

Sussex Farmers' Market

An Evaluation of Three Pilot Markets in Lewes

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**Implementation and Analysis of Surveys by
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COMMON CAUSE
c o - o p e r a t i v e

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1. Introduction

Three Farmers' Markets were held in Lewes on the 17th and 31st October and the 14th November 1998. They were held at the Cliff end of town, in the pedestrian part of the main shopping street, next to a car park and not far from the bus and railway stations. The markets were modelled on the three pilot markets held in Bath in the Autumn of 1997 and based on Farmers' Markets in the US. The idea for the markets in Lewes was initiated by Common Cause Co-operative, a non-profit making community development co-operative, based in Lewes. After preparing a feasibility study with the support of Lewes District Council and raising sufficient funds, Common Cause organised the pilot markets. Common Cause's aims are to promote environmentally sustainable food production in Sussex and greater access to fresh, healthy, local produce to people on all incomes.

a. Organisation and Costs

The markets were organised by two members of the Common Cause Co-operative. It is estimated that a total of 570 hours or one person working full time for fourteen weeks was spent organising the markets. Much of this time was given voluntarily. This includes everything from preparing initial proposals and funding applications, financial accounting, recruiting producers, organising publicity, press work, and time spent at the markets themselves. It does not include the evaluation of the markets (design and implementation of surveys) for which separate funding was sought and an experienced researcher consulted. In addition, some time was also given in kind by Lewes District Council and East Sussex County Council and there was additional volunteer time given by Common Cause Members on the days of the market. It cannot be stressed too strongly that the success of the markets was in part due to the dedication and enthusiasm of the organisers, their local knowledge and commitment to the central aims of the market and their willingness to donate so much of their time to making the markets run as smoothly and professionally as they did.

The final costs for the three pilots is given in the budget over the page.

b. Methodology of the Evaluation

Surveys of four stakeholder groups were conducted. The main findings are given below. Full details of the data gathered can be found in Appendix I.

A profile of **customers at the markets** was established from two separate questionnaire surveys conducted at each market. The first covered issues such as how they had heard about the market, what appealed about it, what they had bought, and demographic data. The second questionnaire survey aimed to gauge attitudes to a number of issues related to farmers' markets including local production, organic food, shopping and cooking confidence. Two surveys were carried out because if all the questions had been combined in one questionnaire it would have made it too lengthy.

Data was gathered from all **the stallholders** through pre-market postal questionnaire surveys and post -market telephone surveys regarding the current nature of their business, their reasons for participating, practical problems on the day, and turnover.

Most shops and cafes in the immediate vicinity of the market, and a number of others in Lewes, were visited after each market to give **local shopkeepers** the opportunity to voice their views of the market, and in an attempt to assess any impact the markets may have had on trading.

A survey was carried out in the days following each market of the **general Lewes community** to gauge awareness of the markets and their aims, and to gather information on a range of issues related to local and organic produce, shopping and cooking to compare with market customers responses to the same issues. The survey was carried out in the High Street, on the outlying estates and outside supermarkets in the daytime and in the evening.

C. Survey kit

The questionnaires, with some adaptations after they were tested on the three pilot markets in Lewes, have been produced in the form of a “Survey Kit for Evaluating Farmers’ Markets”. This comprises sample questionnaires and recommendations for their use. The kit is available from Common Cause Co-operative.

2. Market Conditions

Farmers’ Markets differ from traditional street markets in that selling is restricted to the people who grow or process the food themselves. This guarantees local identity and local origin. The two basic conditions for a Farmers’ Market are that stallholders sell only their own produce and that their produce has been grown or raised locally (in this case, in Sussex). We also applied this rule to producers of crafts (of wool or wood products for example) and to the take-away food stallholder, who sourced all her food locally. Common Cause also gave priority to producers who met the general aim of achieving more sustainable food production in Sussex. Copies of the conditions for stallholders are attached in Appendix II. The only exception to the rule was the Women’s Institute who sold baked goods and preserves from materials not necessarily sourced in Sussex.

At the first market, the cheese producers that we approached were reluctant to sell at the market since there was a shop close by in the town selling their produce. As a compromise we agreed that the shop, which specialised in local cheeses, could sell Sussex cheeses at the market. This caused some annoyance with other nearby traders in the town, and at the second market we decided to keep strictly to the rules of the market and only allow a cheese producer to sell. The cheese shop understood our position and kindly helped to identify a cheese producer who in turn advertised that their own and other local cheeses could also be bought in the shop.

3. Results of Surveys

a. Stallholders

The stallholders were surveyed both before the markets to gain basic information about their enterprises and after each market. The post-market survey was designed to allow stallholders to give feedback on the markets and make suggestions for improvements. There were twelve producers at the first market, and eighteen at the subsequent markets. Eight producers attended all three markets, and sixteen attended at least two. Six producers attended one market only. Producers were selling the following products: Cheese, conventional and organic (in conversion) apples, pears, nuts, organic and conventional mushrooms, shii-take mushrooms, free range eggs, shrubs, herbs, organic vegetables, organic flour and bread, flowers, hot take away food, cakes and preserves, honey and wax products, wool, squashes and gourds, and meat.

Pre-Market Survey

Current outlets

The producers who attended the markets currently supply, between them, a wide range of outlets. Two producers sell most of their produce direct to supermarkets whilst the majority supply a variety of other outlets including wholesalers, farm shops and nurseries, local shops, other markets, processors, or sell their produce through box schemes and Pick Your Own. The WI sells only through its own markets.

Reasons for participating

Nearly all the producers cited, as reasons for participating, wanting to encourage the direct selling initiative and the opportunity to meet customers and get feedback. Many of the producers also saw the markets as an opportunity to expand sales or to sell excess produce. They also gave some producers the chance to test new lines, to publicise their other outlets (their own farm shop or nursery or local retail outlets). One producer had no previous sales experience.

Preferences as to the form a market should take

Producers were divided in their preferences for either a weekly, fortnightly or monthly market, with the last being preferred by most and the weekly option by least. Most producers would prefer a regular market in a fixed location, with only a small minority preferring the option of a roving market. Most producers would be willing to travel up to 20 miles to a market, with smaller numbers being prepared to travel further (30 miles) or less far (10 miles). Only one producer was prepared to travel much further (80 miles). About half the producers could supply a market all year round. For all the others production is seasonal.

Size of current enterprise

The producers represented a very wide spectrum in terms of their acreage - sizes ranged from 2 to 900 acres, but nearly all the producers had fewer than 100 acres and most had fewer than 30. Some of the businesses are exclusively family run, but most of the producers had some non-family full-time or part-time employees.

Post-Market Survey

General comments on the markets

Many producers commented that they had enjoyed the experience in spite of the hard work and bad weather and all wished the markets to continue on a regular basis.

The feedback from producers was almost entirely positive and focused on two main issues:

- **the organisation and the promotion of the markets** (which was compared favourably with other markets by one producer) - 'very professional organisation', 'obviously well promoted', 'very well organised and very efficient - super position', 'very impressed', 'obviously well-promoted, couldn't fault it - just wonderful', 'impressed with general organisation'.
- **the enthusiasm of the customers** - 'the feedback was lovely', 'I was really quite amazed at the enthusiasm', 'lots of very favourable comments from the general public', 'lots of people felt it was just what Lewes needed', 'good response from people', 'very positive response from people', 'wonderful atmosphere and the location was perfect'.

Other issues commented on by producers included:

- **an opportunity for both producers and customers to gain** - the fruit and mushroom producers, who sell most of their produce currently to wholesalers, processors and supermarkets, found an opportunity in the market to sell produce which may be rejected or bought at very low prices (for reasons of size, for instance) at prices which are worthwhile for them and compare favourably for customers with other outlets.
- **changing customer behaviour** - one producer pointed out that for the markets to have a real impact on people's behaviour and attitudes in terms of food and shopping, and in order to reduce food miles in any significant way, the markets would have to be a weekly feature. The same producer was keen to develop ways of making local, good quality produce available to all parts of the community and suggested using some of the profits to finance the sale of leftover stock to communities or institutions at reduced prices.

Problems experienced by stallholders

- **Stalls** - Several producers commented on the stalls, which though adequate, would benefit from providing more protection from the weather (at two of the markets there was a lot of rain and wind and at the third it was very cold), and greater security, by having a back and sides as well as a roof.
- **Parking** - Some producers felt a site where vehicles could be parked next to stalls would have a number of advantages in terms of the staffing needed (one could manage instead of two), restocking the stalls, security and keeping things dry. One suggested that permission should be sought for access to the pedestrian precinct for setting up and packing up. On the other hand, everyone had overcome the problems and appreciated the advantages of being right in the centre of town.
- **Competition** - There were two apple producers, and at the first market they were placed opposite each other. At subsequent markets at the request of one of them, they were placed further apart.

- **Pricing:** Though not exactly a problem, producers noted that where their own products were sold by local shops, care needed to be taken in pricing their goods. If markets are to serve to strengthen the local economy as a whole, and to highlight the links between local producers and local outlets other than the market, some thought needs to be given to this issue.

The economic impact of the market

Producers were asked whether the market had proved worthwhile in financial terms and in terms of building up a customer base. Most felt it had been worthwhile on both counts.

- **Turnover** - The market turnover increased at each market. This was particularly encouraging given the adverse weather conditions (at the second market it rained continuously and at the third market the weather was very cold). There were more stallholders at the second and third markets than at the first, which partly explains the increase, but average takings per producer increased significantly between the first and third market, reflecting the healthy demand for local produce. (Average turnover dipped a little at the second market, almost certainly due to the bad weather conditions). In addition, a number of producers sold out well before the end of the market, suggesting that takings could improve as producers begin to be better able to gauge demand. The way in which the produce is sold can also affect turnover. One apple and nut producer, for instance, reported increased takings after deciding to bag up his produce in advance, but in fairly small quantities. Previously, only some of his produce was bagged up, and in quantities too large to attract many buyers.

Table 1: Stallholder Turnover at the Three pilot Farmers' Markets, Lewes, Autumn 1998.

Date	Total Market Turnover	Average per Producer	Average per Stall**
17.10.98	£3,173	£264	£317
31.10.98	£3,967*	£233*	£283
14.11.98	£5,864	£326	£366
Average	£4,335	£277	£325

*turnover for one producer was not supplied

** Four vegetable producers shared two stalls at each market, and at the second market one other stall was shared by two producers.

- **Building up a customer base and strengthening local links** - The market served as a good opportunity to publicise the producers' other outlets, including their own farm shops or nurseries, box schemes and local shops. Some producers had leaflets advertising their other outlets but for many this activity was carried out informally with individual customers who expressed an interest. Box scheme operators reported success in recruiting new customers. Other producers also reported an interest on the part of customers in other outlets and in production methods. There may well be scope however for developing ways of informing visitors to the market about local linkages as a way of promoting local produce generally as well as building up a customer base for particular products.

b. Customers at the Market

How people heard about the market

- Most customers had heard about the market through word of mouth or newspapers (advertisements and articles).
- As the markets continued, the number of people who had heard about the market through publicity, and who lived further than three miles away increased significantly. This suggests strongly that the publicity had a cumulative effect in bringing in people from outside the immediate area.

Over a third of customers at the second and third markets had come to a previous market. About one fifth at the third market had come to both previous markets.

What appealed about the market

- When asked what aspects of the market appealed to them, most customers mentioned the opportunity to buy local produce, the freshness of the produce and the opportunity to support local producers.
- There was a significant drop at the last market in those citing organic produce as an aspect which appealed to them. This may reflect the slightly different profile of the shoppers at this market, with greater numbers coming from outside the immediate area as a result of the publicity which focused more on the 'local' aspects of the market.

Aspects of the market that didn't appeal

Only one in six people said there were aspects that didn't appeal. These were:

- the queues at some stalls and the crowds, which might be alleviated by placing the stalls further apart,
- the possibly damaging effect on local traders,
- the difficulty of access for people in motorised wheelchairs.

Other comments

The invitation to comment on the markets yielded a wide variety of responses, reflecting the diversity of interests and tastes to which farmers' markets have the capacity to appeal. Many of the comments were confined to an enthusiastic endorsement of the market idea (e.g. 'absolutely brilliant'). Other issues mentioned included:

- the social aspects of the market ('conviviality', 'community spirit', 'meeting friends', 'brings sense of life'),
- the nature of the food and the contact with the producers ('real food, not pre-packed, people want everything sterilised nowadays', 'you can check what's in it', 'I'm fed up with the rules and regulations', 'the variety of apples'),
- the appearance and location ('visually lovely', 'good use of town centre'),
- the opportunity to taste food (at some stalls and at the cooking demonstrations),

- the entertainment for children,
- the pleasant alternative it offered to supermarkets shopping ('nicer atmosphere than supermarkets', 'freedom of a country market, no shopping tills', 'I like this style of shopping'),
- environmental issues (food miles, pollution, support for organic production),
- economic issues (supporting the local economy, 'could be good for local traders', 'revitalises the town centre'),
- pleasant associations with other places or times ('like when I was a lad, when I used to go to the cattle market, traditional Sussex', 'nice to see local people doing what the French do', 'reminds me of a French market' - reflecting the fact that French producers have come over the Channel on a number of occasions in recent years and held markets in towns near the ports, and of course the large number of visitors to France).

Suggestions for improvements

About a third of the respondents thought the market should be bigger, and about one-sixth felt there should be a greater variety of produce on offer. Other suggestions included:

- greater clarification as to what was organic,
- a change in the rules so producers could bring in small amounts of appropriate non-local produce,
- a bigger location so producers could bring in their vans alongside their stalls,
- use the market to promote local produce more actively and educate people about its social and environmental benefits,
- better promotion at the market itself that the producers were local and the produce their own,
- sell shopping bags - people have got out of the habit of bringing their own
- 'something a little less self-conscious - more like a French market'.

Should the market continue?

Everyone asked, buyers or not, wanted the market to continue on a regular basis. Nearly two thirds of respondents would like to shop at a farmers' market weekly, one quarter preferred the idea of a fortnightly market, whilst just over a tenth would like a monthly market.

What other produce should be on sale at the market

This question yielded a wide variety of responses.

- The most often cited items were meat, poultry, meat products such as sausages and cured meat. Many people mentioned organic meat specifically. (There was no meat at the first two markets).
- A number of customers had hoped to find more dairy produce (yoghurt, cream, goat's milk, butter, more cheeses and organic dairy produce).
- Other items noted more than once included fish, more bread, more vegetable stalls, wine, cider and local crafts.

How much people spent, what they bought, and which outlets the market replaced

87% of respondents had bought something. Note that this figure reflects those chosen to take part in the survey or who agreed to take part, rather than the true percentage of those passing through the market who bought something. This was due to the location of the market which was a pedestrianised section of a thoroughfare in the centre of Lewes.

Buyers were asked what they had bought, how much they had spent on each category in five price bands (from under £1 to over £10). They were also asked if and where they would normally buy each of the categories. Nearly a quarter of respondents said that they hadn't finished their shopping at the market, suggesting that the data gathered on what was bought represents something of an underestimate. A third of respondents said that they had done their weekly shop already. At the first market 13% said they hadn't known what to expect. This indicates that if the market became a regular fixture purchasing per customer might increase. An analysis of the results indicated that:

- The average spend per buyer was £6.56.
- The category in which most money was spent was fruit and vegetables.
- The average respondent bought two categories of goods.

When asked where the purchases would normally be made, supermarkets were most often cited (53%). Other outlets (other town shops, village shops, farm shops, box schemes) were mentioned in 37% of the cases, whilst 10% of purchases were said to be in addition to what the respondents normally buy.

How far people travelled to the market

Half the sample lived less than a mile away, 15% between 1 and 3 miles, a quarter between 3 and 10 miles and 12% over 10 miles. As the markets progressed, the percentage of people coming from more than 3 miles away increased, and of these the proportion who heard about it through publicity (rather than through word of mouth or who came across it by chance) increased significantly. This indicates strongly that the effort put into publicising the market was effective in drawing in people from outside the immediate area.

The Lewes Tourist Office received many enquiries about the markets. The day before the last market (following the broadcast of a documentary that featured the Lewes Farmer's Market (see Publicity below), a record was made of where some of the callers lived. They included: Bexhill, Brighton, Domehill, Eastbourne, Findon, Hastings, Hove, Partridge Green, Shoreham, and Tunbridge Wells. Common Cause recorded others from Crawley, Rye and Worthing and one caller interested in coming to the market lived in Essex. The callers recorded by the Tourist Office stated that they would not normally shop in Lewes but were coming specially for the market. Most had heard about the market from the TV. Other callers stated that they had read about the markets in the *Independent* or *The Times* newspaper articles or from advertisements or articles in local newspapers. The Tourist Office and Lewes District Council are still receiving regular enquiries from both local people and visitors

wanting to know if the markets will continue and “expressing great hope that it will” (Sally Ban, Manager, Lewes Tourist Office).

Age, gender and income profiles of customers

Compared with the local (Lewes District Council) population as a whole, the market customer age profile shows a significantly higher concentration of people in the 21 to 60 age range. Not surprisingly, the 16-20 age band is significantly under-represented. The over 60s are also significantly under-represented; this may be due to the fact that among these, the very elderly are less likely to attend an open air market or perhaps to do their own shopping. The customer market profile shows a significantly higher proportion of women and a lower proportion of men than the population as a whole.

The question about income was optional and about 90% of respondents indicated their total household income. The results show that, compared to income profiles for the South East, those in the under £10,000 band, were representative. Those in the £10,000 to £20,000 and £20,000 to £30,000 bands were significantly over-represented whilst those in the top band (over £30,000) were under-represented.

General attitudes of market customers

In the attitudes survey, customers were presented with a list of statements and asked which ones they agreed with or applied to them. These statements related to a number of issues, including local produce, organic produce, shopping outlets, and cooking skills. Overall, the responses to the attitudes survey amongst market customers reflect:

- the strong appeal of local produce and farmers’ markets and a belief that in some sense buying local produce helps to protect the environment,
- the view that local produce may offer a degree of confidence due to traceability,
- a fairly marked lack of confidence in the quality of foods sold in supermarkets and a clear split between those who appreciate the year round availability of all kinds of fresh produce and those who don’t,
- the perception of the markets as giving good value for money, both on their own terms, and in relation to supermarkets,
- an interest in organically produced food, with a majority being prepared to pay more for it, though one third indicated that they would only buy organic fresh produce if the prices are similar to non-organic food,
- that for many people (over one third), the fact that produce is local is more important than it being organic,
- that whilst almost everyone felt confident about cooking fresh produce and eats a lot, 15% of respondents said they would probably eat more if they knew more about how to cook it,
- that a sizeable minority of respondents are interested in furthering their basic cooking skills.

c. Shops

A total of forty-one shops were visited following the markets. Managers were asked for their comments on the markets and whether they had noticed any impact on their trading on the days the markets were held.

Impact on trading

- The majority of shopkeepers spoken to had noticed no perceptible impact on their own trading as a result of the markets.
- Ten shopkeepers or cafe managers, all in the immediate vicinity of the market, had noted an increase in trade on one or more of the market days which they felt was probably attributable to the presence of the market. Two businesses reported having their busiest Saturdays ever.
- Three shopkeepers noted a decrease in trading on the days the markets were held. These were shops selling produce which was in direct competition with stallholders at the market. They included a florist, a greengrocer, and a butcher. Later reports also suggested that two greengrocers and a butcher in other parts of the town and a butcher in a nearby village, also suffered a decline in takings on the days of the markets.

Support for the Farmers' Markets

- Most of the shop owners or managers spoken to were generally supportive of the Farmers' Market initiative, on the grounds that it served to revitalise the town and bring in extra potential customers. Several commented that they provided a good opportunity for local producers to share in the popularity enjoyed by French producers who have held markets in Lewes on several occasions in recent years. Comments included: 'Anything that happens in the precinct is a bonus', 'It's a great idea', 'Nice to see our producers having a go instead of the French', 'It felt good, I enjoyed it - it gave a nice atmosphere to the town like in the old days', 'Anything which brings more people into the town must be good'.
- Some shops noted that while their actual takings were not up on a normal Saturday, more people than usual had come in and looked round, which may mean more sales in the future.
- One shop keeper noted that though one of her suppliers had a stall at the market and was selling at slightly lower prices, this did not present a problem because he had contacted her beforehand to let her know, and his presence could help to promote her shop, first by making the product more generally visible, and second more directly by the producer informing customers about the availability of the product in her shop.

Criticisms of the Farmers' Markets

- A few shopkeepers held the view that the market stallholders had an unfair advantage over local traders as they had enjoyed the benefits of much free publicity and had to pay only a small fee for their stall on the day of the market. This comment was made not only by some of those who had suffered directly on the day but by several other local traders who feared an adverse impact on local shops.
- It was reported by one shopkeeper that one of the stallholders had been criticising the produce on offer in some local shops.
- One shopkeeper noted that one of the producers, who was one of his suppliers, was undercutting his prices by a huge and unfair margin. Another shop keeper felt that

his direct competitor in the market was offering unfair competition by selling ‘at less than wholesale prices’.

Lewes Chamber of Commerce

The Lewes Chamber of Commerce has supported the Farmers’ Markets from the outset. They congratulated Common Cause on the success of the markets but were also concerned about the adverse impact on some shops and recommended that future markets should be held once a month to reduce this impact (see letter received from the Chamber of Commerce in Appendix III).

d. General Community Survey

To gauge awareness of the markets, a survey was carried out of the local Lewes community in the days following each market outside supermarkets, in the High Street and in the outlying residential areas. Almost two-thirds of the respondents had heard about the markets. Of these, two thirds had heard about the markets through the publicity and media coverage (particularly local newspapers). This indicates both the success of the effort put into the publicity and the media interest in the Farmers’ Market initiative.

About twice as many of those who actually went to the markets were aware of them. Three-quarters of those who went bought something at the market. This figure represents nearly a quarter of the total sample. Over half the respondents were aware that the market was promoting locally produced food, but, by the same token, the purpose of the market had not come across clearly to nearly half the sample.

Nearly three-quarters of the sample of the general Lewes community expressed a definite interest in shopping at a farmers’ market. This figure suggests that farmers’ markets, rather than fulfilling the requirements of a ‘niche’ market, may have a more widespread appeal amongst the community generally.

There were significant differences between market customers and the general community in the responses to many of the above statements. These differences suggest that those attending the market tended to be more interested in local and organic produce and less satisfied with supermarkets. However, even given these differences, it is interesting to note that the results of this survey indicate that amongst the community generally such issues are of interest and though the tendency towards an interest in local and organic produce may be less marked, it is still present. Similarly, though more people have confidence in the standards of food quality set by supermarkets they still amount to less than half the sample.

4. Other Impacts

The success of the Lewes Market has helped to promote and encourage the establishment of other Farmer’s Markets in the region. Common Cause has received enquiries about how to set up a Farmers’ Market from seven local councils (in

Arundel, Broxborough, Chichester, Colchester, Kennet, Sevenoaks, and Tunbridge Wells) and two environmental group (Arundel Agenda 21 and Rye Environment Group). The organisers of a Christmas Farmers' Market in nearby Hailsham felt that the success of the Lewes Market encouraged a big response from producers interested in selling at the Hailsham market (the market was organised by Wealden District Council and Hailsham Market Action Group).

5. Publicity

The results of the surveys demonstrate the success of the publicity in informing people about the markets throughout Sussex and beyond (see above). Media coverage for the markets was extensive. Press releases (see Appendix IV) were sent out before each market to the major local newspapers published in East Sussex, to local radio and to television. Contacts were also made with some national newspapers and magazines. Live radio interviews were given before the first market and on the mornings of each of the markets (with BBC *Southern FM* and *Southern Counties*). The local BBC1 television news programme *South Today* covered the first market, which also featured on a regional BBC2 documentary, *Southern Eye*, broadcast just before the last market.

Articles on the markets appeared in the following local newspapers: the *Sussex Express*, the *South Coast Leader*, the *Seaford Gazette*, the *Hastings and Rye Observer*, the *MidSussex Times*, and the *Evening Argus*. The *Evening Argus* produced a feature spread after the second market. The Lewes market featured in an article on Farmers' Markets in *Country Life* Magazine and Lewes was mentioned in articles on Farmers' Markets in *The Independent* and *The Times* Supplement (and since the pilot markets in the *Guardian*). See Appendix V for examples of press coverage.

Posters and fliers were produced (see Appendix VI). These were distributed locally and in all the libraries in East Sussex through East Sussex County Council Library Services. The National Farmers' Union sent fliers to over 500 members in the county and the WI also distributed leaflets. Other producers displayed posters or put posters up in their local village shops. Roadside posters were put up in a 10 mile radius around Lewes for the second and third markets.

6. Additional Attractions

Festive themes

Each of the three pilot markets was linked to a festive theme. The first market on the 17th October, took place close to national Apple Day. Common Cause offered free apple pressing (people either bought apples at the market or brought their own apples for juicing) and free samples of freshly pressed apple juice. At the October 31st market, we invited two pumpkin producers who filled their stalls with a beautiful and colourful display of squashes, pumpkins, and gourds. Common Cause also offered lantern making for children. Volunteers cut the pumpkins (bought from a local pumpkin farm) for the children and each lantern, including a candle, was sold at cost.

The last market on November the 14th was advertised as a Christmas market and we encouraged stallholders to emphasis seasonal delicacies.

Cookery Demonstration

At the first market, we dedicated a stall to a cookery demonstration to promote ideas to encourage children to eat fresh vegetables. Spinach pancakes were cooked and offered for free tasting. Common Cause's booklet "Gluts for Tea - A Guide to Making the Most of your Vegetable Box" containing this, and many other recipe ideas, was offered on sale.

Children's Entertainer

A children's entertainer, Mr. Pineapple Head, was hired for each of the markets, although it was too wet at the second market for him to perform. Mr. Pineapple Head performed two 30-40 minute shows during the market. He drew a large crowd of children and adults around him and made a big contribution to the lively and fun atmosphere of the market. Many parents commented on how much they and their children had enjoyed the shows and how they provided a useful distraction for children while parents shopped.

Music

At the third market, we invited a busking band who played while the children's entertainer was not performing. Again many people and children enjoyed the music and felt that it added to the spirit of the market.

7. Price Comparison

The general attitudes survey of market customers (see above) found that people buying at the market perceive it to be good value for money. A comparison of prices of fresh produce sold at the market and two local supermarkets (Safeways and Tescos) was made at the first and third markets (see Table 2 over the page). Many of the items sold at the market were cheaper than similar items in the supermarkets. A number of the organic vegetables sold at the market were cheaper than the same organic items sold in the supermarkets and some organic vegetables were cheaper than their conventionally produced equivalent. The price survey also revealed that a quarter of vegetables available at the market were not available at the supermarkets. The general perception is that supermarkets offer a wide range of choice. Yet a significant number of locally seasonal items were absent from their shelves.

Table 2: Prices of Fresh Produce Sold at the Farmers' Market and at Two Local Supermarkets, 14th November 1998, Lewes. Unless otherwise stated, prices are per pound.

Item	Market price	Supermarket price	
	Organic	Conventional	Organic
Jerusalem artichoke	70p	-	-
Beetroot	50p each	-	-
Brussel sprouts	80p	55/63p	-
Cabbage	70p each	25p	-
Cabbage red	30p	29p	-
Carrots	40p	18p-45p	48p
Chard, ruby	50p	-	-
Kale	60p (per bag)	59-75 (per 200g)	-
Leafbeat	75p (per bag)	-	-
Leek	65p	59p	-
Mushrooms	£1.00	£1.15	£1.80
Parsnip	60p	49p special offer (normal price 79p)	-
Peppers	£2.00	£1.39	-
Potatoes	20p	25p	54p
Pumpkin	40p	-	-
Squash	40p-50p each (butternut)	49p (acorn)	-
Swede	25p each	39p	-
Herbs	50p each	59p-79p	-
Cox's apples	28p-40p	49p	-

8. Dial a Ride

East Sussex County Council funded a Dial a Ride bus service for people wanting to come to the markets who cannot use public transport, this includes pensioners and people with disabilities. People used the service which was advertised on posters, fliers and in advertisements.

9. Location and Time

The location of the market in the pedestrian precinct was, on the whole, a good choice. The market attracted many passers by and provided a lively, bustling atmosphere. Many people commented about how ‘natural’ it looked. A number of people who did not attend the market, said how they would prefer a weekday or evening market. Mothers on low incomes also stated that they would prefer a weekday and preferably a day when they received their income support (see Food and Low Incomes below).

There are some problems with the location. The Cliffe pedestrian precinct is not very big and could accommodate no more than ten additional stalls (about 25 stalls in total). Vehicles cannot currently be brought onto the precinct. This is a major obstacle for stallholders, especially those off-loading heavy or delicate items. Even if vehicles were permitted on the precinct for off-loading, the precinct could not accommodate more vehicles if the number of stalls increased.

The other issue of concern is that events taking place in the Cliffe area of the town draw people away from the shops in the top end of the town. This has a significant impact on these local shops. It is a problem that is likely to occur in whichever end of the town a market is held (if held in the top end of town, shoppers will be drawn away from the Cliffe shops).

10. Food and Low Incomes

In several towns where Farmers’ Markets are held it has been found that they tend to appeal to the better off sections of society and have not proved particularly successful in making locally grown fresh produce more accessible to lower income groups¹. The piloting of the Farmers’ Markets in Lewes coincided with the publication of a report by Donald Acheson for the government which highlighted the links between poverty, ill health and diet. The report emphasised the need to improve the access to fresh produce and healthy food generally for mothers and young children in particular. In the light of these findings, Common Cause were keen to use the opportunity offered by the Lewes markets to carry out a small-scale investigation into reactions to the markets amongst families on low incomes and their views on other possible ways of making fresh and local produce more accessible to them.

¹ Chubb, A. 1998. *Farmers’ Markets The UK Potential*. ↓co-logic books, Bath.

At short notice, two discussion sessions with five mothers on low income were set up before and after the last market. The participants were given £10 vouchers to spend at the market to enable them to take full advantage of the market. Although generalisations cannot be made from such a small group, there were a number of very interesting issues raised by the participants. The results of the first discussion session highlighted the resourcefulness of the participants concerning food purchasing on a small budget, the concern that their children had good diets, and the difficulty in accessing sufficient amounts of fresh produce at affordable prices. Many fresh produce items are considered a luxury rather than a basic.

The second discussion session addressed the participants' reactions to the market and other suggestions for making fresh produce at affordable prices more available. The results of the second session showed that fresh local produce has a strong appeal, that there are aspects of the market that are inconvenient, especially for mothers with small children, and that there was a strong interest in exploring ways of making fresh produce more accessible through initiatives such as mobile shops, food co-operatives, locally run fresh produce stalls, cookery clubs, etc. This small-scale investigation demonstrated the interest and enthusiasm there is in food issues, the motivation to provide healthy diets for families on a limited budget, as well as a shared sense of the participants own skills and management abilities. The findings suggest that Farmers' Markets and other initiatives have the potential to increase the accessibility of local fresh produce for families on low income. A full report of the study is available from Common Cause².

11. Income Generation and the Sustainability of a Farmer's Market in Lewes

The longer term aim of the markets is to be self sustaining. Once a market is established, the costs go down.

Income - Stall fees are the main source of income. Some income could also be raised through the sales of market merchandise. At the pilot markets, producers were charged £10 for a stall. This figure could be increased at least doubled. Income from stalls would also depend on the number of stalls at the market. Stall fees would aim to cover the cost of hiring, transporting and setting up stalls.

Market organiser - Initially, there is an important role for a market organiser, publicity and children's entertainment. There may also be the cost of hiring a market site if a new location is sought. It is estimated that each market will cost between £1000 and £1,500 to run (see estimated budget on next page). A grant will be required to cover a significant proportion of these costs.

Once a market becomes a permanent feature, the costs can be re-evaluated and organisational costs further reduced. In Bath, after initially hiring a market manager,

² Bur, A.M. 1999. *Can Farmers' Markets Improve Access to Fresh Local Produce for Families on Low Incomes?. A report of a participatory investigation held in conjunction with pilot farmer's markets in Lewes, East Sussex.* Common Cause Co-operative, Lewes.

the Farmers' Market is currently run by a committee of producers and the costs of holding each monthly market (mainly the cost of hiring the site) are divided by the stallholders.

12. Co-ordination of Markets in Sussex

A number of markets are being established in towns in Sussex. Some of these markets will be of interest to the same producers and possibly customers. In addition, the Sussex Rural Community Council (SRCC) is running an exchange of markets between Normandy and Sussex, funded through the European INTERREG scheme. Anglo-French markets will be held in a number of towns in Sussex in 1999.

There are currently suggestions that Farmers' Markets in Sussex should, at some level, be co-ordinated. The SRCC has INTERREG funding to put towards the purchase of stalls. If there is sufficient interest in purchasing stalls by other interested parties (such as local councils), then the idea is that the stalls can be hired out to Farmers' Market organisers in Sussex. This would require co-ordination of market dates, transport and setting up of the stalls as well as some consistency of basic market conditions. The production of a Sussex Farmers' Market logo has also been suggested which could be printed on bags and other market merchandise sold at the markets to promote Sussex products.

Estimated Budget for 10 Markets in 1999

Costs

Market Organiser, 8-9 months (32 weeks), 2 days per week @ £10 per hour	£5,120
Advertising @ £200 per market	£2,000
Posters and Leaflets	£500
Stall hire @ £20 per stall	£4,000
Children's entertainer @ £100 per market	£1,000
Insurance	£200
Site hire @ £100 - 200 per market	£1000 - 2000

TOTAL **£13,820 - 14,820**

Income

Stall fees 15 - 25 stalls per market, @ £20 - average of £400 per market	£4,000
Grant needed	£9,820 - 10,820

TOTAL **£13,820 - 14,820**

13. Conclusions

The aim of piloting three Farmer's Markets in Lewes was to assess the potential benefits of a regular Farmer's Market in Lewes. The success of the pilots can be gauged from the enormous enthusiasm with which they were received by producers, customers and many shops and the demand for more markets. The success of the pilots suggests that a Farmers' Market in Lewes could contribute to a number of objectives addressing sustainable food production. These objectives include revitalising the local economy, supporting environmental production, increasing access to fresh, healthy food by people on all incomes and the subjective objective of improved 'quality of life'.

Revitalising the Rural Economy

Most of the stallholders were small to medium scale producers. They attended the market because they were interested in expanding or diversifying their outlets. Most felt that the markets provided a financially worthwhile direct marketing outlet.

Some of the stallholders currently sell to supermarkets and were interested in testing other marketing opportunities. Supermarkets dominate the wholesale fresh food market. They control prices and many producers feel that they receive poor returns for their products. In addition, small-scale producers or producers wanting to use environmentally sensitive production practices have difficulty meeting the uniformity, quality and volume of produce required by supermarkets. One apple producer who sells to supermarkets sold small, 'ungraded' apples at the market. The money he made on them was an added bonus to his business since he currently had no other outlet for perfectly good, but small, apples.

Small scale producers are important to the rural economy and the environment. They are often low input enterprises and relatively labour intensive. Their success and expansion creates jobs. Both the customer and the general community surveys found that people feel strongly about supporting local producers and enterprises. The Farmers' Market provided the opportunity for consumers to support local agriculture and businesses as well as forging a direct link between producers and consumers.

Environmentally Sensitive Production

A number of the stallholders were organic producers, or were aware of the need to minimise chemical inputs, or, like the egg producers, reared their animals in a humane environment. These producers currently sell through other direct marketing outlets such as Vegetable Box Schemes or farm shops, or to supermarkets or local shops. They felt that the Farmers' Market could offer a worthwhile, additional outlet for their products. Farmers' Markets offer a number of advantages such as easy access to new customers, low operating costs, full consumer price, immediate returns, and direct contact with customers. Other important environmental benefits of Farmer's Markets include the reduction in the distance food is transported and reduced packaging.

Revitalising the Town Centre

For a few hours, the pedestrian precinct in Lewes was transformed into a bustling, colourful, market place. Both shoppers and shopkeepers in the vicinity of the market felt that the Farmers' Market brought a new vitality to the town.

The markets drew people from both Lewes and from around the County. Ten shopkeepers in the vicinity of the market reported an increase in business and others of increased numbers of people visiting their shops. The Tourist office noted that most people enquiring about the market said that they were coming to Lewes for the market and would not otherwise have come to the town to shop. Regular enquires about the market are still being made and as information about Farmer's Markets spreads (Lewes has been mentioned in articles on Farmers' Markets in three national daily newspapers), people are enquiring from further afield. For example, a social club in London has enquired about organising an outing to a future market.

Since the arrival of two supermarket chains, the town centre in Lewes has lost a large number of its independent food shops and most people no longer come into the town centre to do their food shopping. The surveys found that many people were interested in making a Farmers' Market a regular feature of their shopping. Depending on its location, a regular market would bring people back into the town centre and be a tourist attraction.

While some shops benefited from the presence of the market, a few suffered. The surveys found that, although a minority, a significant proportion of the purchases made at the markets replaced purchases normally made at local shops. As a consequence, a number of local food shops in Lewes, and possibly even in a nearby village, suffered on the days of the market. These shops are vital to the local community. They represent some of the few remaining independent food shops in the town serving local communities. Some do home deliveries providing an important service especially for the elderly or infirm. Some also already stock some locally grown vegetables or local free range meat. The Farmers' Markets will inevitably compete with these shops. But they can also provide a platform to raise awareness of the links between local producers and outlets and the environmental and community benefits of local shops and shoppers encouraged to buy from their local shops.

Access to fresh, healthy, local foods

The markets provided the opportunity for people to purchase fresh, healthy produce at affordable prices. Consumers could select from a large range of seasonal organic vegetables and fruit at prices similar to, or even cheaper, than supermarket prices for similar produce grown with chemicals. Other products sold at the markets were free of the additives or preservatives used to preserve food in long distance transport or to give them shelf life. A pilot study found that the Lewes Farmers' Markets could also render fresh, locally grown produce affordable to families on low income.

'Quality of life'

Other features that people felt the market provided and which are important 'quality of life' indicators included:

- an attractive environment
- a social meeting place where people could stop and talk to each other
- the opportunity for producers, who often work in isolated conditions, to meet with customers and other producers
- an opportunity for consumers to meet rural producers, to discuss and sample their produce.
- a fun and entertaining experience for children
- an opportunity to buy tasty, good quality food.

These features of the markets are central to its popularity and to the community benefits that markets offer.

14. Recommendations

Given the success of the markets, Common Cause recommends that a regular market is held at least once a month from Spring to Autumn in 1999. Common Cause is committed to organising such a market. We also recommend that a steering group is created, made up of representatives of producers, the local councils, local retailers, and relevant community organisations. The steering group would advise Common Cause on issues including:

- location - whether the pilot location can be used or another one sought.
- frequency and dates - most producers and the Chamber of Commerce favoured a monthly market whereas consumers overwhelmingly wanted a weekly market.
- how to minimise the impact on local shops and promote the community benefits of these shops.
- fund raising
- co-ordination with other markets in Sussex
- relevant regulations.