location within the mill places it in conversation to many other businesses and food venues, such as the Waterfront Flea Market, Fort Andross Antiques, Nomad Pizza, a bike shop, and a variety of other businesses and offices that support the greater area. Thus, people oftentimes slip in and out of the many different spaces, increasing diversity and random chance interactions. The market's location in such a historic and sightly building in the downtown area makes the market synonymous with Brunswick's core so that even though it may be inside, people are able to come to the market on random chance. While being vendor-run may limit the amount of funds the market has access to, Jinger states that this is a major factor in the market's ability to sustain this model because she does not believe that the market needs to advertise itself to the general community, saving the market money: "if people are interested, they will come".

## Summary

From my personal analysis of the market, based on interactions with the market manager, vendors and customers, I would attribute the market's success to the niche role it fills within Brunswick's winter food scene, its vendor run model, and its general location. As per the market's mission, it makes sense that the market is run by and for the vendors. When continually supported by its vendors, the market is self-sustaining with no additional costs outside of rent when it is continually supported by the vendors. It is in each vendor's best interest to invest time and effort into the market as their ability to succeed is dependent upon it. The sense of community that is created is a direct outcome of the fact that everyone involved in the market is invested in its success.

While the Lowell Market's manager spoke of some drawbacks in relation to the market's indoor location, Jinger did not speak the same sentiment. Rather, at least within my conversation with Jinger, it appears that the indoor location only benefits the market. Ultimately, the market does not worry about not being able to attract customers because it has a centralized location within Brunswick and there are people constantly in the mill, whether it be for the market, the antique fair, or to visit one of the many businesses. While the mill was not renovated with the market in mind, it is clear that the market has become synonymous with the mill, at least during the winter months. The only advertising that the mill does is placing a banner on the road, yet each morning, there is a line of people waiting to make their way into the market with constant business throughout the morning. Overall, the market would not be able to exist without the indoor location. While traditionally, farmers markets frantically search for an indoor location to host a winter market to complement their main summer market, the BWM has the



advantage that this is their existence naturally; they have a consistent location year after year and the stalls and vendors are picked with the indoor location in mind. The market does not need to fit within a set of parameters that is not natural to its existence.

While local agriculture may be the main focus of the market, it is impossible to not consider food security. The intersection between the two can be seen by the immense increase in revenue gained by vendors upon accepting SNAP benefits. In order for the market to be successful, it cannot determine who “gets” to support local agriculture, it must curate a space in which all people can, if they so desire. While there are de-facto food justice benefits, the market doesn't take much active action in addressing food insecurity in the area. By not marketing, there is a limited desire to invite people who might not know about the nutritional and economic benefits of farmers markets into the space, especially in a world where farmers markets get the reputation that they are expensive, upper middle class spaces.

## Providence, RI

A constant within all of the markets I've studied is their existence within cities whose roots are based in industrial economies; keeping with the trend, Providence grew into an established city with a built economy and population as a result of manufacturing, which arrived in the city in the mid 1800s (RISD Museum). Prior to switching to an industrial economy, Providence was once a farming hub. Rhode Island's first name was the "State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations", hinting at the overlap between the states agricultural history and the triangle slave trade (Rhode Island Historical Society). Prior to the industrial revolution, the state was largely influenced by its proximity to the coast. With an agricultural economy, the state was able to profit greatly from imports and exports out of the port on the Narragansett Bay and Rhode Island Sound; Its ideal location granted Rhode Island the privilege of land and sea based economies; goods ranged from sheep, horses, apples and timber, to whales, fish and other marine life (Ibid). The arrival of manufacturing built providence and the state of rhode island's economy by increasing industry diversity (Ibid). The manufacturing industry took particular interest in Providence due to its ports and proximity to Boston by train. Gradually, immigration to the area skyrocketed; the factories created a surplus of skilled and unskilled labor providing attractive employment opportunities. Ultimately, an eclectic mix of populations emerged in providence (The RISD Museum).

In comparison to Lewiston, the most obvious difference is their overall size; Providence's population as of 2021 is 189,692. Beyond providence also has a more diverse population, in terms of race and age: only 34.1% of the population are white alone and only 11% of the population is 65 and older. Similar to the other cities I've

examined, especially Lewiston and Brunswick, Providence is a center of education, home to Brown University, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence College and Rhode Island College. While Lewiston has a greater population of individuals who have graduated high school (83.5%) , Providence has a greater percentage of people who have a bachelor degree (33.3%). Thus, it is clear that higher education plays a large role in the city's overall makeup. Lastly, in order to understand a city's food system, besides race, the most important population parameter to examine is persons in poverty; of all three cities examined, Providence has the highest percentage of people in poverty: 21.5%. It is important to note that this alone does not provide an accurate portrayal of the city; for example, Providence has a higher median income than Lewiston and in 2018, Providence ranked third nationally for income inequality, with the wealthiest residents making 16.7 times more than the poorest (Berube 2018). In a city with a much larger population and encompassing area, it makes sense that these numbers appear more drastic.

To transpose this information onto the food system, I will begin by looking at Feeding America's Mind the Meal Gap Map, which states that Providence county experiences the highest rate of food insecurity in the state at 11.6% with 33% qualifying for SNAP (Feeding America). According to a study conducted in 2019 by a University of Rhode Island masters student, 17/39 census tracts in providence are considered food deserts, with the neighborhood of Woonsocket being the worst food desert in the state, having only one grocery store in the vicinity of 43,000 people (Huang 2019, 9; Shultz 2021).

In regards to these issues, as opposed to what smaller towns in the state of Maine and Massachusetts with much smaller populations are able to offer, the city of Providence

has a variety of food-justice related non-profits as well as city grants that seek to tackle these inequalities. Under a grant from the United States Department of Agriculture, the city offers all students, regardless of their need, free lunches. Within this case study, I will be analyzing the role that Farm Fresh RI plays in organizing a variety of farmers markets throughout the greater providence area. While they operate ~ 7 farmers markets throughout the city, I am most interested in their year round market, located at their non-profit headquarters in a custom-built facility in Providence.

### Farm Fresh Rhode Island



Image 12: Marketing Poster for the year round Farm Fresh Providence FM

Farm Fresh Rhode Island is a 501(c)3 Non-profit that was founded in 2004 by a Brown University student. According to their website, the organization's mission is to increase community access to local foods and grow a local food system that values the environment, health, and quality of life of both consumers and farmers. They have also adopted the *Food Solutions New England* “50 by 60” food vision, which aims to create a New England that can grow 50% of its own food by 2060; currently, 90% of the food

consumed comes from outside the region (Farm Fresh RI). Farm Fresh has a variety of programs that address food insecurity throughout Rhode Island. These include: Farmers Markets, Farm to School and Community Education, Bonus Bucks, Hope's Harvest, and Harvest Kitchen's culinary job training program (Farm Fresh 2023). To understand Farm Fresh's approach to managing and operating farmers markets as a non-profit, I spoke with Cara Mitchell, the Food Access Program Director. After speaking with Cara and conducting my own research, it is clear that all of the organization's programming seeks to target different aspects of food justice that ultimately manifest in a more sustainable and efficient food system.

The year-round Farmers Market is located at the non-profits headquarters in the Valley neighborhood, west of Providence's downtown. Two of Farm Fresh's other markets are located in Woonsocket and Central Falls, neighborhoods with the highest levels of food insecurity in Providence. While Farm Fresh gets a lot of requests to open new markets in different parts of the city, they only do so in areas with low levels of food security. The downtown providence market is open year round on Saturdays from 9am-1pm. During the winter, the market is the biggest in New England. For the months of March and April, the market has approximately 58 vendors, 3 food trucks and a community organization that tables each week. Yet, during the warmer months, when other markets start to open, the vendor base drops down to ~20.

Originally located inside the Hope Artiste Village in Pawtucket, RI, the market moved to its current location in 2022, upon completion of Farm Fresh's new facility, which began construction in 2016. The space is 60,000 sqft, with half dedicated to the organizations programming and operations, including the farmers market, and the other

half leased to small businesses that embody Farm Fresh’s mission: Anchor Toffee, New Harvest Coffee + Spirits, Providence Brewing Company, Red Tomato, Rhed's Hot Sauce, Robin Hollow Flowers, Tallulah’s Taqueria, and Wright’s Creamery.

The space was specifically made to foster community interaction; the hallways were measured to ensure a farmers market would fit, outside, the building is surrounded by green space that is made up of native plants and lastly, it supports local businesses.



Image 13: Building Plans for Farm Fresh’s Headquarters in Providence

For example, they sell Farm Fresh Totes that are made by a local printing and design company, Frog & Toad, and they also offer free composting. By purchasing a tote, individuals are supporting a small local business, artists, and the non profit; similarly, the cost to remove compost from one's home often hinders one's ability to do so, thus Farm Fresh is making sustainable home practices more accessible and supporting Black Earth Compost. All of the other vendors located inside the market are small businesses as well, meaning that Farm Fresh’s market is able to stimulate the local economy for those outside of the food and agriculture sector. Beyond community contribution, there are benefits to an indoor permanent space that are intrinsic to its structure. Since the market owns all of the space surrounding the market, they are able to provide free parking to vendors and

customers alike. Since the building was custom made for Farm Fresh, it is easily accessible for people with disabilities; the space eliminates barriers by having wide hallways, stroller parking, and convenient parking close to the market. On the same note, the market provides electrical hookups and a loading dock to help with products, services that aren't possible when a market is outdoors. Because the space is fit for a farmers market, the need for tents, chairs and additional equipment is removed. Cara shared similar sentiments to other market managers throughout New England, that by protecting vendors and shoppers from the harsh New England winters, Farm Fresh is able to continuously provide direct access year round to nutritious food for the food insecure population. Cara pointed out that farmers are normally members of food insecure populations, thus it is important to support their livelihoods during their less busy season.

While the market's indoor location does lead to many immediate benefits, there are also important drawbacks to consider. The contained nature of any space has the ability to enhance feelings of community, but can also be a space of intimidation for individuals of color. In 2021, Taylor et al conducted an analysis on rural and urban farmers markets in Michigan. Of the 79 markets they examined, 87.3% of the market managers, 79% of the vendors, and 76% of the customers were white; Michigan is not Maine, but these statistics can be used to understand the general make-up of farmers markets. For individuals of color, entering a space that lacks diversity among vendors and customers can lead to spaces being exclusionary, which indoor spaces may exacerbate (Freedman et al 2018, 496). Indoor spaces have the potential to feel trapping while outdoors spaces are expansive and inviting. It is also important to consider what motivates individuals to shop at a farmers market in the first place. Eating locally is often

viewed as committing to a sustainable life and living in harmony with nature; shopping at a farmers market is a means to “buy into” this notion and reconnect with the natural world. Thus, indoor markets do not fully align individuals with this value because, in the most basic sense, they separate people from the outside world. During the summer months, when there is a surplus of markets, Cara revealed that not only does the market's vendor base decrease, but customers are more likely to go to an outdoor market that embodies these desires.

### **Funding**

Oregon State University in 2006 conducted a report on why farmers markets fail. One of the quantifying parameters is understanding how the size of the market impacts its ability to function. According to the report, with ~58 vendors, Farm Fresh’s market would be categorized as a “large” market. Market size largely dictates what it needs in regards to funding, managerial effort, and community support. It is perilous to understand where a market currently, and in the future, derives its funding, as it is directly correlated to the market's functioning capacity. When I spoke with Cara Mitchell, I was interested in how Farm Fresh funded their various operations. As with almost every market, Farm Fresh charges a vendor fee that covers some expenses, a portion of the budget, and is largely used for maintenance purposes, such as paying for market management, printing, events, and publicity/advertising; in addition to this, there is a 50\$ application fee upon acceptance to the market (Farm Fresh Vendor Application). The farmers market is specifically included within the Food Access program; their budget is \$800,000 which is used for staffing, equipment, insurance, and voucher programs. But, these fees are by no means all encompassing and thus, Farm Fresh attends to a variety of different pipelines to



garner funding. The main forms that Cara outlined in our interview were: grants, personal fundraising, awards, and community sponsorships and partnerships. Because the non-profit is heavily established within the providence community, they are able to utilize their connections to garner support for the market and the organization. One of the most direct ways that Farms Fresh extends the influence of the farmers market to vulnerable communities is through their Bonus Bucks program, which provides a 100% matching bonus for shoppers using SNAP benefits; this has amounted to \$1,672,626. They are able to offer this programming through the Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) and private fundraising to cover additional needs. FINI provides grants that help people in low access communities who participate in SNAP increase their purchasing power at local food locals. Another way they have leveraged their size and influence to their advantage is by working with government organizations. Oftentimes, in order to receive grants, the government requires that organizations specifically outline how they plan to use funds, as well as definitive outcomes about where and how the money was used. Bigger organizations are more easily able to do so due to having a larger staff and experience crafting these types of proposals/reports. Farm Fresh has benefitted from partnerships with the Department of Human Services; the DHS distributed fliers through the mail to SNAP eligible households on how to apply and use SNAP benefits at farmers markets in Rhode Island. The last major benefit that Farm Fresh garners from the local and federal government is the use of AmeriCorp workers. The federal government pays employees to be employed at Farm Fresh. Through their labor, Farm Fresh is able to accomplish much more of their agenda; in the realm of nonprofits, labor is always lacking in comparison to the work that needs to be done.

Additionally, Farm Fresh has a variety of partnerships that increase their capacity to offer voucher programs. Vouchers are coupons that can be used to purchase fresh produce at farmers markets. They are distributed either through the market itself, or through partner organizations. Ultimately they allow the farmers market to invite more people to benefit from the market with no cost to the market. While I am focusing on the Providence market, Farm Fresh operates another pop-up market in Central Falls, RI that is located behind a WIC office that distributes checks. Thus, the office is able to direct WIC recipients directly to the market. While being on a busy street does increase visibility and random chance of attending the market, for food insecure individuals, Cara states that markets must go a step further in drawing people into them; elaborating that these partnerships rely on the strong sense of community that the market is able to cultivate through their mission, its vendors and its customers.

Ultimately, understanding where the market derives funding is necessary to see and understand its success. As important as it is for the market to profit so they are able to sustain operation, vendors share the same interest. Knowing that the local food system is only successful when it is sustainable for “the farmers and the eaters”, Cara and the rest of the farm fresh team want to ensure the market continues to be economically profitable for all (Farm Fresh RI). Since many farmers are food insecure as well, they are included in the population in which the organization seeks to address. Thus, their target audience must include food insecure groups and those with disposable incomes. Because individuals with disposable incomes are offered a variety of shopping experiences, the market knows that they have to encourage people to come to the market. This is done by communicating the additional benefits that accrue from shopping at a farmers market that

are not an aspect of a traditional grocery shopping experience, such as the feelings of community, belonging, and connection. Farm Fresh does so by curating a lively event calendar throughout all of their markets. Some examples of what they offer include, concert series, beer gardens that overlap with the market, educational demos and cooking competitions that use in season fruits and vegetables and kids days. These events integrate local food into more aspects of everyday life.



Image 14: Kids Day Flyer at the Armory Farmers Market, an Auxiliary of Farm Fresh

Another way the market derives funding is through their Market Mobile program. Market mobile functions in tangent to the market, and is a way to distribute produce to wholesale buyers such as schools, restaurants, hospitals, farm stands and food banks. Simply, it is an online farmers market. For many vendors, there is a desire to transition into wholesale due to the consistency that it awards. By doing the work needed to bridge this divide, in a way that vendors are still able to sell at farmers markets, Farm Fresh is ensuring greater profits from their vendors and simultaneously allows them to sustain their operations. Nonprofits are allowed to bring in revenue but they are not allowed to profit from it. The money they gain must be used towards operation costs. Farm fresh takes a cut of the money that is made through the Market Mobile program. Yet again, they are making it easier for vendors to continue selling at the market, they are sustaining

their operational needs which benefit the food insecure, and they are distributing local food to local businesses.

Throughout all of these modes of support lies the overarching theme of community. Farm Fresh is able to be successful due to the continual support from the community for Farm Fresh's mission. Largely due to the market's size and ingrained influence in the community, Farm Fresh is able to create an intersectional food system that addresses consumer and vendor food insecurity. Within my conversation with Cara, she said that community sponsorship is the most important condition in determining a market's success. Yet, this is simultaneously connected to the market's ability to retain vendors, create an encapsulating sense of community and be located in a permanent and inviting space. These factors combine to allow organizations to provide the most relief to the community in which they are in.

## Analysis and Recommendations

Each case study provides a different lens into what makes a market successful. As I mentioned earlier, I choose each market because of how they either relate to Lewiston, in regards to their history or demographics, or because they embody something that the Lewiston market can adopt. Overall, I think all of the markets I have examined have a larger customer base, more vendors, and are more established in general, increasing the ease in which they are able to operate in comparison to Lewiston. But, I think there is still a lot the Lewiston market can learn regardless of these limitations.

Generally speaking, there are core components of a farmers market that each case study and the Lewiston market exhibit. These characteristics are to a degree synonymous with a farmers market. Because individuals are drawn to a farmers market for the sense of community that they embody, it is integral that farmers markets offer events or benefits that appeal to this desire. Each market offered some sort of live music. The musicians can be either paid or busking; at Lowell, the musicians are paid while at Brunswick, the vendors cover the cost that is required for the musicians to utilize the space. At Lewiston, while music isn't offered every week, they also offer collaborations with *L/A Arts*, the ArtVan, and craft related events, such as face painting. In order to get the word out about the market, the Lewiston, Lowell and Providence markets put out fliers, either digitally or in person. Conversely, the BWM does not believe in marketing outside of the banner that they place in the city's downtown. For the Lewiston market, which has not maintained a consistent location, it is essential to vocalize these changes to the community. Oftentimes, a newsletter can also be used to highlight certain vendors, increasing vendor satisfaction. All of the markets make sure to offer products that go beyond what one would

traditionally expect at a farmers market; in some cases, pop-up vendors will bring these products. This is to not only support small and growing businesses in the area, but to make the farmers market a place you can go for all of your needs.

The Providence market is one of the most interesting models to analyze in relation to Lewiston; understanding how the market is supported by a food-access nonprofit provides a very interesting comparative analysis. While the Farm Fresh manager stated that the market is not their biggest project, a lot of their work manifests in the market, including their outreach capacity; they operate throughout a variety of neighborhoods in Providence, and their building is a hub of food security. Conversely, St. Mary's main focus is operating nutrition education programs, such as community gardens, cooking programs, youth leadership training, and a food pantry while providing tangential support to the LFM. Thus, the Providence farmers market is one of Farm Fresh's most important projects while the Food Pantry is St. Mary's main priority and the market is an auxiliary project. Naturally, because Farm Fresh is a bigger organization in a bigger city, their capacity of operations, funding, and sponsorship is greater; FF has upwards of 60 sponsors, while St. Mary's main supporters are the Good Shepherd Food Bank (GSFB), Mainers Feeding Mainers, Androscoggin Gleaners, New Roots Cooperative Farm and volunteers. This combined with the fact that the food pantry is St. Mary's main priority rather than the market, makes the market benefit less from its connection to a nonprofit than the Providence Farm Fresh market.

Regardless of their differences, there is still a lot that the Lewiston market can learn from Farm Fresh's organization-market relationship. First of all, St. Mary's has a variety of sponsors and connections that can be used to their advantage and greatly

impact the market. For example, when I spoke with Cara Mitchell, she stated that even more than location, community partnerships have caused the greatest positive change. The Lewiston Market can reassess their current relationships to see how they can make them more efficient, in terms of benefits gained. For example, there are examples of Food Banks partnering with farmers market by issuing grants that allow them to purchase surplus food from vendors; while the three managers I interviewed stated that many farmers will donate excess food to gleaners and local organizations, it is not realistic to expect them to do so at the loss of profit. In the case of Lewiston, they already have a defined relationship with the Good Shepard Food Bank. The LFM historically has had a difficult time creating enduring profit for its vendors while simultaneously being able to commit to a food justice mission. Garnering this partnership would allow the LFM to support its vendors and increase the amount of fresh local food available at the GSF. Another example of using St. Mary's community roots would be reaching out to the city to inquire about sending out SNAP and event fliers through the mail to increase awareness about the market. As the most established food-based nonprofit in the area, it is important that the LFM and St. Mary's use this to their advantage to negotiate grants and sponsorships.

Referring back to the introduction, the LFM has struggled with the cut to the Maine Harvest Bucks Program, as the incentive to shop at the farmers market has decreased. Farm Fresh offers a similar program at all of their participating markets: Bonus Bucks; it provides a 100% match on SNAP purchases with other benefits that can be accessed by joining other programs, such as enrolling in Healthy Food, Healthy Families (Farm Fresh RI 2021). Ultimately, Farm Fresh is able to offer the Bonus Bucks

program thanks to financial support from many funders, including federal grants and private fundraising efforts in addition to one time donations. Farm Fresh is largely able to garner additional funding for this program due to its larger size which I mentioned earlier. Since such a large portion of Lewiston patrons are SNAP users, the market's success is dependent upon them. While the LFM differs from Farm Fresh in these ways, they still have the support of St. Marys. Thus, since individuals with disposable incomes tend to be the ones who are able to offer support to non-profit organizations, St. Marys must appeal to this diverse community by making all people regardless of social class feel invested in the organization, whether that be as a beneficiary or a supporter. The Lewiston farmers market could then use St. Mary's support to better uphold programs that actively incentive food insecure individuals.

Lewiston's greatest challenges, as of recently, has been related to its inability to garner consistent vendors, patrons, and managers. While some of this can be accredited to Covid, Much of this is due to its location change. Many of the market managers, while examining the pros and cons of their indoor location, stated that an outdoor market is appealing because it has the ability to render the feelings of a block party and allow patrons to feel connected to nature. Considering that this is what is appealing about an outdoor market, Lewiston is not necessarily successful in accomplishing this goal; rather, the LFM is located in a lot that is barely visible to the road, surrounded by concrete, and hidden by buildings. In 2012, under the supervision of the City of Lewiston and Halvorson Tighe & Bonda, a riverfront revitalization plan was put into action and was recently amended in 2022. The plan targets the downtown waterfront core in Lewiston, with the goal of increasing connectivity, revitalization, and redevelopment. The LFM is



included within the plan stating a desire to find a permanent location for the market. Upon the approval and implementation of the plan, the market's location could prove to be beneficial to the community and the market; it could play a similar role to the Lowell market in its ability to provide new meaning to a once depressed area (Riverfront Island Master Plan). If the plan does continue to include the LFM in its plans, it would be worthwhile considering the many plaza and parks that are unused throughout the urban core.

The remediation of Bates Mill 5 for development pushed the market out of its long term home and into a precarious position, a prime example of gentrification (Rice 2022). It is important to note that this is not at the sole fault of developer Platz; Tom Platz has owned the complex for a few years now, and has let the market use the location up until this point. Knowing that Platz was eventually going to develop the complex, planning by the market for its move should have been prioritized at an earlier stage.

Yet, assuming the plan follows a timeline similar to what it has so far, in that not much has been done in the last 10 years, it is fair to assume that there will be no immediate change to the riverfront downtown within the timeline that the LFM needs improvements. Thus, I think that it could prove beneficial to the market to assert their desire for a permanent location, rather than letting their needs get overlooked. The Lowell and Brunswick markets are located in prior mill spaces that were not initially developed with the intention of housing either market. A permanent farmers market location is not necessarily indoors; rather, it refers to a structure that is solely for the market that can also serve as a center of community and greater economic development. This can take the form of a pavilion, indoor spaces, and multi-use areas, such as parks, or

public land (Barbour et al. 2014, 2). In the case of Lowell and Providence, the markets are put on by the mills. Thus, whatever profit the mill generates from renting their spaces simultaneously benefits the market. This brings me to argue that if the Lewiston Market found a permanent location within the developed Bates Mill complex, in partnership with Tom Platz, the developer, a mutually beneficial solution would emerge (Rice 2021). Barbour et al. discovered that farmers markets have the ability to be a “small business incubator” in that they create a dynamic relationship between farmers and vendors, enhance the local economy through food, and provide a platform for “public exposure to underused commercial spaces, creating synergistic opportunities for small businesses and property owners” (27-28). Each case study that I examined displayed this relationship. The chance for random interaction between the market and other businesses was one of the major draws to the markets. In the case that the market could not be a one stop shop for everything an individual may need, it is supplemented by the additional business that surrounds the market; people can get produce, talk to their farmer, get a coffee, and even see a movie. Since some of Lewiston’s greatest hardship comes from its inability to offer the city a consistent market, a permanent location, whether in a pavilion or indoors, would make the market a pillar of the community by “maintaining accessibility for people of all abilities and ages while offering comfortable shopping conditions rain or shine”(ibid 12).

Many vendors would benefit from an indoor market because it ensures consistent access to customers and revenue. If the Lewiston Farmers Market wants to provide direct outreach to food insecure individuals within the local area, it needs to further address how it plans to economically satisfy its vendors. As Cara Mitchell made clear, farmers

oftentimes experience food insecurity themselves. At Lewiston, New Roots is the market's biggest vendor and is composed of Somali Refugees who lack food sovereignty. Thus, in order to sufficiently address food insecurity in Lewiston, they have to increase the amount of revenue that the vendors are bringing in. Otherwise, they will continue to leave the market. For Lewiston's main two vendors, New Roots and Chirp Creek Farm, the market supports the functioning of their respective CSA programs by streamlining the process through advertising and having pickup occur at the market. This simultaneously benefits other vendors because people will be tempted to shop while picking up their shares. For as long as the Lewiston market struggles to maintain consistency, the support they are able to offer for their vendors will be limited. A permanent, indoor location, also addresses temporality. All of the locations I examined were located in New England and recounted that being protected from the area's harsh and inconsistent weather has benefitted each market greatly by providing a warm, inviting place for patrons. For a market like Lewiston, which is rooted in increasing food access, an indoor location ensures year round access to fresh produce that can be purchased using SNAP. Additionally, indoor farmers markets provide a consistent customer base and income for vendors. For farmers that might struggle with food insecurity, this could have a large impact on their ability to make it through the winter season. An indoor market leads to potential benefits that can be reached by implementing techniques that mimic what an indoor market is able to do, such as re-establishing and redesigning the online winter market place they have had in the past, or assessing community interest in a covered pavilion space. Generally speaking, conducting the online market in addition to their normal market hours could be a way to bring in additional revenue and target shoppers

who seek a different type of food shopping experience; the Farm Fresh *Market Mobile* program could be referred to for inspiration.

The Brunswick Winter Market provides a different perspective on how to support market vendors, yet it is not applicable to Lewiston because of the different cities in which the markets are located and their general missions. The Lewiston Market is able to sufficiently support New Roots and Chirp Creek Farm, but do not necessarily have the means for more; outside of the profits they gain from the market, New Roots also benefits from grants and awards as well as support from local organizations and personal donors that are personally invested in their operations. In regards to the confusion surrounding the Harvest Bucks system, the Lewiston Market has to actively assist vendors to ensure the system is mutually beneficial, as intended. The support the BWM offers their vendors can be observed through their mission statement, which entails their desire to support rural agriculture through their vendor-led model. Yet, these two factors do not carve out room for the Lewiston markets specific food justice mission. The vendor led model creates a market that is made by and for the vendors. This model does not require additional fundings, the only costs are each vendor's personal "rent" that they have to pay to the mill. Because of this, there are no extra funds to advertise the market to those who may not know about the benefits of local food, support greater food access programs, or even offer individualized vendor support. For a city like Brunswick, where there is a smaller population of food insecure individuals and lower rates of poverty in general, a farmers market of this manner can exist. For Lewiston, a passive market as such is not realistic or beneficial. Thus, an interesting dichotomy is created in an attempt to balance vendor and patron interest. Brunswick reflects one end of the spectrum by adhering to the

interests of only the vendors, while Lewiston reflects the opposite, in their desire to make the market as cost effective and accessible as possible. Farm Fresh and Lowell provide a very interesting middle ground that is not as drastically black or white.

As I began the case study analysis with, Lewiston has the capacity to have a very successful market. The market experienced growth in 2021 prior to its location change in 2022, this can be seen directly through the Maine Harvest Buck sales which increased by 116% from 2019-2021 (Lewiston Farmers Market). Of the Lewiston vendors I interviewed, they all expressed a great love for the Lewiston market. Mahamed from New Roots said that selling at Lewiston gives Somalis on his farm experience dealing with new types of business practices and truly feeling ingrained in the community. Ben Daley stated his affection for the market stems from its ability to create an inclusive space for queer individuals to “New Mainers” in a way that the other markets he sells at are unable to do. The Lewiston Sun Journal did a feature on the Lewiston Farmers Market and a volunteer that represents everything farmers markets are all about. 67 year-old Joe Cook volunteers each week as the market's greeter. He might be bound to a wheelchair and routinely receive dialysis treatment, yet he can always be found helping with setup and breakdown, “drag[ging] out the tents and carr[ying] them on the footrest of his wheelchair” (Rice 2022). Cook was a regular at the market, taking a liking to the raw milk and strawberries, but quickly transgressed into an integral team member upon talking with everyone who works at the market. Cook love for the market stems from the opportunities for community engagement to the chance to support local farmers. Ultimately, Cook and the sentiments from Ben Daley and Mahamed represents everything that is good about the Lewiston Farmers Market. It is welcoming. It cultivates

a unique sense of community. It benefits local farmers by providing valuable lessons about business but also supporting the existence of agriculture in Maine. It redefines what a farmers market is supposed to be. Rather than the upper-middle class white space that is traditionally associated with farmers markets, the Lewiston Farmers re-centers itself around notions of community and progressive food justice. The LFM is already doing a lot of good; the recommendations I present in this section seek to support the market's mission, and help the market accomplish all that it is capable of.

## Conclusion

To begin my conclusion, I would like to state that the Lewiston Farmers Market seeks to accomplish a goal that not many markets take on. It acknowledges the city's diverse community by creating a space in which all people have the right to feel accepted and desired. The market supports Somali Refugees by not only providing them with culturally appropriate food, but allowing them to envision themselves as their own bosses, running their own businesses. The Lewiston Farmers Market seeks to ensure that income is never a barrier to access by making SNAP transactions seamless, and even attempting to make additional bonuses, such as Harvest Bucks, more robust. The Lewiston market appeals to the desire for community at the market by hosting holiday themed events, supporting small businesses and nonprofits, and having fundraising events like their annual Spaghetti Squash Dinner. Yet, due to circumstances that are to a degree out of their control, the Lewiston Market, as of recently, has experienced high vendor turnover and a decrease in customers. While their recent move and Covid have played a big role in generating these conditions, they are also a result of the lack of funding that is needed to directly target social inequality.

Thus, this paper examines the areas in which the LFM could make potential changes, such as harnessing connections and making current market processes more efficient, to increase their capacity for positive change within the Lewiston community. From my understanding of the Lewiston Farmers Market and from an analysis of other similar markets, the LFM would greatly benefit from securing a permanent location that has the potential to offer year round support to farmers, reliable access to local food, and an enhanced opportunity to cultivate a community that revolves around the market. For

an old mill town like Lewiston, with a variety of vacant building space, an indoor market could also assist in economic revitalization. Understanding the limitations that arise in trying to find a market location, it is natural to assume that locating an indoor space may not be feasible. Thus, the market can make smaller changes that accomplish the same goal as moving to an indoor permanent space. One example is using local organizations, partnerships, and the city government, to increase community outreach and make individuals aware of the market. Additionally, the Lewiston market could continue to run their online winter market as a supplement to the normal market hours; this would build on the CSA program they already have and be an additional way to incur profit.

While it is easy for me to make recommendations of this degree, I do not understand the economic and time requirements for changes of this sort. Thus, I see this paper as providing the research that attempts to prove the benefits of implementations of this sort. I hope that sponsors and partners are able to see how much the Lewiston Farmers Market, and those attached to it, benefit and could potentially benefit from changes that seek to lessen the effects of inequality, and support Lewiston and its people. I believe that regardless of what changes the market makes, that they will continue to be an important pillar of the Lewiston Food scene in partnership with St. Marys, the *Good Foods Bus*, the Trinity Jubilee Center, and all of the other non-profits in the area that address food concerns.

I went into this paper nervous about how I was going to write 25 pages. Rather, I quickly learned that this is a topic I could talk about forever (if forever is 80 pages). I fully believe that farmers markets are a viable path towards community food security. Transitioning away from the narrative that farmers markets are strictly a space for



environmentally conscious, upper class white folk needs to change; farmers markets can only be a space of community when they seek to include everyone. There are organizations, farmers and markets out there that are doing great work and they need to become the models for how we move forward. The Lewiston Farmers market can be one of these models if it is able to endure the test of time.

## Appendixes

### Appendix A:

Lewiston specific questions:

1. Do you sell at the LFM? If yes, How long have you been a vendor at the Lewiston farmers market?
2. How does the Lewiston Farmers market compare to the other farmers markets that you sell at?
3. What do you feel the Lewiston farmers market could change to better support its vendors/farmers?

Unspecified:

4. Are the majority of your profits from selling at the farmers markets?
5. What is the appeal of selling produce at a farmers market?
6. What barriers exist that currently or in the future could affect your ability to sell at farmers markets?
7. Do you consider the different customer bases when you are deciding what produce to bring to the market? Or even what produce to grow on the farm?
8. Do you feel that SNAP/WIC programs benefit farmers in addition to consumers?

### Appendix B:

1. What farmers markets do you sell at?
2. If you dont sell at Lewiston, why not?
3. Does the mission of the Lewiston Farmers Market mirror that of Liberation Farms?

### Appendix C:

1. What are the goals of the Farmers Market? Are they accomplished? What do you see as the main challenges in achieving those goals?
2. Basic info to collect for every market:
  - a. In general, what is the demographic of customers? What is the “target audience”?
  - b. How many vendors? What is the cost to vendors to participate, and what do you do to attract, retain, and support them (e.g. infrastructure on site like electricity hook-ups, freezers, loading spaces, etc.)
  - c. Where does the market derive the majority of its funding? Do you partner with any local non-profits?
  - d. How has the market addressed food justice/accessibility concerns?
    - i. What food access programs does the market offer? (snap, WIC, etc)
3. How does the market create a space that is inclusive, accessible, and conducive for positive community development?

## Appendix D:

### Lowell:

1. How does the market's indoor location differentiate it from other farmers markets? What does an indoor market offer?
2. When the mill was renovated was it with the intention of housing the Lowell Farmers Market?
3. What role has the farmers market played in the greater revitalization of the city?

### Ithaca:

1. When was the pavilion built? Does it only house the farmers market? How has the market changed since moving to the pavilion?
2. What does it mean to be a member-run cooperative?
3. What are “friends of the Ithaca farmers market”?
4. What contributes to the market's success?
5. Do you feel that there is a difference between the IFM and traditional FM? How does the inclusion of artisan crafts and goods affect the nature of the market?
6. Do you host any community events?

### Farm Fresh Rhode Island, Providence:

1. When did FF begin building their permanent structure? Where did the funding come from?
2. How does the indoor location affect the market? (in comparison to outdoor markets)
3. Is the farmers market the main priority of FFRI?
4. What other programming is offered in tangent with the farmers market?
5. What contributes to the market's success? What recommendations would you make to other farmers markets that want to accomplish similar goals?
6. How does profit and the justice based mission of the farmers market interact? Is it a limiting factor at times?

### Brunswick Indoor:

1. How do you think the indoor location affects the success of the market? How does it affect the atmosphere?
2. When did the indoor market start within the mill?
3. Do you collaborate with the other Brunswick markets or are you all separate?
4. Where do you feel that the market succeeds? Where is it lacking?

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