Growing Toronto's Farmers' Markets: Towards a Municipal Policy

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Farmers' Markets (FMs) in Toronto have more than tripled in number over the past decade. In addition to being numerous, they are also diverse. FM models are distinguished by their design and logistical characteristics, how they are managed, the types of vendors that occupy them, and the organizational capacity and infrastructure of their administrators. Challenges and opportunities are particular to their differing characteristics and shared urban environment.

Connected to a wide range of city and provincial jurisdictions, Toronto's FMs present an interesting case study of the complexities of re-localization efforts. FMs prioritizing "local" and "organic" goals are pushing forward the FM agenda by adopting new ways of operating within an old political framework. Policies that help limit destructive competition among FMs, create fair cost structures across city jurisdictions, embrace partnerships between public, private and civil society organizations (CSOs), and offer financial and infrastructural support will be helpful in the future as FMs grow in number and popularity.

Introduction

Farmers' markets (FMs) have been the subject of much academic attention in recent years, particularly in light of the effects of neo-liberalism on the food system. Many authors have described the increasing corporate concentration, deregulation, commoditization and globalization of the dominant food system over the last century and particularly since the end of World War II.[1] These economic forces and their subsequent negative impacts on the environment[2], human health[3], the livelihoods of farmers[4], the strength of rural communities[5] and the 'distancing'[6] of people from the source of their food have been well documented.

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1 K. Morgan , T. Marsden, and J. Murdoch, *Worlds of Food*. New York: Oxford University Press; 2006; National Farmers Union (NFU), 'The Farm Crisis and Corporate Profits'. NFU,Saskatoon, 2005, http://www.nfu.ca, viewed January 2008; A. Winson, *The Intimate Commodity: Food and the Development of the Canadian Agro-Industrial Complex*. Toronto:
Garamond Press, 1993; R. Feagan, 'The place of food: mapping out the 'local' in local food systems', *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2007, pp. 23-42; H. Friedmann and P. McMichael, 'Agriculture and the State System: The Rise and Decline of National Agriculture,; *Sociologia Ruralis* XIX , no. 2, 1989, pp. 93-117

2 E.M. Tegtmeier, and M.D Duffy, 'External costs of agricultural production in the United States', *International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability*, vol.2, 2004 pp.1-20;

3 A. Drewnoski and A,Barratt-Fornell, 'Do healthier diets cost more?', *Nutrition Today*, vol. 39,2004, pp.161-168; A. Winson, 'Bringing political economy into the debate on the obesity epidemic', *Agriculture and Human Values*, vol. 21, 2004, pp. 299-312

It has been argued that Alternative Food Networks (AFNs)—such as FMs, Community Shared (or Supported) Agriculture initiatives (CSAs), food boxes and other subsidized food access programs—play a role in resisting trends of hegemonic industrialized agriculture, or 'productivist' food systems, and contribute to the re-localization of food economies, the shortening of food chains and the building of trust and embeddedness within 'producer'-'consumer' relationships.[7] Though there is debate surrounding the alterity of these movements[8], there are an increasing number of political actors becoming involved in the provision of food.[9] Observing trends of FMs in larger cities is particularly significant as urbanization peaks and markets for "local" and especially "organic" food concentrate themselves within more densely populated municipalities.[10]

This study explores the trends of FMs in Toronto, the different models that have emerged and the political context that has shaped them using both qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis. The purpose was to set the stage for the creation of a comprehensive municipal policy by 1) conducting a general survey of the Toronto FM context and characteristics; 2) analyzing policy actors and documents related to Toronto FMs; 3) to document the challenges and opportunities of different FM models and 4) to offer recommendations based on the research findings.

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4 National Farmers Union (NFU), 'The Farm Crisis and Corporate Profits'. NFU, Saskatoon,2005, http://www.nfu.ca, viewed January 2008;

5 J. Sumner, 'Organic Farmers and Rural Development. A Research Report on the Links Between Organic Farmers and Community Sustainability in Southwestern Ontario', 2006

6 B. Kneen, *From land to mouth: understanding the food system (2nd ed. exp.] ed.),* Toronto: NC Press Limited 1993.

7 M. Winter, 'Embeddedness, the new food economy and defensive localism', *Journal of Rural Studies*, vol. 19, 2003, pp. 23-32.; D.C.H. Watts, B. Ilbery, and D. Maye, 'Making reconnections in agro-food geography: Alternative systems of food provision', *Progress in Human Geography*,vol. 29, no. 1, 2005, pp. 22-40. B.Ilbery and I. Bowler, 'From agricultural productivism to postproductivism' in Ilbery, B., Editor, *The geography of rural change.* London: Longman, 1998, pp.57-84.

8 E. M. DuPuis, 'Civic FMs: Alternative value chain governance as civic engagement.' *Crop Management,* 2006, http://www.plantmanagementnetwork.org/pub/cm/symposium/organics/, viewed October, 2007; J. Kirwan, 'Alternative Strategies in the UK Agro-Food System: Interrogating the Alterity of Farmers' Markets', *Sociologia Ruralis*, vol. 44, no. 4, 2004, pp. 395-415.

9 J. Smithers, J. Lamarche and A. E. Joseph, 'Unpacking the terms of engagement with local food at the Farmers' Market: Insights from Ontario', *Journal of Rural Studies*, vol. 24, 2008, pp.337-350.

10 R. MacRae, M. Juhasz, M., J. Langer. J., and R. Martin. *Ontario Goes Organic. How to Access Canada's Growing Billion Dollar Market for Organic Food.*, 2007, www.organicagcentre.ca/ viewed October 2007.

Criteria and Categories of FMs
For the purposes of this research, farmers' markets (FMs) were “generally considered to be recurrent markets at fixed locations where farm products are sold by farmers themselves.”[11] As Alison Brown states, at a true FM “some, if not all, of the vendors must be producers who sell their own products.”[12] FMs in this study were composed of at least two vendors, at least one of whom was considered to be a primary producer. FMs that recurred at separate locations were counted as distinct FMs regardless of management or vendor composition.

Categories employed in this analysis included the terms “municipal” FMs, referring to FMs initiated by municipal offices if not administered by them, “organic” FMs, referring to those FMs that prioritize vendors with certified organic or near-organic status[13], “community-based” FMs, indicating those FMs that were initiated by community groups often with loose organizational affiliations, “My Market” FMs which refers to a model of FM initiated by the provincial organization, Farmers Markets Ontario (FMO), and finally “CSO” FMs, which refer to those FMs administered by Civil Society Organizations.[14] These categories interact and overlap in diverse ways and are elaborated on during the course of this paper.

1. Context and Characteristics of Toronto Farmers' Markets

Logistical Characteristics of Toronto Farmers' Markets

FM Numbers
At the time of this study, in 2008, Toronto FMs occupied 19% of all FMs in Ontario. Of that 19%, almost half (13 out of 27) were categorized as “organic” FMs.

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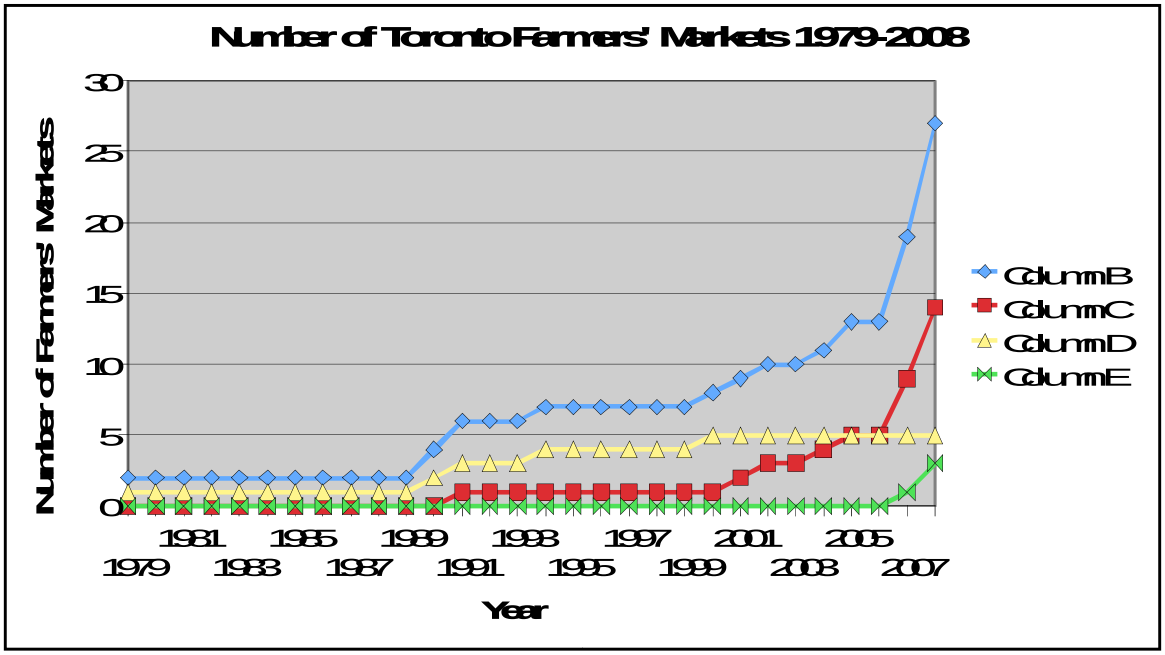
[11] A. Brown, ‘Counting Farmers Markets’, *American Geographical Society*, vol. 91, no. 4, 2001.

[12] ibid

[13] Most “organic” FMs do not necessarily require that their “organic” vendors be certified so long as their practices meet sustainability goals. They are also often forced to compromise their “organic” goals with products such as fruit where few organic vendors exist, opting instead to support farmers with “low-spray” claims if necessary. Many do not claim to be “organic” FMs for this reason. Nevertheless, their recruiting practices and commitment to sustainable agriculture are evident when viewing the vendor mix.

[14] See M. Koc, R. MacRae, E. Desjardins, and W. Roberts, ‘Getting civil about food: The interactions between civil Society and the state to advance sustainable food systems in Canada’, Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition, vol. 3, no. 2/3, 2008, pp.122-144.

Table 1. Number of FMs in Toronto 1979-2008[15]



FM Size

The average number of vendors at FMs across the city was lower (average of 19.67; median of 16) than the number of vendors at "organic" markets (average of 22.7 and median of 19.5). In Toronto, three out of four FMs with over 31 vendors operate with "organic" intentions. It is important to note that while the number of vendors at a given FM is significant, the sales and traffic of a FM also depend on the size and scale of the vendors themselves. The tendency of "organic" FMs to have more vendors may also demonstrate the smaller scale of organic farmers, the diversity of vendors at "organic" FMs and the available infrastructure capacity in addition to the size of the FM.

Time and Day of Operation

While traditionally many FMs in Ontario operate on Saturday mornings,[16] morning being best for keeping fresh produce cool and Saturdays to catch more customers on their day off,[17] newer FMs in Toronto have begun to take advantage of different schedules depending on the clientele they wish to attract. They must also consider the significant distance that some vendors travel and the rush hour congestion that occurs in Toronto. The majority of Toronto FMs (66%) take place on a weekday while approximately one third occur on a weekend. Of the weekday FMs,

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15 Note that in this chart municipal FM's includes the two FMs initiated by city offices but operated by Ontario Farm Fresh Marketing Association. See 'Administration and Management' for more details.

16 H. Cummings, G. Kora, and D. Murray. 'Farmers' Markets in Ontario and Their Economic Impact', 1998, http://www.farmersmarketsontario.com, viewed January 2008.

17 Participant #17

10 take place in the afternoon and evening hours, many choosing the hours of 3pm to 7pm in order to catch the after-school and work crowd. Weekday evenings were initiated by community-based “organic” FMs, while municipal FMs preferred catering to the weekday business noon hours, a result of partnering with civic offices and recruiting conventional growers already attending Saturday morning markets elsewhere when these FMs were created. New Saturday FMs in Toronto depend then on new, often “organic”, vendors or conventional growers seeking a new FM.

Seasonality

The majority of FMs in Toronto begin in late May or early June and end in October with a few exceptions that extend into November and December. Of the 27 FMs reviewed in this study, 5 were year-round FMs and 2 were classified as off-season FMs, beginning in the fall or winter either for the purpose of extending a separate summer FM or catering to a particular institutional population as in the case of the University of Toronto “organic” FM.

Location

The location of the FM often shapes the political framework in which it operates and the characteristics adopted. Location defines the physical and jurisdictional space of the FM and affects its size, how customers travel to it and the rent, stall fees, number of vendors and vendor size. FMs in Toronto are found in myriad locales including municipal squares (5) or buildings (1); commercial or private spaces including a mall and a privately-owned historical district (3); on church grounds (2); in public parks (10)[18]; in parking lots owned by a city corporation (3); and finally in public institutions such as universities, schools and hospitals (3). Public parks seem to be the preferred location for “organic” FMs (9 out of 10) and community-based groups.

Economic Characteristics of Toronto FMs

Stall Fees

Stall Fees vary across the city depending on the size of the FM, its administration and the jurisdiction of the property where it is located. Stall fees are also paid differently with some FMs requiring money upfront for the whole season while others allow vendors to pay week-by-week, giving them the flexibility to come at the peak of their season. Some FMs will also charge an additional fee based on the percentage of sales above a minimum amount. Stall Fees ranged from $0.49 per square foot per week to $4.17 per square foot. These translate to a weekly base fee of anywhere from $15 for a table of any size to $75 for a minimum frontage of 20 feet. Community groups and vendors' associations charged slightly lower amounts vs. provincial marketing associations, whereas CSO and municipal FM stall fees varied greatly. Stall fees did not appear to be correlated to “organic” status or infrastructural capacity.

Costs and Permits

One of the challenges of a city-wide FM policy is that FMs are located in different spaces managed by groups with varying attitudes towards these community institutions. Apart from faith-based and privately-owned spaces, the majority of Toronto FMs are based on municipal

[18] 2 FMs were operated in facilities leased to Civil Society Organizations by the municipality’s Parks Department.

property (20 out of 27) though only 3 are actually operated by city officials. While the Toronto Parking Authority requires nothing for the use of their parking lots except a $2500 damage deposit per market and proof of insurance, FMs located in parks have to apply annually for a $371.00 special events permit plus an additional $78.00 for a parking permit for vendors. Costs differ among the FMs located at civic centres or municipal squares. The costs of FMs operated by the city's Recreation staff are subsumed in City budgets. They also tend to generate income because staff are salaried and spend fewer hours on FM business than other managers might. In contrast, the City's special events office rents its municipal square in the downtown core to a provincial association FM for $20,000 a season. This revenue goes towards music and events held at the square at the same time. The square prices are thus dramatically more expensive but also feature more events and entertainment as a result.

Insurance

Two types of liability insurance are required for the running of a FM. Vendors must have their own liability insurance to cover any claims of illness caused by their food and the FM must have liability insurance to cover on-site injuries. For FMs run by a larger organization or by the City, the insurance costs are covered by a larger insurance policy; whereas for smaller, community or vendor-run FMs, insurance is often bought from FMO for $475.00 plus the required annual membership fee ($125.00 plus taxes for a FM with 0 to 25 vendors; $210 for a FM with 26-50 vendors and so on).[19]

Staffing

Often, men held paid positions, such as city supervisor, vendor or CSO staff, whereas women were often involved in the volunteer initiation of the FMs. Volunteers were often present at newer FMs such as many of the community-based, "organic" FMs and some of the "My Market" FMs.

Characteristics of Toronto Vendors

The number of vendors at Toronto FMs at the time of this study was 280 in total, with 163 counted as primary producers. "Organic" and "natural" vendors occupied over a third of the vendors found in Toronto, a much higher proportion than most other FMs in Ontario.[20] Producers making "organic" or "natural" claims also attended a higher number of Toronto FMs on average (2.5) than vendors as a whole (1.89) or producer-vendors (2.03).[21]

An observer of FMs in the City of Toronto will note that similar FM models have shared vendors. There are several cases where vendors cross FM categories and these tend to be vendors

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19 Farmers' Markets Ontario Website, http://www.farmersmarketsontario.com, viewed May 2009.

20 Anecdotal evidence from participants.

21 "Organic" refers to vendors who are either currently certified organic, were certified organic and continue sustainable practices, or are in transition. "Natural" refers to any vendor claiming to use sustainable practices, whether true or not, without organic certification

who attend the highest number of Toronto FMs and have a distinct product. Vendors who are found at varying FM models are organic bakers, cheese distributors, fruit vendors, honey producers, and a sweet potato producer. These tend to be products with fewer available vendors and thus are popular among FMs. With some products, such as tender fruit and meat, it is difficult to find producers who are certified organic. These products are thus more likely to be found across FMs with varying priorities (for example, “organic” FMs might accept conventional fruit growers).

Administration and Management

In Ontario, most FM administrative bodies consist of Vendors’ Associations, City Corporations, Business Improvement Associations (BIAs), Chambers of Commerce and other organizations such as service clubs.[22] Toronto FM administrative organizations differ from these more traditional affiliations and thus offer new and exciting perspectives and priorities.

Community and Neighbourhood Groups (9 out of 27)

One third of FMs in Toronto were managed by community or neighbourhood groups such as “Friends of” various public parks. Others were initiated by community groups such as Residents' Associations or BIAs, but partnered with the provincial “My Market” program (3 out of 27) and were thus counted as provincially-run. The numbers of community-run farmers' markets demonstrates a high level of civic engagement and community ownership.

Municipal (3 out of 27)

Toronto's FMs were also municipally administered (3 out of 27), falling under the jurisdiction of the Recreation division of the Parks department in two cases and under the Facilities division of Real Estate in the case of the historical city-owned St. Lawrence Market.

Vendors' Associations (2 out of 27)

Two of the 27 FMs in Toronto were counted as vendors’ associations. One began as a municipal FM and was handed over to vendors when the FM responsibilities were reallocated from Public Health to the division of Recreation where they were ill-received and eventually dropped. Another “organic” FM was organized and administered by a cooperative of “ecological growers” at the request of a University of Toronto chef.

Private Ownership (3 out of 27)

Examples of private ownership were few in Toronto and difficult to differentiate from other models. Examples of administrators included several vendors who incorporated (similar to a vendors’ association); a historic district owned by a private company (similar to a BIA); and former teachers of a private school wishing to raise funds for student bursaries (this could also be viewed as “community-based” or “para-governmental”).

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[22] H. Cummings, G. Kora, and D. Murray. ‘Farmers’ Markets in Ontario and Their Economic Impact’, 1998, http://www.farmersmarketsontario.com, viewed January 2008.

Provincial Marketing Associations (3 out of 27)
"Provincial Marketing Association" was used to denote Farmers' Market Ontario (FMO) and Ontario Farm Fresh Marketing Association administered FMs. These organizations differed from other urban-based environmental and social justice CSOs in their access to provincial funding and their objective to support Ontario producers through marketing. OFFMA was first requested to administer a FM at Nathan Phillips Square by city hall, later extending that model to Metro Hall a decade later. FMO, on the other hand, was successful in partnering with community-based Residents' Associations, a BIA and hospital staff as city partners after an initial attempt at operating on their own.[23]

Civil Society Organizations/Community Health Centres (3 out of 27)
Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Community Health Centres (CHCs) are increasingly involved in the FM movement. These organizations have become more engaged in issues of food security and access and have often moved from smaller initiatives, such as community gardens or food box programs, to establishing a FM. In the case of one CHC, the FM was initiated as part of the Good Food Market program[24] but soon grew into a full-fledged FM. The CSO FMs employed community organizers part-time while the CHC staff person was a full-time employee with other programming responsibilities. These organizations were in close communication with each other and other political actors. They also supported the functioning of community-based FMs by providing staff support and meeting rooms for the Toronto Farmers' Market Network.[25]

Internal FM Regulation

Most Toronto FMs have created their own policy documents or guidelines for monitoring and recruiting vendors. These guidelines play an important role in the regional food economy and the sustainability of FMs by serving to prioritize "organic", local, or low-cost foods.

Reselling
The Ontario Food Terminal (OFT) is a source of contention among FMs as it often supplies wholesale fruits and vegetables that can be resold at FMs for retail prices by vendors posing as farmers. There is no guarantee that the terminal produce is grown in Ontario, as importers dominate the marketplace, particularly in the off- season. Consumer awareness of this phenomenon has led to a number of strategies attempting to regulate reselling practices.

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[23] One attempted "My Market" failed. Some study participants attributed its closure to a lack of community-based partners.

[24] Good Food Markets (GFMs) are a food access program for low-income neighbourhoods that attempts to support local and sometimes organic farmers as well. Produce is bought through the Ontario Food Terminal and distributed by a not-for-profit infrastructure so that people pay only the cost of the food.

[25] Toronto Farmer's Market Network is a loose affiliation of FM managers dedicated to the sharing of information and resources primarily between new community-based FMs as well as Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Community Health Centres (CHCs). Though loosely defined, the groups share similar FM models with many sharing "organic" vendors.

The provincial “My Market” FM model attempts to deal with this issue by permitting only the sale of 100% locally grown produce by “real farmers” attending the FM and selling only what they grow. Applicants wishing to be certified in the “My Market” program must submit a crop plan and undergo annual inspections to verify that their acreage, tax bills and other documentation match what they offer at FMs. Another common approach to regulating reselling at FMs is to ensure that vendors are actual producers, but to allow a certain percentage of their product line to be supplemented, whether by terminal produce or by neighbouring farmers, stipulating that it be Ontario-grown.

Yet another model is to allow the reselling of produce without origin specifications only in the off- season when produce diversity is limited. In some “organic” FMs, while produce generally does not originate from the Ontario Food Terminal, vendors may source from other organic wholesalers. In all of these cases, FM guidelines specify different percentages that a producer is allowed to resell. “Organic” FMs tended to allow supplementation specifically from neighbour-farmers or cooperatives and not from the terminal (8 out of 10).

Table 2. Number of FMs with Reselling Percentages Allowances

% Permitted to Resell (OFT or Farmer Neighbours)	No. of FMs
0%	5
15%	1
25%	4
30%	8
No Restrictions	3
Vague or Unknown	6

Certification and Inspection

Many managers approach FM monitoring by keeping a vendor product list and reserving the right to visit and inspect each farm. Inspection is more or less formalized depending on the manager’s time and resources, the stringency with which they treat their guidelines, and the goals of the FM. In the case of the “My Market” model, certification refers to the inspection process that applicant farmers must go through to be considered “real farmers.”

The “My Market” inspection was not the first of its kind in Toronto. St. Lawrence Market also began categorizing and inspecting vendors in 1989 in order to reverse perceptions that vendors were becoming resellers. “Organic” FMs often wish to verify that vendors have sustainable practices in addition to being a grower and usually ask for a minimum of a signed affidavit confirming their “organic” status if they are not certified by a recognized body. At community-based FMs that share “organic” vendors, inspections often occur on a more case-by-case basis depending on the vendor in question.

Motivations

FM initiators had different goals in establishing a FM. Nine motivational themes were identified and categorized from 23 in-depth interviews. Among the top motivational themes recurring in participants' interviews were the wish to support farmers (coded 12 times); the wish to support 'local' or Ontario produce (9); raising awareness about the food system and agricultural practices

(8); having access to “organic” fruits and vegetables (8); and creating a community meeting place (7).

2. Key Governmental Policy Players and Documents

Provincial Food Premises Regulation

One provincial policy that has changed the framework for FMs in Toronto and elsewhere in Ontario is the Food Premises Regulation 562, found within the Health Protection and Promotions Act (HPPA) of the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care. While FMs continue to be inspected and regulated by municipal Public Health Units in Ontario, the terms of inspection were altered by the adoption of an amendment exempting FMs and church bazaars from the same scrutiny applied to restaurants and other commercial food premises in 2006.[26] The amendment exempts FM food vendors from the Food Premises Regulation, which requires Public Health Inspectors to inspect both the food being sold and the premises where it is prepared, sold and displayed.[27] In practice, this means that vendors at FMs fitting the criteria for exemption should not be required to have inspectors visit their processing facilities provided they are selling non-potentially hazardous products.[28]

ASPHIO Interpretation of Provincial Regulations

Although the HPPA and Food Premises Regulation are legislated at the provincial level, enforcement takes place at the municipal level. The ASPHIO, a professional association for Public Health supervisors and inspectors, created a Guide of Common Approaches for FMs interpreting the exemptions for inspectors. The Guideline draws on other sections of the HPPA that authorize inspectors to assess the exempted premises for health hazards. The exemption’s definition of a FM has been interpreted by the ASPHIO as meaning that a FM, in order to qualify for an exemption from the Food Premises Regulation, must have 50% plus 1 food vendors selling farm products.[29] This is the percentage of the total vendors and therefore privileges producers of primary products over processors or vendors of secondary products, prepared food vendors and artisans.

Parks Fresh Market Criteria

The City of Toronto is governed by elected ward councilors who take part in standing committees that monitor and inform decisions made within the City’s administrative divisions.

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26 Press Release Dalton McGuinty 2006, www.ogov.newswire.ca/ontario/GPOE/2006/06/15,viewed February 2009.

27 Recommendations to Ensure Food Safety at Ontario’s Farmers’ Markets’, *Ontario’s Farmers’ Markets Food Safety Working Group*, December 2005, http://www.health.gov.

28 Non-potentially hazardous products include fruit preserves and baked goods without egg or dairy-based fillings.

29 See the Association of Supervisors and Public Health Inspectors of Ontario, ‘Common Approaches to Farmers’ Markets and Special Events: A Guide for Public Health Units’, 2006 for detailed definitions.

The Parks, Forestry and Recreation division is tasked with the maintenance of public parks. The department issued a draft “Parks Fresh Food Market Criteria” document in the winter of 2008 with the intentions of making a city-wide policy for FMs in parks. The document was circulated among park-based FM managers, mainly the members of the TFMN, and other key stakeholders through email in 2007 for feedback. Before the creation of the draft, FMs had been granted permission to operate in parks on an ad hoc basis with the granting of a Special Events permit, often with support from the Recreation employees and supervisors. The document addressed application and evaluation procedures including the payment for parkland rehabilitation, market operation such as season beginning and end dates, market location, and rules for the management of individual FMs in parks. Following the meeting in February 2007, Parks, Forestry and Recreation was to go ahead with formalizing the policy when organizers of FMs involved in the TFMN, with the assistance of CSO staff, called on a sympathetic councilor to stall the process.

3.Key Challenges and Opportunities

Logistical Challenges and Opportunities

Location

Many FM sites struggle with the impact of vendor trucks or vehicles. Parking vehicles close to the FM for vendor convenience while securing parking in a busy city and avoiding political battles over damaged turf or walkways was a difficult balance to strike for most managers. This tension was manifest in the politics surrounding the draft 'Parks Fresh Food Market Criteria' that placed the financial onus of turf damage on FM managers. Although FMs in parking lots avoided this issue, they instead had to contend with a less inviting and multi-purpose space, the risk of non-permitted vehicles blocking the FM and the effects of an unsheltered paved area on wilting produce.

Public and municipally-owned locations legitimized FMs, providing important supports and attracting the diversity of people who access city services. They also leave FMs dependent on and thus vulnerable to city authorization. Strikes, political trends and the interdepartmental shifting of responsibility and staff can sometimes leave farmers without a point of sale.

Economic Challenges and Opportunities

Costs and Funding

Start-up costs can sometimes be a barrier to new community-driven FMs. The cost of permits, insurance and rental fees can add up. For FMs housed within an organization or city department, the capital for initial costs is often covered. In these cases, the FM can act as a revenue generating or self-sustaining program. In other cases, however, where little organizational backing and low infrastructure exists, funding and volunteer support is often relied upon, at least for the early years.

Growth of FMs

The explosion of FMs in Toronto has increased the choice for customers with FM options every day of the week, in residential neighbourhoods as well as business districts, providing both “organic” and “My Market” options. Some managers fear the effects of FM competition on the viability of their FMs and wish for a more coordinated effort in managing growth, such as establishing geographical boundaries around existing FMs where no new FM can initiate.

One advantage of having an overseeing body, such as FMO in the case of the four "My Markets," is that growth can be managed for the collective benefit of the FMs. Unfortunately, however, this network is often seen more as a source of competition due to its "local only" vision and strict vendor regulations, its mainstream marketing approach, and its administration from outside the city, than as a boon to FMs collectively.

While the increased number of FMs has over-stretched some vendors and may be affecting the sales at some FMs, an upside to the increase is the initiation of a network (TFMN) allowing more resource and communication among managers. The increased number and popularity of FMs has raised their profile creating an opportunity for FMs to have more political clout and ties between managers, politicians, CSO staff and city officials as well as greater visibility and public support.

Competition with Business

While FMs do not necessarily compete directly with independent produce shops (they sell "organic" or "local" produce while the shops frequently have a wider selection of imported foods), neighbourhood businesses may initially feel threatened. Some FMs have suffered from these conflicts while others have found strategies to collaborate. Still other FMs are initiated by local business representatives such as BIAs or individual business owners because they see FMs as attracting customers or as a potential source of income.

The success of FMs could also be attracting competition from new kinds of food businesses:

> *But the neighbourhood is changing too. There's an artisanal food shop that opened up at the corner that sells fancy cheese etc. And there's another one that distributes organic CSA shares. It's possible that these stores are related to the market itself. There's definitely been an increase in organics in shops and quality bakeries in the area, at least since I moved here.* [30]

Proximity to FMs was also observed in real estate ads as a selling feature. The attraction of higher-end businesses and the potential increase in property value are two signs that FMs have an economic impact on an area. While this can be an opportunity, it may also prove to be a challenge for FMs in the long run, adding to their growing reputation as "exclusive" and "expensive" places to shop.

Reselling and Vendor Regulation

One major challenge for most FMs in Toronto is finding an approach to supporting producers while achieving a viable and diverse FM. Allowing vendors to supplement their own product line in order to increase their viability and the diversity of the FM without jeopardizing primary

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[30] Participant #12

production can be a serious balancing act. Some FM managers do not believe that it is possible to sustain a FM with producers selling only what they grow:

> *A real farmer may have a couple of crops. How do you sustain that kind of a market in an urban setting?* [31]

This can be especially challenging for year-round FMs, when vendors lack an abundance of produce, particularly as they take on more and more FMs. Some managers argued that restricting produce during the winter months to only local items limits culturally appropriate foods. They also viewed year-round FMs as one way to encourage the improvement of storage facilities and season extension techniques while supporting other farm products:

> *In year-round markets, enough selection to keep markets viable is necessary while we build our local supply of storage crops, preserves, value-added farm products, and continue to support producers of meats, cheese, etc. who have products year-round.* [32]

The effectiveness of FM rules and guidelines often depends on the manager's ability and wish to enforce them as well as the level of transparency and connection between the manager and vendors. One of the challenges of enforcing internal regulations is that few FM managers specify how these percentages are to be measured and monitored (i.e. 15% in weight? In space? In sales?) and give no time allotments (i.e. accumulated over the entire season or on a weekly basis?).

Smaller FMs often have more flexible case-by-case decision making, with FM managers keeping a close eye on their vendors. Larger FMs may be more vulnerable to reselling issues as they are more difficult to monitor and rely on a vigilant FM manager and vendor community. For small, community-based FMs, inspection can be a real burden and often falls by the wayside in the height of the season, especially for well-established and trusted vendors. Staying abreast of organic standards and practices is an extra load in an already time-consuming position. One advantage of TFMN is that managers can share information about certain vendors, campaigns, food issues or policies as they arise.

The "My Market" perspective on reselling is that it is a "slippery slope" towards the eventual decline in the integrity of the FM and of farmers in general. Resellers, so the argument goes, undercut real farmers with pricing based on wholesale economies of scale and "distress pricing." In the past, farmers who supplemented their own produce found that reselling offered a more viable business and thus slowly increased their reselling capacity. This perspective, however, can be taken to the extreme, excluding anyone who is not a primary producer, ergo many cheese and bread producers as well as producer cooperatives.

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31 Participant #6

32 From the TFMN comments made on the draft 'Parks Fresh Food Markets Criteria', January 2008

Management Challenges and Opportunities

Promotion: The language of Certification

Another challenge, according to some FMs, is the confusion surrounding the term "certified." The "My Market" refers to its vendors and FMs as "certified" local. As a couple of participants mentioned, this can be confusing.

> *(T)hey call their markets certified but really that only means that they certify that the farmers offering stuff have actually grown it. And it sounds equivalent to certified organic which is a bit questionable. It sounds like misleading marketing.*[33]

This terminology, while referring to the inspection process undergone by "My Market" producers, has put "My Markets" at odds with "organic" FMs, though their organizers may ultimately be advocating for the same things.

Recruiting Vendors

While FM managers receive calls from vendors interested in selling crafts or non-food items, many new FMs cited recruiting producers as a challenge. The most frequently used approach to recruiting is to approach vendors from other FMs in Toronto or elsewhere in Ontario. The sudden increase in the number of FMs in 2007 and 2008 and the emphasis on, particularly local and "organic", producers over other types of vendors, made opening new FMs an immense undertaking. The "My Market" approach was to hire a recruiter while other community organizers used personal connections to chefs, farmers and other networks to recruit vendors. One community organizer spent a year looking for farmers in advance of the initiation of their FM. The Food Premises Regulation exemption exacerbated this problem by qualifying only FMs with over 50% "farmers."

Another challenge is dealing with issues of "grandfathering." Many vendors and resellers will remain at a successful FM indefinitely and some FM managers privilege these vendors over new ones. In many cases this is how resellers have become prominent at older market. Despite the effect of grandfathering and the recruitment of vendors from other FMs, the growth of new FMs in Toronto has had the effect of growing new, particularly "organic" farmers as well.

> *It's working and I am seeing new farmers coming in and I don't know that they're going to go for organic certification but certainly they're all opening up to discussing sustainable growing and even organic growing.*[34]

It often requires taking a risk, however, to make space for newer and younger producers, especially at a new FM, without endangering the viability of the FM.

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[33] Participant #10

[34] Participant #3

We also took risks in having new vendors. ... at certain times of year we didn't have as good of a selection as we might have had, but I still think it was a worthwhile risk.[35]

Political Challenges and Opportunities

Conflicting Agendas
In many instances, FMs operating in conjunction with, under the jurisdiction of, or housed within City departments have found that attitudes and policy often conflict. Not only do they conflict interdepartmentally, but also intra-departmentally, between councilors and administrators and between people and locations. Often this leads to confusion, political stalemates or the simultaneous support and hindrance of FM efforts.

Incomplete Political Support
Often when the City has initiated FMs, there is incomplete support or ownership. For example, one municipal square FM is part of a city-run program to which it contributes a fair sum in rent. This allows the City's Special Events office to bring in music and entertainment for two months in the summer. However, although the City has requested that the FM be there, it only publicizes the beginning and end dates of the program on the City website leaving the FM on its own for the fall months. This is often confusing to customers who will assume that the FM ends with the programming.

Political Inconsistencies
Across the City, different FMs enjoy different privileges and pay different costs depending on the situation. One example is insurance; the amounts required by each FM often differ. This burden of filing documentation and paying for additional insurance often fall on the vendors. Another case where this occurs is in the provision of infrastructure. Some park-based FMs receive free electricity from a City building at their location while others are not permitted to use power or water.

Prescriptive Policy and Lack of Consultation
The DRAFT Fresh Food Markets policy was the first attempt at creating a policy that would have an impact on multiple FMs. However, many points of the policy were prescriptive, dictating how FMs should be operated and contrary to practices that had already been established. Elements of the draft outlining the dates within which the FMs were to operate or what vendors and products were allowed did not take into account either the diversity of existing FMs in parks or the efforts and resources that had already gone into developing individual FM guidelines.

Inexperience of Policy Makers
Often in the writing of the DRAFT Fresh Food Market criteria, wording and procedures did not take into account all scenarios. For instance, in the policy it outlines categories of vendors and refers to "Grower" as one category. In the feedback, FM managers point out that "Grower" is best replaced with "Agricultural" or "Primary Producer," including producers of all products

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[35] Participant #16

such as honey and maple syrup, in the category. It also demonstrates a simplified understanding of more complex issues such as reselling:

> *We are in the early stages of revitalizing our local food system. Simple sounding rules such as "no reselling", while intended to prevent misrepresentation and unfair competition, are not adequate.*[36]

Parks officials' limited experience with FMs has thus been a challenge in creating a supportive policy reflecting the diversity of FMs.

Social Challenges and Opportunities

Community Ownership and Support

Many FM initiators and participants describe a sense of community connected with FMs. Many, in fact, initiated the FM for the purpose of fostering this sense in their particular neighbourhood. The "community," however goes beyond the confines of the urban context and includes vendors coming from a more rural context. When the neighbourhood, or "community" is not involved in or consulted during the initiation process, developing a successful FM can be a challenge. One criticism of a FM that failed was that it neglected to garner community buy-in in advance. This is especially challenging for organizers living outside of the Toronto context.

Community Inclusion

One of the biggest criticisms of FMs in the City of Toronto is that they often attract a less culturally diverse clientele. This seems to be a more common response from "organic" FMs or "My Market" FM managers. While it is a difficult issue to evaluate, municipal FMs and FMs with resellers seem to have less of a problem with this. One City administrator states:

> *White? middle class? Not here. It can be very ethnic....because they're looking for quantities of food to preserve.*[37]

Although this quote exhibits a problematic attitude towards the "ethnic" other, it does reveal differing purchasing patterns at FMs that permit wholesale reselling.

Exclusive Pricing

One challenge that managers face is the perception that FMs are more expensive and thus only for the wealthy elite. While it may be in part true that prices are higher, the view of FMs as elite or exclusionary is more complex; some customers are not considered high income but instead choose to prioritize food in their budget.

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[36] TFMN feedback to DRAFT Parks Criteria

[37] Participant #6

Some FMs suggested that one benefit of having “terminal farmers” at a FM was that it allowed for more inclusivity, both from a socio-economic and diversity standpoint. Out of the three FMs that hosted “terminal farmers,” two FM managers were interviewed in- depth and both suggested that this model had some advantages. These FMs tended to attract customers from more diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds and tended to be in a location with fewer grocery options.

The challenge of reselling thus comes with some perceived benefits, although managing it in a fair transparent manner is challenging. Customers who can afford to support local farmers, but who are faced with the temptation and confusion of cheaper produce from resellers, may not choose to.

Culturally Appropriate Foods

Another challenge is supplying culturally appropriate foods. Some foods cannot be grown in Ontario, but many foods that can be grown are not because they were not part of the European settler culture that persists in rural Ontario. Many FMs have prepared food vendors that cater to different tastes, but ethno-cultural varieties of produce are difficult to find. However, some FM vendors are starting to become aware of the demand and are changing their growing habits:

> *(Y)ou kind of catch on to what certain ethnic groups are buying and you tend to grow more of those. This year, I started growing what they call Asian vegetables... I'm just learning how to grow them.*[38]

4. Conclusions: Towards Positive Policy Change

FMs in Toronto have more than tripled in number over the past decade. In addition to being numerous, they are also diverse. Myriad factors such as administration type, location, FM goals, operation times, infrastructure, costs, vendors and internal rules make for a variety of FM models facing both similar and distinct challenges and opportunities. Some challenges, such as spatial constraints, competing FMs, increased travel times and traffic for producers, differentiated FMs based on food choices, ethical considerations and communities, are particular to the urban context.

FMs are also affected by the political framework and zeitgeist of the era in which they were initiated. Both provincial and municipal policies as well as the opportunity to fill policy gaps have shaped the behaviour of Toronto FM managers subsequently affecting, however slightly, the local food systems surrounding Toronto. Though each individual FM may only have a small impact on changes in the regional food economy, FMs are rapidly ‘scaling out’ and FM managers collectively have the power to make or break new producers. The challenges for policy makers are numerous as FMs represent an intersection of private, public and civil society interests. Current FMs are becoming well-established and are supported by a strong sense of

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[38] Participant #1

community ownership and inertia. Prescriptive and reactionary policy is met with strong opposition from educated and connected social actors with growing political clout.

The City of Toronto has yet to create a comprehensive policy for FMs though they may soon total over 30. There are, however, many ways in which an enabling and comprehensive municipal policy may support existing FMs and help foster new FMs across the city. Here are some policy considerations that the results from this study point to.

- ***Supporting Partnerships***

A key part of the policy framework for FMs must address, and make comfortable, the private/public hybrid that FMs represent. In many ways, private actors are serving their own and wider public objectives. The recognition that public support for private food entrepreneurs is needed in light of what some might deem a market failure (i.e. the closure of local food infrastructure) requires a re-thinking of top-down prescriptive policies to include other actors in the equation.

- ***Supporting Diversity***

Supporting FMs means creating a framework for consistent political support for diverse models. It is clear that one model does not fit all in the case of FMs and this has to be a major consideration in any policy. Increased political support cannot mean an increased dependency on government agencies.

- ***Planning for FMs***

FM organizers in Toronto have been finding ways to work within existing zoning and policy frameworks. Still, the success of FMs depends a great deal on the context of their location and progressive planning can help mitigate some of the challenges that are currently faced. A Public Health Law and Policy document provides model General Plan language for land use policy in the State of California. In general, it suggests that zoning by-laws can have a positive effect on supporting FMs by removing barriers to their establishment in certain zones. It also notes that one effect of zoning could be to allow municipalities to prioritize appropriate sites for new and future FMs.[39]

- ***Managing Growth***

One of the major challenges for current FMs in the City of Toronto is the lack of managed growth occurring. There is currently no oversight of the number of FMs that are being initiated throughout the GTA and in some cases creating competition between FMs. This is not in the best interests of the producers or vendors involved in the competing FMs and a more coordinated effort towards establishing FMs by a neutral party would be useful. Also, as the PHLP suggests, municipal policy could prioritize establishing subsidized FMs or GFMs in priority neighbourhoods.

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[39] Public Health Law and Policy, Establishing Land Use Protections for Farmers' Markets, 2009, www.healthyplanning.org, viewed June 20, 2009.

- ***Access to Public Infrastructure***

Providing ground rules for FM access to publicly funded infrastructure such as water, electricity and some storage is one way in which FMs may be supported. Currently, this happens in some cases but not others, though public health requirements often necessitate it.

Implications for "Organic" Agriculture

It is clear from the data that new FMs have increased the number of "organic" producers coming into the City to sell their products. They have also helped struggling producers create for themselves a more viable enterprise in the context of food system infrastructure and market failure. It is also clear that Toronto FMs are supporting and fostering new and young "organic" producers. How many new producers have benefited and by how much are more complicated questions as a number of vendors have expanded their production to meet the demand. If instead of fostering sales venues for new producers the growth of FMs only props up the few producers who are at a scale to attend multiple FMs, the unmanaged growth of FMs may simply lead to greater concentration and specialization. This is particularly germane to "organic" producers as many begin to supplement with wholesale sources and/or act in part as distributors for imported organic produce. Avoiding the pitfalls of reselling that were demonstrated by conventional FMs places a greater responsibility on FM managers and requires greater financial resources.

FM managers not only bear the responsibility of monitoring for reselling but have also become a new judge of "organic" status. FM guidelines are becoming a new form of "organic" certification as vendors drop expensive and bureaucratic certification processes in favour of FM attendance. As organic regulations become legally binding and with stricter enforcement, "organic" FMs in Toronto may be forced to create more transparent and formalized rules for vendors. The more likely and preferred scenario by grass roots organizers in Toronto is to continue to make ad hoc and contextualized decisions, but this approach may face challenges in the future as FMs grow in popularity and come under further scrutiny.

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