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Farmers Markets as an Element of Revitalising Rural Areas**

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Towards Planning Recommendations to Encourage the Growth of Farmers Markets as an Element of Revitalising Rural Areas

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Abstract

In theory, farmers' markets can provide a win-win situation in terms of revitalising rural areas, increasing viability of small and part-time farms, re-connecting the consumer with the source of food, providing good quality food at reasonable cost, adding complexity to the social fabric of the market town and increasing numbers of shoppers. This paper reviews the white and grey literature on the economic, social and environmental benefits of farmers' markets.

However, there remain a large number of problems in relation to establishing and maintaining farmers' market. They range from issues with traditional market rights to a lack of support from local authorities and agricultural groups. This paper uses an Irish case study based on interviews and literature to analyse these obstacles from a planning point of view. Other issues that are examined include problems with finding suitable locations, management and promotion issues, insurance, health and hygiene, and the importance of farmers' markets in the promotion of local agriculture. Recommendations are made for the future planning and management of farmers' markets in Ireland.

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Introduction

The continuous and accelerating changes in agriculture over the last thirty years has meant the nature of rural life has changed in a very significant way. The increasing mechanisation and consolidation of farming has led to a reduced rural working population in most western countries. Local feed producers, farm machinery retailers and fertiliser companies have been bought up by international concerns and local needs are serviced from afar (Belfast Newsletter, 2003, pp. 42) Many farmers on small holdings have been forced to supplement their farm income with other labour. Thus, rural areas have become less synonymous with agriculture and there are visible signs of a collapse in many communities. Farmers recognise the fact that they will find it very difficult to compete on world markets at world prices with larger commercial farms in the United States, New Zealand and from within the European Union itself.

However a growing market opportunity exists for farmers and producers in the form of farmers' markets. Ireland, like the rest of Europe, has a history of small-scale farms with local markets selling local produce to local people. The skills and knowledge needed for farmers' market still exist within communities. Farmers' markets enable local producers to sell their goods directly to consumers in circumstances that promote dialogue and understanding between producers and consumers and enable high quality produce to be affordable while generating a fair income for farmers and producers. They offer farmers and producers increased incomes, a secure market, and contribute benefits to the environment. They help rebuild the bond of trust between the farming community and the consumer, providing consumers with access to fresh local produce and play an important role in educating the consumer as to the production and origin of their food.

Agriculture in Ireland

Over the past 30 years agriculture in Ireland has undergone enormous change and this ultimately has had a major effect on rural areas. The percentage total labour force engaged in agriculture has declined from 22% in 1975 to 8% in 2000; agriculture's contribution to the economy (GAP as a percentage of GDP) is now at just over 4%; agri-food exports as a percentage of total exports has declined from 47% in 1975 to 10% in 2000; farm numbers have declined drastically as well from 230,000 in 1975 to 144,000 in 2000 and the average farm size is now nearly 30 hectares (Phelan, 2001).

According to the 2010 Report from the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (2000) fewer than half of the country's commercial farmers are likely to continue to earn a living from the land by the end of the next decade. The study claims that the 44,300 farms considered to be profitable at present will have fallen to 20,000 by 2010. The report

envisages a huge rise in the number of part-time farmers from fewer than 40,000 at present to 60,000 in 10 years time. A further 20,000 farmers are expected to be comprised of hobbyists and young and old farmers in the process of getting out of the business altogether.

Therefore, the future of Irish farming will be made up of a small number of large commercial farms, a number of potentially viable farms and a large number of part-time farms (Sheehy, 2002). In order to allow farmers to make a viable living from this sector it is important for every farm to maximise its income. For many this will mean diversifying into other related activities such as agri-tourism, landscape management, direct marketing and so on. Potentially viable farms may need to scale up their farming enterprise if they are to continue to have farming as their main source of income and if they aspire to having a competitive enterprise to pass on to the next generation (Dempsey, 2004). One method of generating additional income is to explore farmers' markets.

Part-time farmers are also ideally placed to take advantage of the potential of using farmers' markets for the sale of their produce. Part-time farms are typically involved in small-scale, extensive food production and therefore ideally suited to the type of production required by farmers' markets.

Farmers Markets

Farmers' markets are part of an upsurge in the movement by producers to sell directly to the consumer rather than use the supermarkets many producers feel are taking too much of their profit. The National Association of Farmers' Markets defines a Farmers' Market as one "in which farmers, growers or producers from a defined local area are present in person to sell their own produce, direct to the public. All products sold should have been grown, reared, caught, brewed, pickled, baked, smoked or processed by the stallholder." (National Association of Farmers' Markets, 2003). The United States Department of Agriculture defines a farmers' market as "a common facility or area where several farmers/growers gather on a regular, recurring basis to sell a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables and other farm products directly to consumers" (Festing, 1998, pp.5). However, the farmer may also act as a wholesaler, where for example, he may supplement his stock with imported organic goods that are not available locally.

Farmers' markets have an important role to play in the promotion of local agriculture. They "are an excellent way to reclaim economic space for farmers to live in - they help farmers become less dependent on the whims of big supermarkets, highly fluctuating global commodity prices, and ruthless competition in a global economy" (Bullock, 2001, pp.10). Supporting the local agricultural community helps the economy overall in a region by bringing more disposable income to an area. Farmers' markets can be an essential survival route for

farmers, providing extra and alternative revenue sources, as well as developing new skills. There are also benefits to consumers as well as the wider environment. They help rebuild the bond of trust between the farming community and the consumer, providing consumers with access to fresh local produce, and play an important role in educating the consumer as to the production and origin of their food.

Economic Benefits of Farmers' markets

Farmers can get higher prices for their produce than by selling through wholesale outlets, by taking on some of the marketing functions usually carried out by middlemen, e.g., packing and transportation. Cutting out the middleman means that the consumers do not lose out for the higher prices farmers are receiving. Direct selling allows for premium prices. In the USA, gross returns to producers from farmers' market sales are generally 200% to 250% higher than sales to wholesalers/distributors (Integrity Systems Cooperative, 1997). 90% of Illinois' 147 farmers markets are sponsored by a chamber of commerce or a merchant association, and the US Department of Agriculture report that 85% of farmers markets are economically self-sustaining (Festing, 1998). They can also command considerable turnover. "Within the space of five years, Britain's farmers' markets have grown from zero to an industry that generates annual sales of about £65 million" (Allen, 2003, pp. 6). It has been estimated that in New York alone farmers' markets generate \$10 million a year in sales. A survey of Rural Economic Development in New York State stated, "though they are not an economic development panacea, farmers' markets should be considered an important component of a comprehensive local economic development strategy" (Hilchey et al, 1995).

Farmers' markets keep local money circulating in the local area because spending in farmers' markets has a high multiplier effect in the local economy. If local people can buy good quality food from local producers they recycle money within the local area, thereby gradually building up the wealth of the local community (Bullock, 2001, pp.5). This is known as the multiplier effect and is a measure of the number of times money circulates in the local economy before leaving. A high multiplier means that money circulates more times in the local area before leaving - money stays locally if it is spent on wages for local people or buying local produce. "In Devon, a study by the New Economics Foundation showed that £10 spent at a local farmers' market resulted in a net income of £24 to the community as the money was recycled locally. The same £10 spent in a local supermarket resulted in a net income of £14" (Belfast News Letter, 2003). Roger Thompson, from *Business in the Community in Cornwall* (2000) states "In Cornwall, £500 million per year is spent on food. 75 per cent of that is imported from outside Cornwall. If we reduce that by just 1 per cent, we have invested £5 million in our local economy" (Ross, 2000). Hinchey et al. (1995) noted that farmers' markets help circulate money within a local community which might otherwise be spent on imported goods, as well

as drawing tourists, providing supplemental income to participants and teaching business skills to young entrepreneurs.

Similarly, keeping money within an area is an important aspect of regeneration, which tends to be overlooked in comparison with the traditional regeneration technique of bringing money into an area (Friends of the Earth, 2000) The British Government's Social Exclusion Unit (2000) states the problem is not necessarily that too little money flows into a neighbourhood. Rather it is what consumers, public services and business do with that money. Too often, it is spent on goods and services with no local presence, and therefore immediately leaves the neighbourhood. Regeneration programmes should have a core target of radically ring-fencing the local economy to stop the hemorrhage of the little money residents have (Bullock, 2001).

Farmers' markets can act as a catalyst for revitalising market towns. For a number of years market towns in Ireland have been under pressure from economic restructuring, a loss of traditional activities such as livestock markets, a shift of services to larger towns and the growth in out-of-town retailing. Thus, in these times it is important for rural communities that market towns retain their vitality. Farmers' markets are a key way to increase the economic vitality of market towns. Britain's North West Regional Development agency (2002) states "the vitality of market towns is important to local residents, and to those in surrounding rural areas who rely on them for shopping, employment and a range of specialist services. Many towns have suffered a decline in fortunes in recent years - very few, for example, still have a market. This has resulted from increasing centralisation of services, competition from out of town shopping centres, the loss of traditional sources of employment and a lack of investment." The US experience finds that "whether in the form of weekly outdoor markets that convene only in the warmer months, indoor market halls that operate every day year round, or entire market districts, a number of American cities are finding that farmers' markets are providing an effective strategy for revitalising urban communities" (Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources, 1998). Curry and Oland (1998) in writing on the economic multiplier effect of farmers' markets note a steady increase in property values in the market district as well as increases in the number of jobs and new businesses.

Related to this are the economic benefits to the merchants in the surrounding area. A study of 19 farmers' markets in Ontario found that 50% of customers shopped at other businesses on their way to or from the farmers' market and that a total of 24,000 people are directly involved in preparing and selling the goods found in the province's 127 farmers' markets (Cumming et al, 1999). Thus, a trend towards farmers' markets and the resulting strengthening of local links can be expected to have net job gains. Farmers' markets act as natural incubator units for the emergence of new speciality food producers, giving them direct access to consumers. They facilitate product development and diversification. Eighty one per cent of farmers

surveyed at 9 farmers' markets in the USA said that the ability to test new products at their farmers' market was beneficial (Hilchey et al, 1995).

As farmers markets grow, there will be more opportunities for local business links to grow, creating more local businesses. Farmers' markets act as spurs for business start-ups and growth for producers, as well as retailers (Bullock, 2001). The US Department of Agriculture claims farmers' markets play a vital role in enabling small to medium sized growers to gain access to consumers. Without this access the existence of many small-sized growers would be threatened (Festing, 1998).

Social Benefits of Farmers' Markets

Farmers and producers often working in isolation get social contact and interaction with their customers at farmers' markets, often leading to more job satisfaction. Feehan (2004), in his book *Farming in Ireland - History, Heritage and the Environment*, acknowledges that the pressure to specialise and intensify have damaged not only the countryside but have brought about a decline in the vocational dignity of the farmer, a progressive downgrading of farming life. For generations in Ireland, mixed farming to traditional patterns ran in substantial harmony with the natural world. Feehan concludes with a passionate call for a revolution in attitudes, a new philosophy in which small-scale mixed farming, integrated with local markets, could take a separate path from the leviathan of major agribusiness. This raises the banner of 'bioregionalism', reuniting communities with their local resources.

Most farmers' market customers come to the markets for the superior quality and freshness, unusual varieties, a chance to support local agriculture and meet the farmers who grow their food. People can re-connect with food and farmers, and this bond strengthens communities. "One of the reasons for this rise in popularity in the past few years has to be the whole question of provenance – the consumer wants to know where his food is coming from" (Robinson, 2003, pp. 6). Psychologists comparing supermarkets and farmers' markets found the latter to be more friendly, personal, rural, smaller and 'happier' than supermarkets (Sommer and Wing, 1980, Sommer et al., 1981).

Farmer markets also strengthen the links between rural areas and town and cities. "This increased understanding will be very helpful in land use planning issues such as protecting land around cities from urban encroachment, and quality issues such as the pesticide spraying controversy" (Sommer, 1990, pp.4). Hilchey et al (1995) noted that farmers' markets contribute directly to the preservation of open space, and the maintenance of the rural character of the land.

Farmers' markets have the potential to strengthen links between local businesses, attract people to adjacent retail businesses, safeguard local jobs and facilitate business expansion. Farmers' markets bring together town and country in a beneficial way. They reconnect people with where their food comes from, who grows it and how it is grown. This process increases quality of life by strengthening communities, forging stronger links between urban and rural areas and potentially forming a longer term partnership between local consumers and local farms (Friends of the Earth, 2000).

Robin Barachi, a specialist project advisor for the South Tyrone Food Links programme stated, "all the producers at the Dungannon farmers' market come from both sides of the religious divide, and by being together, they started talking to each other...and that in the wider context helps rebuild communities" (Belfast News Letter, 2004).

The US Department of Agriculture reports that direct markets provide access to fresh fruit and vegetables for consumers, especially minority consumers in the inner city, who would otherwise not be able to get fresh produce (Burns and Johnson, 1996). In the US the Farmers' Market Coupon Program has major additional health and community benefits by making fresh, affordable food available where there was previously none. For example the Massachusetts Farmers' Market Coupon Program provides women, children, elders, and other low-income families with coupons redeemable at farmers markets for fresh fruits and vegetables. Local farmers are reimbursed for the face value of the coupons, thereby enhancing earnings and supporting participation in farmers markets (Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources, 1998).

Farmers' Markets and the Environment

Farmers' markets benefit the environment by encouraging sustainable agriculture and small scale, less intensive production. They also reduce the effects of long distance transport of food and the need for excess packaging. "At the moment due to the central distribution policy of the supermarkets it is difficult to find local food in an area. But as soon as you have a farmers' market people will produce for it" (Allen, 2003, pp.6). According to Brown (2002), the role farmers' markets have played in the development of markets for organic foods is acknowledged primarily by food writers, but does not seem to have been confirmed by research. She notes that the link between farmers' markets and recent trends in horticulture research cannot be separated from the influence of the environmental movement and the increased interest in good food of all sorts. Farmers' markets can also reduce food miles, reduce packaging, and encourage farm diversification and hence bio-diversity.

Farmers in the USA report that an average of 22% of their crop could not be marketed if farmers' markets were not available (Festing, 1998). There is less waste, as acceptable food is not discarded because it doesn't fit supermarkets' packaging requirements. Farmers' markets also tend to sell a high proportion of organic or less intensively grown produce. Farmers' markets help small farmers and organic growers, who find it difficult to sell produce to the big retailers.

There is no doubt that the interest in farmers' markets, where producers can sell their products directly to the consumer is a rapidly growing trend through the towns and cities of this country. A strong local economy is particularly important in rural areas and without this strong local economic base, many rural communities risk becoming little more than dormitory facilities for urban commuters (Bullock, 2001). In order to ensure the maintenance of vibrant, sustainable rural communities, farmers' markets should be considered an important component of a comprehensive rural development strategy.

Farmers' Markets and the Planning System

While there are many benefits to a rural community from farmers markets, there are still problems in the Planning System in Ireland in a variety of areas. In order to investigate these planning issues, interviews were used to highlight the issues and problems faced by people in establishing and maintaining farmers' markets. A number of open-ended questions were asked, mainly aimed at getting the opinion of the people being interviewed as well as facts. The interviews were of a discursive nature allowing for discussion of a number of topics, adapting freely to issues arising in the interview, whilst addressing the questions laid out. Among those interviewed were Traders, Traders Association Representatives, Organisers of Farmers Markets and Consultants.

Obstacles in the Planning System

The interviews identified the main planning problems that may be faced when setting up and running a farmers' market. They are examined under the following headings – population; location; casual trading laws; local authorities; funding; market management, promotion and support; insurance and health and hygiene.

Population

In order to survive and prosper, farmers' markets need be located within a large and affluent population. Thus, farmers' markets on both sides of the Atlantic have tended to target middle class professionals (Peacock, 1999). It was found that many of the successful markets in the US are located in urban or suburban areas (Festings, 1998). Festings (1998) differentiates

three models of farmers' markets in California. They are the rural market, which caters for a population of less than 20,000, the suburban market, which caters for a population of between 20,000 and 100,000 and the urban market, which encompasses a population of greater than 100,000. Therefore, in order to generate a farmers' market a large population is required.

Location

As with all retail outlets, location is one of the most important criteria determining a market's success or failure. Farmers' markets need to operate during days and times that are convenient to the most people in the area. To increase patronage of farmers' markets, they need to be located in areas where the greatest number of people can easily reach them. One of the main findings from the research undertaken was the importance of visibility of location. Good road access, an attractive retail and pedestrian environment and sufficient parking are also important in order to make them appealing to the community. It was also found that the best locations for farmers' markets are in towns where there are old existing market rights. However many problem exist in relation to traditional markets right and casual trading which are discussed in the section below.

Casual Trading Laws

In Ireland in 1995, powers to control trading and issue licences were devolved from central to local government through the enactment of the Casual Trading Act. Enormous powers were given to local authorities in relation to markets. The Act deals with many issues but of critical importance are the bye-laws. The bye-laws deal with the control, regulation, supervision, and administration of casual trading. "An 1880 survey showed there were 264 towns with market rights in Ireland. Farmers and others are therefore legally entitled to sell their produce in these towns on market day" (Hurley, 2003, pp.3).

However, "under the 1995 Casual Trading Act market rights may self-extinguish after 10 years if they have not been exercised" (Hurley, 2003. pp.3). Therefore it is very important to enact market rights before 2005-2006 to secure their ongoing existence. This means the bye-laws are superseded by the national law (the Casual Trading Act of 1995). However, according to one interviewee, the judgement in the High Court case between Toby Simmonds and the Irish Organisation of Market and Street Traders Limited against Cork County Council, the Commissioner of An Garda Siochana and the Attorney General in February 2002 established that any town that has a Market Right existing cannot have it's 'market' regulated under the Casual Trading Act 1995. The fundamental issue is that casual trading is different from market trading. A permit or licence can be issued for casual trading, whereas market trading is a right.

Overall, problems still exist in relation to the interpretation of the law. One of the main findings was that some town councils make things as awkward as possible for stallholders by

constantly moving them around sometimes out of sight of potential customers. Currently (2004) there are four court cases pending taken by food traders against their respective local authorities.

Local Authorities

Farmers' markets can offer big returns for local authorities in terms of local economic development. From the perspective of the wider community, local authorities value farmers' markets as a way of building local identity, increasing farm incomes and helping smaller, market towns to respond to the challenge of retailing in particular the growth of out-of-town shopping centres (Peacock, 1999). The initial impetus might come from customers and producers, but in the planning stage, political will is essential. However there is no single, definitive model. Some farmers' markets are launched by the local authority, and subsequently handed over to the producers. Others have launched their own market while other farmers' markets remain under local authority control. This diversity underlines the flexibility of farmers' markets.

Local authority support is needed particularly to deal with start-up costs, publicity and promotion, finding a suitable location, market charter issues and the co-ordination of local markets. From the interviews undertaken there was a varied response to the level of support and co-operation offered by local authorities and town councils. Where there were problems, many of them arose due to local authorities lack of insight and knowledge into the concept of farmers' markets.

Funding

Evidence from the UK and US show that although at least four of every five established farmers markets are self-financing, support is required to encourage their development, help with start-up costs and networking at the local authority level (Friends of the Earth, 2000). In Ireland there is no funding directly for setting up farmers' markets. However Leader and other development groups have in certain cases provided funding for capital expenses such as buying stalls, water tanks, generators and the training of people in the handling and preparation of food.

Market Management, Promotion and Support

Farmers' markets need organisers with responsibility for planning the promotional aspects of the market, which are essential for drawing the crowds. Some farmers' markets are managed and run by an individual in the community while others are sponsored by community organizations or non-profits with a hired market manager. If they are well managed, these markets can provide economic, nutritive, educational, social and psychological benefits to vendors and the community (Abel et al, 1999).

Farmers' market managers are needed to (Friends of the Earth, 2000):

- Co-ordinate farmers' markets, especially in setting-up, networking and marketing.
- Explain the economic benefits to other departments and elected members.
- Liaise with local chambers of commerce to elicit their support and minimise potential for conflict between farmers' markets and local food retailers.
- Highlight potential benefits to all local traders.
- Help source funding for set-up costs, e.g. grants for equipment such as refrigeration units, generators etc.

Bord Bia, a State agency within the remit of the Irish Department of Agriculture, is active in promoting and encouraging farmers' market as an outlet for small food producers. One of the aims of Bord Bia is to support the setting up and running a farmers market and are currently in discussion with the Office of Public Works (OPW) about appropriate expansion of farmers markets on OPW sites (Walch, 2004). However from the interviews undertaken, support for farmers' markets from state bodies in Ireland seems very limited. As a result of the lack of support, the Irish Food Market Traders Association was launched at the end of January 2004. The association's main aim is to encourage the establishment of food markets nationwide and voice the concerns of the artisan and entrepreneurial food producers who sell their hand-made or home-grown produce directly to the public in Irish markets.

Insurance

Insurance is a necessity for farmers' markets as a producer is open to claims from individuals who may injure themselves at the market and from individuals who may be injured from consuming products sold at the market. Therefore every stallholder is required to have insurance cover against public liability and product liability. Attaining insurance cover was seen as significantly expensive and difficult by many of those interviewed.

Health and Hygiene

Farmers' markets are places where food is handled and sold and therefore health and hygiene is of major importance. All food producers are legally obliged to be trained and competent in basic hygiene and HACCP. The Food Safety Authority of Ireland issued *The Hygiene of Foodstuffs Legislation* in 2000 (Stationary Office, 2000) and this outlines exactly what is expected of a person involved in food handling from production to sale.

A number of problems were noted in relation to health and hygiene with some people feeling the environmental health officers were overly scrupulous. Problems included labelling of all items, access to hot water and food that has the potential to be contaminated by bacteria to be kept under 3 degrees Celsius. The latter was considered farcical as some cheeses need

be kept at 12 degrees, others at 5 degrees etc. However other interviewed felt the environmental health officers were genuinely interested in helping people develop successful, safe food businesses.

Planning Recommendations

Local authorities have the opportunity to secure the benefits of farmers' market set out in the literature review by integrating measures to promote and support them in the County Development Plans.

Local authorities should identify and outline objectives and policies that:

1. Facilitate and support the setting up of market committees.
2. Help in identifying suitable sites and positive treatment of planning application for farmers' markets in recognition of the multiple benefits they bring.
3. Encourage the pedestrianisation of streets for markets.
4. Encourage the establishment of new markets right in new towns and suburbs that have grown up over the past few years.
5. Allow a flexible approach in the interpretation of market rights, e.g. allow farmers' markets to operate on different days to conventional markets.
6. Ensure that the different departments within the local authority are working together to promote farmers' markets.
7. Explain the economic, social and environmental benefits to elected members and interested parties.
8. Liase with local chambers of commerce to elicit their support and minimise potential for conflict between farmers' markets and food retailers.
9. Ensure farmers' markets are an integral part of the local retail strategy.
10. Ensure farmers' markets are also set up in poorer disadvantaged areas.
11. Provide grants towards start up costs, capital expenses such stalls, refrigeration units, water tanks, generators and advertising and promotion costs.
12. Co-ordinate local markets to ensure no clash of dates.

National Recommendations

- Greater national commitment and support should be given to farmers' markets. Given adequate advisory and training resources, there is huge potential for thousands of farm families to generate viable incomes from food production. Round-table talks involving the government, local authorities representatives, market traders, the Traders Association and legal professionals should be set up to come up with a formula to safeguard, regulate, enhance, promote and create markets.

- Governments should be mindful of Trading Acts and restore market rights to towns in order to spur the growth of farmers' markets. There should be a comprehensive study undertaken of markets and market rights, including towns that have extinguished market rights
- A singular government department should take complete control of farmers' markets, with an onus on local government to establish, maintain and promote markets in their jurisdictions.
- Government funding should be made available directly to groups wishing to start up a farmers' market. This funding should be made available for capital expense (buying stalls, water tanks etc.) as well as studying the feasibility of markets. Funding should also be made available to train people in the handling and preparation of food
- National and local sponsorship is needed for farmers' markets. A co-ordinator for small food producers should be appointed by the government to enhance the further development of farmers' markets. Developing farmers' markets that work for communities requires the co-operation of many different individuals and groups. In all, efforts to develop, publicise and improve farmers' markets this co-ordinator would seek to involve those groups who can advance the growth of such markets. The identification of patrons and potential patrons is important to farmers, market organisers and sponsoring agencies (Brown, 2002).
- Local governments should integrate measures to promote and support farmers' markets in their Development Plans. Involvement of this nature would act as one of the most useful and cost effective ways of supporting and encouraging farmers' markets. They would provide a one-stop information service for farmers and facilitate information exchange between farmers, consumers and the local authorities. Regional networks could also play an important role in ensuring the authenticity of markets, promoting markets to the public and coordinating days of operation within the network.
- Local government planners and elected members should be educated as to what farmers' markets are and their benefits to the urban and rural economy.
- Support should be provided for the establishment of farmers' markets in poorer disadvantaged areas. These have the potential to ensure a market for quality local produce and at the same time tackle access to healthy food among the local population. Included in this measure should be a farmers' market coupon program.

- Farmers' markets should be included as an important component of, and integrated into, city and town regeneration projects and rural development programmes. Local food initiatives of this sort would help to revitalize rural towns and help farmers to add value to their produce. This would have the knock-on effect of maintaining or even increasing agricultural employment.

- Food safety regulations that are proportionate to the risks involved should be made available. Potential stallholders should also be encouraged to speak with local environmental health officers at an early stage as possible.

- Insurance should be incorporated into the daily fee. This would cut out significant hassle for farmers and producers who currently are required to have their own individual insurance.

- A farmers' market can generate positive PR for a town and an area and add another dimension to its character. Thus, farmers markets should be incorporated into local tourism strategies and could also be further expanded to include craft etc.

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