

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL BENEFITS ASSESSMENT

FINAL REPORT

Comox Valley Farmers' Market (Saturday)

Courtenay, British Columbia

A collaborative project of
British Columbia Association of Farmers' Markets
and
School of Environmental Planning,
University of Northern British Columbia



BC ASSOCIATION OF
FARMERS' MARKETS



UNIVERSITY OF
NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

October 31, 2012

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Funding provided by:

Canada 



Vancity Community Foundation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The demand for locally produced fresh, nutritious food by local consumers has grown rapidly over the past ten years. So too has the number of farmers' markets. As the most visible and accessible component of our local food systems, farmers' markets have strengthened their role as providing unique places for local producers and local consumers to connect. Although this role of farmers' markets within local food systems is well recognised, it is important to know not only what markets contribute to local areas but also to know how much they contribute.

This final report presents the findings from the assessment completed for the Comox Valley Saturday Farmers' Market on August 18, 2012. It includes results of a province-wide assessment of BC's farmers' markets and incorporates some results from a national study of farmers' markets completed in 2008ⁱ.

The provincial project was completed by the BC Association of Farmers' Markets, in collaboration with Dr. David Connell of the University of Northern British Columbia. The purpose of the provincial study was to measure the community and economic benefits of farmers' markets across British Columbia in order to quantify the significant contributions of farmers' markets and to increase their visibility both locally and provincially. This year's project builds upon the success of a similar project completed in 2006. Six years later, by using similar methods we will be to assess changes that have taken place during this time. In total, 33 assessments were completed across the province in 2012.

Highlights of results for the Comox Valley Saturday Farmers' Market:

- **The estimated economic benefit of the Comox Valley Saturday Farmers' Market to the local economy is approximately \$2.7 million annually**
- **The estimated number of market customers on assessment day: 1,746 customers**
- **Over 245 market visitors participated in the study**
- **Average customer spending per visit: \$36.89**
- **Fifty-nine percent of the survey respondents visit the market either 'regularly' (almost weekly) or 'frequently' (2-3 times per month)**

The Comox Valley Farmers' Market is a popular farmers' market on Vancouver Island, about three hours north of Victoria. The Saturday market has been running for twenty years, and started operating year-round three years ago. There is also a weekday market on Wednesday mornings during the summer market season. These markets are known for their great local farm and food products, and excellent live music.

The Comox Valley Saturday Farmers' Market brings in a respectable number of customers, seeing an average of 600 people attending the market each hour it is open. The total estimated number of customers visiting the market during the peak season is 1,350. On the date of the

assessment, attendance peaked during the second hour (10:00 to 11:00 am) of this three-hour market, when it was estimated that 750 customers arrived at the market. Average spending at the Comox Valley Saturday Market is high at \$36.89, putting per-customer spending at this market substantially above that at other markets in BC and Canada, and far above average when compared to small and medium-sized markets in Canada. Average spending per customer at this market has increased by more than \$10 since 2006.

Similar to the average BC market, the Comox Valley Saturday Market has a large proportion of regular customers with about 40% of those surveyed on the day of the assessment saying they attend regularly or each week. The proportion of regulars has increased since 2006, and the proportion of first-timers has decreased. This apparent pattern of customer retention is supported by the finding that the majority of customers surveyed (59.6%) said they have been coming to this market for more than five years. There is also a healthy portion of new customers with 13.3% responding they only started attending the market this year.

Market organizers were interested in learning where market customers live. The majority of customers live in Courtenay, the city closest to the market. Almost as many customers live in Comox, Cumberland, or elsewhere within the Comox Valley Regional District. Almost one-fifth of market customers come from outside of the CVRD to shop at this market.

There are no businesses near the Comox Valley Saturday Market, as it is held at the Exhibition Grounds on the outskirts of Courtenay. However, many market customers do go into the city, after visiting the market, to do additional shopping. Market customers who did additional shopping nearby said they would spend an average of \$29.33 in town that day.

Although more remotely located within the province, the Comox Valley Saturday Farmers' Market is an important player in the provincial profile of farmers' markets and particularly within its region and community. Residents of Courtenay, Comox, the Comox Valley Regional District and other visitors to the market have shown themselves to be strong supporters, spending robustly, and sustaining a year-round Saturday market as well as a week day market. The Comox Valley Saturday Farmers' Market provides an avenue for locals and visitors who are eager to support local food producers and obtain quality products, as well as partake in enjoyable community activities and reputable music.

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Photos: Anna Melnik



DESCRIPTION OF MARKET

The Comox Valley Saturday Farmers' Market

Market Websites:

<http://www.comoxvalleyfarmersmarket.com/>

<http://www.bcfarmersmarket.org/markets/marketdetails.asp?marketID=191>

We are a vibrant, year round market in our 20th year of operation. Our vendors offer a wide and diverse range of products:

All kinds of vegetables and fruits, some certified organic, all grown using sustainable methods; free-range poultry, eggs and meat, from pheasant to turkey, goat to bison and including lamb, beef and chicken.

Our nursery growers offer some rare shrubs and plants, as well as veggie starters and bedding flowers in the Spring.

Local fishers bring tuna, salmon and shellfish. We also feature award winning cheeses, gourmet sauces, take-home meals, artisan and home baking, pet treats, skin care products, fresh pasta and pesto, seafood, preserves and pickles, honey, ethnic foods including Japanese delicacies and tamales.

In addition, we offer live local entertainment at every market!

Eat healthy – buy local!

Availability:	Open year-round Saturdays, 9:00 am to 12:00 pm
# Vendors:	80
Location:	April to October: Comox Valley Exhibition Grounds, Headquarters Road, Courtenay October to April: Native Son's Hall, 360 Cliffe Avenue, Courtenay
Contact Info:	Vickey Brown, Market Manager PO Box 3301, Courtenay, BC V9N 5N5

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RESEARCH METHOD

The assessment of individual markets in BC is organised around two sets of activities: rapid market assessment and market surveys. These are the same methods used for the BC study in 2006.

1) Rapid Market Assessment:

The Rapid Market Assessment (RMA) technique was developed by researchers at Oregon State University for studying farmers' markets. This method has been implemented successfully in markets throughout Oregon and Washington states. The RMA method consists of three parts: customer survey; crowd count; environmental observations. The environmental observations are optional for markets in this present study and so are not included in this report.

- a) Flip-chart survey: The flip-chart survey method engaged consumers in friendly interaction through multiple-choice questions posted in large print on flip charts. This approach has a high response rate, thereby increasing validity and accuracy.

The set of questions used for the survey (Box 1) were developed in two parts. The first four questions were developed by the research team and were asked at all farmers' markets participating in the project. Asking the same questions at all markets was necessary to complete the provincial analysis. Each participating market developed the fifth question to collect data that are relevant to making effective changes and improvements to the local market.

Box 1. Flip-chart survey questions

1. How often do you come to this farmers' market?
2. When did you start shopping at this market?
3. How much have you spent, or do you plan to spend, at the market today?
4. Do you plan to do additional shopping or eating in town today? If so, how much do you plan to spend?
5. Where do you live?

- b) Crowd count: During a ten-minute period of each hour the market is open, members of the assessment team stood at each major entry point to the market and counted people entering. The total number of attendees is estimated from these systematic counts.

2) Market surveys

The analysis of community benefits of farmers' markets involves more detailed surveys of market customers and local businesses.

- a) Customer surveys. A small sample of customers was asked to participate in a short interview. People were asked about where they shop, factors they consider when buying food, how long they spend at the market, and how they spend their time when at the market. Customers were also asked if they shop at other businesses on the same day that they visit the farmers' market. The small sample size means that the results cannot be generalised to all market customers. Nevertheless, the information collected expands upon the flip-chart survey information and lends further insights to market customers and the relation between the market and neighbouring businesses. Some of the customer survey data will be aggregated at the provincial level.
- b) Business surveys. Businesses located near the farmers' market were surveyed to assess the influence of the market on neighbouring businesses and to explore the nature of the relationship. The information collected from these surveys is specific to each local market and will lend insight to how relations might be further developed. The business information will also help to understand the relation between farmers' markets and businesses generally. Surveys were not completed at farmers' markets that did not have other businesses located nearby.

Together, the market assessment and the more detailed market surveys improve our understanding of what makes the Comox Valley Saturday Market successful and how it contributes to the local area, in terms of both its economic and social benefits.

RESULTS

This section reviews the results of the rapid market assessment, including the crowd count estimates and flip-chart surveys. The results for the one-on-one customer interviews and business interviews follow

Rapid Market Assessment

The weather on the day of the assessment was hot and sunny, with some clouds later in the day. There were approximately 56 vendors present.

Crowd count

The total estimated number of people attending the Comox Valley Farmers' Market on August 18, 2012 was 1,746.

When asked, vendors at the market said market attendance was about normal for that time in the season, as compared with past years.

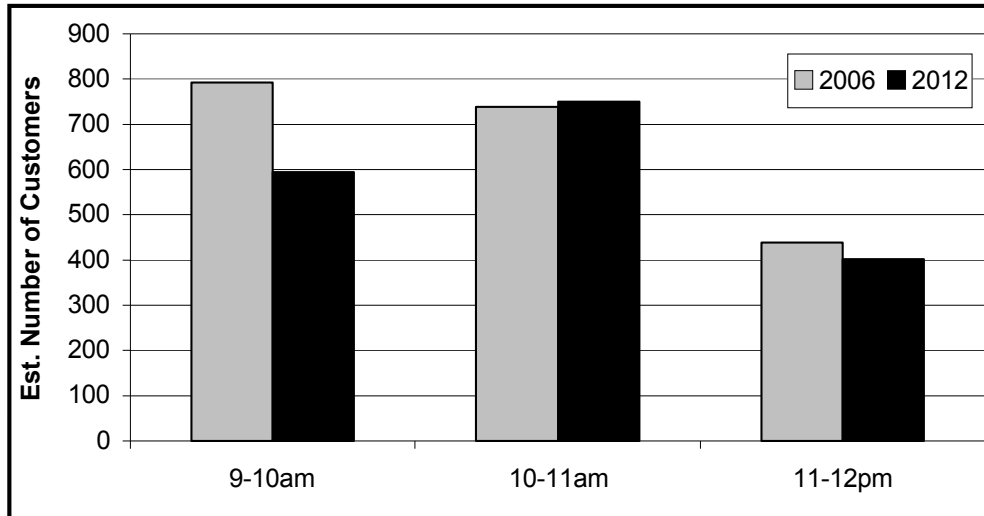
The actual and extended counts for the assessment are shown in Table 1. The total estimated counts are also shown in Chart 1.

Table 1. Estimated Crowd Count

Time period	Count period	Actual count	Extended total
1st hour (9:00-10:00)	9:25-9:35am	99 ⁱⁱ	594
2nd hour (10:00-11:00)	10:25-10:35am	125	750
3rd hour (11:00-12:00)	11:25-11:35pm	67	402
Estimated total crowd count on August 18, 2012			1,746

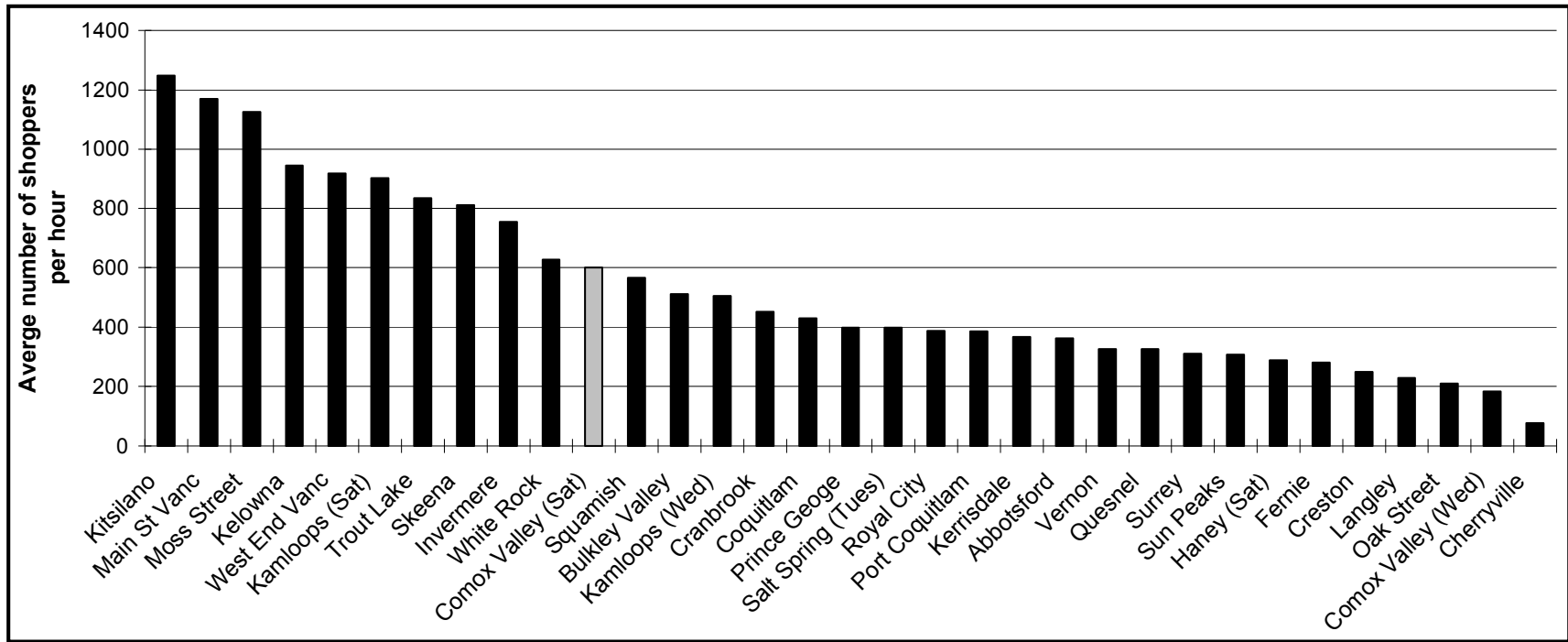
Chart 1 (next page) shows the estimated crowd totals for each hour for both 2012 and 2006. Market attendance starts off high in the first hour, peaks in the second hour, and decreases significantly for the final hour. Crowd count and attendance were similar for the 2006 assessment of this market.

Chart 1. Crowd counts by the hour



As shown in Chart 2 (next page), the number of shoppers attending the Comox Valley Saturday Market is similar when compared to other markets that we assessed in BC. The data are based on the average number of shoppers attending a market on an hourly basis (not on the total number of shoppers).

Chart 2. Number of shoppers at BC farmers' markets (average hourly crowd at peak of season)



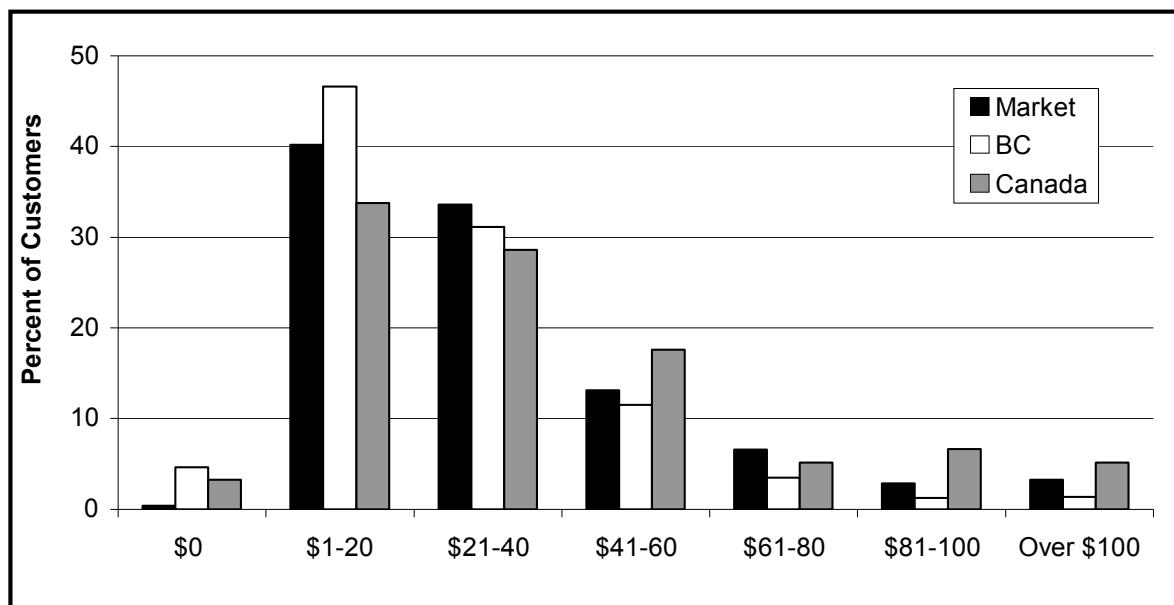
Flip-chart survey

Approximately 245 people responded to the dot survey, which is about 14% of the estimated crowd count. The following five charts show the results for each of the flip chart survey questions.

Question 1. How much have you spent, or do you plan to spend, at the market today?

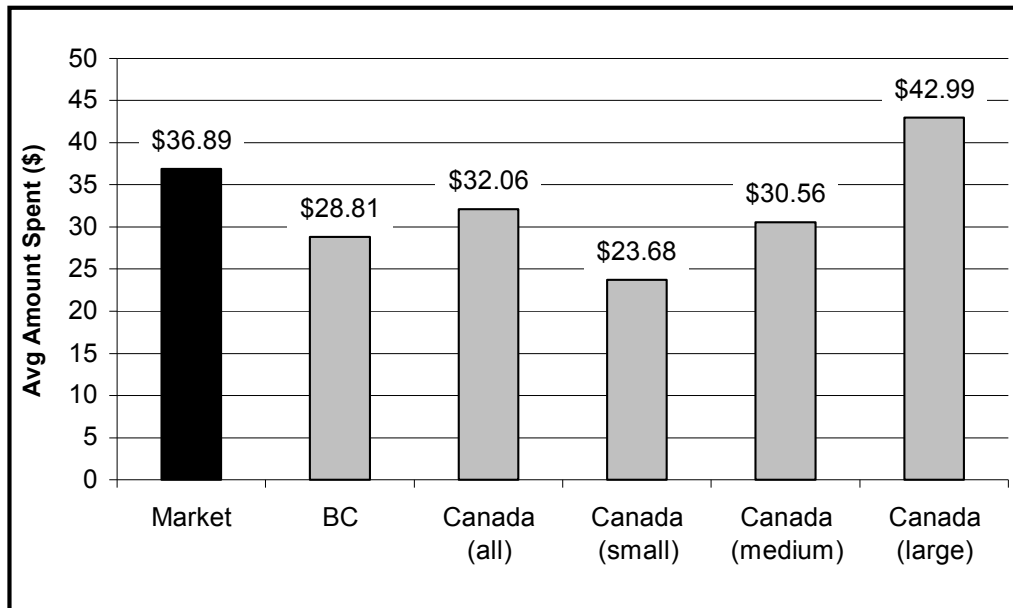
Overall, respondents spent an averageⁱⁱⁱ of \$36.89 each on the day of the assessment. Most customers surveyed (73.8%) said they would spend up to \$40 at the market that day. The average amount spent by shoppers in 2006 was \$26.56, so average spending per customer seems to have increased significantly since 2006.

Chart 3. How much have you spent, or do you plan to spend, at the market today? (Market: n=244; BC: n=9,819; Canada (Large): n=1,013)



The results shown in Chart 4 (next page) illustrate how the Comox Valley Saturday Market compares to the average amount spent by customers at all BC markets and at small (<20 vendors), medium (20-39 vendors), and large farmers' markets (40+ vendors) in Canada. As a large market, the Comox Valley Saturday Market sees higher average spending per customer than the average for other markets in BC and Canada. Although average spending is less than at other large markets in Canada, average spending at the Comox Valley Saturday Market is higher than the average at small and medium markets in Canada.

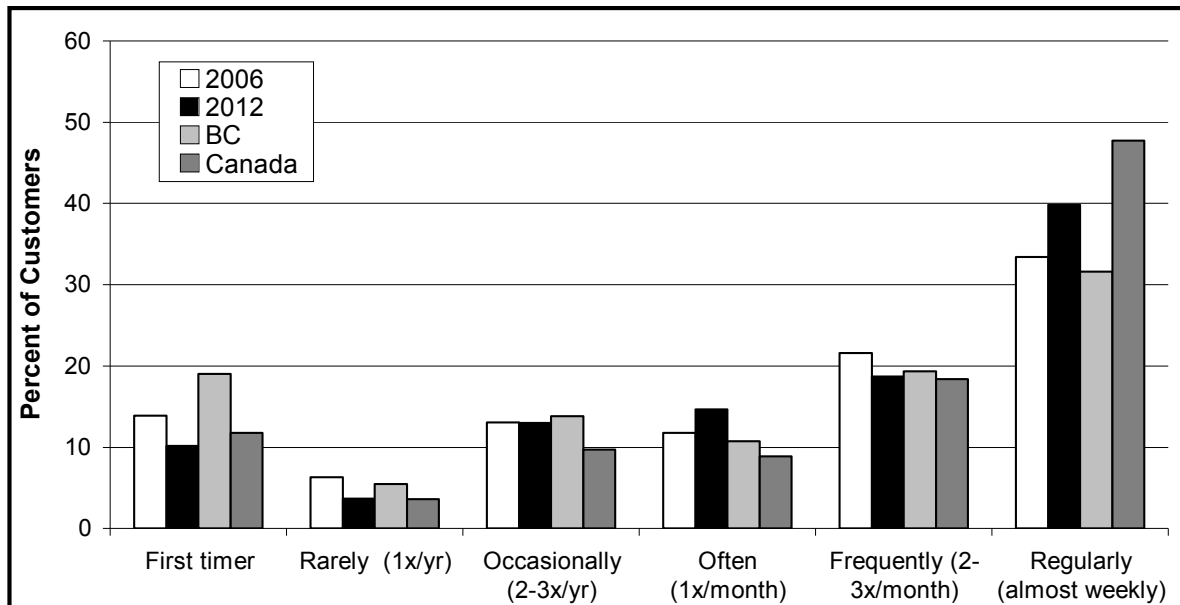
Chart 4. Average amount spent by market shoppers
(Market: n=244; BC: n=9,819; Canada: n=3,167)



Question 2. How often do you come to this farmers' market?

As shown in Chart 5 (next page), the Comox Valley Saturday Farmers' Market has a large proportion of regular shoppers. Forty percent of customers (39.8%) shop regularly at the market, and almost one in five (18.7%) shop frequently at the market. First-time visitors to the market accounted for 10.2% of respondents. This pattern is similar to the results of the assessment in 2006, in which 55% of respondents said they would visit the market either regularly or frequently that season, and 13.9% were first-time visitors. The pattern of how often customers visit this market is also similar to the frequencies for other BC and Canadian markets.

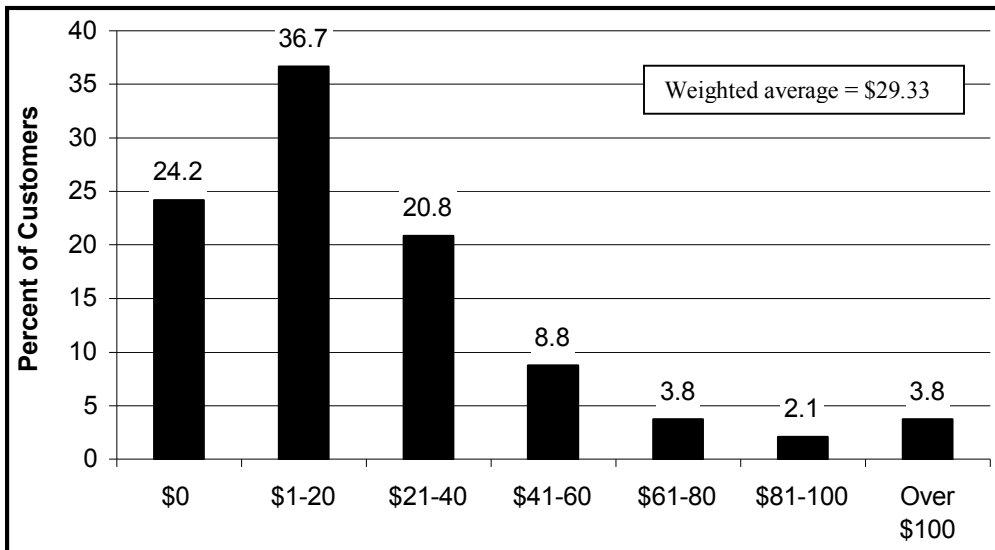
Chart 5. How often do you come to this market?
(Market (2006): n=476; Market (2012): n=246; BC: n=9,874; Canada (Large): n=1,013)



Question 3. Do you plan to do additional shopping or eating in town today? If so, how much do you plan to spend?

Chart 6 (next page) shows the range of additional spending by market customers, with 75.8% of respondents saying they would do additional shopping at nearby businesses that day. More than one-third (36.7%) of customers surveyed said they would spend up to \$20; 39.1% said they would spend more than \$20. The average amount spent per customer at nearby businesses was \$29.33.^{iv} These results are similar to the results of the 2006 assessment, in which the average amount spent per customer at nearby businesses was \$27.77. Given the variability among markets, no comparison is made with BC or national results.

Chart 6. Do you plan to do additional shopping or eating in town today? If so, how much do you plan to spend? (n=240)



Question 4. When did you start shopping at this farmers' market?

As shown in Chart 7, the Comox Valley Saturday Farmers' Market has a good portion of long-time, loyal customers. Sixty percent of all customers surveyed (59.6%) have been coming to this market for 5 years or more, and 25.4% of all respondents have been coming to this market for more than 10 years. In addition to the long-time regulars, there were also 13.3% of respondents who were first-time visitors to this market this year.

Chart 7. When did you start shopping at this farmers' market? (n=240)

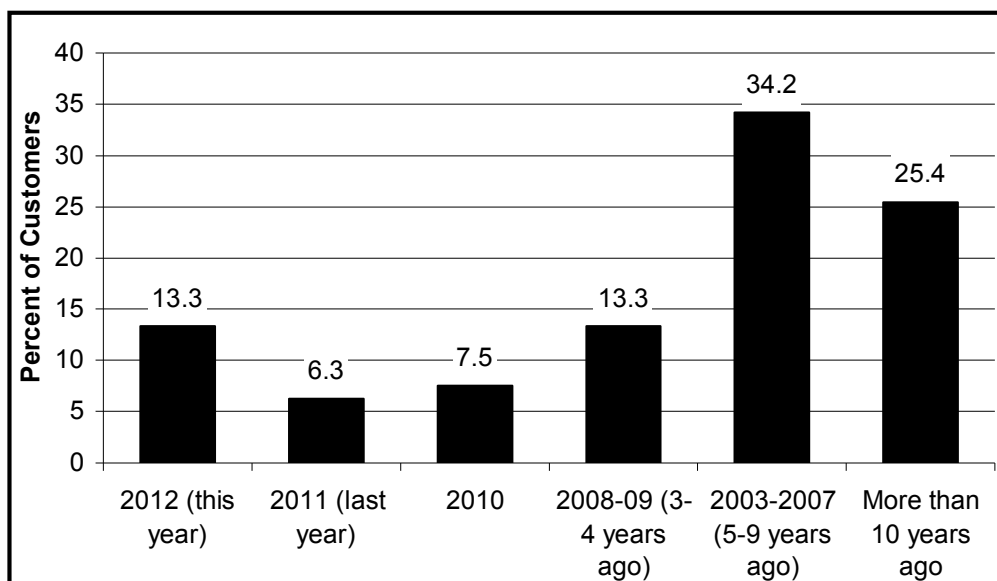
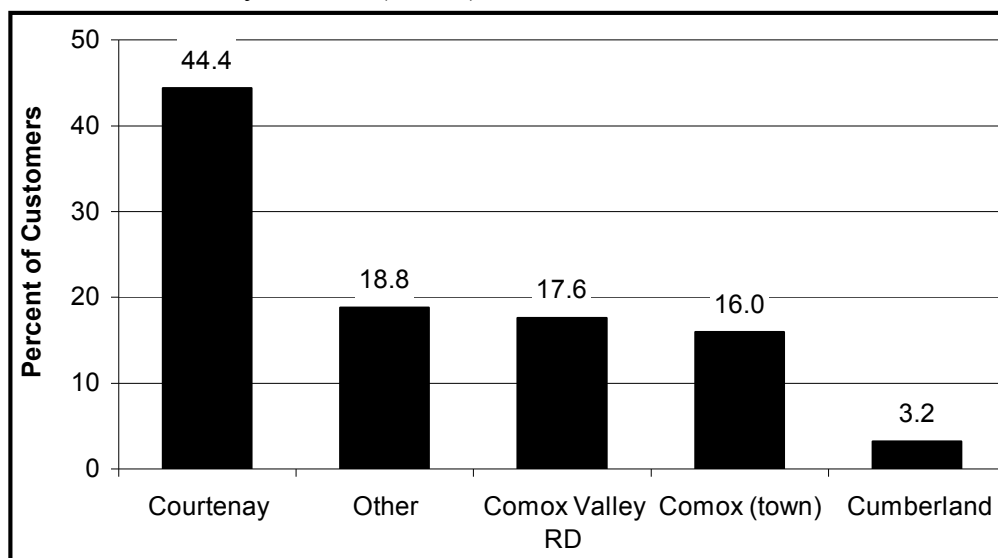


Chart 8 shows where market customers live. Most customers (81.2%) live locally, in Courtenay, Comox, Cumberland, or the Comox Valley Regional District. Many customers also come from outside the region, with almost one in five (18.8%) living somewhere other than in the Regional District. Residents of Courtenay, the closest city to the market, form the largest group of customers (44.4%). This result suggests a decrease in the proportion of market customers coming from outside of the area and an increase coming from Courtenay, since the 2006 assessment. In 2006, 26.9% of customers lived elsewhere on the island (besides the Comox Valley Regional District) or off-island, while 33.2% of customers lived in Courtenay.

Chart 8. Where do you live ? (n=250)



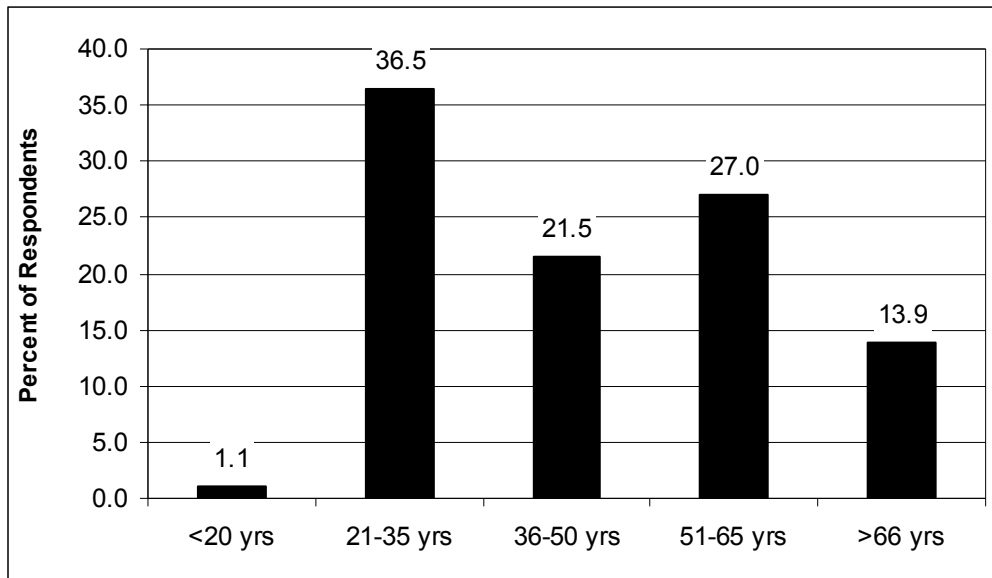
Market surveys

Customer Survey

We conducted interviews with 291 customers at 33 markets in BC. The following charts show results of all the customers surveyed across the province. When interpreting the results of these surveys, it should be noted that the people who agreed to participate in the one-on-one interviews over-represent regular shoppers, as these people are also the ones who are more likely to participate in such market surveys. The over-representation of regular shoppers is evident when we compared the customer survey results (291 responses) against the results gathered from the flip chart surveys (9,819 responses). The flip chart surveys show a wider representation of market shoppers.

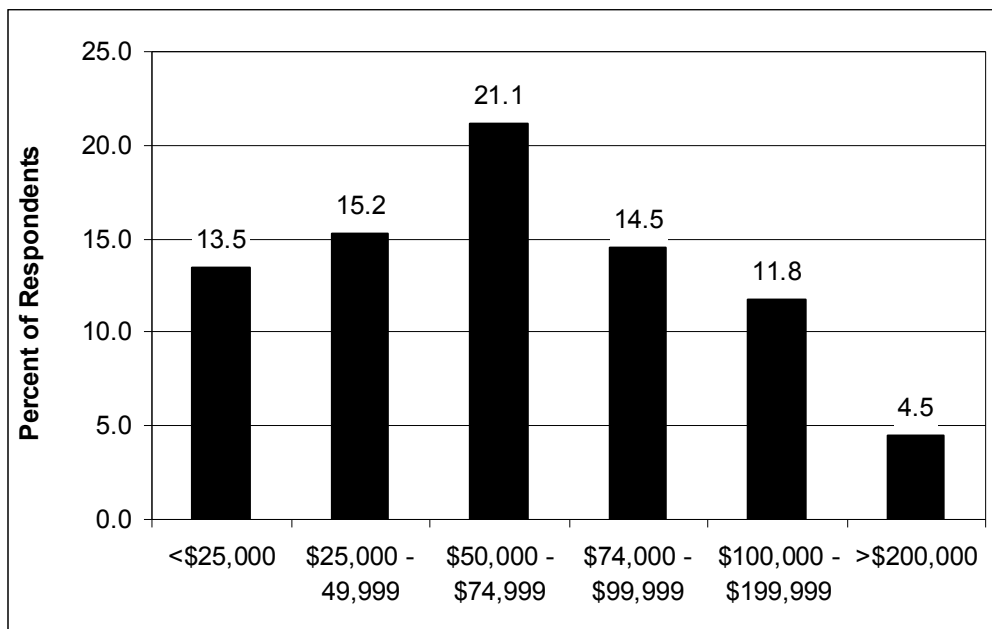
The results in Chart 9 show the age range of farmers' market customers in BC.

Chart 9. Age of respondents (BC: n=274)



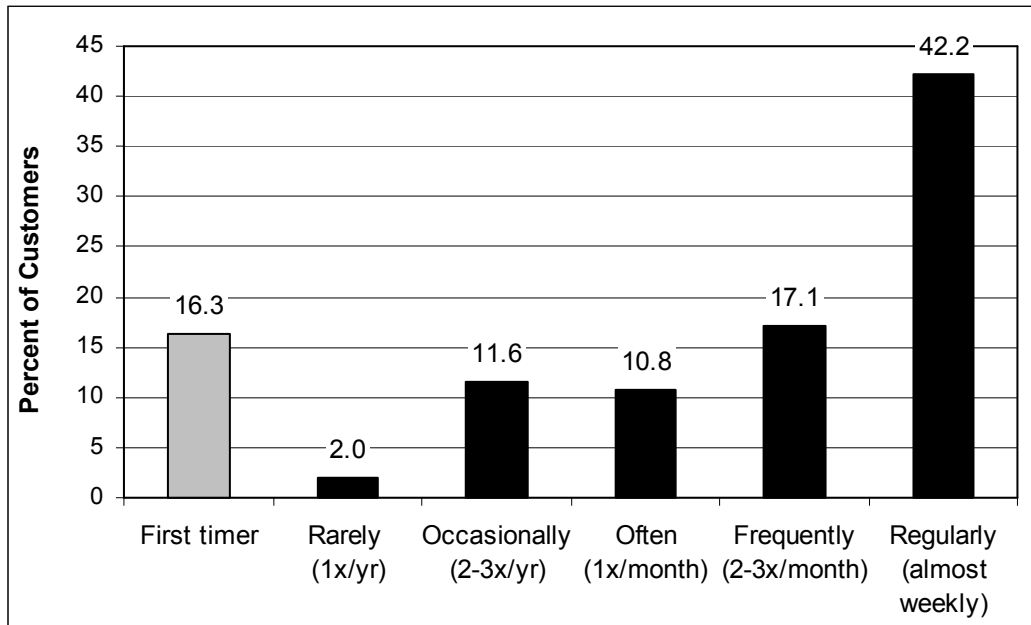
The household income of shoppers at farmers' markets in BC is shown in Chart 10. The results show that people from households with a range of incomes shop at BC's markets.

Chart 10. Household income (BC: n=233)



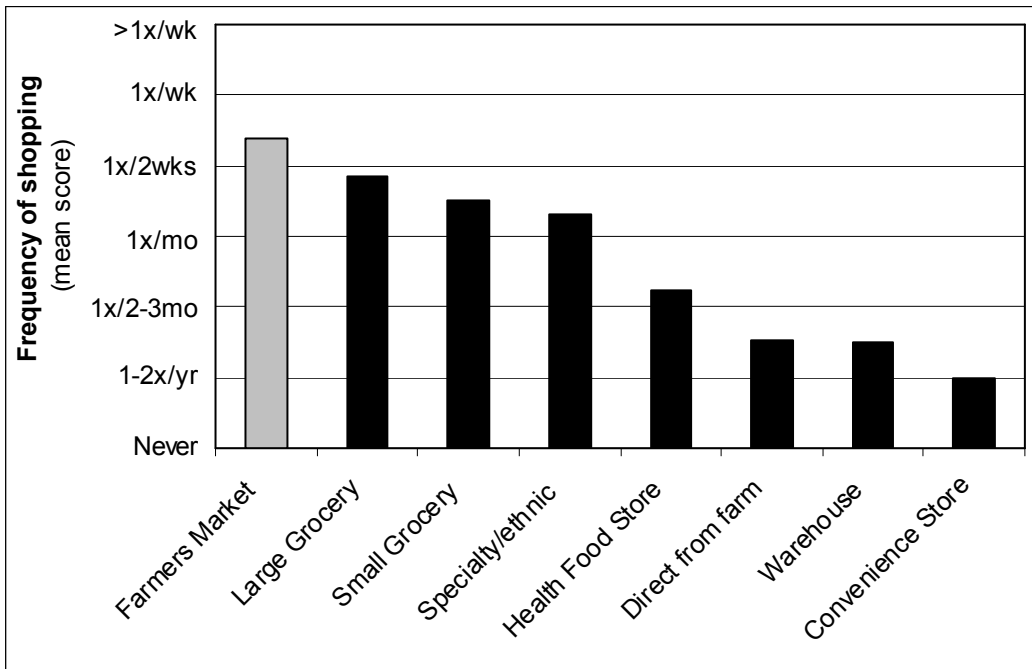
Over 40% of customers surveyed in BC shop at the market regularly (almost weekly), with an additional 17% shopping at least two to three times per month (Chart 11). Together, these results indicate that almost six of ten shoppers can be considered among the core group of market shoppers at BC markets, although, as noted, the results do over-represent regular shoppers. The actual results are likely to be lower but still significant.

Chart 11. Frequency of shopping at farmers' markets (BC: n=251)



We also asked shoppers where and how often they buy groceries at other food retail outlets during the outdoor market season. The people surveyed indicated that they shop more often at the farmers' market than at other food retail outlets (Chart 12, next page).

Chart 12. Where shoppers shop during the outdoor market season (BC: n=290)
Note: a higher bar means shopping more often at the corresponding store.

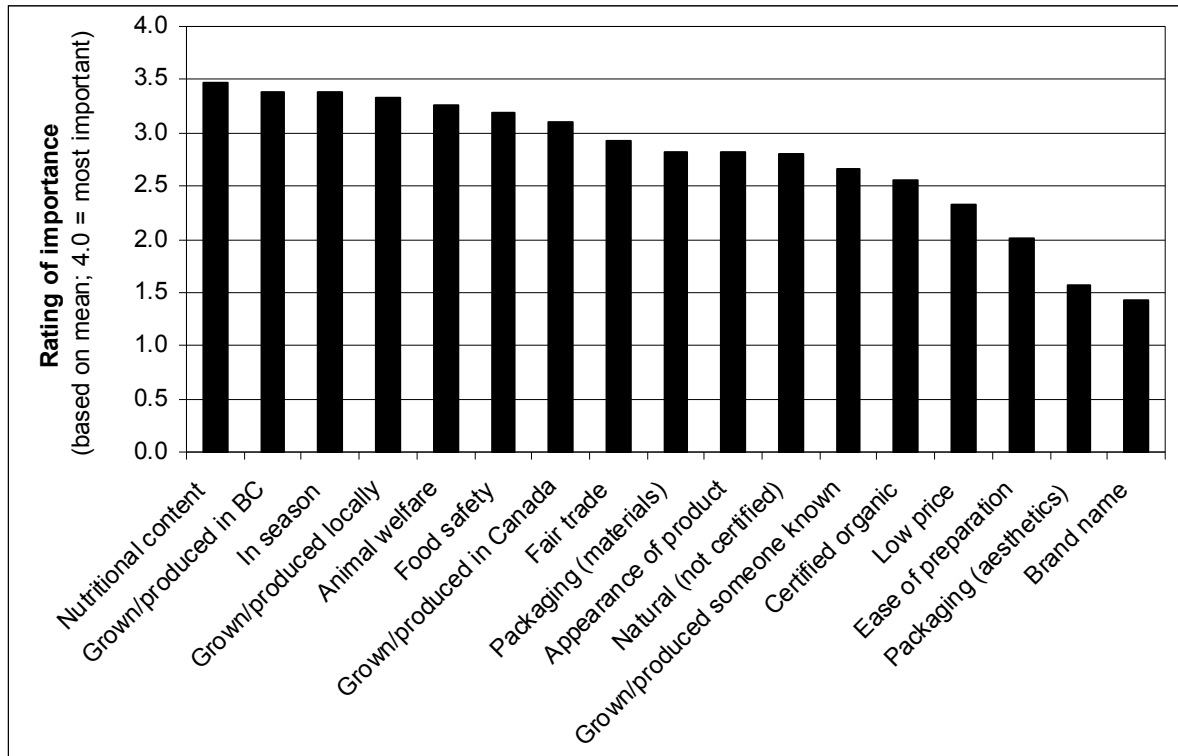


Part of the answer to explain the shopping pattern of market customers is evident in Chart 13 (next page), which shows the relative importance of factors customers consider when buying food. During the farmers' market season the five most important factors to market customers are:

- Nutritional content
- Grown/produced in BC
- In season
- Grown/produced locally
- Animal welfare

Brand name, low price, and certified organic are among the lowest rated factors that influence food purchasing decisions.

Chart 13. Factors people consider when buying food: BC (n=289)



We also asked customers how long they spend at the market (Chart 14) and how much of that time they spend talking with vendors and friends (Chart 15). The results for all BC shoppers surveyed highlight the important social aspect of farmers' markets. Almost 70% of all respondents said that they spend over 30 minutes at the market, and over half (53.8%) of all respondents said they spend at least half their time at the market socialising with others.

Chart 14. Amount of time customers spend at the market (BC: n=290)

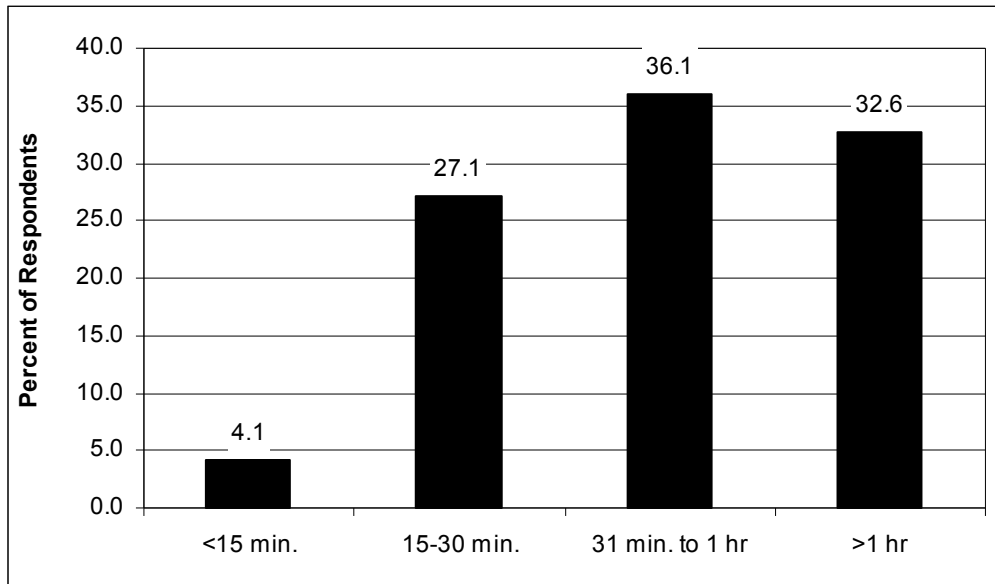
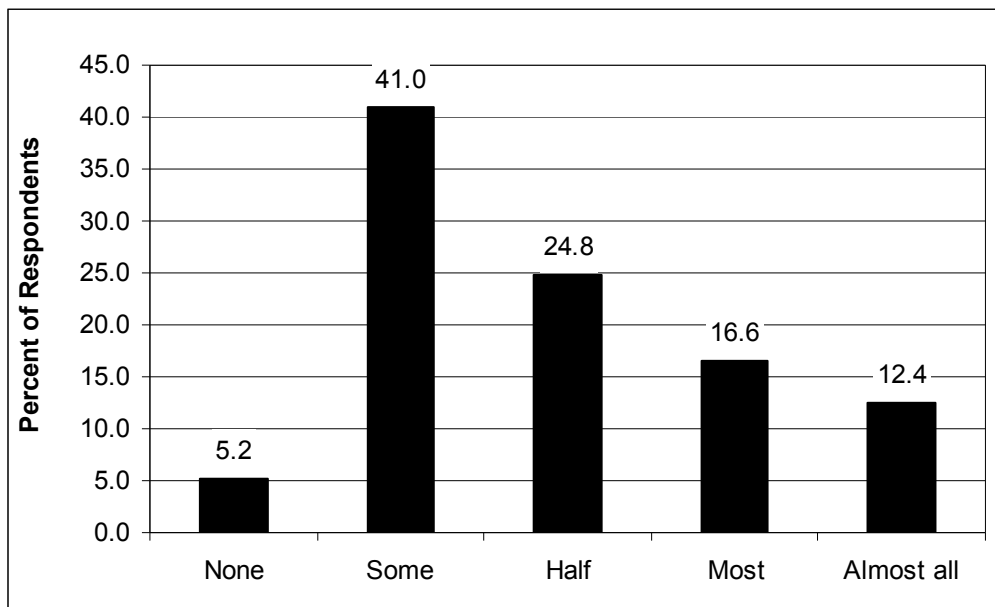


Chart 15. Time spent talking with others at the market (BC: n=290)



The results of the above two questions are combined in Table 2. The shaded boxes highlight those people who spend at least half an hour at the market *and* at least half of that time talking with vendors, friends, and acquaintances. Altogether, these people represent 45% of the shoppers surveyed at BC's farmers' markets.

Table 2. Time spent at market talking with others (percentage) (BC: n=290)

		How time spent					Total
		None	Some	Half	Most	Almost all	
Time spent at market	<15 min.	1	2	0	0	0	4
	15-30 min.	2	17	5	3	0	27
	31 min. to 1 hr	1	16	11	5	4	36
	>1 hr	1	7	9	9	8	33
Total		5	41	25	17	12	100

Business survey

No businesses were located within visible range of the Comox Valley Saturday Market.

Economic Benefits

The information collected in this assessment enables us to measure the economic benefits of the Comox Valley Saturday Farmers' Market.

To measure the economic benefits of farmers' markets means to measure the ripple effect of people spending dollars at the market: if I spend \$1 at the market then how does this dollar benefit the local economy? The ripple effect includes both the profit to the market vendor and the monies the vendor spent on inputs to get to the market (e.g., seeds, feed, ingredients, etc.).

Economic benefits, which can include direct, indirect, and some induced effects, are measured in terms of revenue (\$), output (\$), and employment (jobs). In this study we measure only revenues. We chose to calculate revenue benefits using a multiplier of 1.5^v. This multiplier means that for every dollar spent at the market, another \$0.50 is spent in the local economy. Compared to some other studies of farmers' markets, this multiplier is conservative.

The annual economic benefit is calculated by multiplying direct annual sales by the multiplier (1.5). Direct annual sales are calculated as follows:

$$\text{Average expenditure by customer} \times \text{Number of spending customers per session}^{\text{vi}} \times \text{Number of sessions per year}^{\text{vii}} \times \text{Seasonal factor}^{\text{viii}}$$

For the Comox Valley Saturday Farmers' Market, seasonally adjusted annual direct sales are:

$$\$36.89 \text{ per customer visit} \times 1350 \text{ spending customers} \times 50 \text{ (adjusted) sessions} = \$1,800,000$$

Using a multiplier of 1.5, the annual economic benefit is approximately:

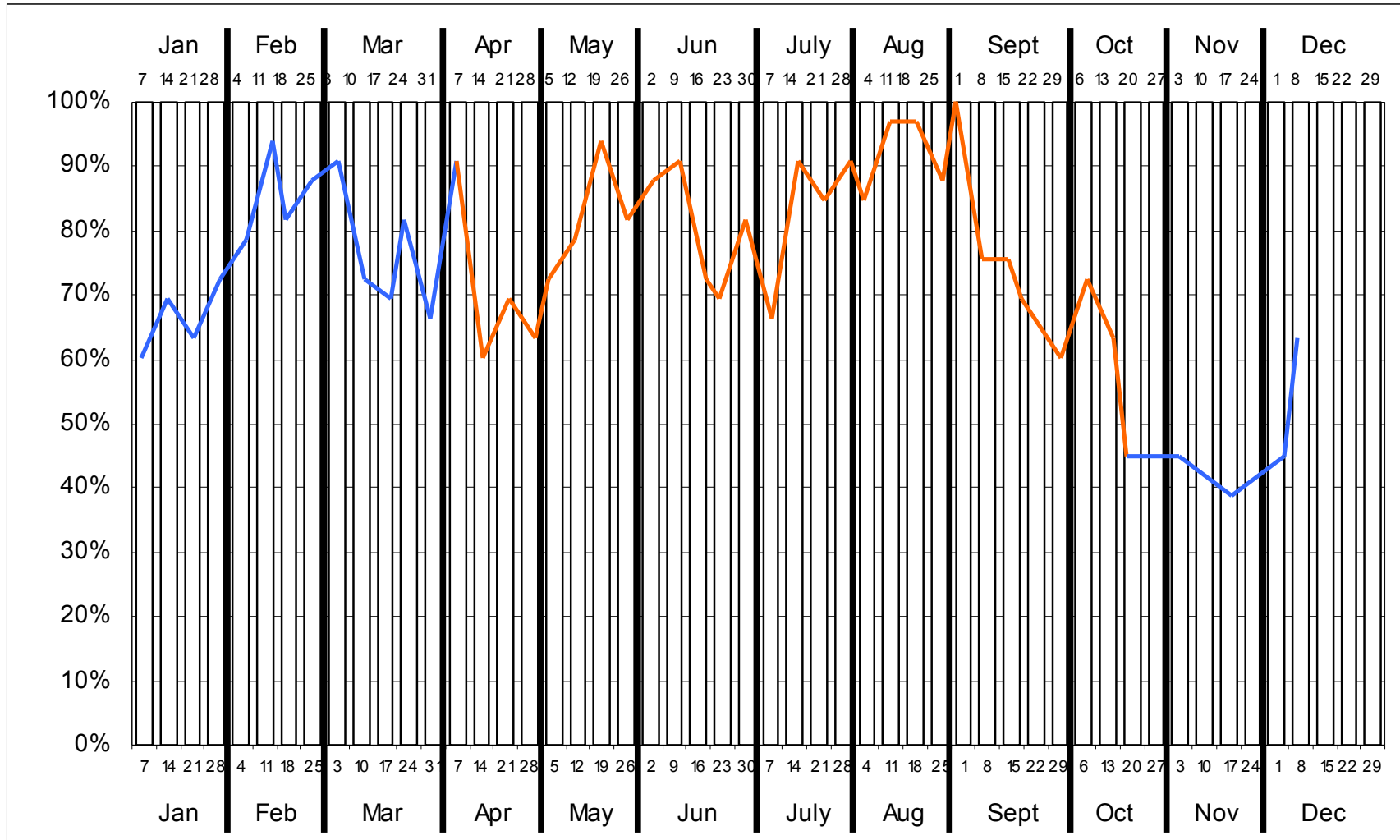
Annual economic benefit (2012): \$2.7 million

This calculation means that the Comox Valley Saturday Market contributes an estimated \$2.7 million to the local economy each year. These monies benefit not only market vendors but also the local businesses that supply these vendors.

In 2006, the economic benefit of the Comox Valley Saturday Market was estimated at \$1.6 million.^{ix} This suggests that the market has grown over the past six years. The fact that the market has increased the number of market sessions from 37 to 50 sessions per year, accounts for a large portion of this increase.

The total estimated annual economic benefit for all farmers' markets in BC is **\$170.5 million**.

Appendix: Seasonal activity chart for Comox Valley Saturday Farmers' Market



Winter location — (blue line)
 Summer location — (orange line)

Acknowledgements

The BC Association of Farmers' Markets and the project team would like to thank the Comox Valley Saturday Farmers' Market for participating in this assessment and for providing a team of volunteers to help conduct the assessment. Financial and in-kind support is provided by participating farmers' markets. The BCAFMS wishes to acknowledge the financial assistance of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC for making this study possible. We would also like to acknowledge the Vancity Community Foundation's contribution to the study.

End notes

ⁱ Source: Experience Renewal Solutions and David J. Connell (2009). National Farmers' Market Impact Study 2009 Report. Prepared for Farmers' Markets Canada.

ⁱⁱ Note: There was a problem with the first count for one entrance. For all other time periods, the count for the two entrances was almost identical, so the decision was made to use an estimated count based on the count from the other entrance for the first time period.

ⁱⁱⁱ The average spent per customer is weighted by category based on results of a national study of farmers markets completed in 2008.

^{iv} The average spent at nearby businesses is weighted by category based on results of a national study of farmers markets completed in 2008.

^v The number used for multipliers for farmers' markets varies, ranging from 1.21 to 3.0. A multiplier of 2.0 is commonly used for convenience. We chose to use a multiplier of 1.5 as this appears to be more accurate based on studies by Hughes, Brown, Miller, and McConnell (2008) and Otto and Varner (2005). We used a multiplier of 2.0 in the 2006 study; the results from the 2006 study that are cited in this report have been revised based on a 1.5 multiplier.

^{vi} This is based on the estimated crowd count. However, not all people attending the market are included in the calculation. Some people may not spend any money while other people included in the crowd count are members of the same household and should not be double-counted. Based on results of the national study of farmers' markets in Canada in 2008, we estimate that 75 per cent of the crowd count is considered a paying customer.

^{vii} Includes special days, if any, such as 'Christmas markets'.

^{viii} The seasonal factor accounts for varying sales/crowd levels during the season. For the outdoor season, markets generally start off slow and peak for a number of weeks during the summer and then decline. The seasonal factor is calculated for each market based on data collected from the market's manager and long-time vendors. A seasonal activity chart for your market is included in the Appendix.

^{ix} The results of the 2006 study have been revised to reflect updated and more accurate assumptions about estimating the economic benefits of farmers markets. For example, some of the assumptions are based on the results of the national study of farmers markets completed in 2008, which included interviews with 3,174 market shoppers across Canada.