

Running Head: SOCIAL MOTIVATIONS AT THE COVENTRY FARMERS' MARKET 1

Importance of Social Motivations to Attendance at the Coventry Farmers' Market

Following the American Psychological Association's Guidelines

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### **Abstract**

By definition, farmers' markets are a physical retail marketplace that focuses on selling locally grown and produced foods directly from farmers to consumers. While markets are all rooted in the same belief in the importance of providing local, fresh food and supporting farmers and food producers, their similarities often end there. Markets across the globe come in different sizes, select vendors and create policies differently, and run various programming that engages local communities. And for as many ways markets design themselves, there are as many different reasons why people shop at a farmers' market. As markets grow in size and scope and become a place where the community gathers, does the importance of that social aspect become the most significant motivation for attendees, even more than the purchase of local foods? In the case of the Coventry Farmers' Market, which has been operating as a weekly market and community event for seventeen years, the changes made as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted the importance of community to the market and this survey uncovers just how important to enable future planning for this market and others organized under similar models.

*Keywords:* farmers' markets, social motivations, community, local foods

### **Introduction**

The Coventry Farmers' Market is a large-scale regional farmers' market, with an average of 3-4,000 patrons in attendance each week. Growing from a small market with 15 vendors to a large event over the course of 17 years, the market now offers patrons over 70 vendors each week along with programming and entertainment, building a community interested in locally grown produce and artisan food producers with the feel of "equal parts country fair and farmers' market" (Chitnis, 2011). When the COVID-19 pandemic hit at the start of the 2020 market season, the community event that existed could not function the same under the temporary state-mandated precautions and as a result, market organizers changed the format to an online platform. The belief was that although the community and social aspects would be missing, it would still allow for patrons of the market to satisfy their altruistic motivations, like supporting local farmers, which are at the root of the local food movement. The results of the season were a mixed success. Shoppers did choose to purchase online and drive through the market to safely pick up their orders with minimal interaction, but in significantly fewer numbers. There are several variables as to why this might have occurred and this study will look further into one of these variables, the importance of community of place and social connectivity to the Coventry Farmers' Market.

Farmers' markets across the country are catalysts for the local food movement, a movement that has grown in popularity since the 1970s. As defined by Wikipedia, a farmers' market is a 'physical retail marketplace intended to sell foods directly by farmers to consumers' (Wikipedia,

2020). What that narrow definition misses are the varied nature of how each farmers' market is executed and their distinct personalities.

As grocery stores continue to add locally sourced food items to their shelves in an attempt to capture shoppers interested in purchasing local foods, people are still motivated to shop at farmers' markets, even with limited hours and varying products. These motivations have been studied and collected (Vaillancourt, 2012) (Crawford, 2018) and include a range of reasons from the product itself (type, quality, and freshness), policy or ethically related concerns (environmental and sustainable food production), and the social experience while attending.

The importance of the social experience, in the context of civic agriculture, is what this study is interested in uncovering. Civic agriculture is a locally organized system of agriculture and food production characterized by networks of producers who are bound together by place. It has the potential to 'transform individuals from passive consumers into active food citizens' (Lyson, 2005, pg.97). By bringing the social aspect to shopping around a place, farmers' markets embody what is unique and special about local communities and help to differentiate one community from another (Lyson, 2012). This idea is further supported by the concept of *communities of place*, a physical proximity of members where they can establish a network of interactions, create social capital, and generate "reciprocities of support" (Brint, 2001, pg. 16). The research argues community of place is becoming increasingly important to the local food movement to shift some of the focus from the individual shopper, or what is often termed the

locavore and the “me” culture, to the “we” culture where the local food system as a whole can benefit (Lind, 2011).

Farmers' markets that are large-scale regional markets, like the Coventry Farmers' Market, rely heavily on creating this sense of community and often grow in size and scope to function more like a destination or tourist attraction (Thompson, M., 2020). Is there a point in which the community of place becomes more of a motivator than other non-social reasons (product and ethical concerns) to attend a farmers' market?

Based on an assessment of the existing literature, we have identified a collection of variables, including the constructs for the Brief Sense of Community Scale (BSCS) (Peterson, 2008) to better understand social motivations. A widely used indicator of social motivation, the BSCS was employed to better understand the importance of the community and social values as a motivation to attend the Coventry Farmers' Market. The following hypotheses will be tested in this study:

H1: Sense of community and social values are a high motivation for all current shoppers at the Coventry Farmers' Market

H2: Sense of community will be positively correlated with intentions to attend the farmer's market in the future

H3: The greater the distance a shopper drives to get to the Coventry Farmers' Market the higher they will score high on community and social motivations for attending the Coventry Farmers' Market.

H4: Sense of community will be more strongly correlated with intentions, compared to the other motivation factors (product and policy)

### **Literature Review**

The literature around farmers' markets has increased as a field of study since the 1970s when markets began to organize more frequently across the country, and work since then has been focused on getting a better understanding of this part of the local food movement. DeLind (2011) argued that although the local food movement has come a long way since the early 1990s, we need to take care in ensuring that we move beyond being individual advocates, and continue to build community relationships around local foods and regenerative food systems.

Farmers' markets, particularly larger markets that incorporate programming like the Coventry Farmers' Market, are an important part of creating a community around local food purchasing. However, as these markets grow their focus on community relationships, the balance can shift from prioritizing local foods to events and public programming, much like you see in other locally run events like fairs and social activities. A market the size of the Coventry Farmers' Market and its programming creates tension between being a tourist attraction to bring in crowds and creating a community feel and maintaining the goals of a farmers' market, requiring market managers to consider the challenges created by that kind of shift (Thompson, 2020).

There are two specific measurements gathered from the literature that were used to determine if the social aspects of the Coventry Farmers' Market were a major motivation for patrons to attend. The first set of questions were designed to frame the conversation around farmers' markets specifically and utilized the work of Belinda Crawford and her colleagues to survey attitudes and motivations of 17 farmers' markets in Sydney, Australia (Crawford, 2008). The study determined 16 different motivations of significance, including research that found the social nature of farmers' markets were important benefits to those surveyed.

The second measurement found through a literature review on the importance of community is the underlying method for measurement, the Brief Sense of Community Scale (BSCS). BSCS is derived from the key theoretical constructs of Sense of Community (SOC), which attempts to measure the fundamental human phenomenon of collective experience (Peterson, 2008). SOC, conceptualized by McMillan and Chavis (McMillan, 1986) is utilized to study a wide range of community contexts including organizations, military environments (Wombacher, 2010), and neighborhoods. The BSCS is a modification of SOC, adapted to provide a more convenient and efficient way to apply the measurement. It measures four concepts:

- *Needs Fulfillment*, the feeling that the needs of a member of the community will be met by the resources received through their group membership
- *Membership*, the feeling of belonging and of sharing a sense of personal relatedness
- *Influence*, the sense of mattering, of making a difference to a group and of the group mattering to its members

- *Shared Emotional Connection*, or the commitment and belief that members have shared and will share history, common places, time together, and similar experiences (Peterson, 2008)

## Method

### Participants

The sample consisted of former attendees of the Coventry Farmers' Market. An A-priori sample size calculator for student t-tests was used to determine the sample size minimum. This analysis revealed that a total of 128 participants were needed to detect an anticipated effect size of 0.5 with a statistical power level of 0.8 and probability level of 0.05. A total of 340 market attendees agreed to participate in the study. After data cleaning to eliminate participants who did not complete the survey (13 respondents) were removed, the sample size remained at 327 respondents. This sample size exceeded the minimum sample size required to detect the specified effect.

Participants were grouped in five age ranges with the largest group representing attendees 55 or older ( $n = 120$ , 37%) with the second largest age range of 46-55 ( $n = 73$ , 22%). Participants were largely female ( $n = 290$ , 88.7%) and drove less than 10 miles ( $n = 135$ , 41%) or between 11-20 minutes ( $n = 131$ , 40%). (Table 1)



**Table 1** Sample Characteristics

	Total Sample ( <i>N</i> = 327)
<b>Sex, % (<i>n</i>)</b>	
Female	88.7% (290)
Male	10.7% (35)
Other	.6% (2)
<b>Age, % (<i>n</i>)</b>	
16-25	2% (8)
26-35	20% (64)
36-45	19% (62)
46-55	22% (73)
55 or older	37% (120)
<b>Distance Traveled (miles), % (<i>n</i>)</b>	
0-10 miles	41% (135)
11-20 miles	30% (99)
21-40 miles	24% (79)
Greater than 40 miles	4% (14)
<b>Distance Traveled (time), % (<i>n</i>)</b>	
0-10 minutes	24% (79)
11-20 minutes	40% (131)
21-40 minutes	28% (91)
Greater than 40 minutes	8% (26)

### Procedure

Participants were recruited from two sources accessible to the Coventry Farmers' Market - the email newsletter database and social media channels including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Those interested in participating viewed an electronic IRB approved information sheet and indicated consent by clicking on a link that led them to the Qualtrics-hosted online survey. Participants read a short paragraph outlining the reason for the survey and reported their age, sex, and location measured in both distance and miles. They then completed a series of

questions in a five-point Likert scale, assessing their motivations for attending a farmers' market using factors established from the Crawford study (2018) and constructs of the Brief Sense of Community Scale (BSCS) (Peterson, 2008). The presentation of these constructs was randomized within each of their respective groupings to prevent order effects. At the end of the study, all respondents had an opportunity to enter a drawing for one of three \$20 gift cards and to indicate interest in participating again in the future.

## Measures

### Behavioral Intentions

Individual motivation factors were drawn from a 2018 study published in the journal *Australian Planner* titled 'Seeking fresh food and supporting local producers: perceptions and motivations of farmers' market customers' (Crawford, 2018). The 16-item measures were categorized into three areas: (1) product, e.g. buying fresh produce or price (2) ethical concerns, e.g. humane treatment of animals or sustainable food production (3) social, e.g. relationship with vendors, market environment. Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not important*) to 5 (*very important*) and the presentation of items was randomized to prevent order effects. The results returned the three highest individual means of supporting local producers ( $M = 4.7, SD = .55$ ), buying fresh produce ( $M = 4.62, SD = .58$ ), and buying top quality produce ( $M = 4.48, SD = .67$ ). The lowest behavioral intention is availability of special dietary items ( $M = 2.76, SD = 1.28$ ). (Appendix A) The five items measuring social motivations were combined into one variable for analysis of the hypotheses'.

A note about including 'supporting local producers' into the ethical category and not the social category. Supporting local producers is a key part of the focus for market coordinators, both in terms of marketing and more essentially at the root of why markets are organized. When the Coventry Farmers' Market went online for the 2020 season, we did that knowing we were providing an opportunity for the community to continue to support local farmers, just in a different way. As a result, for this specific study to determine if the social aspects of attending the market in person were a driving factor in attendance, it was categorized as one of the non-social motivators.

### **Brief Sense of Community Scale (BSCS)**

The Brief Sense of Community Scale (BSCS) is an 8-item scale designed to assess the dimensions of needs fulfillment, group membership, influence, and emotional connection (Peterson, 2008). The BSCS is derived from the broader Sense of Community (SOC) scale defined in the McMillan and Chavis model (McMillan, 1986) and further validated by Peterson et.al (2008). Items of the BSCS were created consistent with recommendations that only positively worded items will be included. Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) and the presentation of the constructs was randomized to prevent order effects. Individually, they each indicate a strong relationship between attending the market and being a part of the market community (Table 2). When combining the 8-items as the construct is designed to do, there is a greater than average mean score with high reliability ( $M = 3.5$ ,  $SD = .60$ ,  $\alpha = .89$ ) (Table 3).

**Table 2** Brief Sense of Community Scale

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements while attending the Coventry Farmers' Market

	N	Mean	Std.	
			Deviation	Variance
I can get what I need in this market community	322	3.99	.68	.46
This market community helps me fulfill my needs	322	3.85	.74	.55
I feel like a member of this market community	322	3.56	.88	.77
I belong in this market community	322	3.61	.85	.72
I have a say about what goes on in this market community	322	2.76	.83	.68
People in this market community are good at influencing each other	322	3.51	.71	.50
I feel connected to this market community	322	3.69	.84	.71
I have a good bond with others in this market community	322	3.28	.85	.73

**Table 3** Brief Sense of Community Scale Combined

	N	Mean	Std.		Cronbach's Alpha Reliability
			Deviation	Variance	
BSCS_Combined	322	3.5314	.6006	.361	.89

### Intentions

Participants were then asked to predict future behavior using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) through three questions - I intend to shop at the Coventry Farmers' Market in the future; I intend to participate in future programming at the Coventry Farmers' Market; I will attend the Coventry Farmers' Market in the future.

Individually they each indicate a strong intention to attend a future Coventry Farmers' Market (Table 4) as well as when combined ( $M = 4.4$ ,  $SD = .60$ ,  $a = .69$ ) (Table 5).

**Table 4 Intentions**

Please indicate your future intentions to attend the Coventry Farmers' Market

	<i>N</i>	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
I intend to shop at the Coventry Farmers' Market in the future	322	4.7	.607	.368
I intend to participate in future programming at the Coventry Farmers' Market	322	3.67	1.007	1.014
I will attend the Coventry Farmers' Market in the future	322	4.69	.609	.371

**Table 5 Intentions Combined**

	<i>N</i>	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	Cronbach's Alpha Reliability
Intentions_Combined	322	4.3509	.59886	.359	0.69

## Results

As expected, and in line with prior research, there is a positive relationship between social activities at the Coventry Farmers' Market and intentions to attend. First, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to assess the strength of the bivariate relationships between all study variables (Table 6). In particular, the relationships between the Brief Sense of Community Scale (BSCS) and Intentions were moderately strong ( $r = .54; p < .01$ ). There was no significant correlation between age, gender, and distance (miles and time) to the study variables of social and community motivation and intentions. All analyses were conducted using SPSS Statistics 27.0 (IBM Corp 2020).

**Table 6 Bivariate Zero-Order Correlation Matrix**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Age	-						
2 Gender <i>a</i>	-.176**	-					
3 Distance (miles)	-0.003	-0.061	-				
4 Distance (time)	-0.12	0.005	.837**	-			
5 Social Motivation (M)	.130*	0.004	-0.033	-0.033	-		
6 Brief Sense of Community Scale (BSCS)	0.031	-0.06	-.155**	-.189**	.509**	-	
7 Intentions (I)	-.122*	0.095	-.148**	-.127*	.362**	.540**	-

*a*1 = Male, 2 = Female, 3 = Other  
 \*\**p* < .01, \**p* < .05

### Hypothesis Testing

The use of two different sets of questions to determine social motivation provided an additional opportunity to discover whether there were similar correlations with social motivations provided by the Crawford (2018) study and the BSCS construct (Table 2). To understand their relationships further, we combined the five Behavioral Intentions related to social motivations (Combined Social Motivations) and combined BSCS. They both indicated a positive correlation with intentions, however the BSCS provided a stronger relationship and better reliability, indicating it as a better predictor. Each hypothesis was tested based on both social constructs in an effort to maintain both data points.

*H1 - Sense of community and social values are a high motivation for all current shoppers at the Coventry Farmers' Market.*

Although not the highest ranked motivation within the Behavioral Intentions, it was expected that the individual sense of community and social motivations would all rank individually with high importance, and they all landing within 3.58-4.38 out of a five-point Likert scale (5 = *very important*) and when combined, averaged 4.0 ( $M = 4.0$ ,  $SD = .662$ ;  $\alpha = .63$ ). The Brief Sense of Community Scale, when averaged, has a mean of 3.53 ( $M = 3.53$ ,  $SD = .601$ ,  $\alpha = .89$ ) (Table 7).

**Table 7** Social Motivations

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Cronbach's Alpha Reliability
Behavioral Intentions – relationship with vendors	3.58	1.093	
Behavioral Intentions – social experience	3.74	1.129	
Behavioral Intentions – market environment	4.31	.73	
Behavioral Intentions – support for a community event	4.38	.841	
Combined Social Behavioral Intentions	4	.662	0.63
Brief Sense of Community Scale	3.53	.601	0.89
Intentions	4.35	.599	0.69

*H2 - Sense of community will be positively correlated with intentions to attend the farmer's market in the future*

As expected in the hypothesis, sense of community is positively correlated with intentions to attend the farmers' market, showing a moderately strong correlation between the Brief Sense of Community Scale ( $r = .54$ ;  $p < .01$ ) and a below minimally acceptable correlation with the combined social motivators ( $r = .36$ ;  $p < .01$ ) (Table 8).

		Intentions	Cronbach's Alpha Reliability
Brief Sense of Community Scale	Pearson Correlation	.540**	0.89
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	
	N	322	
Combined Social Motivations	Pearson Correlation	.362**	0.63
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	
	N	322	

\*\* . Correlations is significant at the 0.01 level (tailed).

*H3 - The greater the distance a shopper drives to get to the Coventry Farmers' Market the higher they will score high on community and social motivations for attending the Coventry Farmers' Market.*

This hypothesis is based on the idea that the longer distance to travel to get to the Coventry Farmers' Market would show a higher rate of social motivations which was not a correct assumption and the hypothesis was not proven. The survey measured both distance in miles and travel time and they produced similar results, indicating no significant correlation with intentions and combined social motivators. There is a negative but weak correlation between distance (as it increases) in BSCS and intentions:  $r(322) = -.155, p < 0.01$  (distance);  $r(322) = -.189, p < 0.01$  (travel time) (Table 9).

**Table 9** Correlation of Distance to Intentions

		Distance in miles	Travel Time
Combined Social Motivations	Pearson Correlation	-0.033	-0.033
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.55	0.557



	N	327	327
Brief Sense of Community Scale	Pearson Correlation	-.155**	-.189**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.005	0.001
	N	322	322
Intentions	Pearson Correlation	-.148**	-.127*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.008	0.023
	N	322	322

\*\* . Correlations is significant at the 0.01 level (tailed).

\*. Correlations is significant at the 0.05 level (tailed).

*H4 - Sense of community will be more strongly correlated with intentions, compared to the other motivation factors (product and policy)*

The three highest individual motivations by Mean score were supporting local producers<sup>1</sup> ( $M = 4.75, SD = .55$ ), buying fresh produce ( $M = 4.62, SD = .58$ ), and buying top quality produce ( $M = 4.48, SD = .67$ ) were positively correlated with intentions, but as expected, items related to social motivations (BSCS and Combined Social Motivations) had stronger correlations to intentions (Table 10).

**Table 10** Correlation of Top Motivations to Intentions

Intentions	Brief Sense of Community Scale	Combined Social Motivations	Supporting local producers (policy)	Buying fresh produce (product)	Buying top quality produce (product)
Pearson Correlation	.540**	.362**	.350**	.210**	.130*
Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0	0	0	0
N	322	322	322	322	322

\*\* . Correlations is significant at the 0.01 level (tailed).

<sup>1</sup> Supporting local producers was placed into the ethical category to highlight the difference between an online and in-person market, which you can still satisfy in both environments.

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\*. Correlations is significant at the 0.05 level (tailed).

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While not a formal hypothesis, we utilized other data collected to determine if there is a connection between gender and motivations. An independent *t* test was conducted between gender and motivations identified in the BSCS and Intentions to attend the market. There was no significant distance for either. BSCS in relations to female ( $M = 3.52$ ,  $SD = .57$ ) and male ( $M = 3.6$ ,  $SD = .80$ ) produced a significance in Levene's test for equality of variances ( $F = 4.988$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). For the Intentions variable (I), there was no significant difference between female ( $M = 4.37$ ,  $SD = .57$ ) and male ( $M = 4.2$ ,  $SD = .82$ ) as Levene's test for equality of variances was significant ( $F = 10.185$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This may be due to a small sample size of men who responded, not allowing for enough difference to detect.

### Discussion

The decrease in market traffic for the 2020 season of the Coventry Farmers' Market can be attributed to many factors, but this survey provides proof in what the market organizers understood to be real, that the benefit participants receive from the social activities and community building around the market is a driving factor in both why they attend, and their intent to come again. This provides the Coventry Farmers' Market with the opportunity to embrace the concept of civic agriculture by continuing to engage in programming and other activities tied to individual social motivations to create an active community of local food champions, or as Lyson (2005) suggests, transform individuals from "passive consumers into active food citizens."

There is an interesting disconnect between what patrons find to be the most important individual motivation, to support local producers, and their willingness to do this in an online environment. One argument that may be at play here is the overuse, and sometimes even deceptive, definition traditional retailers use of the 'buy local' terminology, particularly in grocery stores. Shoppers familiar with farmers' markets are likely savvier in understanding the definition and by connecting shoppers with local producers in a face-to-face community-focused environment, they become more confident that they are actually supporting local producers. In other words, by connecting customers' purchases with the people who produce them, farmers' markets provide an important place of connection within their community. This idea would benefit from further exploration.

The data provided in this survey will benefit the future planning and marketing of the Coventry Farmers' Market, as well as be insightful for other large-scale markets focused on programming and community activities.

Finally, the survey adds to the validity and reliability of the survey tool set out by the Brief Sense of Community Scale, measuring the importance community has on individual needs.

### **Limitations**

There were two limitations to the study that affected the results. The first was the largely female response did not allow for sufficient review of differences that may be present between male and female populations. The second limitation was the low responses rate from patrons that drive

more than 40 miles or 40 minutes, which may have affected the data around the distance travelled hypothesis.

### **Future Directions**

How farmers' markets fit into the local food movement is an important conversation to continue to study. The large variety of markets make it challenging to generalize data and it would be interesting to see if the responses are reproducible at smaller markets or ones that don't focus on programming, entertainment, or engage in tourism. And as markets like the Coventry Farmers' Market look to expand their reach through online sales platforms (as supplements to in-person markets and not as replacements such as what we found ourselves needing to do in the midst of a pandemic), further investigation regarding the challenges in developing not only the structures necessary to alter operations, but the transition consumers need to understand the importance of being supportive and building community through an online environment.

Farmers' markets would also benefit from additional studies to investigate how the market can drive community engagement outside of the market field, being a catalyst in community building beyond the local food movements and as part of the larger concept of community of place.

The survey included an opportunity for respondents to supply their contact information for future surveys like this one which would be interesting to use in subsequent years if changes are made based on this survey response.

### **Conclusion**

The Coventry Farmers' Market is an important part of both the local food community as well as the social fabric that makes up the Quiet Corner of Connecticut. As the market moves forward, the data can provide a framework for future plans around organization and structure as well as marketing to continue on playing an important role in benefiting local food producers.

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### Appendices

#### Appendix A Behavioral Intentions

Please indicate the importance of each item for attending the Coventry Farmers' Market

	<i>N</i>	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
<b>Product</b>				
buying top quality produce	327	4.48	.67	.45
buying fresh produce	327	4.62	.58	.34
buying a variety of produce items	327	4.31	.76	.58
buying produce that looks 'good'	327	3.84	1.10	1.21
price of product	327	3.58	.96	.91
organic certifications	327	3.26	1.18	1.40
availability of culturally specific foods	327	2.95	1.12	1.26
availability of special dietary items	327	2.76	1.28	1.64
<b>Ethical Concerns</b>				
supporting local producers	327	4.75	.55	.30
sustainable food production	327	4.24	.88	.77
humane treatment of animals	327	4.22	1.00	1.00
<b>Social</b>				
relationships with vendors	327	3.58	1.09	1.20
social experience	327	3.74	1.13	1.27
market environment	327	4.31	.73	.53
support for a community event	327	4.38	.84	.71
convenience of market	327	3.83	1.03	1.07