



# Creating A Culture of Inclusion at Massachusetts Farmers Markets Toolkit

The Massachusetts Food System Collaborative

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### Culture of Inclusion Toolkit



This Culture of Inclusion Toolkit is a compilation of tips and suggestions designed to help market managers and vendors create more inclusive cultures and welcoming environments at their farmers markets for all members of the communities they serve. These tools were shared by market managers and vendors from farmers markets across the state during key informant interviews and the two Creating a Culture of Inclusion at Mass Farmers Markets workshops, hosted by the Massachusetts Food System Collaborative. All of the tools may not be appropriate for every market but will hopefully provide a menu of options with which to strengthen each market. This collection is meant to be a starting point – it is by no means all-inclusive of every appropriate tool, and each of these items deserves further development than given here. Our goal with our Toolkit is to collect ideas and to build on them collectively over time, sharing them broadly.

These tools include:

- Connect with the community
- Celebrate market diversity
- Improve training for market staff, volunteers and vendors
- Build a common language
- Establish market rules
- Improve market design
- Reduce language and cultural barriers
- Support under-resourced vendors
- Support the Healthy Incentives Program
- Share resources between markets
- Identify additional funding

#### Connect with the community

Connecting to diverse neighborhoods could go a long way toward creating a more inclusive culture at farmers markets. Markets should learn about what languages, races, and ethnicities and other identities are represented in the community as well as other important characteristics of the neighbors (see Appendix). Outreach would inform neighbors about the existence of the market and solicit feedback on ways the market can

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be more accessible or welcoming to them. Markets may be most successful at beginning a conversation with specific neighborhoods and populations by partnering with churches, schools, senior centers, and community development corporations (see Appendix). Conversations may address perceptions of the market and the neighborhood where the market is held.

Farmers markets should also do outreach through the local media and community newsletters and be sure that the information is available in the languages spoken by the residents.

At the same time, community connections must go both ways. Markets should solicit input from shoppers, community institutions and organizations, and others about how to best be inclusive of the diverse community. What operating hours would best serve the community? What services such as language translation would be helpful to have? Are there particular foods that the market should ask vendors to source or grow? Others ways to connect various communities to the farmers market includes hiring local people to serve as translators or cultural ambassadors.

Farmers markets should also be cognizant about how they portray their markets – who is included in outreach materials and what message does that send about who is welcome at the market?

Many community organizations that serve low income populations may help them use the HIP program by providing transportation to the markets. To avoid situations where several vans or busses of customers arrive at the same time creating long lines, or arrive too early, or too late to the market, it would be useful for market managers to reach out to the community organizations to coordinate transportation that ensures everyone has the best experience at the market. These community organizations can also be part of the conversation around creating a welcoming market.

### Celebrate market diversity

The culture of inclusion at farmers markets may be strengthened through campaigns to educate customers and vendors about the diversity of the market. Outreach could celebrate the numbers of languages spoken at the market or the many crops that are associated with various cultural traditions. Physical signage, smart phone apps, or social media could help disseminate this information.

Many markets offer cooking demonstrations, often in partnership with UMass Extension SNAP-Ed or other community groups. Cooking demonstrations that show how to enjoy less familiar foods and foods from various cultural traditions will help customers from various backgrounds feel confident that they are understood and that they can prepare the foods being sold at the markets.



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### Improve training for market staff, volunteers and vendors

Increased training for market staff, volunteers and vendors around the HIP program and cultural sensitivity will help ensure that customers are receiving accurate, consistent, and thoughtful responses. All staff should be familiar with the HIP program, how it works, and frequently asked questions, and should have tools to enable them to explain the program to those with limited English through using printed translated materials, short phrases, or in writing.

Cultural sensitivity training will help staff understand that different people communicate in different ways and have different expectations about markets. For example, some vendors from certain backgrounds may be reluctant to complain to a market manager about problems they are facing. For this reason, it is important that managers understand their vendors and build relationships with them, talk with them at times that are convenient for them, and be open to feedback. Developing trust, openness, and respect among all people involved in the market is critical.

Market staff should be sure that customers and vendors feel heard. When conflicts arise, it is important that staff listen to their concerns and try to improve the situation. Vendors are often the ones who are communicating directly with customers so it is important to involve them in problem solving and be sure they are aware of new information or procedures. Being proactive and addressing problems early avoids unnecessary conflict, damaged relationships, and long-term harm to the market.

### Build a common language

One way to make sure that people feel welcome is to state that making people – regardless of their race, culture or language – feel welcome is part of the mission of the market. This communication can be written or verbal, issued by one market or used by markets across the state.

After one farmers market was the site of conflict between people from different backgrounds, the market decided to write down the values of their market, including welcoming everyone and respecting differences. They shared this statement with their customers and vendors via their e-newsletter and social media.

Signage may be another way to publicly communicate these values. Market managers may want to share among themselves the inclusive statements that have worked for their market.

### Establish market rules

Managers could establish clear rules for market etiquette as a way to proactively reduce conflicts and misunderstandings. The rules could address such subjects as start and end



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times for the market, protocols for waiting in line, and expectations around how produce is to be handled. This information could be made available by distributing informational handouts and posting signs in languages spoken by all customers.

It would also benefit a market to establish rules that vendors must follow, including welcoming and respecting all customers. These rules could be incorporated into the vendor contracts, and education around how to meet the expectations could be included in trainings for market vendors.

### Improve market design

How a market is designed will affect how people use it and who feels comfortable. Some markets have entertainment and a culture that welcomes lingering; this may encourage families to attend and stay but may discourage people who are looking to shop quickly. When scheduling music and events, market managers should be aware of the whole of the audience. Music and other cultural events that are familiar to some customers may be less relatable to others; having cultural events over the course of the season that represent the diversity of cultures of market customers helps customers better enjoy and feel comfortable at the market. Certain market designs may make it difficult for people with reduced mobility to navigate; some seniors have said that they miss having access to the shopping carts that they usually use at grocery stores. Attention to all of these issues, in the context of the community the market serves, is important.

One of the challenges facing farmers markets is long lines. The frustration of waiting in line may lead to conflicts and drive some people away from the market. Various markets have devised creative solutions to ensure that everyone has access to market produce while reducing problems with lines. At an indoor market with limited space, one market gave each customer a number as they arrived. When the market opened they let in a certain number of people at a time; once they finished shopping, the next group of shoppers was invited in. Other markets and vendors have created better line infrastructure – including a longer space, clear signs, and staff to help direct people to the lines. While it may appear more efficient to create separate lines or even booths for customers paying with EBT cards and those who are not, doing so violates the privacy of those using EBT as well as anti-discrimination law.

Some vendors want to ensure that all customers have equal access to their produce, regardless of when during the market hours they arrive. Many vendors will gradually put out more produce throughout the market hours. Others will limit the amount of a certain popular crop that a customer can buy at once; if there is still more left, customers can get in line for additional amounts of the crop.

One other design component that is critical to the smooth functioning of a farmers market is proper functioning of HIP and SNAP payment systems. When the system that processes HIP payments has a technical problem, this creates confusion and frustration.



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Some markets are prepared with redundant systems so they are still able to take HIP when the system is down; vendors can use manual vouchers if the system goes down. Because HIP and SNAP are tied to national computer networks, farmers, market managers, and even state agencies have no control over that system. Developing, in advance, a way to explain that to customers should the system go down, is a good idea.

### Reduce language and cultural barriers

Language barriers can contribute to bottlenecks, congestion and frustrated customers and vendors. Thoughtful design, a variety of available translated materials, and interpreters may help address some communication barriers.

Translated materials can include signs at the entrance to the market as well as at each booth outlining the market guidelines. Other signs can address frequently asked questions, particularly regarding using HIP and SNAP at the market. Some markets provide materials in various languages with information about the market and how to use HIP; they distribute the materials to vendors to put in customers' bags to take home with them.

The MA Department of Transitional Assistance offers some translated materials here (<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/healthy-incentives-program-hip-for-clients/resources>). Other materials are available through the Office of Food Access in Boston (<https://www.boston.gov/departments/food-initiatives/healthy-incentives-program>). Mass Farmers Markets, DPH and MDAR produced a HIP FAQ and Shopping Tips in 2018 which were translated into approximately 15 languages and distributed through farmers market partners and WIC; for a hard copy of these materials, contact David Webber at MDAR at [david.webber@state.ma.us](mailto:david.webber@state.ma.us). Some markets have also worked with students to translate materials.

Many markets and vendors have hired bilingual staff to be at markets to help translate for customers and vendors. These interpreters can be students, volunteers, community members or trained translators. Markets can reach out to direct service agencies that provide support in languages other than English as they may have volunteers/interns looking for some additional hours. One market was able to hire a person who was respected within the Chinese community to provide translation and explain cultural differences. This interpreter may have some hours built into his schedule to provide Mandarin translation to other markets; contact Rosa Hsu at Mass Farmers Markets at [rosa@massfarmersmarkets.org](mailto:rosa@massfarmersmarkets.org) for more information. Markets can also check the Farmers Market Coalition for other funding opportunities. The USDA has a printable pdf that enables customers to identify which language(s) they speak, if they are literate in that language (<https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/cnd/Ispeak.pdf>).

Reducing the language barriers may reduce confusion and conflicts at markets and also increase the ability for vendors and customers who speak different languages to develop a rapport. Some farmers have expressed disappointment that they haven't been able to



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converse with customers who speak differently languages, as they are able to with English speaking customers.

### Support under-resourced vendors

Attracting and making your market more accessible for under-resourced vendors can add to an environment of inclusion. Customers who see vendors who may look and speak like them may feel more comfortable and welcomed. Efforts should be made to assist vendors who fall into this category.

Markets should consider flexible policies for the fees that vendors pay to participate in the market: a large one-time fee at the beginning of the season may present a hardship for small farmers while paying smaller payments throughout the season may be more feasible. Under-resourced vendors may also benefit from business and market technical assistance from the market or other vendors.

Businesses sometimes also offer to attend a market as a way to advertise and markets can reach out to them at the beginning of the season. One market has successfully partnered with a local business to enable an under-resourced farm to participate in the farmers market; the business paid the vendor's market fee in exchange for publicity at the market. Businesses or universities may be able to provide technical assistance to vendors as well. Markets should work to communicate these opportunities to vendors who might not otherwise participate in the farmers market.

### Support the Healthy Incentives Program

The inconsistent and somewhat unpredictable funding of the Healthy Incentives Program poses challenges to both vendors and customers. Vendors are not able to depend on certain customers if the program is without funding for parts of the year and some customers can't afford to shop at farmers markets during those times. Market managers, vendors and customers can help address this problem by advocating for adequate, sustained funding for HIP.

Many customers and vendors who have used HIP have feedback for how the system could be improved to make it easier to use or understand. It would be useful for these groups to share these constructive comments with the Department of Transitional Assistance, which administers the program. The agency can be reached at 877-382-2363 or [DTA.HIP@state.ma.us](mailto:DTA.HIP@state.ma.us). Individuals or organizations interested in advocating for HIP call reach out to the MA Food System Collaborative's HIP Campaign Manager Rebecca Miller at [rebecca@mafoodsystem.org](mailto:rebecca@mafoodsystem.org).



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### Share resources between markets

Many farmers markets struggle with common challenges. One way to strengthen markets as efficiently as possible may be to share resources and best practices. A network of market managers may help support this collaboration and communication. There is currently a private Facebook group for market managers across the state. Other ways to collaborate include creating a newsletter, list serve, website, blog, Slack, basecamp, google group, etc. These networks could help to create a common culture of inclusion through sharing strategies they have employed to achieve cultural inclusion and diversity.

### Identify additional funding

Farmers markets provide a huge benefit to many people in a community, including providing a venue for local farmers and small-scale food producers to sell their food, and the ability for customers to purchase healthy local food. Markets also help to build community through educating people about the food system and providing a space for the community to be together etc. Markets are being asked to do a lot – provide a place for commerce, educate consumers, administer HIP, SNAP and other programs, and mediate cultural conflicts.

It is important that funders recognize the important work that farmers markets are doing and provide financial support for those activities. There should be ongoing discussions about how to collectively or individually support the work of farmers markets. One grant program for farmers markets is the US Department of Agriculture's Farmers Market Promotion Program (<https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/fmpp>).

### Conclusion

We are very appreciative of the market managers and vendors who engaged with this project, are passionate about strengthening farmers markets in Massachusetts, and shared the examples listed above. We hope that this Toolkit is a constructive starting point to gather best practices and continue the conversation on how to make farmers markets more welcoming. This Toolkit is by no means all-inclusive; we welcome anyone with other examples, resources, and thoughts to contact Brittany Peats at [brittany@mafoodsystem.org](mailto:brittany@mafoodsystem.org).





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### Appendix

**Selling to Everyone**  
Resource Packet



**community**  
involved in sustaining  
**agriculture**



#### **Possible community organization partnerships for market outreach:**

1. Resident groups, public housing, and neighborhood councils
2. Food policy councils
3. Local DTA and WIC offices
4. Food banks and community kitchens
5. Health centers
6. Mass in Motion groups
7. Senior centers
8. Faith-based organizations.
  - Comprehensive guide for connecting with these: [https://farmersmarketcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/gravity\\_forms/16fc51da018bd946fb1dfb74f4bea1e7/2018/01/RAFI-2017-faith-outreach-guide-final-for-web.pdf](https://farmersmarketcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/gravity_forms/16fc51da018bd946fb1dfb74f4bea1e7/2018/01/RAFI-2017-faith-outreach-guide-final-for-web.pdf)
9. Preschools, daycares, family centers
10. Area schools (elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, and colleges)
11. Libraries
12. Social service agencies
13. Transportation providers (bus system, vans)
14. Economic councils and chambers of commerce
15. University extension groups
16. Agricultural or ecological groups
17. Other farmers markets

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#### **Resources for Community Statistics:**

1. **Language by neighborhood:**  
[https://www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/language/data/language\\_map.html?#](https://www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/language/data/language_map.html?#)  
Language mapper by neighborhood (top 10 languages) - 2011
2. **Language by county:**  
[https://apps.mla.org/map\\_data](https://apps.mla.org/map_data)  
Language mapper, 2000 by zip code and 2010 by county. Can see numbers of speakers of top 30 languages in your area.
3. **Census Business Builder:**



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<https://cbb.census.gov/sbe/#>

Community fact finder targeted toward small businesses who want to research their communities. Can view results on a map or in a report by zip code.

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