

The St. John's Farmers' Market Co-operative

Public Meeting Notes

20 February, 2010

Gower St. Church Hall

St. John's, NL

Auxiliary Notes in addition to Power Point Presentation (Posted on Website)

Various members of the Friends of the St. John's Farmers' Market, vendors, and interested members of the public were in attendance.

Introductions: Colin introduced the forum (presentation on-line)

After the introductions and a History of the Market from 2007 – Present Day, there were **stories and testimonials** from various members, vendors, and customers of the Market.

- Colin spoke on behalf of Zainab (not in attendance), who set up her multicultural cuisine table at the market. She had quickly become one of the favorite food vendors at the market and her popularity has resulted in a spinoff business of her own multicultural cuisine restaurant being recently opened on Torbay Road.
- Oz, from the Organic Farm in Portugal Cove, also a board member: said they were proud to have been vendors since the very first market and mentioned that it was great fun and a joy to work directly with the customers that attended the market to buy their produce.
- Patsy, regular vendor at market, also a board member: said she enjoyed working alongside the other vendors, and greatly appreciated the people who came to the market. She also mentioned that due to an overflow of business resulting from the market, she gets much business outside of the market as well.
- One Outdoor Vendor (name?): She sells crafts, and expanded to sell perennials, preserves, eggs, and sausages on the bun. Really enjoys the business she does at the market and loves chatting with customer and other vendors.
- Alison, board member since May and Volunteer Coordinator: explained how much she liked volunteering and working at the market, she also appraised all the support from the other volunteers, who also really enjoyed the experience, and without whom the market wouldn't be such a success. These volunteer jobs included (but were not limited to) selling coffee, setting up the tents in all kinds of weather, and setting up the tables. She said that the coffee sales actually helped pay for most of the building rent, and couldn't be done without the volunteers. She said there was a genuine sense of community at the market and it attracted a diverse crowd of people who also had lots in common with each other. She is looking forward to the exciting new year and forming the co-op.
- Martin, blueberry vendor from Conception Bay: He said he really enjoyed his experience and the sales from his berries went up significantly since he had been a vendor at the market. He is also a part of a berry co-op. His only complaint was that working outside his table was always next to the dumpster. The dumpster will be moved this year ;)

- Colin, board member and chair: He did sell smoothies and lemonade at the market, but primarily has enjoyed Farmers' Markets in many parts of Canada and all over the world, and is pleased that our market is quickly becoming a part of this network.
- Josie, volunteer when in town: She really appreciates the opportunity to get together as a community and participate in the market. She also appreciated the opportunity to organize the Christmas party for the Friends of the St. John's Farmers' Market and said that it was a fun time enjoyed by all.
- From a customer: He said he was out of town a lot but really enjoyed the market whenever he was around and is hoping to participate as a vendor this year.

Co-operative Development: Jim Winter, our co-op consultant, gave a presentation on co-op formation and its relevance to the St. John's Farmers' Market (power point presentation available on the website)

These are extra notes of use that were not listed in the presentation slides.

Jim explained that he was involved in the development of over 30 co-ops province wide and vastly enjoys working with the SJ Farmers' Market. He is hoping to get more involved as a possible vendor in the future as well. As a co-op, Jim explained that he sees its importance in terms of permanency of the market, as it would be a good solid business. He said that owners of the market co-op would hold a stake and would therefore be the people with the most 'vested interest in it. As a co-op, he explained that we would need the right type of ownership and went on to explain different governance models, and that the Multi-stakeholder approach would represent the best model for the Farmers' Market at this point in time. The multi-stakeholder approach would be more community owned and would represent a diverse mix of people. He also mentioned that while a co-op is a business, it is more service oriented, rather than profit based.

Questions asked by the public participants:

It was noted that the main idea of this forum was to get ideas and public input and to generate interest in the co-op formation, as well as inform the public on matters that may concern them.

- Are other farm markets multistakeholder (MS) co-ops in Canada?
 - MS Structure is a relatively new approach, however as an example Granville Market in BC is one example of MS Structure. Our market was started and ran mostly by 'vested individuals of the community, thus the MS approach was more applicable in this case, however the hope is for there to be a much higher percentage of farm producers involved in the future and the governance structure can change to a homogeneous variety later on if the co-op as a whole decides it is a better plan of action for that time. It was noted also that the MS structure was proven in many other co-ops to work and would be expected to in this case as well. The MS governance structure guarantees that all individuals and groups involved are well represented, including the producers.

- Does the accountability of the “Friends of” governance change when the co-op begins?
 - Jim explained that he was under contract with the Friends of the St. John’s Farmers’ Market (FoSJFM) and is currently accountable to them, however he can transition from one to the other as well. It was noted that the FoSJFM is accountable for funding and also has vendors on its board, so the co-op will be accountable to the FoSJFM for the time being. However having said this, the co-op will also run the Farmers’ Market in the summer and will be accountable to these actions.
- Will the Friends of board continue to exist in the future?
 - It could dissolve, but it is up for discussion and will ultimately be the responsibility of the co-op to decide this in the future. It was noted that there are advantages to the Friends of board to exist for now because it could set up training workshops and apply for certain types of funding that would assist the co-op.
- Can the St. John’s Farmers’ Market have a more inclusive name?
 - Generally farmers’ markets imply that there are also crafts artisans and food vendors, etc, included, thus the name is generally implied to be all inclusive. However it is up to the co-op to decide if a better name is needed, ie “Producers Market”, etc. It was noted that the St. John’s Farmers’ Market also has made quite a name for itself and is well known as it is (branding for two years in place already).
- How many founding members will we need for the co-op?
 - The minimum is 3, but ideally would have many more people involved.
- What about “Share Capital”?
 - This needs to be looked at carefully by the founding members of the co-op. Shares can not be set too high or too low.
- What is the timeline to get started?
 - This will begin as soon as possible, hopefully within this month. The hopes are to get the ball rolling from this meeting.
- What entails a founding member?
 - A founding member is involved in getting the co-op registered and up and running. A founding member also acts as a support beam for the co-op, with the more support the better, in that essentially we have to demonstrate that we have numbers (of people) to show we have support.
- How much will it cost to become a founding member of the co-op?
 - Legally, the minimum share purchase in a co-op is \$5. It is usually a bit higher than this but generally is not restrictive and could be anywhere between \$5 and \$50. It is not allowed to be prohibitive, so as anyone who wants to become a member should be able to afford to do so. It is up to the members to decide which amount is sensible in this regard. ‘Vested individuals generally refer to someone who devotes his or her

time to the cause, however in regards to the co-op also means “invested individual”, so has two meanings. Also, if you buy a share in the co-op, you can sell it back at 100% if you decide you can no longer be a member of the co-op. The membership essentially is just a security deposit that shows you are a ‘vested individual to the needs of the co-op, is also known that people who buy shares are generally more engaged in this activity. People who buy shares have a sense of ownership. It was noted that there is also a feasibility report available on-line for people that would like more information on the pros of buying a share in the market co-op. It was also noted that the share capital was just a one-time investment and there would not be annual fees to stay a member.

- Does a vendor have to be a member to sell goods at the market?
 - Regular vendors will be required, but this also comes with special benefits, one being that they will always have a place secured at the market. However one-time vendors, who just want to try out the market to see if it suits their needs may not necessarily have to be a member, although there may not always be space for non-members, there will hopefully be some leeway. This will all be up to the founding members to decide upon the final details.

Colin next took the podium to give the final portion of his presentation “Looking Forward” (available online on the website). He made sure to point out the sign up sheet for those who didn’t see it when they first came in.

Discussion:

- A chef from the Sheraton was present, who represented the Chef’s Association (CA). There were also members of the Restaurant Association (RA) present as well. The chef was very interested in the Farmers’ Market co-op on behalf of the CA (as well as those of the RA), and brought up the possibility of becoming a member or a potential partner.
- Some people mentioned they really liked the Lion’s Club location for many reasons. Colin pointed out that it was a great location but that we are also looking towards getting a new or bigger location to accommodate our growing needs in the future as well. In the meantime, we are hoping to have better more accommodating tents for the market overflow, so we can have a bigger market in a smaller space.
- Someone asked if a 2-day market could work. It was replied that it would depend on the vendors and the volunteers. In some ways it could work, however at the moment we are still relatively small and may not be able to handle two days of markets at the moment, but perhaps in the future it could be a possibility. In the meantime, we have to start small and build up for better success.
- Another participant asked if a trading community could be set up.

Meeting adjourned at 3:45pm