Farm Fresh Food Boxes: Increasing Food Access in Rural Communities through New Markets for Farmers and Retailers

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Abstract. Farm Fresh Food Boxes (FFFB) is an integrated project that explores the impact of a new food systems innovation on rural economies. The FFFB model stimulates rural economies by providing farmers with an additional direct-marketing opportunity without the time investment or food waste of a farmers’ market. It also provides grocery stores and convenience stores with increased foot traffic, creating opportunities for additional sales. Finally, the FFFB model may also increase food access for rural consumers who are unable to pay for a season’s produce up front or who may be uncomfortable shopping at a farmers’ market. The FFFB is similar to a CSA, but without the season long commitment, FFFB attempts to reduce barriers to high quality food while supporting new partnerships between farms and small, local retailers.

Benefits for Consumers, Farmers & Retailers

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Figure 1. Cost Comparison of Different Models for Consumers, Farmers, and Retailers

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Outcome Measures and Analysis.

Pre-Season
- Demographic Survey
- Pre-season FFFB Roster

During the Growing Season
- Weekly Tracking Form
- Customer Survey

Post-Season
- Qualitative Interview

Lessons Learned

- Process: Establish clear expectations for all participants; plan logistics, monitor and provide support as needed;
- Communication: Determine best manner and frequency to talk to each person in the project;
- Marketing: publicize FFFB to create “buzz” prior to launch; offer several size boxes (small or large) at different price points; include recipes in the box;
- Reduce respondent burden: Review data elements to eliminate non-essential variables;
- Customer surveys: Develop mechanism to follow up with customers who don’t fill out paper surveys.

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