

# Farmers' markets offer different strokes for different folks

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Farmers' markets are not created equal. Some sell only fresh produce while others offer entertainment and a wide variety of vendors. And each market's unique personality attracts some people while repelling others. A University of Illinois study revealed that based on what they offer, farmers' markets self-select people who are on a specific mission -- and visiting other retail stores isn't one of them.

"Not one of the six farmers' markets we visited in the city of Chicago and suburbs drew any business to any of the other retailers on the same day as the farmers' market," said U of I [economist](#) Michael Mazzocco. "That's not to say that there isn't an occasional person. But on the questionnaire we asked 'how many other retailers have you visited or will you visit on this trip?' and the answer was zero."

Mazzocco concluded that market organizers are mistaken if they are counting on a farmers' market to bring in more traffic in retail stores. "The farmers' markets may build awareness of other stores for future trips, but we did not investigate that."

So, what does bring people to the market?

"Each farmers' market attracts those who they subconsciously, inadvertently, want to attract," Mazzocco said. "For example, the Oak Park farmers' market is the only one where we found a majority of men, and a larger proportion of money than anywhere else we went was spent on food consumed on site. People were there to buy coffee and donuts,

roam around downtown, and visit with their friends."

Mazzocco compared the mission of the Oak Park Saturday morning market shopper to those at Hyde Park on a Thursday afternoon. "The Oak Park stroll-around-with-coffee-and-donut is a mission. They tend to buy some produce while they are there. They might not. At Hyde Park, the mission is to get off the CTA on your way home from work, buy some produce and continue your route home. If you are stopping on your way home from work and you just want to get your zucchini and go home, you won't stop at a market with a carnival atmosphere because all of the people engaged in entertainment and social causes are in your way."

The point is, markets are going to turn some people on and turn some people off, he said.

The study identified five preference-based consumer segments: market enthusiasts, recreational shoppers, serious shoppers, low-involved shoppers, and basic shoppers - each with significantly different demographics and behavior characteristics.

Mazzocco advises market organizers to pay attention to community demographics for indicators of their potential and actual customers.

"We don't want to tell market organizers who they should be targeting. All we can tell them is they are targeting something, whether intentionally or not. And, what works one place, may not work somewhere else."

Adding a market at the same location but at a different time or day may actually draw the same customers. "We learned that people are not monogamous when it comes to farmers' markets," Mazzocco said. "If they're going to a farmers' market on a Saturday, they will generally go

to the same one. But a Thursday afternoon farmers' market can augment Saturday's and get the same customers. Some people will go twice, perhaps because they have run out of what they bought on Saturday. So, it's about freshness."

Mazzocco said the study got a strong message from people that buying fresh is an important feature, but not necessarily organic. "People going to the market expected to find organic, but weren't going there specifically for it. They expected to see it there and to be one of their choices, but that wasn't why they were going there."

Two other points of interest in the study were that food safety was something market shoppers cared about, and, on average, people spent about \$20 per person, per visit.

At the six market locations, 508 questionnaires were completed, out of which 383 were useful.

Consumer Segments in Urban and Suburban [Farmers](#) Markets, co-written by Gabriel Elepu, will be published in the April, 2010 issue of *International Food and Agribusiness Management Review*.

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