Business is Blooming:
An Inquiry into the Development of the Dane County Farmers’ Market
and the Factors of its Success

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Abstract
The Dane County Farmers Market is a special part of our lives living in Madison, Wisconsin and we want to know, what trends in the region influenced the development of the Dane County Farmer’s Market (DCFM) and what factors can we attribute to its success? Our research consisted of an interview with DCFM Manager Larry Johnson and a review of twenty-five newspaper articles. In our paper we highlight four major factors that we found to have the most influence and contribution to the current success of the DCFM. The increasing trend of eating local in Wisconsin is a major factor of success as local food is rooted in the geography and people of Wisconsin. Additionally, the increase in marketing of local producers aides in facilitating the relationships between producers and consumers. Vendors at the DCFM can only sell goods that they themselves produce. This is an integral part of the market because the DCFM is currently the largest producer-only farmers market in the nation. The critical location of the market, around the Capitol Square, aids in the promotion of the market and creates a unique phenomenon that brings consumers to downtown Madison. The market also is an important community center for Madison, bringing together individuals and groups with interests in various political and social issues. In identifying these characteristics of a successful farmers’ market and exploring their value, we hope that these factors will encourage and enhance farmers markets both in Madison and elsewhere.

Introduction

All roads lead to the Dane County Farmers’ Market. A personal map of the market depicts frequented vendors. (Map: Davies 12-6-11)
A customer shops the market with their symbolic red wagon filled with produce. (Photo: Davies 10-7-11)

The Dane County Farmers Market (DCFM) is a soaring success hosting twenty thousand customers on a good Saturday making it the nation’s largest producer-only farmers’ market. The success of this market connects thousands of shoppers with locally grown and produced goods with the farmers who produce them. But how did the market get to be the bustling outdoor grocery store it is today? What factors led Madison, Wisconsin to become the host of a flourishing celebration of local community, mutually benefiting an extravaganza of local small-scale agriculture?

After reading many studies and articles on farmers’ markets, we have posed this research question for our project: *What trends in the region have influenced the development of the Dane County Farmer’s Market (DCFM) and what factors can we attribute to its success?* When we asked Dane County Farmers Market manager, Larry Johnson, what he thought made this market so great he replied that, “it’s the one on one connection with the people that produced your food, it’s the strong community support and it’s the beautiful location of Capitol Square” along with the growing trend of eating local. Eating local is becoming a trend especially in Wisconsin where local food is already apart of the people and the land. It is also becoming more available through the increased marketing of local producers. Vendors at the DCFM can only sell products that they themselves have produced. This gives the market an informal feel as well as a variety of products that are tailored to customer interests. The market location around the Capitol serves as a icon for the market calling all consumers of locally-grown products to the center of Wisconsin’s capitol city every Saturday morning. The market acts as an informal community center because it serves as a place for not only local food but also local politics, music, and
It is important to start with a clear idea of what a “farmers’ market” actually is before we can discover any trends within the market. For the purpose of our research project we will use this general definition: a farmer’s market is a collection of vendors, mostly farmers, who set up stands in a common location at the same time to sell fruits, vegetables, meats, beverages and sometimes prepared meals. Not all of the goods purchased at the farmers market are conventional. Some goods are cultural items as well as personal goods. The size of a farmers market can range from just a couple of stalls to several hundred spanning multiple city blocks, depending on the region's culture, economy, and resources.

The USDA defines a market as "a common facility or area where several farmers/growers gather on a regular, recurring basis to sell a variety of fresh fruit and vegetables and other farm products directly to consumers" (Payne 2000, 1). Because farmers’ markets sell produce directly to the consumer, they are a growing market tool for farmers. Customers can also benefit from direct contact with the producers of their food. (Payne 2000, preface IV).

The DCFM in particular is one of the largest in the country and is proudly displayed on the Madison Capitol Square.

“The market shows off the beauty of Madison and the talent of Capitol landscapers and gardeners. It is a social grocery store that invites the questions of newcomers and the bravery of taste-testers. It is a culinary circus where veteran customers become knowledgeable tour guides” (Carpenter 2003, 8).

Because of the beauty of farmers’ markets and the benefits they bring to the local economy, most popular farmers markets are in well-traveled areas of the city. This may be due to two of the factors we looked at specifically for the DCFM. One being that the DCFM connects consumers to the surrounding area (Capitol Square) in addition to the market stands. People come downtown for the market and spend money at many other restaurants and retail shops in the area. This increases the popularity of the shops in the area that the market is held in. Also, the DCFM stands as a central part of the community in Madison, thus the location of the Capitol also stands as a community center, during and after the market.
As the hand-written sign indicates, these tomatoes and all other produce is “home-grown” and produced solely by the vendor selling it. (Photo: Davies 10-7-11)

The timeline [Figure A] gives a temporal perspective to events that shaped the DCFM. Right away we see that vendor response was enthusiastic and within a few years the market was operating at full capacity. The timeline illustrates the market’s adaptations to the trends we discussed, such as the pairing of local producers and restaurants that began when Odessa Piper began foraging at the market to complete her menu at L’Etoile, a tradition that continues to this day. The growing popularity of the market is evidenced by the establishment of a vendor wait-list, as well as expansion of the vending season in 2001. Due to the importance of the market manager, both in the operation of the DCFM as well as in our research, the terms of market managers have been included, ending with Larry Johnson, current manager and key interview subject.

Research Methods
To answer our research question we analyzed a wide variety of information sources. We took advantage of one crucial interview with the DCFM Manager, Larry Johnson, we analyzed local and national newspaper articles, we read multiple studies on farmers’ markets in general and a few that used the DCFM as a study subject and we also used our own observations and photos from the outdoor and indoor market over the course of the semester. We interviewed Larry Johnson because the market manager is one of the most crucial factors in determining the success of a farmers market (Oberholtzer, et al. 19, 2003). In the twenty-five newspaper articles concerning the DCFM that we read, we found that newspaper sources were the best predictors of wider trends, popularity and attitudes of the DCFM. Looking at previous studies on farmers markets and changing food trends gave us a good idea about what constitutes a farmers market as well as what possible factors could contribute to the success of our farmers’ market. Our personal observations, experiences and photos were a major part of our research and how we
developed the lens from which we view the market. Other sources of information that played a significant role in our research includes, but is not limited to the DCFM website and Mary Carpenter’s book, “The Dane County Farmers’ Market: A Personal History.”

We used the method of abduction in guiding our research and data collection. Since the DCFM has been a instant success from its beginning with a great many non-exclusive factors at play, this method seemed to be the most applicable. In following the method of abduction, we searched for broad patterns and trends at work which could potentially play a role in explaining the inexplicable success of the DCFM. In using this method, we attempted to analyze the phenomenon of the DCFM from a plethora of perspectives in order to understand the DCFM in its entirety. This method allowed us to be flexible in our research by allowing us to incorporate new findings into our study which we could not have foreseen from the outset. It is important to note that the four factors which we outline in our findings are not independent of each other but rather they are interconnected and often play off of each other. Our research is not all-inclusive as we could not feasibly undertake the task of outlining every potential factor influencing the success of the DCFM. We admit that there are a great many factors which we have overlooked, these could be the focus of other future studies.

Our research can be considered a geographic inquiry because it consisted of both theory and observation (Gomez and Jones III, 2010, 27). Studying the DCFM gave us the unique ability to theorize about how the market is structured and how it works while being able to actually go to the market and observe how these theories play out in the real everyday workings of the DCFM and vice versa.

We approached our research from a variety of different research paradigms. We took a post-structuralist perspective in defining what local is and how it influences the success of the DCFM. In our exploration of the market as producer-only, we dealt with critical-realist theories concerning the relations of production and the changing trends in agriculture. Our analysis of the location of the market around Capitol Square delved into the spatial science paradigm when looking at the physical geographic location of the market and the impact that this has on the markets success. In looking at the farmers market as a community center, we took a more humanistic approach concerning the market as a sense of place, looking at who visits, why they come to the market and what is the result of these connections.

Research Results

We will discuss four major factors that we found contributed to the markets success. First, the increasing trend in eating local that Madison and the surrounding areas embrace so strongly. Second, the strict rules on being producer-only that are in place at the DCFM and how that influences the customer base and the producers profits. Third, the location of the market at the Capitol Square in the downtown area of Madison and how that contributes to the local economy. Lastly, we will look at how the DCFM located at the center of Madison stands as a center for the Madison community. Also, we will discuss how all of these ideas and trends have played a crucial role in the development and success of the market as a whole.

Emphasis on Eating “Local”
A variety of cheeses laid out at the Forgotten Valley Cheese stand on Main Street, beckon Wisconsinites to taste them as they walk by. (Photo: Davies 10-7-11)

The increasing trend of eating local is a major factor influencing the current success of the Dane County Farmers Market. Farmers markets nation-wide have increased by 63% during the period between 1990-2000 (Payne, 2000, preface IV). The Capital Times reported that Americans will spend an estimated $7 billion dollars on locally produced foods in 2011, up from $4.8 billion in 2008 (DeVires, 2011). The Oxford American Dictionary even felt that this trend was big enough to call the word "locavores", one who eats locally produced foods whenever possible, the best new word of the year in 2007 (Oxford University Press Blog, 2007). Eating local is becoming a trend. But what is “local”?

Despite all the attention that the word “local” gets in reference to food, defining what this is can be difficult. The post-structuralist paradigm comes into play when trying to define what local is and how it influences the success of the DCFM. The Official U.S. Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008 defines local food as food that is consumed within 400 miles of its origin. (H.R. 2419, Sec 6015 A I) But when applied to the DCFM, local means within a 150 mile radius of Madison, inside the state of Wisconsin (see graphic below). The fact that vendors can only come from within the state of Wisconsin reinforces this idea of “local”.
The public of the Dane County area is committed to buying food locally (Arts et. al.). This is one of the major factors of the success of the DCFM according to Arts et. al. A survey done in 2003 found that the main customer base for the Dane County Farmers Market is local with 50% of customers coming from within five miles (LeMire 15, 2003). In the Dane County area there is a need for increased consumer access to locally produced goods. This is evident
when you take into account that the Dane County Farmers Market hosts around 20,000 customers on a good Saturday (Larry Johnson). The crowds on any given Saturday for that matter will be packed person to person filling the whole width of the ten foot sidewalk surrounding the Capitol. Once apart of this counter-clockwise flow there is no turning around or even stopping, to do so one must dislodge oneself from the continuous movement of the “locavores.” The supplying of local food to local consumers is a niche that the Dane County Farmers Market fills with great success.

The geographic location of the State of Wisconsin makes the ability to eat “local” a reality. This research falls under the Spatial Science paradigm. Informally known as the “Dairy State”, Wisconsin is located just on the outskirts of the grain belt region of the United States where dairy and agriculture farming play a large role in the identity of many “Wisconsinites.” Almost everyone that lives in Wisconsin either knows a farmer or knows someone who knows someone who’s a farmer. Customers come into the DCFM feeling the need to support local farmers, while at the same time being able to buy quality produce. According to a survey done in 2003, 82% of customers thought that supporting Wisconsin agriculture was important (LeMire 45, 2003). The state of Wisconsin is surrounded by fresh water coming from the Mississippi River, Wisconsin River and the two Great Lakes; Michigan and Superior. Access to water for crop irrigation along with the relatively flat topography of the region and fertile soils, notably the Antigo silt loam (the State soil of Wisconsin), make Wisconsin an ideal place for farming. With a majority of the state classified as rural (Cromartie and Bucholtz 1, 2000), densely populated urban centers such as Madison and Milwaukee are surrounded by farmlands. Farmlands which on average were 194 acres in 2007, that is less than half the size of the national average of 418 acres in 2007 (USDA Census of Agriculture, 2007). This means that Wisconsin farms are more likely to be smaller-scale agriculture. The ideal combination of urban and rural landscapes in the state of Wisconsin gives small rural farmers access to large locally sourced consumer bases, while giving consumers in urban areas plenty of access to locally grown produce.

Another contributing factor of success, according to Arts et al., is the marketing of local producers in Dane County. Organizations such as REAP Food Group’s Farm Fresh Atlas, further facilitate the relationship between local producers and consumers by informing the consuming public of opportunities to buy locally grown foods (Arts, et. al. 2005, 10). Other organizations such as the Madison Chapter of “Slow-food,” which is a national grass-roots movement that supports locally produced foods, and events such as the “Wisconsin Eat Local Challenge,” which was hosted by the Willy Street Co-op in September 2011, promote a growing incentive and information base for eating locally produced foods.

The fact that the DCFM takes place around the Capitol every Saturday incites efforts on the behalf of the County and State governments to get in on the action of local food. In 2005, the Dane County Board voted to create a Dane County Food Council to make local foods more available in the county and to provide increased marketing resources for local farmers (Becker, Casey 2011). And then in 2006, Dane County created the Institutional Food Market Coalition to connect local farmers with bulk food buyers such as universities, hospitals, hotels, and conference centers. The rewards of these government council efforts were notable in 2010 by successfully selling and delivering over 1.5-million dollars of locally grown products to dozens of public and private sectors in 2010 (Becker, Casey 2011). The State of Wisconsin also plays a large role in the local food movement simply by allowing the DCFM to surround the State Capitol by blockading four major streets in the city. The County and State governments of
Wisconsin, in supporting local farmers, are realizing the importance and growing popularity of "local" foods. The consuming public is becoming increasingly more food conscious. Nationwide the organic food movement is strong with 31% of U.S. families buying more organic food in 2009 than in 2008 (Blazek et al. 2010, preface v). But in the Madison area, "local food trumps organic", says DCFM Manager Larry Johnson. The trend of eating "local" is taking the place of "organic" because organic foods must abide by a set of strict federal regulations concerning their production, but distance from consumers is not part of those regulations. Buying local food supports local farmers, this is something that is important to the people of Wisconsin and especially to the customers of the Dane County Farmers Market.

**Unique Producer-Only Policy**

The second major factor of success we looked at for the Dane County Farmers’ Market is its producer-only policy. What “producer-only” means is that the vendor at the farmers’ market must have been involved with the production of the goods they are selling. This can include the cultivation, harvest, baking, packaging, and any other tasks that need to be completed for the item can be sold. Not all farmers’ markets have this policy, and Dane County Farmers’ Market is the largest producer-only farmers’ market in the country. By verifying the direct connection with the goods sold, the DCFM eliminates the possibility of vendors profiting from resold items. What this policy means is that more money goes to the farmers because the supply chain is not as fragmented. This is an integral part of the DCFM because as we mentioned earlier, “local” is very important to Wisconsin consumers. Direct contact between consumer and producer is hard to come by these days, but the personal and authentic exchanges at the DCFM keep people coming back week after week.

The Dane County Farmers’ Market assures that its producer-only policy is followed by visiting the production sites of vendors. When the farmer becomes a vendor, they agree to allow the DCFM market manager to inspect their facilities to verify their role in production. Different rules exist for agricultural produce than for prepared goods however, like breads and baked deserts, both market staples. For these types of products, the raw ingredients do not all need to be locally sourced (though one can imagine that in such a locally driven community many make this choice). Due to the large amount of ingredients required for some value-added products, and the difficulty of their local production, the rules include that certain types of goods need only be locally made. Further regulations are in place to limit bakeries who sell at the DCFM to only one retail outlet, at their production facility. By contextualizing “producer-only” for bakers and other similar vendors (pasta, desserts, etc.) the DCFM makes sure that no “chain” stores can join in on the farmers’ market and compete with family vendors. Similar rules exist for cheese vendors. At the DCFM, cheese is sometimes sold by a dairy farmer who brings his milk to a cheese maker, and sometimes by the cheese maker who may have several dairy sources. There are also dairy farmers who are their own cheese makers. Cheese and cheese curds are some of the most popular DCFM sellers, and by assuring an even playing field for all vendors, there is room for all to find success at the market.

Another tendency that the farmers’ market promotes is the variety and specialization of goods. Any farmers’ market visitor would admit that there is more variety in locally produced foods at the farmers’ market than at their grocery store. This is because the farmers’ market rewards diversity, specialization, and quality, while traditional grocery stores seek portability, uniformity, and quantity. By connecting local producers and providing an enthusiastic market
downtown, it is possible for farmers to invest themselves into their products, rather than simply choosing their crop by which prices are highest. Consumers enjoy a wide selection and encourage further diversity by searching out heirloom varieties of fruits and vegetables, high quality seasonal produce, as well as a number of value added products like cheese curds or hot spicy cheese bread. Furthermore, the benefits of a local producer-only farmers’ market can be illustrated simply in [Figure B] below. Each time the grocery store produce travels or passes through someone’s hands, that process has to be paid for, resulting not necessarily in a higher consumer price, but a lower price being paid for the produce from the farmer. The farmers’ market supply chain simplifies the journey from food to fork, meaning that money spent on farmers’ market goods result in higher prices paid to farmers. Another important difference that this graphic illustrates is the aspect of transportation. There are many claims on how far the average product travels from several hundred to several thousand miles to reach its consumer, and no matter what that distance, the farmers’ market offers a less intensive transportation network. This simplified economic chain supports small Wisconsin family farms much more than modern industrial agriculture and large food brokers.

The DCFM built a platform to benefit both the consumers and the producers. Because the DCFM organization is non-profit fees for vendors are low, this allows many different people to practice direct marketing without investing too much in vending costs (Carpenter 2003, 13). The DCFM benefits both the producers and the consumers by selling directly to the consumer. This eliminates “the middle stages of distribution and processing that spell higher prices for consumers with continued low income for producers” (Carpenter 2003, 13). Vendors also receive fair prices for their goods with the added benefit of getting to interact with the consumers who buy their products. Many consumers are willing to pay more for the freshest products and for wide varieties of produce that cannot be found other places, so the producers who provide these products benefit even more (Carpenter 2003, 14).
A simplified supply chain

[Figure B]
A plant and herb vendor hands off her product, as customers in the background admire her healthy plants for sale. (Photo: Davies 10-7-11)

The Dane County Farmers market has changed significantly since it began in 1972. Vendors have continually tailored their products and marketing strategies to better fit consumer trends and desires. Many vendors at the market notice that some products out sell other products or different types of products. By noticing a gap in the market, vendors can change their products or strategies to better meet the needs of the consumer and therefore increase their sales (Carpenter 2003, 14). For example, Stella’s Bakery famous for their “spicy cheese bread” first started selling eggplants, with very little bakery goods (Carpenter 2003, 15). Many other vendors at today’s market have also changed their strategy to fit into a certain niche.
“The Gourd Guy” is a must stop at the DCFM every Saturday. He offers dried and fresh gourds of all shapes and sizes to use for decoration or craft projects. (Photo: Davies 10-28-11)

Farmers markets provide small farmers with an alternative marketing outlet as a way to stay in business in a changing agricultural economy. The agricultural system in the U.S. has changed from being a network of small locally owned and operated farms to one of large scale commercial agriculture. Commercialized agriculture along with an increase in urbanization has driven most small farmers out of business. With the advent of the supermarket and large chain stores such as Wal-Mart, small farmers are struggling to make profits when selling on the wholesale level. Urbanization in some areas can provide new marketing opportunities associated with rising demand for ‘local’ food production” generally in smaller communities (Clark 2007, 3). Through direct marketing local farmers can provide consumers with goods that are of increased variety and quality as opposed to goods that are mass produced and sold in supermarkets. Not only are goods of high variety and quality more marketable, but when sold directly to the consumer they are more profitable. By cutting out the middleman, (wholesale buyers such as supermarkets), small farmers are able to sell their produce directly to the consumer at a reasonable price while retaining a greater percentage of the profits. In many
moderately-sized cities similar to Madison, we are seeing a “rise of lifestyle, hobby, or recreational farming” across the United States (Clark 2007, 6). A younger generation is taking an interest in small scale farming, “where the fundamental logic of decision-making is based on considerations of quality of life factors as opposed to enterprise efficiency” (Clark 2007, 6). Farmers markets are a useful alternative economic strategy for small farmers to stay in business in the advent of commercialized agriculture and urbanization. The title and recognition of the DCFM as the nations largest producer-only farmers market enhances the markets reputation and creates a positive feedback loop for its success. (Arts, et. al. 2005, 10)

Central Location of Market

The Location of the Dane County Farmers’ Market has played a significant role in the success, and expansion of the market. The DCFM was not always the glamorous, bustling market we see today. Before the market was on the Capitol Square, it was originally located on a vacant lot adjacent to East Washington Avenue. County agents James Schroder and Ron Jensen, along with Madison mayor Bill Dyke heard the outcry from farmers and customers for an improved and expanded farmers market. They managed to move the market to a better location, in front of Treasure Island Discount Store, but this was only a minor upgrade from the original lot on East Washington Avenue.

The DCFM still needed a better location to attract more customers, promote sales and increase its number of vendors. Inquiries were made into moving the market to the parking lots outside of Hilldale Mall and West Towne Mall, but both of these ideas were rejected because the market was deemed to messy. In 1972, the Central Madison Committee, which was organized a year earlier with the mission to revitalize and promote downtown Madison, stepped in and agreed to put the Dane County Farmers Market on their liability insurance (Carpenter 2003, 3). This took care of the last concerns about liability, trash and security allowing the market to be moved adjacent to the Capitol Square.

On September 30th 1972, the DCFM moved to Monona Avenue, now known as Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, adjacent to the Capitol Square and thousands of customers flocked to buy fresh produce. Eleven vendors were present at the first market and they were overwhelmed by the sheer amount of customers who attended. Word got out of the huge success at the first market on the Capitol. On October 6th 1972, the second week of the farmers market, the market grew by eight fold from the original eleven vendors on Monona Avenue, to 85 vendors; and filling much of the Capitol square (Carpenter 2003, 4). By the start of the 1973 season there were over two hundred vendors and the entire Capitol square was filled.

The location of the DCFM has played a major role in the success of the market and has helped fuel it to the status of the nations largest producer-only farmers market. The market is located in heart of Madison adjacent to the Capitol Square. According to an interview with Larry Johnson, the stunning setting of the farmers market, located next to the highly manicured landscape of the Capitol Square, draws people to the market every week and keeps them coming back. The Capitol Square is a beautifully maintained setting and is also a state park. This makes the DCFM the only farmers market in the nation located on State Park grounds (Carpenter 2003, 5).

The location of the market has played a role in the success of the DCFM and keeps it highly sought after. According to an interview with Larry Johnson, currently there are around 185 vendors every Saturday at the DCFM and the market is capped. There are currently 85 vendors on the waiting list and that is about a five year wait. The 185 vendors present now, plus
the wait list, shows that the DCFM has been in high demand since early after its inception. This is because selling at the Farmers market, which is producer-only, is one of the best situations for small farmers to be in in order to be economically viable.

The DCFM has created a unique feedback loop that benefits downtown Madison. Tens of thousands of customers flock to the farmers market every week during the summer to buy fresh produce. This influx of people to the downtown area of Madison benefits restaurants and retail stores in the area. Customers inevitably end up shopping and dining in the downtown area and bring business to the Capitol Square, state street and the surrounding area. The city takes note of this influx of people and sales downtown and in turn promotes and beautifies the DCFM in order to bring in even more people to downtown Madison for the market.

![Figure C](image)

The atmosphere at the DCFM is another factor that keeps people coming back week after week. The market has a much more relaxed setting than your typical retail or grocery store. According to Larry Johnson, people don’t have a “Let’s hurry and get this over with it” attitude that is prevalent at large stores and supermarkets. On the contrary, the DCFM is characterized by a leisurely stroll counter clockwise around the square where customers get excited to see what fresh goods the next vendor offers. This easygoing, communal, social experience, far away from the uncomfortable atmosphere at many national chains, has helped contribute to the success of the DCFM.
The Capitol building stands as an icon for the DCFM. (Photo: Tolle 10-7-11)
The Capitol lawn serves as a gathering space for families to relax, recreate, and enjoy market treats. (Photo: Davies 10-7-11)
The Market as a Community Center

Trees shade vendors and customers alike, as they engage in supporting local commerce. (Photo: Davies 10-7-11)

Because the DCFM sits at the center of downtown on the Capitol square, it is also acts as a community center on Saturday mornings, this is the last factor we will discuss in relation to the success of the market. A wide variety of people in the community come to the market and interact here, whether it be vendors discussing canning techniques with their customers, chefs buying produce for their menus that night connecting with the “foodie” community, local politicians campaigning to their voters during election time, or music groups playing for an audience on the grass of the Capitol lawn. It is not uncommon to hear people exchanging gardening practices, cooking skills or recipes at all the stands around the square. On most Saturdays you can hear multiple different languages spoken around the square, all discussing food. People from across the world come to the market in search of the highest quality local produce to satisfy their wildest culinary ambitions.

Local groups within Madison also create strong connections with the community in Madison. The Friends of the DCFM provides multiple opportunities for children and adults to learn about local food at and outside the market. They host food tastings, chef demonstrations, recipe distribution, and cooking classes such as “School on the Square” (Friends of DCFM). The Friends of the DCFM also connects all class levels to the market. They make it possible for food to be donated or sold at lower prices to local food pantries and other organizations in need of food donations. This allows for local food to be available to a wider range of class levels in Madison. Compared to local food organizations and farmers’ markets in other cities, the DCFM is making a real effort to provide high quality food. This also creates outlets for food that would normally go to waste to be used and farmers’ are usually compensated for their products.
We hypothesize that the trend of local food embodied in the form of Madison restaurants using local fare on their menu increased the popularity of the market as well. The culture of Madison has grown into one where food is valued for quality, taste, variety past what grocery store chains can provide. The majority of customers cook at home and they love the variety and freshness of the produce (Carpenter 2003, 10). Much of “Madison's impressive dining scene, [was] built on the foundation of the Dane County Farmers' Market” connecting local restaurants to their food producers as well (Troller 2011). L’Etoile Restaurant and its previous owner Odessa Piper were the first to forge this connection with the DCFM, she supported many farms when they were first getting started, such as Fantome Farm and the Fricke bison operation. She paved the way for future chefs in Madison and around the nation to buy local produce from farmers’ markets like the DCFM. Piper worked hard trying to connect locals with local food; she “hosted the first harvest dinner at her restaurant, featuring the [produce] of area farmers” to showcase there products to the public (Carpenter 2003, 15). Because of her efforts and chefs like her, the Chef Collaborative was born. Chefs in this group are a fundamental part of their communities and farmers’ markets because they “continue to buy directly from local markets” (Carpenter 2003, 15). Many people ask the chefs who often frequent the market about certain types of produce and how to cook with them. Market customers have “a respect and appreciation for diversity” in their food. The market is so successful because vendors provide these diverse goods for the food-forward Madisonian customer (Carpenter 2003, 9). According to Carpenter she calls the market “a giant cooking show,” recipes are exchanged between customers and vendors, newcomers and old-timers, the opportunity for food education is endless (Carpenter 2003, 12).

“Food as culture is also generational. Veterans of the market have told me that the market has changed. Customers used to descent early, looking for bushels of this and pecks of that. In a sense they treated the market like an extension of the farm stand” (Carpenter 2003, 9-10).

There are major changes going on in food culture right now, especially in Madison. Larry Johnson believes that people no longer need to buy bushels because there are so many opportunities to get fresh local produce in the area. There are multiple farmers’ markets in operation through out the summer and a in the winter in addition to the DCFM, which operates year-round.
There’s something for everyone at the market, as the crowd moves counter-clockwise around the square. (Photo: Davies 10-28-11)

Future Research

After learning what we did during this project, we realized that we had just reached the tip of the iceberg in terms of this issue. There are many possible directions of future research. Some possibilities that our group considered looking at have to do with the economic viability of farmers’ markets in terms of the money that goes to farmers, the demographics of DCFM patrons (difficult on many levels to gather a worthwhile sample), and the trends in buying among consumers throughout the years and seasons. Some of these ventures involve survey methods and sample sizes beyond the capabilities of our research group. During our literature review we realized that although there is literature on the subject, extensive research is limited as “more often than not, there are no published accounts of farmers markets in the scholarly literature of the state” (Brown 2001, 666). This leaves many opportunities for further research.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our inquiry into what determined the success of the Dane County Farmers’ Market lead us to realize four main factors which have shaped the identity of the market as we know it today. They are 1) the importance of “local” as a consumer trend, 2) the producer-only policy of the DCFM, 3) the Capitol square location of the market, and 4) the importance of the DCFM as a community center for Madison. These factors are qualitative and are not associated with any rank. We recognize that the four factors of success that we have highlighted in our research are not exclusive nor independent determinants of the success of the DCFM. Rather, by
exploring these factors we hope to give a more in-depth analysis and insight into the inter-
workings of the phenomenon that is the Dane County Farmers’ Market.

In our personal observations of the market, we noticed the connections that grow out of
the market between producers and consumers. It is a rare quality and privilege to be able to speak
with the person who produced and labored over your food. There is so much to be learned here,
the flow of information from person to person throughout the food culture here is inspiring. The
more times you go to the market the more connected you become with individual vendors; you
feel as though you are part of a small local community every time you go back. A sense of
community in a city the size of Madison is hard to come by and at the DCFM, you can feel it the
second you get onto any block of the Capitol building. As perfectly stated by Mary Carpenter, “I
know of no other large event that carries the sense of unity that this market seems to inspire”
(Carpenter 2003, 16). Walking down the sidewalk of the market, you can see thousands of
shoppers enjoying the company of family and friends along the lawn. You can also count on
running into at least one person you know there every Saturday and striking up a conversation
with them learning about their newest recipe for “farmers’ market chili or lasagna.” Its
intoxicating, the food culture that brews along the streets of the Capitol on a Saturday morning;
you just get caught up in it all. As residents of Madison, we forget how unique our farmers’
market really is, until you step back and take it in for its grandeur. We take for granted that it sits
on the beautiful site of our State Capitol Building and that our vendors must take part in every
step of their process to produce their product, to insure the utmost quality in all goods at the
market. Not to mention, the local communities strong support for local farmers and local food in
the area that contributes to the sense of community and success of the market. From producer to
consumer; that’s where it all began and we do not see any sign of it slowing down here at the
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Appendix

[Figure A]

Dane County Farmers’ Market 1970-2011
A timeline of formative events
Ben Tolle

1970
First Saturday market takes place. Jonathan Barry is the first farmers’ market manager. The eleven vendors are soon overwhelmed by customers.

1972
First full season market opens. More than 200 vendors attend.

1973
Vendor attendance climbs to 300.

1974
Growers’ Council is formed for the purpose of advising market sponsors and the manager.

1975
Due to popularity, a system for assigning stall space is instituted.

1976
Dan & Judy Peterson become market managers. The once dirt path around the Capitol is paved. DCFM publishes rules and policies.

1977-1979
Paul & Jo Prust become market managers. DCFM becomes a non-profit organization. A board of directors forms in addition to the growers council.

1978-1982
The season of the market is extended to the current April-November schedule.

1980-1983
Mary Walters becomes the DCFM manager. A mission statement and guiding principles are established.

1984-1989

1985

1986-1987
L’Etoile Restaurant, located on the Capitol Square holds a DCFM benefit dinner, pairing local produce and local restaurants, a trend that since become more popular.

1989
A seniority program is established so that vendors don’t have to sleep overnight to secure space.

1990-1991
The concept of “producer only” is refined. Vendors must participate in the production of what they sell.

1991-1992
With nearly 400 vendors, a limit and waitlist are established. A program is instituted to collect excess produce and distribute it to local food pantries. DCFM.org is established.

1995-2000
Bill Warner and Judy Hageman become co-managers. The winter farmers’ market begins.

2001
Friends of DCFM, an independent co-operating non-profit is formed.

2002-2003
Larry Johnson becomes market manager.

2004