

# Insights

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GROUP HEALTH FOUNDATION



## **Inland Northwest Farmers Market Association**

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## 1. About Us

### *1a. Mission*

The Inland Northwest Farmers Market Association (INWFMA) is a nonprofit coalition of neighborhood-based farmers markets working toward increased food access, economic activity, and cultural vitality for all.

### *1b. Purpose*

We uphold our mission by serving as a pillar of connectivity from which our region's farmers markets, food growers, and artisans can network. Working in a united direction, we identify and share best practices, and jointly participate in creating lasting impact for our region's social, health, and economic outcomes.

## 2. Community Engagement

Spokane County is home to approximately 12 farmers' markets, each located within and serving a distinct section of our community. Recognizing the unique attributes each of our markets provides, we identified the value in coming together and sharing our best practices by forming a common nonprofit organization: The Inland Northwest Farmers Market Association.

Our organization was officially incorporated in April 2017 and led by four Spokane neighborhood-based farmers markets. Our Association was designed to address a common need communicated by our farmers markets: streamline our systems and avoid costly duplication where feasible. Although our markets perform similar functions within our respective communities, we are often siloed from one another. Even worse, market managers feel they need to "reinvent the wheel" when they start a market or begin a new program. This model often drains our markets' resources, personnel, and ultimately leads to market failure...limiting the impact farmers markets hold within the fresh food system and our region's economy.

Since our inception, our coalition has quickly expanded to 8 markets, and is now reaching into rural communities surrounding Spokane. Together, our markets engage, convene, and maintain relationships within our respective neighborhoods and the greater Inland Northwest region by:

- Serving North, South, East, and West Spokane County, representing distinct neighborhoods and celebrating the unique cultural heritage each brings to the collective conscious of Spokane.
- Reaching over 25,000 people annually.
- Representing over \$750,000 in annual sales for 220+ local farmers, growers, food artisans and producers, all while providing them a place to sell their goods and build a loyal customer base for their small business/local family farm.
- Reaching over 1,800 kids with the 'Kids Eating Right – Nutrition and Exercise for Life' (KERNEL) program, youth-oriented nutrition and physical activity program that engages children in learning about lifelong healthy eating habits, gardening, and exercise, as well as \$2 fresh food vouchers, all at their local farmers market.
- Connect community members to Fresh Bucks, a program which matches EBT (formerly referred to as 'food stamp') clients with 40% more to spend on fresh produce at their market.

- Empowering families with Volunteer Days and nonprofit booths, informing residents of these groups' volunteer needs, services, and vital resources.

### 3. Community Solutions

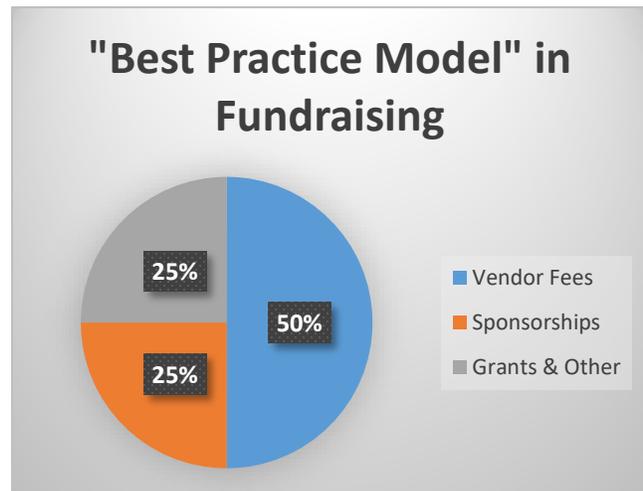
The Inland Northwest Farmers Market Association was created by community grassroots organizations: farmers markets. As a result, our programs and services are also co-designed by our organization, key stakeholders, and community members.

We have worked with these partners, and others in the community, to co-develop four key solutions: Fundraising; KERNEL; Fresh Bucks; and Operational Support. These solutions are further described below.

#### ***3a. Community Solution: Fundraising***

Prior to our organization's existence, our region's farmers markets were struggling to find sustainable funding for their operations and programs. In addition, most of our markets did not have 501(c)3 nonprofit status or access to a nonprofit organization that had c3 status, meaning they were unable to apply for grants and sponsorships. This was a stark contrast to our counterparts on the West Side of Washington State, where many of their markets raise 50% of their funds from vendor fees, 25% from sponsorships, and the remaining 25% from grants and other fundraising avenues.

Our markets wanted to implement a similarly successful and diversified fundraising model but were unable to due to their lack of (a) nonprofit status; (b) knowledge of funding opportunities or how to apply; and (c) oversight in administering and reporting on the grant/sponsorship, if awarded. Further adding to this complication, we found that many of the markets who were applying for grants were applying to the same funders (and many times, for the same purpose) ...meaning our markets were literally competing against one another.



Instead of operating under this segregated model, we decided to come together and create INWFMA as a nonprofit 'umbrella' organization that could apply for, accept, and oversee grant awards. We brought our contract grant writer on board as a part-time Executive Director. This individual oversees the fundraising of our coalition. We do this by serving as a primarily fiscal sponsor to our region's markets, striving to increase sustainable sources of income and magnify the impact of funders' investments.

#### ***3b. Community Solution: KERNEL***

'Kids Eating Right – Nutrition and Exercise for Life' (KERNEL), the youth-focused, health promotion and education program delivered at our farmers markets. Offering a different fun and free activity each week, youth are rewarded with fresh food vouchers, informational/recipe cards, and access to resources in the community. At a couple of our markets, library staff deliver the KERNEL alongside their free summer reading program. This unique delivery model helps ensure our youth are

staying engaged and healthy over the summer, and a lifetime to follow.

KERNEL's curriculum and assessment tools were originally developed by Catholic Charities of Spokane's Food For All Program and the Spokane Regional Health District in response to findings from a focus group of WIC (Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children) families. A common sentiment expressed by WIC families was that they wished that there were more family-oriented opportunities at the farmers markets. These opportunities were seen as creating a more rewarding shopping experience for the parents and their children when they shopped with their WIC checks or SNAP/EBT benefits at our farmers markets.



KERNEL was piloted at the Emerson-Garfield Farmers Market in 2015, and has since exploded in popularity, transforming from simply a market feature to something that is now integral to Spokane's summer

youth programming. We now offer KERNEL at 6 of our markets and reach 1,800+ children/year.

### 3c. Community Solution: Fresh Bucks

Fresh Bucks matches SNAP/EBT benefits (formerly referred to as 'food stamps') with 40% more to spend at our participating farmers markets. Fresh Bucks currency can be used on fresh fruits, vegetables, herbs, mushrooms, or plant starts.

Through this program, EBT cardholders swipe their card for the amount of EBT they wish to spend that day. Market staff then give them that quantity of EBT tokens and matching Fresh Bucks currency (\$2 for every \$5 swiped). For example, an EBT cardholder could swipe their card for \$5 EBT and receive \$2 in matching Fresh Bucks, having \$7 total to spend.

Fresh Buck's "matching funds" are covered by multiple agencies: 50% of the match is covered by the Washington State Department of Health (via a FINI grant), 25% by Catholic Charities of Spokane's Food For All program, and the remaining 25% is covered by the farmers markets. Although our markets are only responsible for 25% of the match, this amount can add up fast. INWFMA is currently seeking funds to help offset this 25% match to prevent markets from having to tap into their own operating funds in order to offer this program.

**GET MORE**  
AT YOUR **FARMERS MARKET** WITH  
**FRESH BUCKS**

- 1. GO** FIND THE FRESH BUCKS SIGN AT THE MARKET INFORMATION TENT
- 2. SWIPE** YOUR SNAP/EBT CARD
- 3. MATCH** RECEIVE \$2 IN FRESH BUCKS FOR EVERY \$5 IN SNAP/EBT YOU SPEND
- 4. SHOP** GET 40% MORE FRUITS AND VEGETABLES!

### 3d. Community Solution: Operational Support

Our organization has co-created solutions for assisting our region's farmers markets with their day-to-day operations. Unfortunately, a discouraging reality exists in our markets: market managers are generally volunteers, or at best, under-compensated despite their endless hours and multiple roles. All farmers markets must handle both simple and highly complex tasks in order to operate during the market season and to maintain their management operations during the off-season. Without support, this administratively cumbersome model often results in our managers getting burned out and even closure of the market itself. The Oregon Tilth Association reports that market manager burnout is the #1 reason for market failure.

Examples of the ways we have worked with markets to co-develop solutions include:

- *Hiring of local college students as work study interns.* We hire these students through our Association and deploy them at various market sites as “Farmers Market Assistants,” to lend vital support to market managers with their operations or oversee programs at market sites (i.e.: KERNEL & Fresh Bucks). As a nonprofit, we can get 70% of their wages reimbursed by the Washington State Work Study Program. The remaining 30% is mostly paid for by grants.
- *Accounting.* Greatly lending to market manager burnout is financial accounting. Bookkeeping is one of those behind-the-scenes jobs that makes a real difference in how efficiently farmers market run. And yet, between figuring out their farmers market organization’s budget and tracking weekly sales, fees, and tokens, accounting can get complicated quickly. We have been working with markets to create a “best practice” model, then replicate and individualize this model at other markets in the region.
- *Messaging.* A side-effect of our farmers markets working in isolation from one another is disconnected messaging in the community. The Seattle Neighborhood Farmers Markets faced a similar barrier that they overcame through (a) streamlined logo design and graphics; and (b) corresponding messaging in the community via web, tv, radio, print, and social media marketing. We intend to do implement a similar strategy here and are soon hiring a centralized work study-funded university student to lead this effort. Complimenting this ‘streamlined marketing campaign’ is an initiative to increase awareness of our markets through permanent art installations. Art installations will serve as year-round fixtures in our communities, celebrating the unique cultural heritage of our neighborhood and keeping our markets’ presence in the public eye.

#### **4. Addressing Inequality**

INWFMA respects, values, and celebrates the unique attributes that make each person unique. We uphold this commitment by addressing systematic inequities that affect health as part of our community engagement work.

We primarily do this by drawing families into our markets via our programs. Our programs are designed to connect the Inland Northwest’s most vulnerable families to services that support their basic needs, provide opportunities for stability and self-sufficiency, and resources that build healthy relationships within their households and our broader community. We specifically target lower-income families with women, children, and/or seniors, although anyone and everyone can benefit from connecting with others at the farmers market!

We also choose to deliver our programs within the trusted neighborhood settings of farmers markets. Our markets are located near or within a USDA-designated ‘fresh food desert,’ defined as neighborhoods experiencing a shortage in the availability of affordable fresh fruit, vegetables, and other healthful whole foods. In short, we’re reaching people when and where they need us most.

INWFMA continually works to advance inequality both within our organization and the community. We do this by:

- Increasing the diverse makeup of our board, staff, and partnerships. Our nonprofit organization is representative of the communities in which we serve, and thus, help embody the needs of our neighborhoods. We leverage diversity by creating an environment where all people feel supported, listened to, and empowered to do their personal best.
- Increasing inclusiveness of our programs. Our unique delivery model allows us to bring diverse

individuals together and in an integrative manner. Although many may originally come to the market to do their weekly food shopping, they are ultimately connected to a plethora of resources and people in the region, including free cooking demonstrations, service providers, and other nonprofit agencies (i.e.: libraries, medical providers, childcare centers, WIC, health insurance enrollment coordinators). We think of our markets as “incubators of connectedness” where people can come together, connect with their neighbor, and celebrate what we have in common. Looking forward, we plan to expand our geographic footprint (and diversity) by partnering with even more farmers markets in surrounding communities.

## **5. Our Culture and Successes**

Our organization is new and innovative for the region. We were primarily organized to raise funds for area markets. Although we were first organized for this purpose, markets have come to us and asked for help with many other operations, including: market design, staffing, marketing, and accounting. Quite honestly, we’re finding it difficult to keep up with the demand as more people want to know where their food comes from, meet local farmers, and connect with their neighbors.

INWFMA’s organizational structure has allowed for new community relationships to flourish. The farmers markets that comprise the backbone of our organization have deeply rooted connections within their neighborhoods, and many have a loyal base of weekly shoppers and vendors. We are building upon these connections and making new ones. Some examples are:

- Our coalition of markets is pursuing, for the first time, funding from our City Council. Many other cities in the state provide financial (and in-kind) support to their farmers markets. To date, we have had limited interaction with the City Council. We are initiating contact with our Councilmembers and have a ‘group ask’ scheduled in the coming weeks.
- Other nonprofits and NPOs dedicated to fresh food access, economic activity, health promotion, and community revitalization. As previously mentioned, farmers markets serve as ‘gathering hubs’ for people from all incomes, backgrounds, and ethnicities. As our society relies more heavily on electronic communication, the need for positive, face-to-face interactions is growing. We view our markets as hubs for such interactions, centers that connect people to their food, local farmers, artists, and live music.
- Our board is representative of the variety of neighborhoods comprising our organization. We have a board member from each farmers market included in our Association. Most of the time, the board “representative” is the market’s manager. Our Board President, and co-founder, Rob Allen, is highly involved in the region’s philanthropy circle and was one of the founders for the Fairwood Farmers Market. His guidance, combined with the fundraising experience of our Executive Director and grant writer, Lisette Alent, allows us to build sustainable connections in the community while respecting the unique identify of our individual markets.

## **6. Challenges and Lessons Learned**

Our most significant challenge has been ensuring our organization’s sustainable, long-term growth while working with a limited budget and staff.

We were surprised to find the strong demand for our services, a demand that exceeded fundraising. This demand has resulted in us hiring our first staff member, an Executive Director, and four additional part-time, work-study college student staff. Our staff work hand-in-hand with the board to ensure the (a) organization’s needs, and mission, are being met all while (b) the farmers markets are sustainable and having the greatest impact in their neighborhoods.

Providing for the markets has been a difficult endeavor. To start, each market has different needs. Additionally, each is located in a different neighborhood, a neighborhood which may or may not have a high demand for a farmers market. Some managers are paid while others are not. We have been carefully deciphering the needs of each market by communicating with their managers on a regular basis, and in the case of a few markets, working with their board to identify next steps. In the end, we want to support the markets without discouraging their autonomy. Ultimately, most of these issues can be worked out through open and regular communication.

## 7. Next Steps

We have been inspired by the growing demand for fresh, healthy, locally grown food. Moving forward, we hope to see this demand grow even more and transform our health care system from a *reactive model* into one that is *proactive*.

Supporting this transformation, we will focus on behaviors people can integrate into their everyday habits, such as:



- Increasing access to fresh and affordable foods for all. In addition to KERNEL and Fresh Bucks, we are exploring a partnership with our local food bank to make our farmers markets ‘distribution site’ for lower-income children and families to access free meals during the summer. We are also diversifying our funding streams for these programs, so that we are prepared for any potential changes that may occur to the Farm Bill (the primary funding entity behind our programs).
- Increasing consumption of fresh and healthy foods. Our markets are going to offer more cooking and canning demonstrations, as well as educational resources on selecting produce, preparing the food, and creating fun recipes.
- Increase activity levels. We are encouraging people, especially children, to get outdoors and visit their nearest farmers market, either by bicycle or walking. Our KERNEL program also has an aim at making exercise a regular behavior in the lives of our youth.
- Increase connection to the local arts scene Spokane is an artistic community. Unfortunately, to budget setbacks, many of our schools and museums have had to cut back on their art programming. We want to bring more artists and live musicians into our markets, making art accessible to all.
- Revitalizing and connecting our neighborhoods. Over 25,000 people visit our markets each year! This number is astounding, yet not enough to meet our goal. We want to complete, revitalize, and empower our neighborhoods via farmers markets and all the resources existing within these ‘community gems.’