

# Mt. Vernon Farmers' Market

## Rapid Market Assessment

### August 9, 2003

**Market Hours:** Saturday, 9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.  
**Location:** The Revetment on the River, Gates & Main, Downtown  
**Market Staff:** Manager Suzanne Butler  
**Opened:** 1987  
**Fees:** \$10/year plus \$10/day  
**Vendors:** 36, including farmers, artisans, prepared foods and crafts  
**Market Sales:** \$7,944 estimated sales for the day  
**Market Attendance:** 1,024 estimated adults (light rain first two hours – only .39” in August, parade by market)

**RMA Team:**

Vance Corum, Washington State University Small Farms Program, Vancouver  
 Inger Hutton, Everett Farmers' Market  
 Tone Hutton, Everett Farmers' Market  
 Judy Kirkhuff, Ballard Farmers' Market  
 Nan Laney, Sedro-Woolley Farmers' Market  
 Don Walker, Anacortes Farmers' Market

**I. Total Attendance: 1,028 adults**

Pre-opening shopper estimate	= 20
1 <sup>st</sup> Hour (9:00-10:00) estimate	= 228
2 <sup>nd</sup> Hour (10:00-11:00) estimate	= 252
3 <sup>rd</sup> Hour (11:00-12:00) estimate	= 258
4 <sup>th</sup> Hour (12:00-1:00) estimate	= 270

*Comment: There was an even division of customers during the first and second half of the market, somewhat uncommon but probably explained by the intermittent rain during the first two hours followed by clearing skies. Future customer counts are likely to demonstrate nearer a 60% figure for early shoppers on a sunny day.*

**Entrances (by percentage each hour)**

	<u>East</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>South</u>	<u>ALL</u>
1 <sup>st</sup> Hour	9%	12%	2%	23%
2 <sup>nd</sup> Hour	11%	9%	5%	25%
3 <sup>rd</sup> Hour	14%	7%	5%	26%
4 <sup>th</sup> Hour	<u>11%</u>	<u>10%</u>	<u>6%</u>	<u>27%</u>
	<b>45%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>100%</b>

[Percentages may not be exact due to rounding to the nearest whole number.]

*Comment: Customers appear to find parking most easily to the east, on or across Main Street. Customers also find parking twice as frequently on the north side as the south side of the market, possibly indicating that more come from the north, including across the bridge. Better signage coming north on one-way Main Street might lead people to the substantial parking on the south end.*

## II. Dot Survey Questions

Four dot survey sheets were begun with the market opening at 9:00 a.m. With the rainy weather and reduced customer count, there was no need to put up a second set of sheets for the second half of the market, which could be done on a future occasion to note differences among first-half and second-half customers.

### **Question 1: What most influenced you coming to the Farmers’ Market this season?** **(Shoppers for 2+ years, dot “Old-Timer”)**

N=252

Old-Timer	52%
Saw driving by	20%
Word-of-mouth	15%
Newspaper – Suzanne’s column	6%
Signs	3%
Co-op or Lincoln newsletter	2%
Newspaper ads	1%
Radio	0%
Poster/flyer	0%

*Comment: The market has a substantial new customer base in the last two years (non-Old-Timers). Location is critical as proven by visibility from the Skagit River bridge and being on Main Street along the river. Excluding “Old-Timer” and “Word-of-mouth” responses, the market’s most successful advertising appears to be its visible location (62% drive by), the manager’s newspaper column (19%) and signs (9%).*

### **Question 2: How much will you spend (or did you) at the Farmers’ Market TODAY?**

N=246

\$0	7%	
\$5	12%	
\$10	26%	
\$15	12%	<b><u>Average customer spending = \$17.24</u></b>
\$20	13%	
\$25	9%	
\$30	13%	
\$40	5%	
\$60	2%	

\$80	0%
\$100	0%

*Comment: The median expenditure was \$11.83; half of shoppers spend less and half spend more than this amount. Some 29% spend more than \$20, so there is sufficient product to purchase. We might look at how to increase the number of serious shoppers through various marketing and educational programs. Markets have used frequent shopper cards, \$1 market tokens, co-advertising with local businesses and education about average household grocery expenditures so that they realize how much is spent elsewhere in relation to the market. This estimate may be low, reflected by the rain.*

Total market sales can be roughly calculated as follows:

- ◆ 1,024 shoppers/2.0 adults per shopping group = 512 shopping groups (assumes 80% shopped as couples, 10% as singles, 10% with three adults)
- ◆ Total sales: 512 shopping groups x \$17.24 = \$8,827
- ◆ Total sales modified by light rain: \$8,827 x .9 = **\$7,944**
- ◆ Sales per vendor: \$7,944 / 36 = \$221

If we were to use a less conservative figure of 1.8 adults per shopping group, we would arrive at 569 shopping groups, a sales total of \$8,829 and average vendor sales of \$245. The figure of 2.0 adults per shopping group was a conservative estimate to avoid any exaggeration of sales.

Sales undoubtedly were influenced by the rain and several vendors not coming.

**Question 3: How much will you spend in downtown businesses, including restaurants, in conjunction with your farmers' market visit TODAY?**

N=251

\$0	35%
\$5	10%
\$10	10%
\$15	10%
\$20	8%
\$25	10%
\$30	6%
\$40	5%
\$60	3%
\$80	2%
\$100	4%

**Average local business spending = \$17.21**

*Comment: No other market has found spending in local business to equal farmers' market spending, dollar for dollar. Setting aside the 35% who spend nothing, the average expenditure of those who spend downtown is \$26.34. Only 36% spend \$20 or more but their purchases represent 83% of total expenditures. This would include market visitors along with local residents who saw the market from the Skagit River bridge and decided to check it out (Q1). While the market is close to many businesses, there was no visible effort at linkage between local businesses and the farmers' market. Perhaps a cross-promotional effort could be considered since there is*

already a base of consumer cross-over from the Skagit Valley Food Co-op and the Lincoln Theatre (Q1).

AmericaWide Mortgage sponsors and pays for The Market Chef, who prepares tastes for customer using market ingredients and simultaneously gives visibility to the mortgage company. Gretchen's sponsors several summer classes in which the chef instructor brings students to the market to buy ingredients before returning to cook lunch. Skagit Valley Food Co-op(monthly) and Anderson Electric have sponsored music at the market to gain visibility as well.

The market participated in a Taste of Mt. Vernon in July sponsored by the Downtown Business Community.

**Question 4: What is the primary reason you came to the market today?**

N=270

Fresh local produce	49%
Organic farm products	19%
Atmosphere/entertainment	10%
Ready-to-eat foods	7%
Socializing	6%
Take-home foods	4%
Crafts	3%
Parade	3%
Scoping out FM (added late)	1%

*Comment: Fully two-thirds of customers came primarily for fresh and/or organic farm products. Another one-sixth came primarily for the social or entertainment value of a pleasant river-side atmosphere. Eleven percent came primarily for prepared foods to eat immediately or take home. Surprisingly, three percent came as a result of the third and final year of the parade, a number equal to those coming principally for the crafts. A fair number of people were challenged to place their dot in only one space, which may account for the slightly higher response, people using more than one of their four dots on this question.*

### **III. Constructive Comments/Observations**

The purpose of this section of the report is NOT to provide an overall grade to the market or rank it against any other. Rather, it allows for feedback from a fresh “outsider” perspective. The team noted elements they liked, what they thought could be improved and questions they had. The RMA process is about sharing; both the markets observed and the markets that sent observers should gain new insights and ideas for improved operation.

#### **Physical Site**

**What team members appreciated about the physical site:**

- Love the multiple entrance lot
- Nice flow, good amount of space in aisles and between booths; like aisle width.
- Parking is pretty good, still available at noon on south end, maybe due to rain.
- Wheelchair access is great.

- No obvious liability issues except dogs which I like.
- Good milling area.
- River location provides bridge visibility and great parking.
- Opening is well orchestrated.

### **Physical Site – Improvements and Questions:**

- Move riverside vendors further out to avoid inhibited customers with gutter
- More trash cans and better placement to stop people searching
- Should move vendors closer together – not so wide aisles and fill no-show spaces
- Aisles too wide for vendor communication and feeling of consumer connections
- Closing in the U or H-shape diminishes the too-spaced-out, empty appearance
- Need to know when vendors will “no show” so you can space them properly and not leave holes – what about a \$15 penalty for those who don’t cancel?
- Is there a way to soften the concrete barriers?
- Tables on sidewalk caused customers to walk into the gutter to the east entrance
- Concern about vehicles unloading close to opening time
- Does any other downtown space provide visibility to passing motorists while allowing the market to help local businesses? A long-term location should get infrastructure improvements, including water fountains, bathrooms, etc.
- City no-parking signs that clearly indicate vehicles will be towed would give strength to the claim and avoid disgruntled drivers.

## **Atmosphere**

### **What team members appreciated about market atmosphere:**

- Happy atmosphere; very comfortable market
- Nice customer turnout in spite of rain; happy shoppers undaunted by rain.
- Love the music and market chef. Great music! Market chef neat.
- Lots of color, both with the different canopies & textural diversity – eye pleasing
- Looked very local in spite of some vendors not being local
- Friendly and helpful vendors
- Senior program nice – I’m sure it helps both farmers and seniors
- Seemed many seniors anxious to get to the produce first, also many single buyers
- Nice to see so many vendors also buying
- Truly dedicated shoppers – vendors very friendly
- Tables are a great idea.
- Suzanne is obviously appreciated by many vendors.

### **Market Atmosphere – Improvements and Questions:**

- Businesses open at north end of market but dead zone to the south hurts feeling
- Only two businesses open across the street; more traffic at north end of First St.
- Improved vendor displays would improve the atmosphere
- Good mix of shoppers, but mostly “white folks.” Target strong Skagit latino population, many of whom

highly value homegrown food.

- Late morning – more couples and families – not much to engage kids
- Homey feeling would be more achievable with tighter layout; empty spaces give a feeling of non-caring, too casual approach to a cooperative business.

## **Vendors and Products**

### **What team members appreciated about vendors and products:**

- Good vendor variety, plenty of market farmers and flowers. Really great turnout.
- Not too many processors and crafters that can overwhelm a market.
- Good quality crafts.
- Breadfarm had great samples, smaller pieces would be fine to taste several.
- Harmonyfarm's wonderful bags on the tree provide full vertical visual field
- Some vendors are really "on the ball" regarding signage, display and marketing
- Love the way flowers are displayed – looks like a flower shop.
- Tables were beautiful, reflecting how artistic growers have to be (veg & flowers)

### **Vendors and Products – Improvements and Questions:**

- Improved signage – name, town, organic, no pesticides – would cut consumer time and confusion.
- Some booths have great signage, others have inadequate signage (unclear, small) and some have none at all – could be greatly improved.
- Great Frog Song farm signs but need price signs.
- Great Lenning berries but need to educate and reinforce with variety signs.
- Cheese had no identity at all – poor self image means poor sales
- Samish Bay Cheese looked like soap
- Might reinforce multiple signs at vendor meeting by complimenting Dunbar's back sign and Skagit River Ranch's front & back signs and clean containers, etc.
- WIC signs not very prominent at most vendors
- Vendors packing early is irritating; one vendor thinks there's too much produce
- Keep working on educating farmers on displays, signs & marketing so they keep coming back!
- Need organic eastside cherry and peach grower
- Clarity about growing methods and ingredients is always appreciated.
- Not all vendors have canopy weights.

It will be useful to conduct similar research on a normal, non-rain day to establish a more reliable base of statistics for comparison. It also would be useful to note quantity of rainfall for the day so that rainy day comparisons can be relatively made with confidence.