

Innovations in Rural Development:

Farm Fresh Food Boxes

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Background

Rural communities

Big farms can sell larger volumes at lower prices to wholesalers—smaller farms can't compete¹.

Growth of national retail chains forcing smaller retailers out of business, particularly in rural areas.

Rural agricultural economies are weakened²;

Rural consumers find it hard to access fresh, affordable healthy produce^{3,4}.



Direct-to-Consumer (DTC)

Benefits

DTC sales can encourage healthy eating and have a positive impact on farm profitability

- Enhanced social ties
- Community economic development

Drawbacks

The economic returns to DTC farms are not well understood.

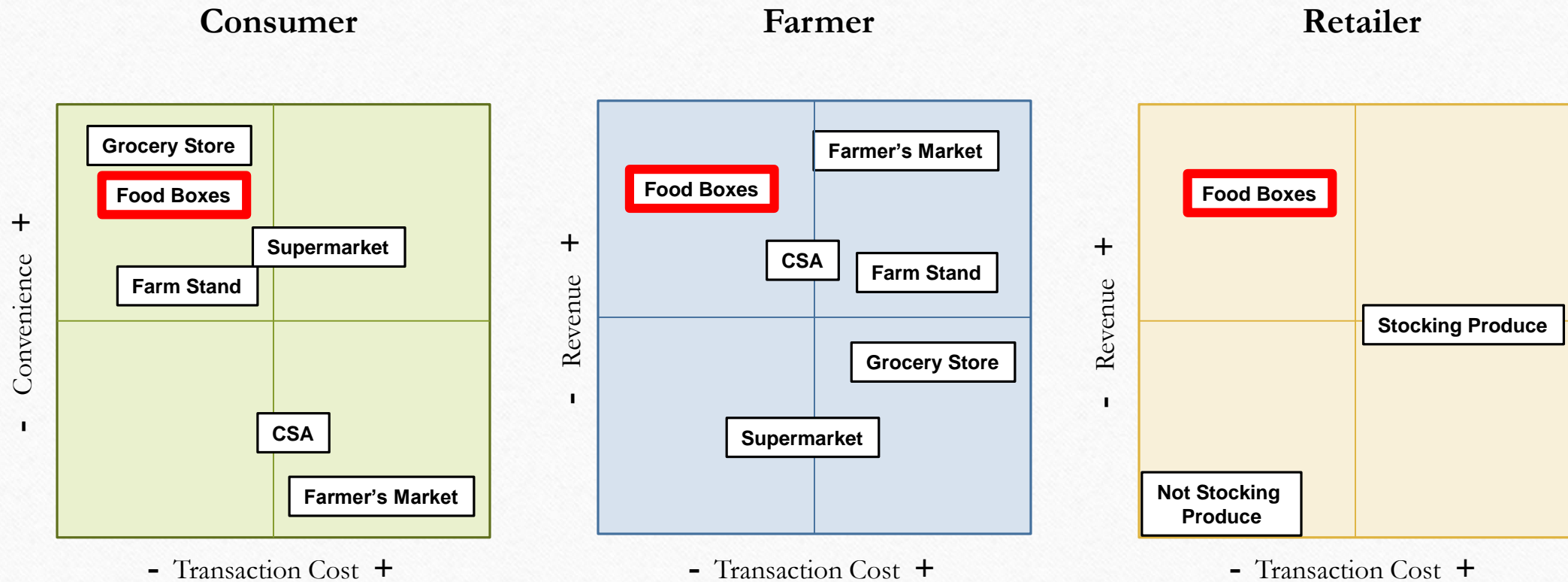
- Farmer's markets require transportation and staffing; unsold product may be wasted;
- Upfront cost of CSA subscriptions covers farmer's risk and covers operating expenses but may not cover labor costs;
- Market is saturated and rapidly evolving

Farm Fresh Food Boxes (F3B): *A New* DTC alternative



- **Farmers** offer weekly FFFB at participating retail sites that consumers can easily access. Box contents change throughout the season
- **Retailers** provide a drop-off point, in exchange for a nominal transaction fee. Participating retailers advertise via sandwich boards and flyers. In-store whiteboards detail the cost and weekly contents of the box.
- **Customers** pre-order a weekly FFFB at the retail site or on-line on a week-to-week basis for later pick-up. Customers can use SNAP/EBT.

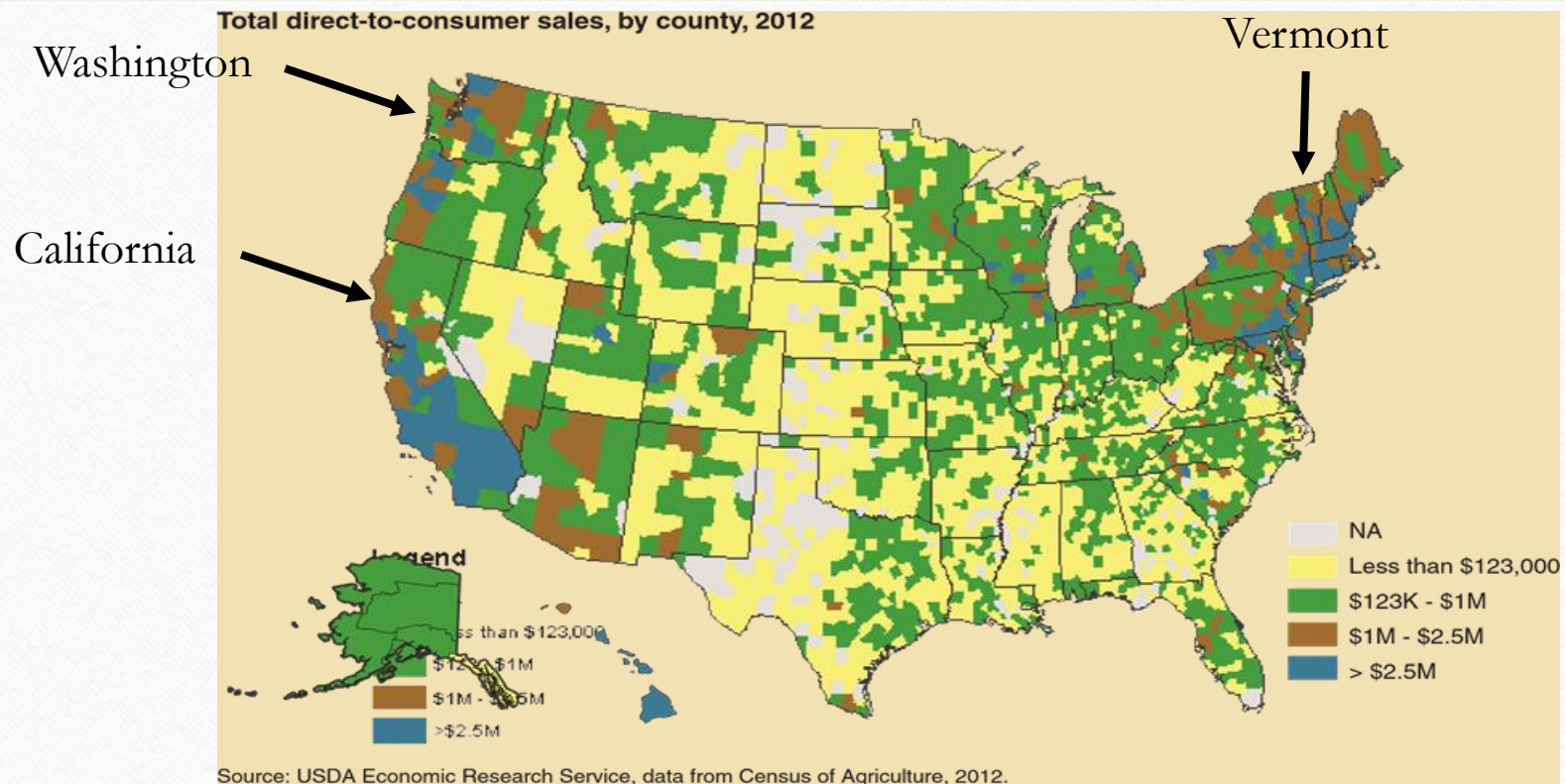
Advantages for consumers, farmers *and* retailers





Our approach

Multi-state, integrated collaboration



Extension Objectives

- **Develop an innovative, low-risk market channel** for 2-4 farmers in each of three geographic areas;
- Create opportunities for 4-6 retailers in each site to **provide local products at no-risk**, that will result in associated sales;
- Provide rural consumers with **access to healthy foods at affordable prices** in an accessible, convenient, and “comfortable” location, with little perceived risk;
- **Determine best practices** in the FFFB approach, and disseminate information widely to producers and retailers in rural communities.

Research Objectives

- **Assess the market potential** for the FFFB in rural communities in three geographically areas;
- **Measure economic impact** of FFFB project returns to farmers and retailers and the regional economy;
- **Measure acceptability and use** of FFFB among consumers;
- **Compare benefits and barriers** of FFFB project to farmers, retailers and consumers with the benefits and barriers of other direct sales approaches, namely farmers' markets and traditional CSAs.

Pre-Season

Extension

- Engages Retailers & Farmers
- Provides FFFB Materials

Farmers

- Receive FFFB boxes & stickers
- Complete Demographic Survey

Retailers

- Receive Flyers, Sandwich boards and white boards
- Receive customer order pads
- Receive training on the trackers from extension team
- Complete Demographic Survey



During Growing Season

Extension & Research

- Ongoing technical support

Farmers

- Tells retailer weekly box contents
- Puts customer survey in box
- Receives orders from store, packs boxes, delivers to store

Retailers

- Display promotional materials—flyers, sandwich boards and white boards
- Takes orders, collects payments,
- Relays weekly orders to farmer
- Distributes boxes

Post-Season

Extension & Research

- Supports data collection
- Pays participants stipends

Farmers

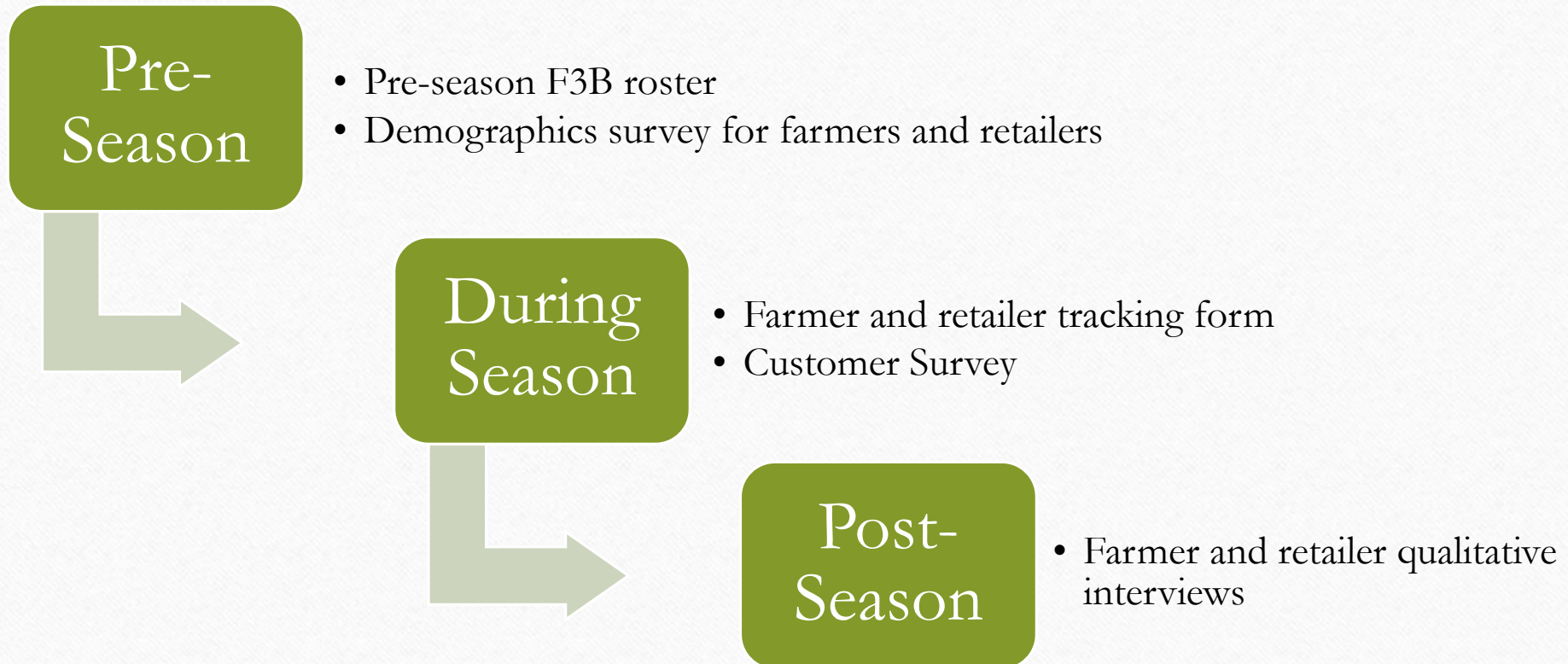
- Participates in post-season interviews with researchers

Retailers

- Participates in post-season interviews with researchers
- Receives 10% of box sales from FFFB extension team



Outcome measures and analysis



Community profiles

- List of profile elements created
- Data sources identified for intervention sites in each state (WA, VT, WA)
- Template created and mock up for one pilot site county



Pilot Results

Pilot Sample



- Two farmer/retailer pairs were identified as test sites for the Vermont pilot;
- Overall, 16 boxes sold during a five week period in Fall 2016;
- At least 2 customers purchased boxes multiple times.

Feedback

“[F3B] is a good way to connect with community, to bring in customers, and connect people with the farm”.

- VT Farmer

Retailers

- One retailer found running credit cards onerous
- Didn't generate new customers -but confident it will do so in future.
- Customers were happy /excited about the boxes

Farmers

- Incorporating FFFB along side CSA packing is easy
- Both farmers were grateful for Extension's initial outreach to retailers
- Farmers may be more motivated to “make it work”

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 sizes and include recipes in the box

Lessons learned

Reduce respondent burden

Review data elements, to eliminate non-essential variables

Revise tracking form so that it is collected only once, at the beginning of the season

Customer surveys

Develop mechanism to follow up with customers who don't fill out paper surveys.

Email surveys may pose several challenges.

Project Team



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