

Connect2Direct Summit: Building Vibrant Farmers Markets

Evaluation Report

Overview

On December 8, 2015, RAFI and ASAP jointly hosted the first Connect2Direct Summit: Building Vibrant Markets, a statewide gathering of market managers, vendors, and supporting agencies. The purpose of this interactive event was to gather direct-market stakeholders to share knowledge, learn best practices, and for Connect2Direct to gain insight as to what challenges and opportunities exist for markets in North Carolina—and from this, drawing conclusions for the interest and viability of a state farmers market association.

Testimonials

“I thought this was well-organized and engaging! The way it was structured allowed for diversity and retained my interest”

“Excellent mix of presentation and discussions—we all feel valued, encouraged, and empowered”

“I’ve got concrete ideas for things we’ll do in 2016. I’ve got other ideas and concepts that are marinating for future action. Thanks so much for pulling it together for us”

“Great conference! It was the perfect space for me to voice a lot of ideas and meet people who can help me turn those ideas into action”

Who Came?

About 181 guests participated in the summit, including speakers and staff. Through a registration survey, Connect2Direct collected some information on who was attending the conference.

Type of Organization Represented	Number of registrants
Farm	25
Farmers Market	73
Downtown Corporation/City or Town	3
Public Health	32
Nonprofit/market support agency	9
Ag. Dept/State	13
Other	26
Total	181

The table below shows the different ways that registrants heard about the Summit

Method of Communication	Number of registrants
ASAP Email	28
RAFI Email	42
Word of Mouth	34
ASAP Staff	2
RAFI Staff	3
FM Support Organization	29
Listserv	4
Other	58

What did participants say about the conference?

The summit was structured to engage participants in different formats throughout the day. An expert panel spoke to the state of NC farmers markets, followed by an open space session in which participants collaboratively led discussion topics and networked. A plenary session on farmers market metrics delivered information on current national projects, and gave participants tools to conduct data collection at their markets.

Four workshops were offered: Managing Change—Leadership Transitions & Preserving Institutional Knowledge; Tools, Resources, and Strategies for Vendor Sales Success; Building Your Customer Base—Market Outreach, Promotions, and Customer Connections; and Cultivating Food Justice. An Action Planning session followed, wherein participants were assigned a breakout issue to collectively brainstorm solutions. The summit attendees then gathered as a whole and individuals voted on their favorite solutions from each breakout group. Finally, a networking and social hour concluded the event.

Below is feedback on the summit from our survey. 71 surveys were filled out.

What was your reaction to the Expert Panel: The State of Farmers Markets?	Number of Responses
Not at all useful	0
Slightly useful	4
Moderately useful	20

Very useful	36
Extremely useful	6
<i>Total responses</i>	66
<i>Response rate</i>	93%

What was your reaction to the Open Space Session?	Number of Responses
Not at all useful	0
Slightly useful	4
Moderately useful	15
Very useful	31
Extremely useful	16
<i>Total responses</i>	66
<i>Response rate</i>	93%

How useful did you find the networking time provided throughout the event?	Number of responses
Not at all useful	1
Slightly useful	7
Moderately useful	12
Very useful	33
Extremely useful	15
<i>Total responses</i>	68
<i>Response rate</i>	96%

How useful did you find the Plenary: Farmers Market Metrics- Measuring Success?	Number of responses
Not at all useful	2
Slightly useful	3
Moderately useful	13
Very useful	25
Extremely useful	18
<i>Total responses</i>	<i>67</i>
<i>Response rate</i>	<i>94%</i>

Please select the workshop you attended	Number of responses
Managing Change	10
Cultivating Food Justice	26
Building your Customer Base	28
Vendor Sales	9
<i>Total responses</i>	<i>63</i>
<i>Response rate</i>	<i>89%</i>

How useful did you find the workshop you attended?	Number of responses
Not at all useful	1
Not very useful	6
Somewhat useful	24
Very useful	35
<i>Total responses</i>	<i>66</i>
<i>Response rate</i>	<i>93%</i>

What was your favorite part of the Summit?	Number of responses
Networking/connections	21
Information	10
Open Space	21
Peer Learning	10
Plenary	6
Workshops	10
Closing Session	3
Action Planning	6
Expert Panel	3
<i>Total response</i>	<i>54</i>
<i>Response rate</i>	<i>76%</i>
<i>Total comments</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Comment rate</i>	<i>15%</i>

What was your least favorite part of the summit?	Number of responses
Plenary	0
Networking	1
Expert Panel	2
Group Discussion	0
Market Metrics	8
Open Space	3
Facilitation	3

Action Planning	7
Lack of Diversity	2
Summit Logistics	7
Workshop	2
<i>Total Responses</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Response rate</i>	<i>21%</i>
<i>Total comments</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Comment rate</i>	<i>30%</i>

What would you like to see more of at a future summit?	Number of responses
Shared Learning	17
Additional Experts	5
Skill Building	2
Success Stories	7
Facilitation	3
Takeaways	4
Networking	12
Data Sharing	3
More representative/inclusive participant base	5
Best Practices	8
Breaks	3
Farmer Engagement	4
Metrics Resources	2
Market Manager Training/Info	7

Partner Organization Engagement	3
Racial Equity Theme	1
Small/rural market focus	3
Translation Services	2
Workshops	2
<i>Total Responses</i>	39
<i>Response Rate</i>	55%
<i>Total Comments</i>	32
<i>Comment Rate</i>	45%

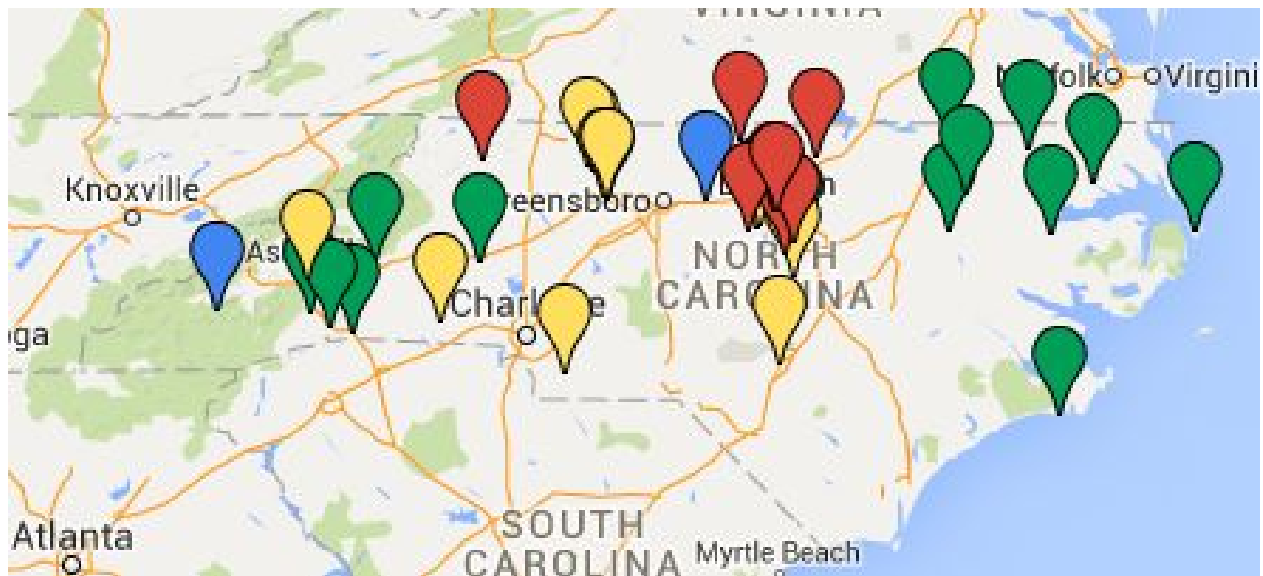
What would you like to see less of at a future summit?	Number of Responses
Group Discussion	0
Powerpoints	1
Lecture Format	2
Market Manager-specific Content	1
Statistics	2
Action Planning	3
Market Metrics	1
“Us & Them” Dialogue	1
<i>Total Responses</i>	4
<i>Response Rate</i>	6%
<i>Total Comments</i>	7
<i>Comment Rate</i>	10%

Other Feedback? Comment Codes	Response rate
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Food Access/Food Justice	4
Logistics	4
Organization	10
Positive Feedback	23
Resources	5
Uncategorized	1
<i>Total responses</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>Response rate</i>	<i>52%</i>

What did we learn about farmers markets and direct marketing outlets in North Carolina?

Before the Summit began, Connect2Direct asked participants to locate the market they represented on a state map with a market according to their perception of market demand in their area. Below is the map representing markets at the Connect2Direct Summit.



Key:

- Blue—Don't know if markets in my areas are meeting demand.
- Green—Markets in my area need to grow to meet demand.
- Yellow—Markets in my area are currently meeting demand.
- Red—Markets in my area have grown beyond demand.

This map survey indicates that rural markets, particularly in the mountain foothills and the eastern part of the state, would most benefit from interventions to support market growth and vendor recruitment and retention. Conversely, urban areas, such as the Piedmont and Triangle, would most benefit from interventions to strengthen the customer base and increase demand.

Throughout the day, participants learned about resources available for their markets, collaborated to develop strategies to build vibrant markets, and were asked to articulate these ideas in the Action Planning session. Participants were split into groups based on the following questions, which emerged during the Open Space session:

- *What are the most strategic avenues to increasing direct sales in NC?*
- *What emerging opportunities and challenges do direct markets have in NC?*
- *What resources do farmers and markets need to increase direct sales?*
- *What needs/issues would a state farmers market association address?*
- *What changes would lead to increased participation for low-income/currently excluded populations at market?*

After the Planning session, folks gathered to vote on the **three things they thought were most needed to create vibrant markets in NC**. Below are the results from the voting:

Coordination, communication among markets, best practices sharing	33
Improve marketing materials (translate, strategic placement and partnerships)	21
Creating/deepening/enhancing community partnerships	15
State Farmers Market Association	14
More funding and strategic planning	12
Technical support (apps, online services, social media templates and packages)	12
Cooking demos/nutrition education (in and outside of market)	12
Address transportation issues	9
Prioritizing community input on market access initiatives and market operations	8
Food access initiatives to increase sales	7
Incentives	5
Capture sales data	1
Legislative support and advocacy	1

