

2020 Annual Report

Shoreline Farmers Market Association

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Overview

The Shoreline Farmers Market (SFM) completed its ninth and most challenging season in 2020. COVID-19 hit and altered the operating structure of SFM, challenging the market to retain customers, support farmers, and continue to generate revenue to cover essential operating costs. Additionally, after being centrally located in the future Shoreline Place, the market moved across the parking lot, into an empty former bank parking lot that is within a defined space, leaving no option for expanding the market layout and increasing vendors. On top of these challenges, the region experienced significant levels of wildfire smoke late in the season, which strained operations.



Throughout these challenging times, the Shoreline Farmers Market continued to support local agriculture and small businesses and partnered with the City of Seattle to provide equal access to fresh foods for food insecure families. Vendor sales decreased by only 8% from 2019 but shoppers spent more on average per market trip. The City of Shoreline secured a second year of Port of Seattle Economic Development Partnership Program funding. This funding pivoted from increasing marketing strategies and program support to covering COVID related expenses. This report will detail the Market's 2020 operations, financials, staff, marketing, programs, vendors, as well as challenges and opportunities in the future.

COVID-19 and Operating Plans

During the planning stages of another market season, COVID-19 hit the world and a global pandemic blanketed us all. WA State declared Farmers Markets an essential business and provided specific operating guidelines that they updated regularly. (Many states did not allow farmers markets to open or failed to officially recognize them as an essential business and provide necessary support.) SFM staff attended 32 weekly meetings with WA farmers markets staff, Department of Health (DOH) representatives, and County Public Health officials to review, discuss, and learn more about operating safely during a pandemic.



Furthermore, each County Public Health Department carried their own set of COVID guidelines that needed to be met in order to operate a farmers market. These guidelines limited the number of vendors and customers allowed inside the market and had a direct correlation to lower operating revenue. (King County implemented the strictest guidelines in all of WA.)

The Seattle & King County Public Health Department Health Inspectors worked with individual markets to develop a COVID-19 Operating Plan that was submitted and approved weekly by County Health Inspectors. This detailed plan outlined operating procedures that would keep vendors, staff, volunteers, and customers safe and comply with state and county recommendations. A brief outline includes sanitation station maps, marketing outreach plan for safety measures, in depth overview of physical distancing enforcement, vendor health screening procedures, safety verbiage and photos of signage, market maps, etc. This plan was also submitted to the City of Shoreline for their records. Each week the plan was reviewed and updated to ensure the safest operating environment. After 2 months of weekly plan updates and multiple market health inspections, the SFM was approved to operate for the remainder of the season. County Health Inspectors continued random inspections of the market to ensure compliance.

One important aspect of the Operating Plan was markets had to restructure marketing the day not as a fun and festive gathering space for the community, but rather a place to purchase food in a safe outdoor setting. Community programs were prohibited including live music, kids programming and chef demonstrations. Farmers Markets were to operate as a food distribution center only and all marketing has to stress this point. It was a true pivot for all farmers markets.



Market Programs

Supplemental Nutrition Access Program (SNAP) & Department of Health (DOH) Market Match:



The DOH created and funded the new Market Match program. A statewide initiative, this program recently received funding for an additional 3 years. Market Match is similar to a former matching incentive program, Fresh Bucks, by matching dollar for dollar, all SNAP and EBT transactions made at participating farmers markets; meaning a \$20 withdrawn from the account is matched with an additional \$20 that can be used to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables only. (Unfortunately, the Market Match program does not include a Rx Program and customers receiving these prescriptions will shop at Seattle farmers markets. Farmers Markets operating in the City of Seattle will continue offering Fresh Bucks, Fresh Bucks Rx, and the new Market Match Program. Fresh Bucks is funded by the Sweetened Beverage Tax.) Unlike Fresh Bucks, Market Match

does not cover 100% of the program leaving SFM to spend appx. \$3,000 on this program.

When schools closed due to COVID-19, Washington State provided families with emergency funds named Pandemic-EBT (or P-EBT). Eligible families received additional funds per child. Customers came to the farmers market to take advantage of our food access programs stretching their purchasing power during the pandemic. SFM saw a 118.61% increase in EBT distributed over the 2019 season and the Market Match Program provided individuals and families with \$10,135 to spend on fresh produce.

We continually stress that SNAP is essential to our communities and the Market Match program makes shopping at a farmers market more accessible to all socioeconomic groups. Beyond SNAP, we saw customers spend \$10,168 using WIC Vouchers and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) checks. In 2021, SFM anticipates hiring a Food Access Coordinator to oversee all of the Food Access Programs, secure funding to cover the DOH contract gap, and promote programs within the Shoreline community.

Hopelink Partnership:

At the beginning of the season, Hopelink was unable to accept fresh produce due to health and safety guidelines. As we learned, more about how COVID-19 is transmitted the donation guidelines eased SFM farmers were allowed to donate to the Hopelink's Food Access Program. Over 6 Saturdays, SFM farmers donated 2468 pounds of fresh produce, bread, meat, and cheese. (Compared to 2019 data: 3523 pounds during 18 weeks.) This represents a 110% increase in per market donations so although the market was limited in the earlier part of the season, the positive impact of this program was still realized. These fresh goods were distributed directly to members of the Shoreline community at Hopelink Food Bank, continuing our impactful 8-year partnership.

Power of Produce (PoP) Program:

Our most popular program at the Shoreline Farmers Market is the kids PoP Program. PoP is a multifaceted program that gives \$2 in market currency to youth that can be used to purchase fruits and vegetables at the market. The program is designed to encourage healthy food choices and teach kids the value of a monetary transaction - and includes hands-on interactive activities about farmers market produce. In light of COVID-19, the PoP Program was suspended. The DOH recommended that children stay home during shopping trips so SFM paused the PoP Buck distribution as well as the learning activities. In light of the importance and popularity of this program, SFM worked with volunteers to develop a plan to continue engaging PoP Participants.

SFM worked closely with The Everett Clinic, PoP sponsors since 2015, to pivot the PoP Program to an online format. Pediatricians provided time to contribute their knowledge and participate in teachable moments in several PoP videos. In late October, SFM plans to release 14 weekly fun and educational videos to the public through the market website, newsletter, and social media channels. SFM hopes these videos will engage children and keep their enthusiasm for farmers markets alive until we feel confident in bringing back our hand-on activities.

Chef Tent:

The DOH prohibited prepared food and samples at farmers markets forcing the suspension of this program for the season. SFM is evaluating this program for 2021 based on a combination of safety concerns and budgetary restrictions.

Musical Performances:

The DOH prohibited live music at farmers markets. With a full line up for the season, local musicians were disappointed but are eager to return in future seasons. In the spirit of farmers markets live music was replaced with a lively playlist and was much appreciated in breaking up the rigidity of the new structured market feel.

Additional Market Highlights:

Although the DOH prohibited community organizations from participating in farmers markets this season SFM was able to host several community orgs outside of the market exit. The City of Shoreline distributed Celebrate Shoreline yard art supplies and collected canned food for a Hopelink Food Bank. Shoreline Community College performed outreach to market customers and distributed information about their new virtual classes. Seattle T2P2 held two donation drives collecting menstrual supplies for local distribution. The highlight of our partnerships was working with the Parkwood Neighborhood Association (PNA). They received a microgrant from the City of Shoreline to help their neighborhood respond to COVID-19 by purchasing Shoreline Farmers Market gift certificates to distribute to low-income residents in need of fresh produce. PNA distributed \$975 in gift certificates to the community, allowing new customers to discover the farmers market and support the local economy in a time of need.

Sales and Market Finance

Sales:

Market sales in 2020 were \$370,372 - a mere 8.4% decrease from 2019. This is recognized as a great success considering the documented challenges of the 2020 season. Customer counts decreased by 31% with 16,233 customers attending the market. (The Health Department mandated that farmers markets discourage groups and families attending the market together and instead send one household member. We saw a shift in customers, less children and younger couples.)



Part of the Operating Plan included encouraging online pre-orders to counteract customers waiting in line and congregating. While several of the market vendors offered this service and SFM promoted weekly, customers did not respond with anticipated enthusiasm. Instead, customers were succinct in their market shopping and we are in and out of the market in an average of 20 minutes, compared to the appx. 45 minutes from previous years.

As a member of the Washington State Farmers Market Association, SFM is required to track and report annual sales and farm sales must be greater than processors. These guidelines aid us in creating a balance of vendor and product diversity while maintaining the focus on local farms.

Market Finance:

The 2020 season brought in a gross revenue of \$123,962. This was made up of \$26,471 from vendor fees, \$37,000 from the City of Shoreline, \$23,000 the Port of Seattle Economic Development Partnership Program), \$15,000 from King County CARES Act funding, \$11,000 in private sponsorships, and \$4,105 in individual donations. SFM retained key sponsors including The Everett Clinic, Shoreline Community College, and Goldfish Swim School but lost the financial support of Central Market.

The City of Shoreline (COS) continues to be the main financial support of the Market with additional in-kind donations including office space and significant staff support. The City of Shoreline contributed staff hours to secure the Port of Seattle Economic Development Partnership Program funding for the SFM budget. This Program Funding included \$23,000 to be spent on marketing, staffing, and program expansion for the farmers market. These funds were distributed after the receipt of the mid-season and annual reports. These additional funds were key to the compliance of the unexpected COVID-19 regulations.

Outgoing expenses include staff, volunteer stipends, marketing and promotions, COVID-19 safety signage, professional development opportunities, and administration fees. Total expenses at the end of the fiscal year will amount to \$95,453.

Vendors and Staff

Vendors:

The Seattle & King County Public Health Department mandated a minimum 10ft spacing between vendor booths at farmers markets. With a limited market footprint combined with the mandatory spacing, SFM reduced their vendor count by half (thereby reducing vendor fee revenue by a minimum of \$14,000). The market layout and roster was reviewed and approved by the local health department. In 2019, the market had an average of 40 vendors on site ensuring a wide variety of products (including crafts) were available for customers. In 2020, SFM had 25 unique vendors, averaging 19 vendors each Saturday. COVID-19 Operating Plans prohibited non-essential vendors including: prepared foods, crafts, community organizations, and sponsors.

SFM worked closely with vendors to comply with the Operating Plan, seeking out funding opportunities for small businesses and procuring vital PPE from WA Farmers Bureau for distribution. The relationships built over the years with vendors came into play this season as we all relied on each other to comply with guidelines and ensure everyone's health and safety while working. Farm visits were suspended but are expected to continue next season with appropriate precautions.

Staff:

SFM reduced its staff during the 2020 season in a preemptive attempt to meet the anticipated revenue reductions. Three staff members were converted to volunteers and remained an integral part of the farmers market success. One seasonal part time staff was retained to oversee volunteers, Food Access Programs, and the Information Booth. Each market was supported by 6-8 volunteers giving over 900 hours in service to the market. For reference, this was a 388% increase over 2019 volunteer hours.

In light of the severity of 2020 and looking toward the 10th anniversary of SFM, it is imperative that SFM is able to anticipate and prepare for challenges. To start, SFM evaluated the market manager's job responsibilities and amended the contract position to Market Director. The Market Director will continue to oversee the market operations while reprioritizing time to the recruitment and development of the board and strategic planning to ensure the markets success in anticipation of another relocation and loss of funding from COS and key sponsors.

Marketing

Marketing strategies shifted this season to focus away from the “event” theme of markets to the safety of shopping at such a highly regulated market. Our rules and guidelines were highlighted on social media, covered the front page of the website, and included in every newsletter. With over 9,000 social media followers, SFM was able to reach a broad audience each week so customers arrived at the market prepared for a new shopping experience.

Due to the closure of most businesses, SFM could not distribute posters on community bulletin boards or inside of local businesses. In an attempt to reach a broader audience, SFM aired 14 radio ads on a local NPR station, KNKX. There were a total of 3 ads that promoted our safety measures and food access programs.

2021 and Beyond

SFM cannot predict what a farmers market will look like in 2021. From the information at hand, we can only deduce that markets are forever changed and we need to prepare for another season of health guidelines, less vendors and customers, smaller sponsorship funding, and continued stress on SFM's staff and volunteers.

The COS has allocated staff time to work with SFM in recruiting a working Board of Directors in hopes to further strengthen the farmers market in the community and ensure its longevity. SFM is actively seeking Board members with skills that translate to the market's ongoing needs including: accounting, digital marketing, real estate, and fundraising. Recruiting appropriate individuals during such a chaotic time has proved to be challenging but the goal remains to have a working Board of Directors in place by Spring 2021.

Another continuous challenge for SFM will be relocating in the 2021 season. The 2020 location was a temporary solution that is not an option for future years. Although the Shoreline Farmers Market continues discussions with MGP, property management company for the future Shoreline Place, they are forthright in their inability to prioritize securing a long-term location for the farmers market until construction of Shoreline Place is complete (expected 2025). The instability caused by multiple moves is an inherent risk that the market is striving hard to mitigate. SFM will expend a large amount of time and efforts in seeking new partnerships within the Shoreline community to secure a new location.

Summary

While no one could predict the trials and challenges of 2020, SFM immediately understood its important role in serving the community and supporting local agriculture, rising to the challenge and creating the safest food shopping experience in Shoreline. Our devoted staff understood the severity of the situation and continued their support in a volunteer role, showing up consistently and being that friendly (masked) face of the market that so many people were searching for. SFM not only maintained consistent sales from previous years, but we created a space for local agriculture to thrive and deepened our value in the community.

2020 SEASON by the Numbers

TOTAL VENDOR SALES: \$370,372

AVG DAILY SALES: \$21,287

SHOPPER COUNT: 16,233

AVG SHOPPERS PER MARKET: 955

AVERAGE TRANSACTION/SHOPPER: \$22.82

TOTAL UNIQUE VENDORS: 25

TOTAL MARKET DAYS: 17
(closed July 4th)

OPERATING REVENUE: \$123,962

SNAP & MARKET MATCH: \$17,732

WIC & SENIOR VOUCHERS: \$10,168

VOLUNTEER HOURS: 918

POUNDS DONATED TO FOOD BANK: 2,468

