Farmers Markets: Success, Failure, and Management Ecology by Garry O. Stephenson

Important Reference Book For Food Advocates

Farmers Markets: Success, Failure and Management Ecology is the only book presently available that investigates the current phenomenal growth of farmers markets in the U.S. The research is a reflection of a period marked by growing consumer interest in locally produced foods, a resistance toward a globalizing food system, and seemingly boundless interest in and support for farmers markets. Using an ecological approach, the book explores historic trends related to growth and decline in market numbers, examines the management organization associated with markets of specific sizes, analyzes the characteristics and issues associated with markets that fail, and offers a model that illustrates how farmers market organizers successfully adapt to barriers and challenges in their environment. The book engages a node in the food system that has implications for the economic health of small farms and the social and economic life of communities. The book incorporates both the academic and the practical. It will be an important reference to students and researchers across disciplines with interests in food system research, as well as practitioners managing or working with farmers markets. As an applied study, the book provides information and recommendations to assist markets with decision making and strategic planning. Although the focus of this research is on one area in the United States, the findings have broad application. The foreword to this study is by distinguished scholar and food system analyst, Gail Feenstra of the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (SAREP) at the University of California, Davis.

My Personal Review:
Professor Stephenson’s book is a must have for market managers and advocates. The book is a refinement of his work over many years in Oregon studying farmers markets and direct marketing farmers. As reference material it contains dozens of fascinating facts and bits of
analysis for those interested in markets and alternative agriculture. Stephenson was one of the first to analyze the capacity of markets by extrapolating characteristics such as the number of vendors it has or length of the market managers tenure to show the potential success (or failure rate) of markets to do all of the great, important things we need them to do.

It does only include Oregon data but the framework and analysis has been used in dozens of national studies of market since. I always keep an electronic copy nearby when i write about or work with markets.

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