Bucksport Bay Farmers' Market Sustainability Plan



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Contents

1

	List of People Interviewed	2
I.	Introduction	3
	Market History and Situational Analysis	3
II.	Customer Survey	4
	Customer Count	4
III.	Vendor Survey	11
	Market Scale	12
	Growth Limitations	13
	Operations	14
IV.	Community Leader and Vendor Perspective	15
	Challenges	15
	Solutions	16
۷.	Analyzing Abundance	23
	Market Share	24
	Future Growth	25
	Location	25
	Community Input and Committee Structure	27
	Outreach Team	27
	Fundraising Team	27
	Special Events	27
	Publicity	27
VI.	Maine Producers – Potential Vendors	28
VII.	Recommendations	29
	Conclusions and Vendor Suggestions	31
Additi	onal Information	33
	Market Customer Survey Summary	33
	Demographic Overview	34
	Demographics	34
Resources		38

List of People Interviewed

Many thanks to these community leaders and vendors who provided their thoughts, ideas and vision for the ongoing development of the Market:

Jim Boothby - RSU 25 Superintendent, Bucksport Denise Gordon - Employee, BookStacks, Bucksport Katie Gourley - RSU 25 employee, Bucksport Mike & Colleen Gross - Owners, Verona Wine & Design, Bucksport Karen Johnson - Food Pantry volunteer, Bucksport Andy Lacher - Owner, BookStacks, Bucksport Sue Lessard - Town Manager, Bucksport Jane Marston - RSU 25 employee, Bucksport Marsha Mushrall - Bucksport Community Concerns, Bucksport Arleen Reed - Market customer and resident, Bucksport Cheryl Robinson - RSU 25 employee, Bucksport Rich Rotella - Economic Development Officer, Bucksport David Roy - Owner, Stubborn Cow Glass, Bucksport Lea Velardi - Market customer, Bucksport Helen Wardwell - RSU 25 employee, Bucksport George Watkins - Manager, Camden National Bank, Bucksport Leslie Wombacher - Executive Director, Bucksport Bay Area Chamber of Commerce Ray Zimmerman - Mediterranean Foods, Bangor

I. Introduction

The Maine Federation of Farmers' Markets received a 2016 USDA Rural Business Development Grant to study five farmers' markets. Chosen were Bucksport, Belfast, Norway, Calais and Presque Isle. This study is focused on the potential for expanding the Bucksport Bay Farmers' Market. The analysis incorporates background information, a consumer survey, a vendor survey and vendor meeting and interviews with community leaders. The perspective of vendors, consumers and community reflect the view that improvements can be made that will result in a healthier local economy for Belfast and Waldo County with far-reaching benefits.

Market History and Situational Analysis

A Bucksport Outdoor Market was envisioned by the economic development officer and created in 2004 on the waterfront behind the Chamber. Due to high wind, inconsistent food offerings and failing customer response, the market moved westward in 2006 to the lot by the town dock. While it had less wind only the Orland nuns co-op with baked goods were available as vendors. Around 2009, a farmers' market was reestablished on the town lot next to the Post Office with 4 or 5 vendors. Within a short time, only Home Co-op was left selling for several years.

When Leslie Lombacher became the executive director of the Bucksport Bay Area Chamber of Commerce in 2012, she was inspired to try again. She attended the Maine Farmers' Market Conference, met with Healthy Acadia which received a grant for a SNAP/EBT machine and got the town blessing and a land use permit for their lot next to the Post Office, thanks to economic development officer Dave Milan. She opened the new Bucksport Bay Farmers' Market in 2013.

Bucksport lost 570 jobs with the December 2014 closure of the Verso Paper Mill, which had operated since 1930. The unemployment rate shot up more than four points to 11.7 percent. Gone were \$60,000 jobs that supported families and 47 percent of the City's tax revenue. Fortunately, the City had \$8 million in a reserve fund that helped to soften the blow and facilitated the transition, that is still in process, to a new economy. The Market also suffered due to residents no longer having the same disposable income for food.

The Market serves customers with about 10-12 vendors selling their products. The Chamber takes care of management, promotion and day-to-day issues, while getting input from vendors. The Market membership fee is \$40 per year, members pay \$5 per day, non-members pay \$15 per day.

The mill closure created a large employment vacuum and a population decline. The town of Bucksport was financially prepared and has aggressively responded with a rebuilding plan. Its proximity to Belfast, the population growth of Waldo County, the sale of 100+ Bucksport homes in 2016 and and the tenacity of town leadership in the face of adversity makes the Bucksport comeback a betworthy proposition. The Farmers' Market can and should be a part of the rebuilding. It can help lift the spirits of locals and energize interest from outside.

This study is intended as a review of the Bucksport Bay Farmers' Market within the larger community context. A Market Consumer Study, a Vendor Survey, a Vendor Meeting and Community Leader Interviews are combined in this comprehensive Bucksport Bay Farmers' Market Sustainability Plan.

II. Customer Survey

On August 18, 2016 a customer survey was conducted at the Bucksport Bay Farmers' Market. The goal was to obtain valid and accurate customer data. A single-sided, 30-question survey (including 9 satisfaction ratings) was developed that could be answered in three to five minutes. The intercepts were done at the Main Street entrance to the Market, the information booth and the entrance from the Post Office parking lot. While intended as an exit survey, it was difficult for survey staff to limit themselves just to intercepting customers who were leaving the Market. Shoppers were asked for their input to help build the Market and offered a \$2 bill as an incentive. The survey was presented to them on a clipboard with a pen for self-administration.

The customer counts and intercepts of 70 shoppers were done thanks to the help of Chamber executive Leslie Wombacher, Emily Buswell of the Maine Federation of Farmers' Markets and David Weeda, the Market volunteer EBT coordinator. Vance Corum led the effort, completed all the data input and wrote the analysis.

As with any survey of this nature, care must be taken in reflecting on data and making recommendations that are based on intercepts on a single Market day. However, with a fairly good intercept process, we are confident of the perspective gained from the shoppers and we encourage continued research.

Customer Count and Survey Response

We estimate that 85 shopping groups entered the Market on August 27. The 70 shopping groups completing the survey represent a good 82 percent intercept capture rate. While several people tried to refuse our \$2 bill, they generally accepted it when we asked them to spend it with a Bucksport downtown business in order to reinforce the Market's connection to other businesses in town.

Question 1: How many adults (18 or older) are in your party, including yourself?

Of the 70 respondents, a surprisingly high **57 percent were adults shopping alone. One-third were adults shopping with another adult** (33%) and 10 percent were in groups of three or more adults. Our respondents averaged 1.6 adults per shopping group, within a typical range for a weekday market, giving us a total of 112 adults among them. We estimate that **136 adults attended the Market representing 85 shopping groups**. Weekend markets usually have a higher number of adults in each shopping group (between to 1.7 to 2.2). With a warm summer day and 43 percent of the shopping groups in Bucksport having two or more adults, the Market had a relaxed feeling reflective of a summer crowd.

<u>Question 2</u>: How many <u>children</u> (under 18) are in your party?

Four of every five shopping groups (80%) had no youth under 18. **One-in-five shopping groups** (20%) had children or youth, who are potential future customers. There were a total of 20 children among the respondent groups, so we estimate 24 children came through the Market. Vendors and

management should consider how to encourage more children to attend. Sampling foods is a key element in satisfying children. The Market is also a place for education and entertainment. The SNAP-Ed program is doing a good job of encouraging regular weekly visits by kids. Consider encouraging young shoppers to try samples. Food sampling must always be in accordance to the latest guidelines established by the Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry (DACF). The latest food sampling policy is available at the Maine Federation of Farmers' Markets website.

Question 3: What is your zip code?

Bucksport comprises 43 percent of customers and, if including the towns of Orland and Sandy Point within five miles, the primary trade area is 57 percent of shoppers. Extending to 15 miles, the secondary trade has another 9 percent, so two-thirds of customers are within 15 miles.

Towns outside 15 miles account for **11 percent in the tertiary trade area**. **Nearly one-quarter (23%) of customers are from distant areas of Maine, or out-of-state visitors.** This is a very healthy sign of the Market capturing interest from tourists.

<u>Question 4</u>: How did you <u>travel</u> to the Farmers' Market today?

A full 7-of-every-8 customers came to the Market by car, with another 3 percent using a carpool and 8 percent walking. The Market needs to have sufficient, reliable parking to build its clientele.

<u>Question 5</u>: What was your primary motivation for coming to downtown Bucksport today?

The Bucksport Bay Farmers' Market is the key reason for two-thirds of shoppers (68%) coming to this area. People said they came because they live here (19%) and to socialize (6%. Similar to Belfast, this Market found that 16 percent came to town for general shopping. A surprising 12 percent of shoppers were visitors. Others came to eat out (10%) or for work or an appointment (7%).

For the vast majority of Market shoppers, the Market clearly is the destination attraction that motivates them to come into Bucksport. Retail business owners might want to take notice and work with the Market to strengthen that draw. With one-in-six Market shoppers (16%) saying they are motivated by General Shopping, the Market also would naturally want to cooperate with local businesses as well. (There were 1.39 responses on average for 69 respondents.)

<u>Question 6</u>: How much did you (or will you) <u>spend</u> at the Farmers' Market <u>today</u>?

Average customer spending is \$20.72, a good level for the number of vendors. The median expenditure is \$15. Spending was 23 percent lower than the \$26.90 average in Presque Isle, and 44 percent lower than the \$37.16 average in nearby Belfast.

Two-fifths of shoppers (41%) spend \$20 or more, and half of those (19%) spend \$40 or more. However, 3-in-5 shoppers spends less than \$20. Average sales per customer invariably increase as a Market grows with a larger product mix. Daily sales are estimated at \$1,800 for this peak summer period. Using seasonal Market customer estimates, annual sales are estimated at \$30,000 (range of \$25,000-38,000). <u>Question 7</u>: How many different vendors do you purchase from each time you visit the market (or today)?

Four percent bought nothing and 20 percent of shoppers made purchases from only one vendor. Three-fourths (76%) of customers support at least two vendors in their regular purchasing, compared to 87 percent in Presque Isle and 95 percent in Belfast. A reasonable 38 percent of Bucksport customers buy from three or more vendors when they shop, and 8 percent purchase from five or more vendors. Those figures, respectively, are 76 percent and 24 percent for Belfast.

<u>Question 8</u>: What percentage of your <u>weekly grocery budget</u> is spent at the Farmers' Market?

The average shopper said that 10.7 percent of their grocery budget is spent at the Farmers' Market, versus 15.2 percent in Presque Isle and 20.8 percent in Belfast. The median for shoppers is 5 percent. One-in-six shoppers spend 0 percent of their food budget (triple that of Presque Isle and Belfast). Another sixth spend up to 1 percent of their weekly food budget at Market (10 percent in Presque Isle). Overall, the Market's customer base breaks out in these loyalty groups:

2/3 spend 5 percent or less of their food budget at the Market
1/6 spend 10 - 20 percent of their food budget at the Market
1/6 spend 25 percent or more of their food budget at the Market

<u>Question 9</u>: How much will you spend at <u>businesses</u> near the Farmers' Market today?

Three of every five Market customers (60%) shop at local businesses in conjunction with their Market visit. This is a healthy sign that the Market trip is associated with downtown purchases.

The average customer spends \$19.66 in local businesses, almost equal to that spent in the Farmers' Market. Taking out the non-downtown shoppers, the Market-goers who make downtown purchases actually spend \$32.57 on average, 57 percent more in downtown than at the Market. The Market is linked to about \$1700 of weekly activity for local businesses.



The chart above reflects the percentages of customers that spend a given dollar amount in local businesses. While two-fifths spend nothing (red), 31 percent spend from \$5 to \$20 in local businesses (light blue). Almost 30 percent of survey respondents spend \$25 or more locally

(green). The top portion of shoppers, 14 percent with expenditures of \$50 or higher, account for 52 percent of all spending with local businesses.

<u>Question 10</u>: What stopped you from buying <u>more</u> at the Farmers' Market today?

A good **two-thirds (67%) of all respondents were happy with their purchases**. However, our goal was to evaluate what is holding back customer purchases. There were **four principal reasons shoppers give for not buying more**:

- Variety is lacking (15%)
- Out of cash (12%)
- Out of **time** (8%)
- High prices (6%)

These issues may reflect a deeper dissatisfaction that explains why the public is not coming to Market. While parking was not noted by customers as a problem, it must be addressed if the Market is to expand.

<u>Question 11</u>: What motivated you most to visit the Farmers' Market today?</u>

In Bucksport, fresh **fruits and vegetables are the main motivator for 69 percent of respondents.** This outpaced prepared food (31%), meat/poultry (24%), and socializing (18%). Good prices are a reason why 1-in-10 shoppers come to Market, and a special event helped motivate 7 percent.

While there is no major concern, the Market might consider placing somewhat more emphasis on caution areas: fruits and vegetables often garner around 90 percent, meat/poultry over 30 percent and socializing often over 40 percent. Baked goods, artisans, quality, entertainment, support for farmers – when listed – often get a 30 percent response or higher.

Question 12: What items did you buy today at the Farmers' Market?

Vegetables were bought by 55 percent of customers, and only 28 percent bought fruit. Baked goods were popular at 49 percent, as were meat and poultry (25%), and organic items (23%). Prepared foods were bought by 17 percent of customers, cheese by 8 percent, jam/ vinegar and ice cream/yogurt by 3 percent, and chocolate and dry beans by 2 percent. Based on comparable data in other market studies, the key products that seem to have low levels of customer purchases are: vegetables, fruit, cheese, jam/vinegar and ice cream/yogurt.

<u>Question 13</u>: What other farmers' markets do you shop at, and how many times per year?

While **45 percent of customers are not going to any other farmers' market**, many of the rest shop at in Bangor, Belfast and Ellsworth, as well as other local markets. Bucksport is clearly engaged in friendly competition for the attention of its customers.

Question 14: What advertising do you notice?

This question provides a glimpse of how the Market may most effectively reach out with various promotional messages. Customers rated **posters (37%), sandwich boards (29%) and flyers (27%) as**

the key, low-cost methods of reaching them with a Market message. Half as many pay attention to the Chamber and Market websites (both 14%). Other options included email/newsletter (5%), Facebook and banner (both 3% write-ins) and Chamber website (3%). All of these avenues need to be used to reach customers inexpensively. Traditional paid advertising - **newspaper**, television and radio - got 24 percent, 15 percent and 14 percent, respectively. Given the lack of advertising funds, the Market might host regular events that are newsworthy and send press releases to all the key media outlets.

<u>Question 15</u>: What <u>other products</u> would you buy if they were sold in this market?

With 2.16 mentions per respondent, customers are clamoring for more products. Top on the list for Market customers are cheese (48%) and bread/pastries (39%), followed by 32 percent wanting more organic. At least one-in-five customers want more prepared food (21%), followed by meat/poultry (16%), milk (13%) and chocolate/confections (11%). People also want seafood, dried meat and other items. It should be on the lookout for any new producer and product that is a bit different.

<u>Question 16</u>: How many weeks have you shopped at this Market in the last year, including today?

Surprisingly, **one-third of all customers are first-time or once-a-year shoppers**. Another third have only come 2-5 times in the last year, and one-fifth have come 6-10 weeks. **The last 15 percent of customers come 11 or more weeks** per year. They are the **loyal customer base that every market needs**. Healthy markets usually have 30 percent or more of their customer base coming at least half the time, so this data reflects the need for the Market to build a more solid base of regular customers.

<u>Question 17</u>: Rate your <u>satisfaction</u> with the following aspects of this Farmers' Market?

Customers graded their satisfaction with nine elements from 1(low) to 10 (high). We find **9.78 out of** a perfect 10 for vendor friendliness, which is the highest such rating ever seen by this researcher. Quality/freshness ranks second with a very high **9.58**. Convenient location drops off a bit to 9.36, but most people coming are happy. Layout also gets good marks at 9.25, with ease of payment at 9.14. We begin to notice more discontent with with 8.80 for ease of parking, and consistent drops for convenient day and hours at 8.59, prices 8.42 and diversity of products 8.25.

To ensure that the Market is sensitive to all customers, we determined the percentage of customers who felt that the Market was failing at an observable level (8 or lower), given that anything short of a "9" should be treated as an area for improvement.

- Forty-five percent of all customers were at least somewhat dissatisfied with prices
- Forty-nine percent were unhappy with the diversity of products.
- One in every three customers were somewhat dissatisfied with day and hours (36%) and ease of parking (32%).

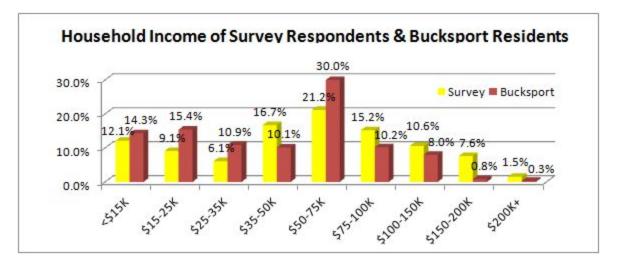
<u>Question 18</u>: <u>Where do you buy</u> your food during the summer months? Please note percentage of each.

Farmers' market shoppers are still heavily dependent upon supermarkets in Bucksport when they noted the percentage of summer food purchased in each outlet. **The supermarket gets more than \$4 from farmers' market shoppers for every \$1 they spend in the Market**. Farm stands garner a 21 percent share from one-quarter of farmers' market customers, and club stores do about the same. Bucksport Market shoppers represent 1.75 percent of Bucksport's households. Almost all local households are spending their food dollars elsewhere, including Market customers. **These data reinforce the value in making the Bucksport Bay Farmers' Market more irresistible to customers**. **There is substantial room for growth if it is planned effectively.**

Question 19: Your total household income?

The Market has a healthy mix of income levels. Households below \$35,000 income are 27 percent of shoppers while those above \$50,000 are 56 percent, including **20 percent of customers with** income above \$100,000. This Market reflects a fair cross-section of all household incomes, including immediate and surrounding areas, and tourists.

While **median household income** is \$35,981 for Bucksport (2013), for **Bucksport Market customers** it is **\$68,750**. This reflects the Market's attraction to somewhat higher income local households and summer visitors. Because we found this surprisingly high compared to numerous other studies, we investigated further to compare to the local Bucksport populace.



The percentage of Market shoppers from household income groups below \$35,000 (chart above) is consistently below the percentage of Bucksport residents in those income brackets. All the medium and higher income groups are overrepresented compared to what might be expected, with the exception of households with income of \$50,00 to \$75,000. We speculate that the lower turnout of those households may be related to weekday work schedules. The importance of the Maine Harvest Bucks program is also evident.

The Bucksport Bay Farmers' Market is a melting pot of all ages. All four age categories from 35-44 through 65-74 have at least 11 percent of the Market customer base. As Hancock County is losing younger people, it seems to be seen in the Market as well. The median customer age is 58. Comparing Market age groups to Bucksport residents, we see that 25 to 34 and 35 to 44 are definitely underrepresented among Market customers, 45-54 is as expected, and 55 to 64 and 65 to 74 are overrepresented. These last two older groups may reflect visitors, with 62 percent of shoppers being 55 or older. Since the Market has only 38 percent of shoppers under 55 years of age, it may want to consider how it can adjust product offerings, promotion, programs and activities to attract a younger audience.

<u>Question 21</u>: Please share your ideas for <u>products</u> or <u>improvements</u> in the market:

A good 40 percent of all survey respondents provided 28 written comments, indicative of their desire to reinforce the positive benefits and suggest improvements at the Bucksport Market.

There were people that gave heartfelt kudos for the Market as it exists now with comments of "I love it now!" and "I (heart) the market" and others who gave guarded praise with "Market is adequate" and "It's getting better." One said: "Good! First time here." The rest took advantage of the survey to show their appreciation by giving specific advice as requested.

- Sixty percent of those making comments want to see more vendors selling everything from veggies to seafood, biscuits, prepared foods and much more.
- One asked for more farms and less crafts.
- Another suggested a massage therapist.
- Other comments addressed the need for music at the market.
- Some wanted different hours to reach day workers,
- A more flowing layout without space between vendors was requested.
- A newspaper ad with a list of products was suggested.
- Some suggested incorporating the Market with "Wednesday on Main."

The comments reminded us of the Market's range of customers, from people with their own veggie gardens to those grateful because "We wanted Maine blueberries this trip and we got them!"



III. Vendor Survey

The Bucksport Bay Farmers' Market serves farmers on a local basis. All of its 12 vendors have farms within an hour's drive throughout Hancock, Penobscot and Waldo counties. They travel an average of half and hour one way to Market. As vendors are at the Market serving customers, the Market plays a small role in helping to keep these farms healthy economically which in turn allows them to support their nine local communities spread over the Mid-Coast.

A vendor survey was distributed to all 12 vendors via Survey Monkey. It gave everyone an opportunity to express their views on the Market. There was a 67 percent response to the survey. Additional insights and opinions were expressed through phone calls up to two hours in length and via a long vendor meeting at the end of the market day on August 18, 2016.

Years Selling	at FMs	at BBFM
1-5	71%	100%
6-10	14%	0%
11-15	14%	0%
16+	0%	0%

The vendors have about five years of experience in farmers' markets generally and under two years experience in Bucksport on average. Collectively, they sold at eight different farmers' markets in 2016, from Ellsworth to Blue Hill, Bangor (2 markets), Brewer, Orono and Hampden. Thus, most are experienced with stronger markets.

Vendors are committed for their season with 14 percent selling on five Market days, 43 percent on 11-15 days, 29 percent on 16-20 days and 14 percent on more than 20 days in 2016. They are small producers, generally with one to 10 acres.

The Farmers' Market generates a slight majority of overall farm sales for vendors. Vendors also use a mix of wholesale, restaurants, CSA, online and "other" outlets to market their production. They are eager to expand their sales in each of these marketing avenues. Vendors understand and agree on the **four Market strengths that are key to its success**:

- 1. A fun, diverse, supportive group of **vendors** with a good mix of products
- 2. A loyal core of local **customers**
- 3. A beautiful, convenient location with good atmosphere
- 4. Chamber and town support.

As one vendor wrote: "Bucksport has a great vibe...We strive to bring big city selection to a small town market."

The vendor survey included a rating scale from Disagree (1) to Agree (3) on nine potential Market actions. All vendor responses are shown in the interest of transparency. A 2.00 rating average would show a neutral feeling on the part of all vendors.

Operations	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	No answer	Rating Avg.
Bucksport is a well-run farmers' market.	0	2	4	1	2.67
Manager enforces rules fairly & objectively.	0	3	4	0	2.57
Concerns handled in fair & timely manner.	0	3	3	1	2.50
Market manager is available, listens to ideas.	1	2	3	1	2.33
Bucksport has effective governing group.	2	1	3	1	2.17
New rules need to be implemented.	2	3	2	0	2.00
Market promotions are thorough & effective.	3	2	2	0	1.86
Special events are regular & worthwhile.	3	2	2	0	1.86
Market advertising is effective.	4	0	3	0	1.86

Vendors most strongly agree that **Bucksport is a well-run market (2.67), rules are enforced fairly and objectively (2.57), and concerns are handled in a fair and timely manner (2.50)** There is a bit more hesitation relative to the manager being available and listening to ideas (2.33), and there being effective governance (2.17).

Vendors are neutral on new rules being implemented (2.00) which leaves us with a confidence void. There is some greater dissent on the last three statements reflecting dissatisfaction with promotions, special events and advertising (all 1.86), which are all dependent on Market finances.

The fact that several vendors either rated many issue a "neutral" or did not answer leaves some extra concern. Only the first two issues showed confidence from a majority of responding vendors.

Market Scale

While figures are not exact, vendors reported their range of total annual sales in 2015 and 2016. Most vendors reported no change in 2016 sales, but one showed substantial growth while another had a decline. Using an aggregate of individualized vendor data as reported and estimates for those not responding, total **vendor sales in 2016 are estimated at \$30,000 in 2016**.

Bucksport residents were 43 percent of the Market population in an August customer survey. If we assume that they are about 67 percent of the total customer base on a year-round basis, they represent about \$20,000 of Market food purchases, or about **0.25 percent of the estimated \$8,000,000** spent by Bucksport residents on in-home food purchases annually.

Bucksport vendors averaged 9.7 months of production (range of 5-12) in 2016, and they project the same production season in 2018.

Growth Limitations

Vendors see five critical issues limiting the Market's growth:

- 1. Lack of advertising
- 2. Market location
- 3. Need for special events
- 4. Vendor variety
- 5. Limited parking

Additional issues noted by individual vendors were management, vendor layout and Bucksport socio-economics. To address the five top issues requires targeted thinking by small groups of people:

- 1. A Marketing Team to develop an advertising plan along with the financing mechanism.
- 2. A Site Team to assess potential locations with more aesthetic and practical benefits.
- 3. A Special Event Team to plan regular monthly events that can highlight the entry of a new seasonal product or the high season of a product.
- 4. **A Vendor Team** to add additional people in various product categories before doing outreach to meet a target expansion goal.

Just as customers expressed their desires in the Customer Survey, they have clearly done so with farmers as well, because **vendors realize that customers want more choice**. Existing farmers could expand production to cover growth but more variety is needed as well.

Vendors recognize the **potential for 10-80 percent sales growth in 2017**, with the average being almost 30 percent growth. A strong majority showed interest in attending a presentation on merchandising and sales, including accessing the \$80 million WIC program.

When asked for **three ideas to help such an expansion** occur – at any level – the top ideas suggested by multiple people were:

- 1. More new vendors in a tighter and more inviting layout
- 2. Increase product variety
- 3. Promote more, including flyers and postcards to local towns.

Additional ideas were: improved displays, more sampling, updated and unified marketing materials, market signage, discounts/raffles for local employers and relocating to a Route 1 site.

Asked about specific products or activities in that expansion, vendors had many ideas.

- Promotion
- Music
- □ A larger variety of farms with different products
- □ Local cheese/dairy
- □ More prepared foods
- Specialty drinks
- Seafood

- U Weekly guest (massage, chiropractor, garlic drying demo, etc.)
- □ New artisan vendors
- □ Food wagons
- Pet products
- **Coloring books**
- **u** Events like story time, demonstrations, small workshops or seedling sales
- □ A relaxing space with tables and chairs

Operations

Looking at ideas to improve overall Market operations, vendors were asked to rate 14 possible Market actions from Disagree (1) to Agree (3). A Neutral vote (2) was counted but a "no response" was not.

Market Management Actions	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	No answer	Rating Avg.
Colorful A-frame signs approaching Market.	0	0	7	0	3.00
Permanent sign before bridge & US 1 SB	0	1	6	0	2.86
Establish a Kids Entrepreneur program with schools.	0	1	5	0	2.83
Add Maine value-added businesses.	0	1	5	1	2.83
Expand the number of special events.	0	2	5	0	2.71
Increase Market social media presence.	. 1	0	6	0	2.71
Customer loyalty card with incentives.	1	1	5	0	2.57
Expand to 20 vendors to increase selection.	1	1	5	0	2.57
Add processed and fermented food options.	1	1	5	0	2.57
Hire part-time manager.	0	3	3	1	2.50
Special events good time for new vendors.	1	2	4	0	2.43
Move the Market to a location on US 1.	2	2	3	0	2.14
Pilot for MOFGA cook apprentices on farms.	2	2	2	1	1.71
My business is aggressively using social media.	3	3	1	0	1.71

Ideas were positively received by vendors. While a few vendors were neutral on several issues, **vendors agreed on 11 of the 14 ideas**, with no more than one dissenter. These first 11 issues have substantial enough support (3.00 to 2.43) that they might be approved immediately and given to various committees to implement. Market vendors understand that expansion of the vendor base and customer base should occur simultaneously, so vendors are best added in conjunction with a special event when there can be a new level of customer numbers and sales. Two vendors are interested in having a MOFGA pilot program to place cook apprentices on their farms. While work is being done now on a more solid social media presence, admittedly vendors could do a better job with their own social media (1.71).

IV. Community Leader and Vendor Perspective

About 20 community leaders were interviewed including business, nonprofit and government leaders. Mainers with deep roots and new people with a variety of experiences as well as older and younger farmers. With diverse opinions, they share a sincere goodwill and commitment to a vibrant market in Bucksport.

Challenges

There were a few issues that community leaders and farmers addressed which, if tackled effectively, might lead to a stronger, more vibrant and sustainable Market. Generally, as has often been found in similar past studies, there were multiple individuals who brought up the following concerns:

- 1. Lack of Farmer Interest The Farmers' Market is not seen as a viable outlet for farmers. With regular turnover, the vendor base has relatively little history with the Market.
- Lack of Variety, Choice and Volume Many popular items are absent. There should be choice in every product category so customers are overwhelmed by abundance and variety.

"The Market was sold out the one time I went this year so I haven't gone back." -Bucksport resident

 Low Customer Interest – There has never been a strong base, partly because of the high number of low-income residents, and because the product variety has been lacking. Consumers feel the Market is unresponsive about price and payment options including more acceptance of credit/debit cards.

"Challenges include getting locals to shop local, make them believe they won't spend more because they shop at Market. They used to pay more for goods because they were paid well."

-Leslie Wombacher, Exec. Director, Bucksport Bay Area Chamber of Commerce

 Poor Site and Atmosphere - Visibility is low with the Post Office and trees blocking the view for traffic. The parking lot asphalt is hot, there is little shade and there is a dirt parking lot across Main. The Market needs to make improvements if it wants customers to enjoy shopping.

"It's not an inviting place to go. It's hazardous to have families cross the street." -Bucksport leader

- 5. **Management** Volunteer managers frequently tire of time commitments relative to other vendors. Open voting sometimes hinders truthful perspective.
- 6. Lack of Services A massage therapist, food trucks, essential oils and others might make good additions.
- 7. No Financial Stability Some vendors may not appreciate the need to make a financial commitment reinvest some earnings in order to build a solid future.

8. **Resistance to Change** - It's easier to accept the status quo than to plan change for growth. However, even the status quo changes; nothing stays the same in a dynamic environment.

"You can continue as is and achieve the same results. People don't want to go to Ellsworth and Brewer. People will support the Farmers' Market like Art Festival 2015 with 2000 people, but it has to be bigger."

-Jim Boothby, Superintendent, RSU 25, Bucksport

Solutions

There are many elements to a successful market. The Bucksport Bay Farmers' Market has made many improvements yet still is searching for the missing ingredients. There needs to be a dramatic shift in perspective to realize that for the Market to grow, it needs a substantial increase in both farmers and customers simultaneously. Therefore, we urge a review of many components presented here and a strong effort to incorporate as many aspects as possible to excite and motivate vendors, customers and other community players to become involved. A community meeting to gather even more ideas is a great start.

"Do a Farmers' Market CSA box for housebound seniors and deliver it after the Market." -Arlene Reed, Market customer, Bucksport

Abundance – There needs to be an abundance of vendors and activities, and abundance within each vendor's display. Given the food dollars spent locally, there is tremendous potential for the farmers' market to expand exponentially. To capture a significant share of local food dollars, it must compete with other food outlets in terms of variety and volume, and provide superb, personalized customer service within a larger, festive atmosphere. Farmers should be encouraged to have CSA pick-ups at Market, and to build wholesale accounts with local businesses.

"Belfast has CSA shares. My son gets a vegetable share. We need a farmer that will do a full CSA." -RSU 25 employee, Bucksport

"With a \$2.75 student meal, farmers need to match Sysco. We have White's apples. We'd like to introduce fruits and vegetables to students. Price is the issue, great quality and a consistent supply line."

-Jim Boothby, Superintendent, RSU 25, Bucksport

Variety – The Market must be creative in adding to its product mix, whether sauerkraut, soap or smoothies. As each new vendor brings their own customers, the impact multiplies for all vendors. Expanded variety and customer expansion need to happen together and may involve coordination with other markets. For instance, a distant vendor might come to Bucksport and stay over for Belfast on Friday to get two markets from one trip.

"There is a culture change now. You want a good mix of products including meats, fish, Rachel Ray cooks with ideas."

-Rich Rotella, Economic Development Officer, Buck

Choice - Customer choice in many food categories within the Market is essential if the Market is to become truly competitive. As stores have developed a fuller line of products, farmers' markets have lost that advantage, so competing personalities and displays make the Market stand out relative to conventional retail stores. Instead of less than 2 percent of Bucksport households which the Market currently has, the Market can capture 5 percent with abundant variety and choice, and attract people from miles around to a vibrant environment. Then it will continue to grow market share by word-of-mouth because people enjoy the atmosphere.

"My wife shops but Blue Hill Farmers' Market is much stronger with Horsepower Farm and others."

-A NYC customer at BookStacks

"Even the supermarkets don't give you just one brand. People talk about competition, but there isn't any. The competition is Mexico and California. We have the ability to get people to our product, which is Maine."

-Dan Cousins, Pietree Orchard, Sweden

Atmosphere – A hot parking lot does not engender a sense of place. Consider colorful flags and banners at the entrance, creative displays and signage at every vendor booth. Add a live musician, a socializing space with tables and umbrellas and other locally-approved ideas and the Market will become a social center. Vendors might strategize with the community on how to make it more appealing.

A kids' play area, a small performance area on the grass with seating, and a sausage stand or creperie would be other additions to draw a crowd. Focus on activities that satisfy human gathering impulses, thus creating a larger stock of parked cars that engender curiosity from cars traveling by.

"You could use more cool drinks – slushies, snow cone, Italian ice, lemonade with local blueberries and maple puree."

-Lea Velardi, Customer, Bucksport

"It's always been my position: I want as many vendors as possible. If you have 50 vendors, you'll have a big crowd."

-Jim Brown, Whole Earth Farm, Presque Isle

Layout – Vendors should be immediately next to other vendors to create an intimacy with those vendors and consistent connection with customers. A narrow customer aisle between two rows of vendors allows vendors to communicate across the aisle. The Market should be conscious about strategic placement of more powerful **"anchor" vendors** to maximize customer flow through the entire Market. Vendors doing poorly in one location might be offered a chance to try out a different location for three weeks, with the understanding that if it doesn't work out, they will be returned to their original location. Pairing vendors is often helpful, like bread next to cheese or chocolate. Markets can and should be tweaked to find the best combination of goods and people.

"In Camden we are in a line-up with tofu and mushrooms, the perfect combination." -Victoria Lasbury, Headstrong Garlic, Camden

Signage – The Market needs to capture customers' attention with signs visible for traffic coming into town from every direction. If permitted by the municipality, reminder signs should direct traffic at key intersections coming onto US 1 and into downtown. Parking signs are essential.

Partnerships – Building relationships with downtown and area-wide businesses, nonprofits, schools, churches, hospitals and government is essential. Continue to encourage them to be a part of the Market as sponsors, partners, supporters and participants. When each organization seeks to raise funds or awareness of their programs by being at the Market, they build a rich community marketplace.

"The Council realizes that the community has a chance to start from scratch without the 900-pound gorilla (the mill). What are we?" -Sue Lessard, Town Manager, Bucksport

Board of Directors – A governing board that has a regular rotation of membership and leadership (with term limits) teaches and strengthens the membership to understand policies and procedures and gain experience in organizational management. Historically, most Maine markets have been exclusively farmer-run. Yet, nothing precludes a board from taking advantage of the skills of other resourceful community members. The key is finding several individuals who would like to contribute to the success of an improved Market. An enlarged board allows for different perspectives and skill sets – farmers, customers, prepared foods, local businesses, a promoter, strategic thinkers and more.

Publicity Plan – Many different types of customers need to be targeted with outreach campaigns. The Market needs to build its brand identity with customers and should get started with the Frost Fest in February, then attend the annual awards ceremony in March to build its "Fifty for Farmers" campaign. Become involved and help with the Pixie Harbor Hoopla and the River Duck Dash in June, Bucksport Bay Festival in July, Golftoberfest in September, and Ghostport in October. Coordinate with these and other events on farms and in other communities to spread the word, solicit new vendors and even make sales. Vendors might be active in these events, where "Fifty for Farmers" cards should be distributed. They might be actively involved in other Chamber activities to network with other local businesses and get publicity out through them. Get rack cards into local and area-wide businesses, especially the many food and lodging establishments along the coast. Do outreach to the RV parks and campgrounds .

"All four of us are on Facebook; we need reminders. The Market should list what's available." —Helen Wardwell, RSU 25 employee, Bucksport

"We did a 50-mile circle to reach a population of 50,000. It was a good approach with Facebook, Ellsworth American and a Bangor Daily News insert." -Mike Gross, Verona Wine & Design, Bucksport

Provide posters listing business sponsors in a 20-mile radius to start. There could be several rack card designs, or a card could be re-thought each year. Make sure to have a colorful photo and the Bucksport Bay Farmers' Market name on the top portion of the card.

Balance Vendor-Customer Growth – Vendors want more customers. Customers repeatedly said they want more vendors and variety of products. Everyone is right. It is best to add vendors and customers simultaneously to expand the Market to a new level. These growth spurts can be timed with new seasons and with special events, whenever there is publicity attracting more customers to balance the extra vendors.

Healthy Food Access – Hopefully, the Let's Go! Hancock program will continue under a new contract to reach all citizens whose health is compromised by obesity, poor food choices and lack of exercise. Much of the effort is focused on the schools but perhaps the Market could be a summer focal point. A Vendor Team might designate "heart healthy" vendors with signs on display to reinforce the healthiest food choices, and mileage-to-Market signs.

Electronic Processing – Vendors need to improve the payment options for customers by handling credit and debit cards and SNAP/EBT cards. The more farmers that process cards, the more sales will go up and customers will see vendors as responsive.

Bucksport needs a strong Maine Harvest Bucks program to serve the extremely high low-income population of the City and County. MHB provides a 1-for-1 match that enables SNAP customers to double the dollars they debit from their EBT card. This program should guarantee thousands of dollars in purchases if the Market includes EBT on signage. Low-income residents will get a great deal with double the product for a great price. Farmers might also be ready to offer quality seconds at a reduced price to build low-income shopper loyalty.



Food Court – Create a mix of food and drink options. Caitlin Hunter

who runs the Rockland Farmers' Market noted that Uproot Pie Co. has made the market more dynamic, bringing it alive at noon. Local restaurants should be encouraged to participate, adding diversity, fun and energy to the Market. Breweries, wineries and cideries could participate on a daily basis, on an alternating basis, or for special events.Rotating businesses of all types expand critical word-of-mouth thru various social media like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

"We should have Main Street come to the Farmers' Market."

-George Watkins, Manager, Camden National Bank, Bucksport



Youth Entrepreneurs – Having kids be involved trains the next generation of vendors and gets parents and friends to support the Market. A kids entrepreneur development program might be set up by the Market in conjunction with Hancock County 4H. Vendors who might not otherwise

participate could be encouraged to hire a young person to handle sales if they had confidence in the training program.

Youth Shoppers – The Power Of Produce (POP) Club is a nationally recognized kids program started

at the Oregon City Farmers Market in May 2011 with the help of a Kaiser Permanente grant. With a \$2 token they receive each week, kids are empowered to make healthy food choices and learn where their food comes from. In 2016 there were over 2,000 kids (age 5-12) who made over 6,200 trips to the market. The concept has been adopted in Maine, and the several markets have regular Kids Club activities. This is a great way to gain the involvement of Hancock County Soil and Water Conservation District, banks, elementary and middle schools, and/or other interests.



20

"If you are not willing to risk the unusual, you will have to settle for the ordinary." -Jim Rohn, author, business philosopher

Memorable Experiences – The Market should be doing everything possible to create regular memorable experiences for consumers, whether it's providing a recipe, giving a free sample or creating a venue where people want to shoot photographs of people and products. If the Market teamed up with local creative arts people, it might result in regular appearances by various artists doing their work on site.

Hopefully, the local churches or civic groups could develop a program to provide recreation and activities to inspire kids and adults, like coordinating a pumpkin carving contest. They also can distribute flyers, put up posters and provide volunteers for many activities.



Business Synergy – Market vendors also can appreciate how synergistically Market activity is linked to overall business health. The Market can collaborate with downtown and other businesses. That can be encouraged with interlocking boards so that all business interests are heard clearly. Participation in special events is another option. Posters with business sponsors are common. There is a readiness among some retailers to link with individual Market vendors in a 1:1 relationship where each distributes coupons for the other.

"Farmers' markets are good for communities. Particularly I like them when they are in the downtown."

-Sue Lessard, Bucksport Town Manager

"We love the fresh product just two blocks away. Longer hours would be great. It's often sold out at the end."

-Mike & Colleen Gross, Verona Wine & Design

Data-based Decisions – A manager needs information to make good decisions, whether running a produce department or a farmers' market. They need to know the volume of products that are moving through the market, including seasonal fluctuations. When vendors provide weekly sales data, crop by crop, managers can meet customer demand with the help of other vendors when one cannot be present. A governing board and a manager make better decisions about the effectiveness of a marketing campaign for a special event with baseline data and sales data later. Without data, they don't know the value of advertising and promotion efforts, and can waste vendor fees.

Loyalty Card – The frequency of market visits is correlated with increased purchasing habits. Therefore, the Market may want to test a Bucksport Farmers' Market Frequent Shopper Card. Provide periodic incentives when customers show that they have bought \$100 of products. A \$2 item can reinforce their regular visits to earn another gift. Such 2 percent costs are inexpensive when compared to the cost of generating a new customer. Cultivating more regular attendance is the most effective way to grow annual sales.

Fifty for Farmers – The Market needs a solid core of regular customers. It might reach out to local leaders and residents to ask them to invest \$50 each week at the Farmers' Market to ensure that we sustain farmers in the region. Customers might sign a pledge card for the season, get it stamped regularly and receive periodic gifts for their loyal patronage. "Fifty for Farmers" helps people to make a real commitment to support local farmers. With 200 "Fifty" customers, the Market is assured of \$10,000 sales weekly.

Day and Hours – One community leader suggested that the Market might want to combine forces with Wednesdays on Main to become stronger with local food businesses. If the Market commits to a food court, it might involve a change of hours to 11-2 or 4-7. Hours can always be extended by popular demand if the Market is busy. As one successful business person said: **"Thursday 2-5 are working hours, not good, not enough."** Local workers echoed that sentiment, saying it should stay open until 6, but a weekend is really better for anyone working.

Community Involvement – Involve every player that is part of the community and wants to help themselves by helping the Market. Virtually every nonprofit in the community should have a booth at the Market periodically during the season. The Market could provide two or three spaces weekly for free as long as the nonprofit helps spread the word.

Another step worth considering is a community-wide meeting where the Market invites vendors, potential vendors, consumers and organizations to share their ideas for an abundant community marketplace. This forum might be a good vehicle for finding community board members.

Artists might be invited to participate in the Market if they have an active project that invites conversation and education among viewers. Try an art contest right at the Market.



Rockland Farmers' Market art in the park invites customers to indulge other sensibilities.

Special Events – Use regular events to coordinate Market growth by adding new vendors and customers simultaneously. Plan major monthly events that highlight vendor products or choose fun, random events. Contests in Norway included cow mooing, watermelon seed spitting, egg carry, juggling with food bean bags and rooster crowing. The goal is to get people involved in good-natured fun and celebrate our expanding food culture.

"You have to make it a destination. There has to be a reason to go there, not just to buy some lettuce. Ten years ago farmers' markets offered better quality, but supermarkets have made great strides at good prices. There have to be other reasons." -John Simmons, Stoneheart Farm, South Paris

Social Media – Build a strong presence especially on Facebook and Instagram. Create small incentives to attract customers. Ask every vendor to build their own social media connections; each should have their own following.

"We're making Facebook work for us. One customer said, 'I saw your beet salad on Facebook and drove right over to buy it.' We now have 2,000 likes on the Market Facebook. We spend \$35 per week on Facebook ads and it's getting us 35 likes per week." -Ray Zimmerman, European Foods, Bangor

Sponsors – There are always businesses and organizations that want to gain more visibility with a quality Market that has regular visitors seeing their name as a supporter. Sponsors may support the overall Market, the music venue, tasting table, special events or the poster. Make sure to promote those businesses on banners or signs or at an annual dinner. Sponsors of a specific event can also be one or more growers.



Specific Goals – In order to turn a vision into a reality, goals are critical. That goes for individual farms and for the Market as a whole. The Market could become a wholesale market where more local restaurants source their product. The Farmers' Market needs to plan its future, and continue to reassess regularly. Regular research can be a crucial part of getting a wider view of the customer experience.

The Market could kick off an expansion with the new season, and/or with a mid-July event when the richness of the summer season's color is fully on display, and summer visitors are present. In planning for a higher level of economic activity, the Market needs to coordinate promotion at a time when it is assured that many crops are ready to sell in volume so that a financial goal is reached.

"Think big! Even if you don't reach your goals, you will get farther than if you never set any." -Vance Corum, Farmers' Markets America

Secret Ballot – As one Maine producer has said, "We need to make decision-making anonymous. People manage their businesses to maintain the status quo, not based on a growth model." Decisions can be difficult, so if the Market feels pulled apart at any time, a secret ballot might be helpful. It is wise to have healthy discussions and air all the most important sides of every issue, but even that can be intimidating for certain people. While some markets operate on consensus, voting may be a better option or it could be avoided if decisions were left to a Board of Directors.

Part-time Contracted Staff – While the Market's current size does not justify it, a part-time contract manager might be a consideration in the future, if the Market is successful scaling up (or in order to scale up). If a manager is hired, the Market should have a clear vision of the necessity, expected hours, job description and financing of the position. If the manager is also on site, their job can include being a two-way communication vehicle between vendor and customer interests, and a decision-maker that balances those interests.

Taking on a paid contract manager may be a big shift for an organization. Markets often start slowly with staff paid for specific functions like accounting or credit card/EBT processing. The position grows when they want to add other responsibilities like event planning, music scheduling, promotion and community outreach. A manager can lift burdens from key vendor volunteers while working with the board and committees to plan and strategize the next level of Market operation. The manager should be guided by board principles.

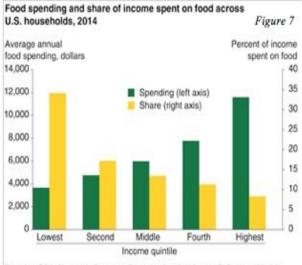
"We're running a business and don't have time...Farmers are just way too busy. That's why we need a board and a manager."

-Heide Purinton-Brown, Toddy Pond Farm, Monroe

V. Analyzing Abundance

Income levels do not determine whether people eat out more; they simply affect whether its fast food, a fancy restaurant or home delivered meal services. Without regard for class, Americans want someone else to plan and fix the meals. As household incomes rise, Americans spend more money – but a smaller portion of their income – on food. While the share of disposable personal income spent on food dropped between 1960 and 2007, rising food prices and falling incomes clearly put the greatest pressure on those with the least resources.

In a 2012 Gallup poll Americans reported spending \$151 on food per week on average. One in 10 Americans said they spend \$300 or more per week and, at the other extreme, 8 percent spend less than \$50. Young adults' average weekly food spending was \$173, more than what older Americans said they spend. Those with incomes of \$75,000 or more per year average \$180 per week, compared with \$144 for those with incomes of \$30,000 to \$74,999, and \$127 for the lowest income group. Adults with children under 18 living at home spend \$30 more per week on average than those without children.



Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Expenditure Survey, 2014.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2015 households ("consumer units") were spending an average of **\$4,015 on food at home** and \$3,008 on food away from home. With 4,924 residents in Bucksport and 2.3 people per average household, there are about 2,135 households. Given spending patterns for food at home, Bucksport households can be projected to spend over \$8 million on food purchases for home consumption.

Figure 7 (left) shows that higher income clearly allows for greater food spending (green), even as it is a smaller percentage of household income (yellow).

Market Share

Let's **assume that the Farmers' Market wanted to capture 3 percent of at-home food expenditures**. It would require a number of food producers capable of selling \$240,000 of food each



year. That would be \$120,000 during the summer Market season of May to October.

Another way to understand \$120,000 of volume is 24 weeks of \$5,000 sales each week. Given lower shoulder seasons, **let's assume a need for \$7,500 of product each week** during the height of the summer season. Based on experience, we can safely assume **\$30 in sales per customer**, up from \$21 now. Thus, the Market would need about 250 shopping groups, compared to the 85 current estimate. This growth could be planned over several

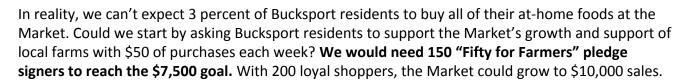
years; a good 100 percent jump initially would be helpful in reaching that larger goal.

One way to meet this demand is to have 10 vendors supplying \$750 each week, or 20 vendors ready to sell \$375 each, or some comparable combination. Given the relative strengths of different farms and other businesses, the \$7,500 weekly goal would be met through a combination of smaller and larger farms/vendors that sell anywhere from \$100 to \$1,500 every Market day. The Market might

discuss financial goals with each vendor, and track sales to ensure that they are satisfied and reaching their potential. The break-out might look something like this:

Farmers Value-Added Producers Prepared Food 9 x \$500 avg. = \$ 4,500 6 x \$250 avg. = \$ 1,500 4 x \$375 avg. = \$ 1,500

Of course, those totals would depend on the desired ratio of vendor types, which vendors participate, their effectiveness in meeting customer desires, and the collective success of the Market in attracting and stopping traffic. It would require placing professional signs throughout the community and building more community support.



Or, recalling that 43 percent of current Market shoppers are from Bucksport. We might set a <u>target</u> of:

Primary Market: 6 percent of 2135 Bucksport households (HHs)		
Secondary Market: 3 percent of 3480 HHs in other key towns < 15 miles	104	20
Tertiary Market: Tourists, periodic county residents		30
Total	262	

If this target were reached, the Market would reach its goal of \$7,500 sales based on 250 people purchasing an average of \$30 of food. With "Fifty for Farmers" pledge card signers, it would only take 150 customers to reach the goal. Realistically, it will be a combination. Betting a strong base

number of 100 would almost guarantee the goal is reached since an improved Market and word-of-mouth would bring additional customers during the height of summer. With softer shoulder seasons the Market should be able to reach a \$120,000 season goal.

The Market's reputation will continue to expand with improved visibility, signage and promotion including posters in businesses and **rack cards at tourist and recreation sites**. If Market members decide to pursue a specific financial goal, growth is more likely. The plan should include specific activities and promotion to reach the numbers desired.

Having sufficient food at every stand to cover Market hours will build consumer confidence that they can shop at any time. This would deal with shoppers who think they have to be early birds to get the full selection.

eat like it MATTERS

25

Future Growth

Growth in 2017 and beyond is possible but not guaranteed. A competitive marketplace exists and customers are increasingly savvy. Addressing the concerns above is part of building a more stable



customer base, but true marketers want to achieve measurable growth to ensure stability. Producers of healthy food want to reach more people to feed them well, and that demands a plan.

The Market would do well to envision a 70 percent expansion of vendors (from 12 to 20) in conjunction with a 100 percent expansion of customers, leading to 150 percent growth in sales (with higher sales per customer). Both the supply and demand must be increased together. The 150 percent increase in sales allows for individual vendor sales to grow, even with 70 percent more vendors. More vendors mean more choice, which leads to more customers, but they need to be educated about the expansion. For instance, a poster might list all the vendors committed for the season, and/or advertising might name additional new farmers coming for a special event.

New vendors can be added gradually, one at a time, but it is more beneficial to add them in groups at the start of a season or in conjunction with any major event the Market is planning. To simply add a vendor(s) on any given week, without some sort of promotion that encourages new customers to come witness the expansion, leaves existing vendors in a position of potentially losing sales.

Avoid thinking a "sell out" is a good day. When sell-outs happen, growth in the market is impossible. Customers attending the market later in the day would find fewer options and may decide not to return. Vendors can assure themselves of not wasting product by finding other avenues such as selling leftovers to a local restaurant or grocer or dropping prices for the final hour.

Location

The current location should be maximized for full impact on Main Street drivers. There appears to be a general sense that the current location is acceptable, even if the vendors are not highly visible to traffic. All **vendors should be grouped together** as close as possible to Main Street. Key vendors with colorful three-tier displays should be placed nearest the street, with extra wing tables for street view. A **narrow customer aisle of 10'-14'** is recommended to keep customers enveloped by the Market's sights and sounds, and there should be a renewed focus on multi-level displays and multiple colorful signs for each vendor. The importance of 1-on-1 personal connections cannot be overemphasized, and the entire Market is dependent upon pleasant interactions.

Banners should be used for approaching traffic and colorful flags attached to the top of the existing Market sign near the sidewalk. A-frame signs could slow down approaching traffic to make it safer for customers to cross Main Street.

While the current location appears acceptable, there was a split opinion on moving the Market to a **US 1 location**. Such a move will require more discussion and a serious search for the best site. The goal of a new location would be to take advantage of the higher traffic counts on US 1, given the difficulty of enticing traffic into the downtown area and the limited parking. If the Market can grow more easily at a new location, it might eventually return to downtown when the mill site has been redeveloped and downtown is revitalized.

If any alternate location is considered by a Site Team, it might use the Maine Transportation Count Book to discern traffic counts for those locations and compare the sites. Parking is often the limiting factor in determining customer numbers. With 100 parking spaces, a site can expect to accommodate 300 customer groups over a 3-hour Market, depending on the number of Market attractions. Although not currently permitted by state law, a seasonally permanent sign on US 1 would remind people as they pass through the area, whether daily or just once a week. A sign or banner would get **70,000-85,000 views per week** depending on its exact location. The Market needs to generate most of its customer traffic through signage, word-of-mouth, advertising and promotion and capture 10 percent of cars just driving by. During Market hours alone that should amount to 250 shopping groups.

As farmers have pointed out, many farmers' markets would do much better if they had more signs in all directions at a distance from the site, preparing people to come stop at the Market. With good connections to property owners, several seasonal or permanent signs should be possible up to five or even 10 miles from the Market (if permitted by state and local law). Additional sandwich board signs should be placed at key locations approaching the Market on



Market day by vendors and the rest of the management team alike.

Community Input and Committee Structure

This vision of an enlarged Market is based on substantial community involvement, beginning with a community meeting that inspires individuals and organizations to help create and fulfill the various elements of the new Market that people find most desirable. A board including farmers and community members would take on this challenge. Committees, or teams that work together, should be created to handle various activities, in conjunction with the manager..

Outreach Team

This team would outline the necessary balance of vendor and consumer numbers. General goals should be established so that each sub-team (Farmers, Value-Added, Hot Food, Music) can take the contacts and create an even more expansive list. They would develop the plan, materials, letters and follow-up phone calls to get vendors committed. The manager and team members should have strong awareness, or openness to learning, about what minimum volumes may be expected by farmers and others to consider participating in the Market.

Fundraising Team

While the Market budget should be solidly balanced on the operational income and expenses, the fundraising team could raise money for Market expansion to a level where fees cover expenses.

A fundraising team could do outreach via many different avenues. A crowdfunding site such as Kickstarter, or better yet Barnraiser, enables people to commit a sum of money and simultaneously support the Market by shopping. Businesses and organizations might commit various amounts to put their logo on a poster, or Main Street, music stag or Kids Club banner. They can sponsor radio ads.

The team could develop a package of sponsor and supporter options that goes from \$100 to \$1500 for the first season. It must be ready to quantify the number of adults who would see their message during the entire year. Different businesses should be approached three months before the Market opening to show good planning and enlist them in spreading the word to their contacts.

Special Events Team

An Events Team can plan and implement a schedule of special events throughout the year, and plan with the Outreach Team to line up additional producers to join the Market for an event. This reduces the potential for new vendors reducing the sales of existing vendors, and it gives the Publicity Team the chance to put a listing of all new vendors in any promotional material for the event.

Publicity Team

A Publicity Team might include vendors, board members and volunteers as well as chefs, health professionals and any other entity in the town interested in natural food, local business and the market. All vendors should be involved in the social media campaign, providing photos and tidbits in their own posts as well as through the Market posts on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.

An advertising team could create a campaign that reinforces local Maine values and the benefits of the Market. A 30-second PSA (Public Service Announcement) might read like this:

"Mainers are proud of the products they produce especially when they contribute to a healthy local economy. When you shop at the Bucksport Farmers' Market, 100 percent of your money goes to local Maine businesses who re-spend that money with other local companies. Where you spend your food money is one of the biggest decisions you make every week. Help strengthen local family farms. 'Buy Local' at the Bucksport Farmers' Market every Thursday, 2-5 and encourage your neighbors to do the same."

A print campaign could be focused on mailers to Bucksport, Orland and Verona residents encouraging them to support the "50 for Farmers" campaign. This campaign to Buy Local and Support Farmers could have many of the points outlined in the PSA campaign above. Second-home owners could be reached through a postcard mailing to their primary address based on county records.

VII. Maine Producers – Potential Vendors

Every market should have a back-up list of vendors in waiting, people who want to get in but for whom there is no space. When vendors can't come, phone calls should be made to existing vendors and/or others on the waiting list to ensure that customers' needs are not left unfulfilled.

When an event is planned, the Event Team should estimate the impact on buying power from customers and management should contact vendors to relay the projected percentage increase in customers. Or perhaps discussed regularly in the weeks leading up to the event. Information for vendors is the key to their ability to meet demand.

The Market should be seeking producers that are part of the local economy - generally Hancock, Waldo and Penobscot producers - but understandably an expanded product mix may demand vendors from other counties.

Producers often want visibility in communities outside their own, and coming to Bucksport can be made into a desirable drive even for a vendor if the Market is vibrant. Producers in more secluded areas may be more inclined to travel a distance in search of new customers, even if only periodically. Having different vendors on a regular basis also can encourage more regular customer visits so that they don't miss their favorites that come irregularly. Drawing fruit growers from further south may involve promising several Facebook posts for their Market visit.

Before contacting vendors, mbe familiar with their product line, know how far they will be traveling, and be ready to outline all the benefits. It is possible to get good leads from people in the community who like good foods and know producers they would value in the Market.

VIII. Key Recommendations

Recommendations are presented together here to stimulate a more thorough discussion among all those who care about the Market.

Customers

- 1. Expand customer database (email/Facebook/Instagram) using promotional item incentives.
- 2. Establish a professional logo that brands the Market with a clear identity. Use consistently.
- 3. Connect with customers weekly, concentrating on Facebook and Instagram.
- 4. Send a targeted high color photo postcard to local households.
- 5. Provide rack cards to area restaurants to reinforce a Buy Bucksport initiative. Tell Facebook.
- 6. Print 5-20,000 rack cards to stimulate card displays in many businesses across the region.
- 7. Post a double-sided, 3' x 8' colorful banner perpendicular to Main St.
- 8. Increase A-frame signs on US 1 and other principal highways entering town or US 1 nearby.
- 9. During Market have a person with a corn costume flagging people at US 1 and Main.
- 10. Mention meats, cheese and baked goods with product-based ads and promotions.
- 11. Key banner words: farmers, local artisans, fun atmosphere, baked goods, ready-to-eat.
- 12. Consider an on-site ATM machine to provide easier access to cash.
- 13. Improve information booth with real info on where to go for goods and services.
- 14. Implement a BBFM Frequent Shopper card with incentives to cultivate repeat sales.

Vendors

- 15. Set goal of having one vendor from each of 12 local towns, and celebrate each with signage.
- 16. Concentrate on adding product diversity, and more choice in each product area.
- 17. Find conventional fruit/vegetable growers and reinforce consumer price concerns to all.
- 18. Use a Western style "WANTED" poster to appeal to new farmers. Put in banks & businesses.
- 19. Attract one or two more farms with a CSA program, including Market choice and pick-up.
- 20. Add younger employees and vendors, collaborating with RSU 25.
- 21. Expand choice for fruit, vegetables, meat, poultry, baked goods and prepared food.
- 22. Ask every vendor to provide nutrient density signage and reinforce with customers.
- 23. Encourage vendors to offer credit card reader for cash-strapped customers.

- 24. Improve vendor signage, create custom canopies, multi-tiered displays, add sample tables.
- 25. Conduct regular price audits of local grocers to build vendor awareness of the competition.
- 26. Get farmers to expand with value-added line, and reach out to new value-added producers.
- 27. Add more prepared food, including beer, cider and wine.

Atmosphere/Environment

- 28. Regular weekly acoustic music.
- 29. Develop social/relaxation/coffee space at entrance with umbrellas, tables and chairs.
- 30. Create activities and atmosphere to attract kids and young adults.
- 31. Host at least monthly special events with customer reminders and media press releases.
- 32. Coordinate arrival of new vendors with those special events to the extent possible.
- 33. Ask 25-54 year-old parents for specific ideas of kid-friendly activities to implement.

Partnerships

- 34. Find an organization to host a Kids Club that will distribute \$2 vouchers every week.
- 35. Build relationships with sponsoring businesses using posters, flyers and rack cards.
- 36. Seek business sponsors of specific events, weekly music, Kids Club, nutrition education, etc.
- 37. Link farms and local businesses in two-way coupon program for awareness and sales.
- 38. Build linkages with local employers as Market Supporters, e.g., for employee reminders.
- 39. Ask high school students to design individual vendor displays, signage and color plan.
- 40. Coordinate annual poster contest for H.S. students (\$500) with insurance/college sponsor.
- 41. Ask area restaurants and schools to use Market as wholesale source.
- 42. Ask top 10 area employers to develop incentive health program for employees to shop.
- 43. Build a vendor business training program with a bank and experienced vendor mentors.
- 44. Consider a Bucksport area non-shopper study, investigating concerns and disincentives.
- 45. Invite restaurants to participate in Market Chef series to teach good food preparation.
- 46. Host annual Market Forum with farmers and strategic thinkers to update strategy.
- 47. Get involved with Bucksport events like its Ghostport Festival.
- 48. Host a "Home Farm" team in the Coffin Race; provide a free "deadly salad" for all entrants.
- 49. Create a scavenger hunt for downtown businesses to connect to the Market.
- 50. Build "Fifty for Farmers" campaign for leaders and locals to buy \$50 or 50% of food weekly.
- 51. Print canvas bags for "Fifty" customers, Market logo on one side, sponsor logos on the other.

Vendor-business alliance - Work on cross promotions, offer coupons at the market for local businesses and ask the businesses to do the same for the market. Encourage local restaurants to purchase from vendors.

Signage should be prominent entering Bucksport from all major entries. Given that paid advertising potential is limited, the Market should invest in at least six good A-frame signs for these heaviest traffic locations. The signs are best located as cars slow down approaching US 1.

Vendor expansion effort - the Market site should be full, with at least 20 vendors including more fruits and vegetables along with value-added businesses, Maine-made crafts and kid's activities.

"Fifty for Farmers" - This pledge card program should be developed to allow customers to make a commitment to spend \$50 a week, or 50 percent of their food budget, at the Market. For those wanting a different option, a customer loyalty card would be distributed that encouraged them to

attend weekly and receive an incentive with each \$100 they spend. When pledge and loyalty cards are distributed, contact information is acquired for email and social media contact. These customer programs can be stimulated by special events, a heightened social media presence, and good partnerships.

MOFGA pilot chef apprentice program - Approach MOFGA to create a chef apprenticeship on MOFGA farms since there is farmer interest in Bucksport, Belfast and Presque Isle.

Customer Survey Conclusions and Suggestions for Vendors

The Farmers' Market has certain advantages that few retailers can claim: pride in product, a sincere smile, samples. Vendors need to use them to their advantage, and consider how to use cubic footage in their space, not square footage. Vertical appeal fills the consumer's view. Think about how to greet every potential or regular customer with a positive individualized comment. Make sure some display elements are low enough that kids feel included in the Market experience. Seventy percent of people's attention is directed between elbow and shoulder height, so consider the height range for your product with a range of people heights.

Include a small sample as a friendly gift to make someone into a regular shopper. The goal is always to build a lasting friendship over making an immediate sale. Be open in referring shoppers to a favorite restaurant, or handing them one of your best recipes. Be quick to refer customers to another vendor or a source downtown. You want to be seen as a key source of information and help, rather than someone pushing only their own products.

Have a child ready to offer help in getting items to the car, or see if the Market can offer local high school students the chance to gain some community service credits. Ask customers how the Market could be better and take notes to discuss at a vendor meeting. Build your own mailing list of steady or periodic customers by offering to connect on Facebook and send pictures from your farm, or a discount offer.Hand out a Bucksport Bay Farmers' Market sticker or bumper sticker that customers can proudly show. Wear a Market hat or T-shirt that shows your pride in being a vendor at the Bucksport Market. Establish your farm brand and keep it visible constantly.

Board of Directors – Consider establishing a formal board including farmers and vendors along with committed community members. The depth of business acumen, cultural perspective, consumer attitudes and marketing skills will enrich the Market.

Committee Structure – All strong organizations operate with a set of standing committees. The true work is done at the committee level. Possible standing committees might be Policy & Governance, Outreach, Promotion, Advertising, Special Events, Fundraising, Finance and Education. Their recommendations come to the Board for final approval. Ad hoc committees can be established by prerogative of the board president for short-term specific goals.

Reserve Fund – Consider dedicating a part of fees to a reserve fund, which can be used as a rainy day fund to cover unexpected costs, or used for buying property and constructing a market building. The Market should take control of its future and build a solid foundation which ensures future farmers have a secure place to sell. This respects the commitment of so many people that has brought the Market to this place so far.

Advertising/Promotion Fund – Establish a fund to pay for all advertising and promotion activities. Ask an Advertising/Promotion Team to write a plan.

Membership and Space Fees – Consider reducing the membership fee to \$20 to cover basic membership. A higher fee like \$40 discourages smaller vendors with a high up-front entry cost. Free first year membership or a low fee ensures they give the Market a fair period of time to see if their product is well received.

Given that farmers' markets have historically been established to help small farmers, we should attempt to create standards that respect **several key principles**:

- 1. Every vendor should be able to compete on an equal level with every other vendor.
- 2. Fees should be fair, not punitive to smaller producers.
- 3. Small vendors should be encouraged to participate since they provide diversity of product.
- 4. Larger farmers often provide needed volume and variety to satisfy the masses.
- 5. More valuable space like corners have a higher value. Those willing to pay should get the space, rather than senior members.

For years the Market has allowed farmers to benefit from the Market without paying for it. Because the Market had no financial stability, there was no money to invest for farmers' long-term benefit. To build a Market that farmers can depend on, it would be wise to have a daily fee that builds Market resources and doesn't tax smaller producers unjustly.

The Market should consider a daily space fee that aligns with sales volume. A reasonable solution that is equally fair for all and allows the Market to have funds to operate like an established business is a \$5 minimum daily, or 5 percent of sales, whichever is greater.

Payment would be made daily at the end of Market. An easy way to handle this is for every vendor to submit their payment along with a product sheet listing their items and volumes sold in a clasp manila envelope to the manager. The manager could issue them a receipt immediately if they wish, or create a ledger of all payments at home and provide a receipt in the manila envelope given to them the following Market day for their next payment to be submitted.

The Market manager would be the only person to know people's sales and would keep them private. The current Bucksport system provides little money for expenses and no security for the Market. A realistic fee would generate \$4,000 to 10,000 annually. The Market would additionally be able to track annual growth, and even data for special events so that the Market knows whether the investment in each event is a wise decision. The manager would provide overall sales data on a regular basis so that committees/teams have good feedback on their work.

Paid Part-time Manager – The Market is operating at a scale where volunteers are essential to its continuation and part-time paid help will be needed if growth is achieved.

Partnerships – The key to growth is constantly focusing on the potential of the Market, setting goals, listening to customers and displaying abundance in every way. With a solid partner in Leslie Wombacher and the Chamber, the Market needs to continue establishing relationships with other entities throughout the local area.

Conclusion

While the Bucksport Market has a good base, the key to its expansion is an improved atmosphere, heightened volume and variety of goods to spark interest and loyalty from a larger base of customers. The best expansion strategy incorporates several key elements. Add 20 farmers, create a lively atmosphere, build to 150 regular customers through outreach around a "Fifty for Farmers" campaign, and improve signage.

With a new board, committees, new fee structure and extensive special event schedule, the Market can readily expand sales by 100 to 300 percent to serve 70 percent more local vendors and double the customers or more.

Additional Information

Market Customer Survey Summary

Bucksport is well-positioned in the midst of a rich Mid-coast wealth of small farms. The Bucksport Bay Farmers' Market has access to some of the best farmers in Maine. There are many young starter farms in the area that might be interested in a revitalized, expanding market.

Community members and leaders will need to show they value local farmers by supporting them. Only if we buy from local farms can we expect local farmers to survive.

The promise of a "healthy local farmers' market" is dependent on supportive relationships. Farmers and consumers are important but not all that is needed. Every school, social and business organization needs to join the effort.

Farmers' Market Organizer. Through town funds or a grant, a 3-month position should be created for a person to implement the organizational plan. This person will play a leadership role in the community process of scaling up the Market.

Increase the Base to 20 Vendors. These 20 farms and food artisans need \$500 a piece each week to participate. They will be ready with \$10,000 of food for committed customers.

Encourage 150 Customers to Sign the "Fifty for Farmers" Pledge. With 150 customers at \$50 a week, the Market will have a committed core of people ready to purchase \$7,500 of food.

Cultivate 20 Community Partners. From banks to barbershops, every business and organization should be asked: "At what level would you like to sponsor the Farmers' Market" and "How can we help you?"

Hold a Community Forum. Ask leaders, community, business and vendors to attend a forum create a vision of what they desire in a community marketplace. People are rebuilding a local economy starting with food relationships, and resulting in healthy diets, improved social vitality and supportive connections to enhance Bucksport's future.

Demographic Overview

In 2016 there were nationally 7.9 million fewer people nationally requiring SNAP benefits to feed their families. However, this is was not true of Maine where 186,372 Mainers still require the

program. The Annie E. Casey Foundation found in 2014 an increase of 6,000 more Maine children living in poverty than in 2008. Mainers using SNAP benefits were encouraged to shop at the 36 farmers' markets that offered Maine Harvest Bucks (MHB) in 2016, with the assistance of the FINI (Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive) grant program. Generally providing a 1:1 match for SNAP users, MHB doubles the volume of Maine fruits and vegetables that customers can purchase at farmers' markets. Bucksport is one of the communities providing a MHB match at the Market.



Bucksport is located 18 miles from the two service center towns of Belfast and Ellsworth. It has banking,

retail and other services but not comparable to those found in service center towns.

Demographics

While the U.S. population grew 4.1 percent from 2010-2015 to 321.4 million people, Maine's population grew less than 0.1 percent. Generally, a declining trend characterized most of the state, offset by growth in Greater Portland.

Maine is the "oldest" state in the country with an average age of 42.7, a full 5.5 years older than the U.S. average. Between 1990 and 2010 there was a large shift in age with the percentage of the population under 18 dropping from 25.2 percent to 20.7 percent and 18-34 year-olds declining from 26.8 percent to 19.6 percent of the population. The result was that 35-64 year olds grew from 34.7 percent to 43.8 percent of Mainers, and those 65 and older expanded from 13.3 percent to 15.9 percent.

From 2010-2015, the U.S. Census shows that Hancock County grew 0.4 percent in population to 54,659 residents (or about 24,371 households). The county racial makeup is 96.2 percent white, 1.4 percent Hispanic, 1.1 percent Asian, 0.5 percent American Indian, 0.8 percent black and 1.4 percent from two or more races. High school graduates were 93.7 percent of the population, and 32.7 percent had a Bachelor's degree. The median household income was \$47,030.

The Bucksport population was estimated at 4924 residents in 2010, and 2,135 households. Median household income in Bucksport was \$37,047 (2015). The poverty rate was 16.4 percent versus the 13.5 percent state average.

Maine had an extremely low 2.32 average household size in 2010, compared to 2.58 for the United States. Hancock County had a 4.2 percent increase in the number of family households from 2000-2010 (pre-mill closure), fifth highest in Maine, and a 23.1 percent expansion in non-family households , second to next door Waldo County. Non-family households grew from 34to 37 percent of all Maine households by 2010. Females as head of household grew from 26 to 31 percent, and single female heads of household make up 54 percent of households. Thus, the state as a whole and Hancock County as well are seeing a shift toward non-family households which relates to a smaller household size and lower food consumption levels for each household.

Housing affordability is causing more middle-aged people to rent. From 2000 to 2010, Maine median home values grew quickly while real median household incomes declined in all but three counties, so the ratio of house price to income dropped dramatically, despite the housing recession. The share of 35 - 44 year-old renters grew by 11 percent, and for those 45 - 54 by 15 percent.

During the period of 2000 to 2010, Hancock County experienced a 1 percent increase in real median household income at the same time as the median home price grew by 94 percent. This combination of factors puts further pressure on households when it comes to food affordability. With the mill closure and loss of 570 jobs in Bucksport, it was further exacerbated.

Noting the principal communities that the Bucksport Bay Farmers' Market could and does serve, there are well over **25,000 residents within 15 miles**. However, many of these communities have better, closer markets which leaves about about 13,000 in the most likely towns*:

<u>Town</u>	Population	Miles to FM
Bucksport*	4924	-
Verona*	544	2
Orland *	2225	3
Prospect*	709	6
Stockton Springs*	1591	9
Frankfort*	1124	10
Searsport	2615	12
Dedham	1681	12
Orrington	3700	13
Winterport*	3757	13
Penobscot	1263	13
Swanville	1388	15

(Bold are towns from which farmers currently come, including lists below.)

If we look at the tertiary market, there are an additional 23,000 residents in towns 15-30 miles from Bucksport. While they are more likely to go to the Ellsworth market, they should know to stop in Bucksport when they are close by. Castine residents are a perfect example, as we shall see.

Hancock Co.	Population	Miles to BBFM
Blue Hill	2686	17
Castine	1366	17
Surry	1416	18
Ellsworth	7741	19
Lamoine	1602	22
Brooksville	934	23
Sedgwick	1196	26
Deer Isle	1975	26
Trenton	1481	28
Hancock	2394	29
Brooklin	824	30

To be hopeful we might look at other communities in Waldo County as well in the 15-30 mile range. These could generally be expected to support the Belfast market:

Waldo Co.	Population	Miles to BBFM
Monroe	890	17
Belfast	6833	19
Morrill	884	25
Belmont	942	25
Waldo	762	21
Belmont	942	25
Brooks	1078	25
Morrill	884	25
Northport	1520	26
Searsmont	1392	29

Bangor (32,673) and Newburgh (1,551) alone account for more than 34,000 of Penobscot County's 145,000 residents. It would be a long shot to tap into the citizens of Maine's third most populated county, given the farmers' markets in Hampden, Bangor, Brewer and Orono, but general awareness with good road signage might capture some residents coming to the coast in the summer.

Similarly, there are another 20,000 Hancock County residents and 11,000 Waldo County residents outside 30 miles from Bucksport. All these more distant towns are not worth targeting. However, when their residents are traveling outside their communities for work or other reasons, signs are critical in giving them the opportunity to stop and shop.

The Bucksport Market inevitably must come to grips with its smaller size and needs to find its own unique identity that distinguishes it from surrounding market towns. Given that Maine residents have many reasons for traveling, it is important to focus on supporting the local Market and simultaneously give others a taste of what Bucksport stands for. It is critical to devise programs and activities to accentuate the Market's desirability for local people. Among these are the development of a health improvement program linked to larger employers. Working with the restaurant industry and other retailers could lead to mutual referrals where everyone benefits from co-promotion.

The vision presented in this study is one of **substantial growth** in the vendor base, variety of products and number of customers to reach a sustainable level where natural growth is possible. The Market will need to convince the local populace of the importance of supporting local farmers. If it is achieved, both the farmers' market and the town of Bucksport will experience an expansion that is healthy for everyone.

Resources

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A farmer cooking vegetable samples at a farmers' market.

Many thanks to Lee Auto Malls for a vehicle loan that facilitated this project.