

Importance of Farmers' Markets in Southeast Kansas

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Makeup of Southeast Kansas

- ▶ Southeast Kansas is neither sparsely populated nor defined by a large metro area
 - ▶ Largest city: Pittsburg (just over 20,000 people)
 - ▶ Seven towns with populations over 5,000
 - ▶ Most SEK counties over 12,000 in population
- ▶ Cities and towns are not far apart, but are diverse and have distinct identities
- ▶ Identity formation occurs through several avenues



Identity formation of “small towns”

- ▶ Traditions & rituals
- ▶ School districts (including activities and athletics)
- ▶ Industry
- ▶ Businesses unique to the town



Role of Farmers' Markets in Small Town Identity Formation

- ▶ Farmers' markets serve as important fixtures of small town commerce
- ▶ Markets often boast producers or products unique to a particular area
- ▶ Can serve as a facilitator of new rituals and traditions
- ▶ Likewise, may be an important extension of existing rituals and traditions



Markets as Economic Driver

- ▶ A 2002 study commissioned by the Project for Public Spaces found that 60% of market shoppers visit nearby stores on the same day
- ▶ The same study found that 36% of market shoppers **only** shop at nearby stores on the market days
- ▶ A longitudinal study by Oregon State found that in towns under 50,000 in population, 33% to 65% of market customers make purchases at neighboring businesses before/after a market trip
- ▶ The same study found that, compared to money spent at market, customers spent 31% to 92% as much at the neighboring businesses on day of market

Markets as Employment Generator

- ▶ A 2008 Clemson study of farmers' markets in towns of fewer than 8,000 found that markets in such towns generate both direct and indirect full-time jobs
 - ▶ Job generation depends on success of the market; can create as many as 15-16 agricultural, retail, and administrative jobs
- ▶ A similar study at Washington State found that markets of 11-30 create up to 6.0 market-specific full-time jobs when founded in towns under 10,000
- ▶ Businesses in Wisconsin small- and medium-sized towns were found to increase staffing during market days and hours

Markets as Community Rituals

- ▶ Customers of small town markets in various states consider the market an “event” as much as a shopping area
- ▶ Respondents in Indiana study considered attendance at small town markets as a “ritual” repeated each week
- ▶ Several communities have found that pairing a farmers’ market with an annual event (or monthly event) has increased attendance at both, creating a much larger event



Important Takeaways

- ▶ Area businesses and governments often underestimate the impact of farmers' markets on their small communities
 - ▶ Businesses see market as competition for customers, not as a draw
 - ▶ Governments worry about setting aside public places for a market; are concerned with upsetting potentially unhappy business owners
- ▶ Our “job” as market participants should include public relations efforts
- ▶ Vital to educate the public about the benefits of farmers' markets in Southeast Kansas towns
- ▶ In addition to the traditionally-espoused market benefits (eating locally produced foods, healthier foods, etc.), we should underscore the ability of SEK markets to assist in town identity formation

