



# BUSINESS REPORT

PUBLIC POLICY

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## 1. Executive Summary

This report examines the vital role of farmers markets in enhancing food security and supporting the local economy. It analyzes the Vancouver Farmers Market (VFM) as a case study, exploring its significance, challenges, and potential for growth.

The first section delves into the importance of farmers markets in promoting sustainable local food systems and their contributions to food security. The analysis of the Vancouver Farmers Market (VFM) reveals that it plays six pivotal roles:

- Business Incubator and Entrepreneurship Support
- Food Security Advocate
- Prominent Advocate for Sustainable Practices
- Promoter of Education and Awareness
- Support for Local Businesses and Entrepreneurs
- Local Food Systems Promoter

The second section investigates the barriers faced by VFM, including lack of stable locations, limited government support, and inadequate infrastructure.

The third section confirms that VFM shares the same objectives with the City of Vancouver, Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, and Vancouver School Board. Additionally, this section compares government support for farmers markets in other jurisdictions, such as Alberta, Portland, and the European Union (EU), highlighting the positive impact of such support.

The conclusion emphasizes the importance of government support in ensuring the sustainability of farmers markets. It underscores the need for the BC provincial government and the City of Vancouver to take cues from successful models in other regions, like Alberta and Portland. This report recommends that the City of Vancouver:

- In coordination with the province, should officially recognize farmers markets as vital community amenities.
- Actively seek feedback from vendors and customers to align major policies with farmers markets' goals.
- Consider minor regulatory changes, like reducing administrative burdens, to support farmers markets.
- Explore permanent market spaces in parks or on City grounds, increasing stability and helping avoid last-minute cancellations or relocations.
- Prioritize improving market infrastructure.

## 2. Introduction

Farmers markets are crucial in alleviating food shortages, and also ensuring the growth of the local economy. Among them, the Vancouver Farmers Market (VFM) holds a significant place within the City of Vancouver's food system. As a vibrant marketplace connecting local farmers

and producers with consumers, VFM contributes to the availability of fresh, locally sourced produce, encouraging sustainable consumption practices (Vancouver Farmers Market, 2023a).

This report examines the challenges faced by VFM and explores potential solutions through government support, including inspiration from successful models in other jurisdictions. The first section of the paper illuminates the vital role of farmers markets in enhancing food security and fostering sustainable local food systems. The second section delves into the specific challenges VFM faces, including the lack of stable locations, limited government support, and inadequate infrastructure.

To address these obstacles and unlock the full potential of VFM, it is helpful to analyze the successful approaches adopted in other regions. The third section of the paper compares government support for farmers markets in Alberta, Canada; Portland, USA; and the European Union (EU). By understanding how these jurisdictions support their farmers markets, valuable insights can be gained to inform strategies for VFM's growth and success.

This report aims to highlight the significance of farmers markets, identify the hurdles faced by VFM, and propose actionable steps for government support. By fostering an environment conducive to the growth of VFM, the City of Vancouver and the BC provincial government can strengthen the local food system, promote economic prosperity, and enhance food security within the region.

### **3. Background of Vancouver Farmers Market**

Vancouver Farmers Markets (VFM) is one of the leading farmers markets in Canada. The market is a not-for-profit organization that was founded in 1995 with the main goal of enhancing food security within the Vancouver region (About Us, 2023). The market has since grown and currently serves close to 500,000 shoppers annually in the nine markets it operates (2023). VFM operates all year with seven weekly markets designated for the summer and the remaining two markets operating weekly during the winter.

Vancouver Farmers Market supports local small-scale farmers, producers, and entrepreneurs by providing them a safe space to connect directly with local community members and customers. VFM supports “small BC farms and producers, connecting them with folks from all walks of life that share one thing in common: the love of local food” (About Us, 2023, par. 1). In essence, VFM helps to promote the local economy and to ensure that there is a sustainable food system within the Vancouver region.

The Vancouver Farmers Market is a producer-only market, which means that its products within the markets are not imported and there is no room for re-sales of products (VFM, 2023a). All the products within the market are either baked, harvested, or grown by the over 250 vendors who are registered across the nine markets. Additionally, only producers within the BC region are allowed to sell their products within the markets, even though there is no limit to the distance a product travels before getting to the market as long as the product is from BC province (VFM, 2023a).

The Vancouver Farmers Market is managed by a board of directors who serve in a volunteer capacity. The board of directors is aided by a team of paid staff members who help in the VFM's daily operations (VFM, 2023a). The markets are self-sustaining in that the operational costs are derived through vendor application fees, membership support fees, and through sponsorship and partnerships that VFM has with several organizations that include, but are not limited to, organizations like "1% For the Planet", and the British Columbia Association of Farmers' Markets" (VFM, 2023).

However, despite its long history and support to the local food system in Vancouver, VFM still operates in public spaces like parks, and street corners, with seasonal permit applications. This has limited the market's opportunities for growth. This paper advocates for VFM to be accorded a stable market space with improved public infrastructure so that the market can achieve its vision of being "a resilient local food network that values people and the land" (Vision & Mission, 2023). In the following section, we will focus on the six roles that Vancouver Farmers Market showcases in the city of Vancouver.

## **4. VFM's Roles in the City of Vancouver**

### **4.1 VFM as a Business Incubator and Entrepreneurship Support**

Many start-up businesses and entrepreneurs lack enough resources and supportive programs to steer them toward growth and stability. The VFM has emerged as one of the most useful hubs for fresh produce and local goods at the heart of British Columbia (Lee, 2022). Moreover, VFM has established itself as a vibrant business incubator and a facilitator for entrepreneurial undertakings (Lee, 2022). VFM has acted as a nurturing ground for aspiring entrepreneurs, thereby giving them a platform to thrive and flourish. In the past three years, a total of 10 businesses has been launched (Flavors of Hope). VFM has acted in this capacity by providing supportive platforms that include the test market, sales outlets, and important networking prospects.

#### ***4.1.1 Test Market and Product Validation***

VFM provides farmers with a market and opportunity to test their products before making a full-scale launch. VFM has developed a Seeds for Growth program that is mostly done in January, during the winter season when market operations are slow, to "provide support for new business owners to test out their products" (Lee, 2022, para.10). In 2022, VFM partnered with several startup vendors, including Empanada Girls, Sauce Club, and Tamaly Shop. After testing their products through the seed for Growth program, they appeared in various markets hosted by VFM during the busier summer months. Test markets are avenues through which business owners can gauge demand and acceptance of their products before making a full-scale launch, through customers making a taste of the goods being offered (Lee, 2022). In this way, VFM helps farmers to mitigate the risk associated with a full-scale launch, as farmers can gather crucial feedback information and refine their products as required through customer preferences.

Additionally, VFM markets are a composite of various shoppers coming from across various cultural backgrounds, which in essence reflects the dynamic and multicultural composition of Vancouver. For instance, in a 2022 report of the Riley Park Summer market, 35.8% of the

customers were from Riley Park, 48.1% of the customers came from neighbourhoods close to Riley Park (Mount Pleasant, South Cambie, and South Granville), 13.2% were customers from other parts of Vancouver, and a further 2.8% came from outside of Vancouver. This trend of customer diversity is experienced in other markets like False Creek, and the West End, among others (Vancouver Farmers Market, 2023a and 2023b). This diverse range of customers within the VFM markets offers vendors valuable experience in terms of interaction and assessing their products through direct contact with consumers. Vendors can gain insights into terms of customers' needs, preferences, and shopping behaviours directly. Lee notes that, for customers "who have got time, part of the market experience is getting to talk to somebody who is making their product and seeing if [they] can get a taste" (2022, para. 11). The opportunity to interact with customers directly gives producers and vendors a glimpse of how their products is being received and in the process, they can look at ways to fine-tune their offerings that meet their customers' tastes and preferences.

#### ***4.1.2 Sales Outlet and Financial Sustainability***

Apart from offering a nurturing ground for budding entrepreneurs with this test market, VFM is also a sales outlet for entrepreneurs by giving them a platform to showcase and sell their products. VFM enables the growth of small-scale entrepreneurs by eliminating some of the financial impediments that these businesses face in terms of reaching a wider customer base. Lee notes that VFM has grown considerably since its inception, thereby reaching a wider customer base within Vancouver (2022). She further asserts that the market attracts a huge number of visitors with about 80% of these visitors having a preference to shop in a farmer market since these markets are easily accessible and offer products at affordable rates (2022). What this statement implies is that the geographical barriers to accessibility between vendors and customers are eliminated. Hence, the vendors can conduct their business and grow in due course.

Moreover, VFM allows vendors to develop a close relationship with customers which enhances customer loyalty. As stated above, VFM allows for direct customer-vendor interaction, which is essential in developing customer loyalty. Loyal customers are more willing to come back for repeat purchases. Lee remarks that about 80% of visitors tend to come for repeat purchases (2022). Therefore, since VFM is an open-air market that helps in creating a loyal customer base while at the same time eliminating the need for a brick-and-mortar establishment, VFM allows vendors to channel their resources into other activities like product development, research, and marketing, and growth.

#### ***4.1.3 Networking and Mentorship***

Vancouver Farmers Market is not only a sales market but also a hub of networking and mentorship platforms by offering a collaborative environment where vendors share knowledge and experience. VFM provides budding entrepreneurs an opportunity to network with like-minded vendors, share constructive ideas, and also learn from seasoned entrepreneurs who have successfully navigated through the hardships of being raw entrepreneur. VFM notes on its website that they are "a community made up of a diverse community of farmers, fishers, food preparers, artisans and more" that adds up to about 280 small-scale vendors (Vancouver Farmers

Market, 2023a, para.3). This implies that vendors have a huge base of other vendors with whom to associate and share ideas.

Vancouver Farmers Market has worked in close association with organizations to educate vendors on various products that meet both the quality and environmental standards within Vancouver and Canada by large. For instance, since its inception, VFM has been in collaboration with health authorities like “Vancouver Coastal Health, “to expand the kinds of products (e.g., salmon) considered to be safe in an open-air market environment” (Lee, 2022, para.9). These authorities provide guidance and advice to vendors who are then empowered to make wise decisions on how to grow their business. For example, in this case, a young vendor would know and understand that salmon is a safe product that is easily marketable at the market and thereby attract a return on their investments.

## **4.2 Vancouver Farmers Market as an Advocate for Food Security**

The desire for access to fresh, healthy, and environmentally sustainable food products in recent decades has escalated the growth of the farmers market in North America (Wittman et al., 2012). In short, food security has been a pressing issue for the world in the recent past and farmers markets have grown to bridge this gap through the social economy and local food systems that ensure food security (2012). Vancouver Farmers Market has been a shining light in regard to ensuring food security within Vancouver. Lee (2022) writes that VFM was founded to address the issue of food insecurity in East Vancouver; this is a function it has played well as noted by its burgeoning expansion by offering markets throughout the year (2022). VFM has been committed to providing fresh, local, and culturally enriching foods thereby serving as an agent for food security within the Vancouver community. VFM has been acting as an agent of food security by supporting local farmers, and offering an inclusive space for the varied culinary traditions of the Vancouver community.

### ***4.2.1 Supporting Local Farmers***

Vancouver Farmers Market has been dedicated to supporting local farmers as indicated by its mission statement that reads in part that they “support small farms and producers” (Vancouver Farmers Market, 2023a). VFM attracts about 500,000 customers annually through their weekly markets, which turns into over \$13.8 million in vendor sales every year (2023a, para.3). Through the market approximately “4,000 acres of local farmland [are kept] in sustainable food production each year”(2023a, para.4). The market has been a cornerstone for local farmers by providing them with a platform to sell their products. Moreover, the market is a hub for maintaining a sustainable food system by ensuring that the community has a consistent supply of fresh and nutrient-rich foods from the local farmers that it supports. In addition to supporting local farmers, the market gives more priority to farmers who use environmentally friendly and organic farming practices which contribute to a healthier and more sustainable food supply system.

The market's dedication to local farmers is obvious in its demanding vendor selection process, which emphasizes the importance of sustainable agricultural methods and high-quality produce. For instance, vendors who engage in prepared foods are prioritized according to the ingredients

used; those who use products from local farms are given priority (Vancouver Farmers Market, 2023a) This strategy not only ensures that customers have access to the most nutritious and fresh goods, but it also develops trust and transparency between farmers and consumers. Farmers may share their knowledge and tales through direct interactions, while customers can better understand the hard work and dedication that goes into growing their food.

#### ***4.2.2 Access to Culturally Enriching Foods***

In addition to access to food calories, food security also involves access to culturally nourishing foods that reflect the diverse cultural background of the community in context. In this regard, VFM has been a strong advocate for the production and sale of locally produced food that reflects the cultural diversity of the Vancouver community. In fact, on their website, VFM notes that it is a “community made up of a diverse community of farmers, fishers, food preparers, artisans, and more” (“Become a Vendor, 2023, para.1). The diverse and local aspect mission of VFM is further highlighted through its partnership programs that advocate for access to BC-only foods. For instance, VFM has partnered with BCLocalRoot “to engage and empower [BCs] communities to choose an economic and food secure future by purchasing BC-only food and beverage products” (BCLocalRoot, 2023, para.1). VFM has recognized the importance of food security in terms of access to culturally enriching food and therefore it promotes access to fresh produce like vegetables, herbs, and spices among others that are key to the various local cuisines.

The market promotes and maintains a culinary legacy by providing a forum for local growers to present culturally relevant products and ingredients. Farmers from all ethnic backgrounds are invited to join, resulting in a vast range of unique and traditional foods that would otherwise be difficult to purchase in mainstream grocery shops. This commitment to cultural diversity ensures that people of various origins may discover familiar ingredients and try new flavours, creating ethnic pride and building social harmony.

### **4.3 VFM as Prominent Advocate for Sustainable Practices in Vancouver's Community**

Sustainability has become one of the most pressing issues in today’s world, driving communities, organizations, and individuals into actively developing and adopting environmentally friendly practices. Vancouver Farmers Market has become prominent champion of sustainability within Vancouver. Leveraging its influence as one of the most cherished institutions within Vancouver, VFM has been at the centre stage of the organizations within Vancouver that are pushing for sustainable practices within the community. For instance, VFM fosters sustainable practices through its emphasis on reducing carbon footprint and connecting the community with locally produced foods.

#### ***4.3.1 Sustainability through Local Produce***

Farmers markets have been established to promote and support the local food system which ultimately contributes to sustainability goals. VFM promotes the production and consumption of locally produced foods which contributes towards sustainability in two major ways. First, local food systems reduce the environmental impacts associated with the long-distance transportation



of goods. Link and Ling (2007) note that farmers markets have the potential to reduce “food miles” which is the distance that food is transported from one region to another. They further assert that the amount of fossil fuel consumed is directly linked to the distance it takes to get food to a particular region. What this statement implies is that, since farmers' markets encourage local production of goods, farmers markets significantly contribute towards the reduction of fossil fuel consumption which is one of the environmental goals highlighted by the UN in its Sustainability Goals 2030. Link and Ling (2007) note that reducing the distance traveled by food products contributed to positive environmental outcomes like pollution reduction. VFM is an avid champion of locally produced fruits, and vegetables, among other agricultural products thereby contributing to the reduction of the amount of distance to transport these foods compared to being imported into the Vancouver. Thus, VFM promotes environmental sustainability by ensuring that the local food system is supported and limiting the number of imports into the Vancouver region.

The second way through which VFM promotes sustainability is by providing local farmers from British Columbia with a platform to showcase and sell their produce thereby providing farmers with the much-needed income necessary to continue with their sustainable farming practices. VFM directly connects local farmers to consumers which in essence helps the farmers to thrive economically thereby feeling much more confident in adopting their sustainable farming practices as well as participating in the production of local products. For instance, by providing a market for salmon which is believed to be an environmentally safe and healthy product, VFM offers the local producers an opportunity to continue their partnership with Vancouver Coastal Health – which promotes the safe production of environmentally friendly products – thus contributing towards environmental sustainability (Lee, 2022, para. 9).

#### ***4.3.2 Sustainability through Reduced Carbon Footprint***

Vancouver Farmers Market venues are conveniently located within Vancouver thereby encouraging both farmers and community members to use sustainable transportation alternatives which considerably contributes to reduced carbon emissions. Lee (2022) writes that “80% of visitors are more likely to walk to a farmers’ market versus traveling far to visit one by car, transit, or bike” (para. 6). Roman (2022) also notes that one of the advantages of shopping locally is that it helps in reducing carbon emissions since small businesses or local producers are suitably located thus “residents can walk or ride their bikes to the store, saving on gas” (para. 3). This statement is further echoed by Vancouver’s Best Places website which notes that VFM’s “Main Street Station Farmers Market is one of the most convenient markets with respect to public transit” (Vancouver’s Best Places, 2023a, para. 10). and that the False Creek Market can be reached through taking a leisurely walk or cycle when in the City of Vancouver (Vancouver’s Best Places, 2023b, 2023, para. 6). In essence, both Lee and Roman acknowledges that carbon footprints can be reduced through the promotion of local economy that provides goods and services to the local community. In this regard, VFM is able to further contribute to the reduction , because VFM markets are geographically located in areas where they are easily accessible to the local populace. The ease of accessibility thus encourages most consumers to use sustainable means of transportation such as bikes, walking, or public means. By using these alternative means of transportation, the amount of fossil fuel usage is considerably lowered which translates into lowered levels of carbon footprints. Thus, VFM helps to alleviate both traffic congestion and

environmental pollution due to carbon emissions leading to a cleaner and healthier environment within the Vancouver region.

#### **4.4 VFM as Provider of Education Channels for Local Food and Community**

Vancouver Farmers Market has evolved over the years to become one of the lively educational platforms that connects farmers, consumers, and the local populace within the Vancouver region. VFM has transcended from just being a marketplace for local producers and artisans but also being a hub for educational programs that benefit relevant stakeholders.

##### ***4.4.1 Educational Space for Promoting Local Food***

One of the pivotal roles that VFM plays is providing local farmers and producers with a direct avenue for the sale of their products. This direct connection between consumers and producers in the marketplace allows for face-to-face interactions between both parties as Lee remarks that “If you’ve got the time, part of the market experience is getting to talk to somebody who is making their product and seeing if you can get a taste” (2022, para. 11). What this means is that, apart from the farmers having the space to sell their products, they also get the opportunity to educate their consumers about their products and the benefits of consuming locally produced goods which are the main commodities offered at VFM market places. The face-to-face interaction between producers and consumers fosters a sense of trust and transparency. Thus, both parties benefit in that while the producers and farmers get to promote their commodities to consumers, consumers themselves get to acquire relevant and crucial knowledge concerning the products on offer henceforth having the capacity to make informed decisions about their purchases.

On top of the above-mentioned point, VFM is also a space for cultural exchange within the Vancouver community where vendors showcase the local food culture. VFM is an avenue through which the diversity of local foods is showcased, for instance through programs such as Local Food Global Flavours that “[celebrates] the diversity of local foods available from our growers at the [VFM markets]” (Local Food Global Flavours, 2023, para. 1). VFM markets are comprised of a diverse array of farmers, artisans, food preparers, fishers among other vendors (“Become a Vendor”, 2023, para.1). Groups like food preparers get to share the culinary traditions and heritage of the Vancouver region. As earlier mentioned, about 80% of visitors who come to the VFM markets are bound to make a return visit; what this implies is that the vendors get the perfect space to introduce a variety of cuisines and ingredients to the visitors which helps in fostering cultural understanding and appreciation which consequently creates a sense of togetherness among community members. Moreover, VFM through its Local Food Global Flavours offers visitors various educational YouTube videos that teach them how to “source, store, prepare and cook crops that are new” and also there are cooking events that allow visitors to learn and improve their culinary skills on local produce by learning from local chefs (Local Food Global Flavours, 2023, para. 1). This exchange of information and cooking skills enhances a deeper understanding and connection among community members which subsequently helps in promoting local food traditions.

##### ***4.4.2 Provision of Engaging Education Channels***

The services that VFM offers both producers and consumers include cooking techniques, food preservation, and sustainable farming practices among others. These services are aimed at equipping the relevant stakeholder with adequate information and knowledge so that they can make informed choices. Some of the ways through which VFM manages to offer such educational services is through various workshops and demonstration programs. For instance, the Local Food Global Flavours program involves an activity where participants get to participate in a contest on how to cook local food and win a market shopping voucher (Local Food Global Flavours, 2023, para. 1). Also, the program is tailored so that there are educational videos for participants and other community members to learn local food recipes. Therefore, VFM empowers participants by providing them with not only shopping and cooking knowledge, but also with insights on their food consumption choices.

Additionally, through its partnerships with local organizations, community groups, and local learning institutions, VFM expands its educational breadth. These partnerships provide awareness of food literacy, environmental conservation, preservation, and community development among other roles. For instance, VFM partners with ElectroRecycle which is a program that allows marketgoers to bring their small broken, old, or unwanted electronic appliances for free disposal (ElectroRecycle, 2023). This partnership program not only brings awareness to the marketgoers but welcomes them to navigate their website to learn more about the recycling of small tools and electronic appliances. This means that marketgoers get equipped with the necessary information and knowledge on how to dispose of their electronic waste in an environmentally friendly way. Thus, apart from offering both consumers and producers an opportunity to interact in terms of their products, VFM has created a space to educate the local community on how to dispose of their electronic waste responsibly through the ElectroRecycle partnership. This is one among many partnerships that VFM has formed to enhance educational empowerment within the Vancouver region.

#### **4.5 VFM as a Quality and Reliable Physical Location for Local Producers and Food Manufacturers**

There is an increased demand for locally sourced and produced food in the past few years. Jain and Babayan (2023) write that “according to Business Development Bank of Canada, 97% of Canadians would prefer buying local to support the economy, while 87% believe it is better for the environment” (par. 15). Additionally, consumers from BC are inclined to prefer locally produced goods. According to the BC Agrifood and Seafood Domestic Study, “more than 60% of [BC] people are buying local products at specialty stores and farmers’ markets” (BC Gov News, 2018, par. 4). In essence BC consumers tend to look for local products that enhance environmental sustainability. In this regard, VFM has been a major player in meeting the demand for local BC products. For example, in a recent VFM survey of 163 consumers from BC, 96.9% of them responded that they consider shopping at VFM markets to support BC’s local economy (VFM Shopper Survey, 2022, p. 9). VFM markets have been a cornerstone in providing local producers with quality and reliable spaces for meeting these consumer demands and preferences.

##### ***4.5.1 Direct Market Access for Local Producers***

One-on-one connection with consumers through direct market access is a good way to enhance trust between consumers and producers and consequently encourage loyalty and repeat sales. VFM is an avenue that offers producers a space for direct contact with consumers by eliminating the need for intermediaries such as wholesalers and retailers. VFM markets act as spaces where both vendors and shoppers directly and actively engage with one another without any middlemen (VFM Vendor Experience Survey, 2022, p. 4). Furthermore, in the Vendor Experience Survey, which included 63 vendors, 42.9% referred to VFM as their primary sales channel, with 3.2% indicating that this market is their only sales channel with a further 50.8% of the vendors confirming VFM as one of their primary sales avenues (2022, p. 2). From these data, it is apparent that VFM provides an interactive space for vendors and consumers directly. This direct interaction allows producers to educate consumers on their offerings with regard to their farming practices and production processes. For example, local farmers can explain their organic farming methods, the absence of synthetic pesticides as well as the use of natural resources in the production. Thus, consumers gain more confidence in the goods they consume thereby enhancing trust among consumers and contributing to repeat sales.

#### ***4.5.2 A Space for Supporting Local Farmers Economically***

Aside from being an avenue where consumers and producers interact, VFM's primary function is being a sales avenue for producers. VFM acts as a platform where small-scale farmers showcase their products to consumers. The small-scale nature of these farms is seen by the fact that most of the vendors own family farms. For instance in a 2023 survey of the VFM vendors, approximately 88.9% said their firms are family-owned (Vendor Application Question, 2023, p. 3). Family farms typically lack the financial muscle of large-scale commercial farm who have access to traditional distribution channels. VFM helps small-scale farmers to solve the problem of access to traditional distribution channels by offering affordable entry fees into the markets which as previously stated, helps producers to showcase and sell their produce. The VFM market fees range from \$50 to \$125 per day depending on the market location and the stall size requested. Additionally, there are annual membership and application fees (Vancouver Farmers Market, 2023a). In essence, VFM provides a reliable space for vendors to interact directly with their consumers since VFM markets are operational throughout the year. Moreover, since the markets provide a reliable place for small-scale vendors to earn decent incomes, it means that the vendors are offered value for their registration fees.

The value proposition offered by VFM to vendors is evident by the importance vendors attach to the market. In a survey of 200 vendors in different categories, about 50% view VFM as an ideal market to introduce their product. In the expanding distribution category, 55.9% of the vendors agree that VFM is a very important component in the distribution mechanism while 33.5% say it is moderately important; In the hiring or training of new staff, about 33.9% of the vendors surveyed portrayed VFM as very important, while a further 37.8% affirmed it as moderately important (Vendor Application Questions, 2023, p. 24). In a nutshell, VFM offers vendors a quality and reliable space for showcasing and selling their products.

#### ***4.5.3 Quality Control and Transparency***

Vancouver Farmers Market only allows for the inclusion of high-quality products in their markets. VFM carries out an assessment of the production standards of their vendors. This is done through strict application guidelines that require vendors to meet high standards both in terms of quality and transparency in the production process (Vancouver Farmers Market, 2023a). The implication of imposing high standards is that farmers are committed to locally sourced ingredients as well as supporting fair trade practices among the vendors in addition to stringent food regulations.

Food makers can show certificates or labels demonstrating their use of organic, non-GMO, or sustainable production methods as required by VFM (Vendor Application Questions, 2023, p. 4). This transparency fosters customer trust since consumers typically value knowing the origin and production processes of the food they consume. It also allows food makers to educate consumers on the importance of ethical sourcing and production.

#### **4.6 VFM as a Facilitator of Access to Local Produce for Vulnerable and Low-Income Consumers Through Coupon Programs**

The health of a community hugely relies on the ease of access to locally grown produce regardless of an individual's socioeconomic bearing. The gap between vulnerable and low-income consumers, and freshly nutritious food is an important aspect of a healthy community. VFM helps to bridge this gap. Among several programs initiated by VFM, the coupon program is a standout initiative that aims to provide the local community's vulnerable population access to local produce.

##### ***4.6.1 Overview of BC association coupon programs***

The coupon program offers low-income and vulnerable community members an opportunity to extend their purchasing power through a dollar-to-dollar match (Community Food Security Resources, 2021, p. 3). In this sense, the local community can access fresh produce that is locally made. The coupon program is a partnership program that involves VFM with other community organizations, local firms, and government agencies. The coupon program is designed to solve the problem of food access experienced by at-risk individuals together with low-income community members by trying to balance the opportunities for access to fresh produce through collaborative efforts like the "Vancouver Farmers Markets Fresh to Families Fund is an expansion project of the BC" (2021, p. 3).

##### ***4.6.2 Farmers Market Nutrition Coupon Program***

Through partnership programs, VFM offers low-income and vulnerable community members with direct access to fresh produce. Some individuals and community members may lack access to nutritious foods due to their social or economic status. For instance, new immigrants and refugees who are poor economically are eligible for such programs as the Vancouver Farmers Markets' Fresh to Families Fund (Community Food Security Resources, 2021, p. 3). These groups may otherwise struggle to access fresh and healthy food products without the help of such programs.

Vancouver Farmers Market makes it possible for the vulnerable within society to afford fresh and local produce in a myriad of ways. Firstly, the programs stretch the purchasing power of vulnerable individuals by providing them with extra disposable incomes in terms of vouchers. According to Vancity Community Foundation (2023), low-income community members are often awarded coupons that they can use “to purchase fresh produce, meat, eggs, nuts, and dairy direct from vendors at any farmers market in BC - supporting the livelihoods of small-scale producers and helping family farms stay farming across the province” (par. 3). What this implies is that, for an individual or a family who could only spend \$50 initially, upon receiving the coupon, they can get more in the product in dollar terms, that is they are able to get products whose total dollar value would be greater than the initial \$50. Thus, these families attain greater food security as the coupons enable them to afford a diverse range of fresh produce and food products. With improved purchasing power, they can shop for various ingredients, maintaining a healthy diet and ensuring access to nutritious options.

In addition to allowing direct access to fresh produce, the coupon program acts as a cornerstone of inclusivity within the Vancouver community. VFM accepts a wide array of vouchers to the vulnerable and low-income members within the Vancouver and BC region by extension. For instance, VFM accepts Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) and Women, Infants, and Children vouchers (Fresh to Families, 2023). Additionally, partnership programs with other organizations like Vancity Community Foundation are essential for the low-income and vulnerable people within Vancouver to access fresh food. Vancouver Farmers Market (VFM) and its partners have implemented a wide range of payment methods, which enhances accessibility to food for all individuals attending the market. By offering various payment options, such as cash, credit/debit cards, and Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT), the VFM ensures that people can purchase food regardless of their preferred payment method or financial situation.

Moreover, the availability of diverse payment methods helps reduce the stigma associated with using certain forms of payment. By allowing individuals to use their preferred payment method, the VFM creates an inclusive environment where people do not feel singled out or excluded based on their financial circumstances. This approach fosters a sense of belonging and equality among all market attendees, regardless of their socio-economic status.

#### ***4.6.3 The Impact of BC Association Coupon Programs***

BCAFM Nutrition Coupon programs which administered by VFM have a positive influence on vulnerable and low-income consumers. These efforts not only increase access to fresh, local produce but also empower individuals by encouraging healthier eating choices and participation in the local food system. Customers contribute to the resilience and sustainability of the local food industry by purchasing from local farms. Furthermore, the community-driven strategy of the market develops social relationships, eliminating social isolation and establishing a friendly environment for all clients.

Individuals and families benefit from the coupon programs by gaining access to a variety of fruits, vegetables, and other agricultural items that might otherwise be out of reach financially. This greater access to fresh food has a significant impact on dietary patterns, resulting in better health.

## **5. The VFM Alignment with City of Vancouver, Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, and Vancouver School Board.**

The Vancouver Farmers Market has become an integral component of the City of Vancouver's local economic system, social makeup, and sustainability initiatives (Vancouver Farmers Market, “Part 2: Land Use Strategy and Farmers Markets”, 2022, para 1&2). As a significant participant in the City of Vancouver operations, the VFM has formulated goals that align with those of the City of Vancouver, Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation (VBPR), and Vancouver School Board (VSB). This section will explore the synergy between the Vancouver Farmers Market and these governing bodies, highlighting their shared vision for the community by promoting local agriculture and food security, promoting environmental stewardship, and enhancing community engagement and education.

### ***5.1 Promoting Local Agriculture and Food Security***

One of the ways in which the VFM aligns with the City of Vancouver and Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation's goals is through its commitment to promoting and supporting the production of local foods within Vancouver. By supporting local agriculture within the city, the VFM ensures local food security which is one of the goals of VBPR. VBPR had set a Local Food System Action Plan (LFAP) in 2021, which is a “four goals and 38 actions outline steps to move towards a just, sustainable, and decolonized local food system by making space for Indigenous food sovereignty, increasing equitable access to food assets and services” (VBPR, 2021, p. 1). The LFAP program is meant to address several issues including the issue of food security within the City of Vancouver by promoting and supporting the local food system (2021, p. 2). In line with this goal, the VFM has been one of the champions of the local food system by encouraging the production of local foods in addition to providing local farmers with a platform to earn an income through the sale of their products (VFM, 2023a). Thus, by supporting the local farmers and producers of local goods, the VFM has enhanced the local food system within Vancouver which is in line with the LFAP goals.

### ***5.2 Supporting Environmental Sustainability***

Through the LFAP program, VBPR aims to achieve environmental sustainability. The General Manager of the VBPR asserts in the 2021 report that the LFAP program is tailored to meet the goals of sustainability, specifically, “[to work] towards food system resiliency as part of climate action” within the City of Vancouver (VBPR, 2021, p. 1). VBPR has identified that over-reliance on the global industrial food system has been a major cause of concern to the growing climate emergency the industrial food system we depend on is both extremely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and a major contributor to climate change” (2021, p. 16). What this statement implies is that VBPR is looking for ways to actively promote production processes that mitigate environmental degradation. One of the ways through which environmental degradation can be mitigated is by encouraging the production of local food (Connolly et al., 2022). As previously mentioned in the roles section of this paper, carbon emission is directly linked to the mileage the food products have to be transported before they reach the final destination (Link & Ling, 2007). From this perspective, the VFM plays a major role in curtailing climate change in Vancouver by

promoting the production of fresh produce which in turn limits the amount of imports into Vancouver (VFM, 2023a). The promotion of local produce within Vancouver ultimately reduces transportation distances, which essentially reduces the amount of carbon emission and supports one of the goals set out by the LFAP program run by the VBPR.

### ***5.3 Enhancing Community Engagement and Education***

One of the goals of both the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation and the City and the Vancouver School Board is to enhance community engagement and education. VBPR includes a focus on providing spaces where the residents of Vancouver can socially interact and foster positive relationships among community members (VanPlay Inventories, 2023). The Parks system within the City of Vancouver is established in order to provide community members with a wide range of experiences. For instance, the VanPlay program in Vancouver was initiated to enable “conversations on the VanPlay tour centered on the need to strike a good balance of spaces for quiet relaxation, with space for gatherings, events and celebrations, public art, performances, farmers markets, food trucks, and more active pursuits” (VanPlay Inventories, 2023, p. 11). This implies that the VBPR has the intention of bringing the community members together through a myriad of activities within the designated park spaces. In this sense, the VFM markets play a very crucial role in community members’ engagement within the Vancouver area. The VFM serves as a gathering avenue for community members where they can interact and connect during their shopping expeditions. Therefore, the VFM markets have acted as spaces where community members can actively interact with one another and exchange ideas.

Also, the VFM markets support the educational services goal of the Vancouver School Board by hosting educational events, workshops, and demonstrations on topics such as sustainable farming practices, nutrition, and cooking which are meant to promote one of the goals set apart by VSB which is to “increase knowledge, awareness, appreciation of, and respect for Indigenous histories, traditions, cultures, and contributions” (Vancouver School Board, 2023, Goal 3). In accordance with this goal, the VFM markets offer community members, both children and adults, an opportunity to learn about things like cultural culinary skills, and traditional foods. For instance, The VFM provides educational YouTube videos under the program called "Local Food Global Flavours," which aim to share information about sourcing, storing, preparing, and cooking unfamiliar crops. These videos offer guidance on exploring new food options. Additionally, the VFM organizes cooking events where visitors can enhance their culinary skills by learning from local chefs, specifically focusing on using local produce. These events provide an opportunity for visitors to engage with the chefs and gain hands-on experience in cooking with locally sourced ingredients (Local Food Global Flavours, 2023, para. 1).

### ***5.4 Equitable Access to Public Spaces and Eliminating Discrimination***

One of the mandates of the City of Vancouver Parks and Recreation Board is to enable equitable access to public resources, particularly public spaces. In this regard, VBPR holds the expectation that any individual or organization utilizing public spaces should be ready to foster equality in the access to resources, both within and beyond those spaces. Since the VFM uses some of the public spaces that are managed by the Board, it is an expectation that they uphold high standards of integrity in terms of equitable and fair access to products within their markets in a way that



eliminates discrimination. One of the ways through which the VFM has been enabling equitable access to resources and elimination of discriminative practices is through coupon programs. Caron-Roy et al (2021) note that “inadequate income is the most important determinant of food insecurity, individuals with lower incomes have higher rates of food insecurity than those with higher incomes” (par. 1). The initiation of the British Columbia Farmers' Market Nutrition Coupon Program (FMNCP) was prompted by the existing disparities in resource accessibility, particularly regarding food. Notably, the FMNCP distributes coupons that can be utilized at all farmers' markets associated with the BC Association of Farmers' Markets, of which the VFM is a member (BC Ministry of Health, 2021).

British Columbia Farmers' Market Nutrition Coupon Program (FMNCP) offers low-income households weekly coupons valued at \$27 for them to purchase healthy foods at the farmers' markets (Caron-Roy et al, 2021, par. 7). This program aims to equitable access to farmers markets by improving the purchasing power of the low-income household. Since the VFM is a member of FMNCP, this implies that it aligns with the mandate of the City Board through its participation in the coupon program.

## **6. Farmers Markets in Other Jurisdictions and the Support They Receive**

As mentioned in the previous sections, farmers markets play a pivotal role in enhancing food security within a given region. In essence, even though farmers markets provide a sustainable local food system and are a pillar of the local economy, the Vancouver Farmers Market (VFM) has not yet been recognized as an official partner and does not receive much support from any level of government, federal, provincial, or municipal. This is in contrast with farmers markets in other jurisdictions, both within and without Canada, which are successful due in part to government support. This section explores the support farmers markets in other jurisdictions receive from the government as illustrative cases for what might be possible for VFM.

### ***6.1 Farmers Markets in Alberta, CA***

Farmers markets in Alberta receive tremendous support from the provincial administration. One of the key pointers to the support that the farmers markets in Alberta receive is evident by the sheer number of farmers' markets that are in this region. According to Loney and Stucken (2021), there were around 140 approved farmers' markets within Alberta. These markets have been supported through various policy systems that provide them with favourable working environments within the province. These authors assert that the Alberta Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry formulates and revises guidelines that allow for a conducive working environment (2021). Moreover, the Alberta government has provided technological support to farmers markets within the province.

One way the Alberta government provides support to farmers markets is by providing the necessary information to the market authorities and users. The Alberta government, through a program named Alberta Approved Farmers' Market Program, avails necessary information to the market managers and vendors so that they are “successful in their roles and keep your [customer] visit safe” (Alberta Approved, 2023, par. 1). This implies that the Alberta government recognizes that the success of the farmers market relies hugely on the market managers and the vendors.

Therefore, by offering them the necessary information they require, these parties can make informed decisions on how to operate the market or the businesses effectively. This information can range from the guidelines on market operations and the product quality and the requirements within such markets (Loney & Stucken, 2021). For instance, the Alberta Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, in 2021 published “New Guidelines” through the Alberta Approved Farmers’ Market Program Guidelines stipulating the new requirement for farmers and vendors in the 140 approved markets in Alberta; these changes were aimed at “[reducing] red tape, [promoting] Alberta businesses . . .” (2021, par. 1). By providing vendors and market managers with this valuable information, the government improves their chances of making informed decisions and thus running successful businesses within the farmers market setting.

Moreover, these guidelines provided to the vendors and market managers ensure that they create a safe space for visitors and shoppers who spend a considerable amount on their trips: “shoppers spend an average of \$70 per farmers' market visit” (Alberta Approved, 2023, para. 2). These guidelines that ensure consumer safety include information on food safety practices that are encapsulated within the Food Regulation Guidelines, Alberta Food Retail, and Foodservices Code, and the Starting an Alberta Approved Farmers’ Market Guidelines (Loney & Stucken, 2021, para. 2). By ensuring that market managers and vendors adhere to these guidelines, the program helps minimize potential risks, promotes a safe experience for visitors at the farmers market and encourages the visitors to come for repeat purchases.

As stated earlier, the Alberta government ensures favourable guidelines for the farmers' markets in the region. For instance:

Approved farmers' markets meet minimum standards set out by the government, one of which is to provide preferential access to Alberta entrepreneurs through the ‘80/20 Rule’ where a minimum of 80% of the products must be produced in Alberta by the vendor (Farm.Com, 2023, para. 2).

However, to show further support for Alberta farmers markets, the government loosened the requirements for new farmers markets that are granted conditional approval up to a maximum of two years even if they do not meet the 80/20 rule (Loney & Stucken, 2021, para. 2). There are additional guidelines that are aimed at supporting the farmers markets. For example, the Alberta farmers markets are now allowed to operate for a minimum of five days as opposed to the previously required ten days. In essence, the Alberta government has formulated and amended its regulations and guidelines to provide support to farmers markets.

Of note also is the technological support that the Alberta government offers to farmers markets in the region. The Alberta government launched an app in 2016 that helps Albertans to find farmers markets and fresh produce within the area. Ellwand (2016) writes that “a government smartphone application that cost \$40,000 to develop will help Albertans find farmers markets and fresh produce in their area with the tap of a finger, and give the flourishing industry a boost” (para. 1). This implies that the Alberta government has taken the initiative of investing in technology that helps the farmers markets to be easily located by the Albertans who are interested in these markets. This kind of technological support is important, especially in the modern era. In essence, some technology is very expensive to develop, but since the Alberta government took the initiative to provide the app, this boosts the farmers markets in the region. It

is not only in Alberta that the government provides support to farmers markets but also across the borders of Canada like in the USA and Europe.

On the other side, while the BC provincial government has done a commendable job during and post-Covid-19 in ensuring that BC farmers are abreast of the online platforms, more needs to be done. The BC government should be proactive in initiating technological programs that benefit BC farmers. For instance, it took until post-Covid-19 for the BC government to help BC farmers to develop the “BC Farmers Markets Online” where vendors who are members of the BC Association of Farmer’s Markets could sell their products through online store (BC Farmers, 2023a). This is slow adoption of technology compared to Alberta farmers who were being empowered by the provincial government through the online app as early as 2016.

However, the BC government through the BC FOODSAFE Secretariat in partnership with the BC Association of Farmers’ Markets created the MarketSafe program which stipulates guidelines for BC producers who want to be part of the BC farmers markets (BC Farmers, 2023b). This program has provided information for farmers on how to maintain food safety which in essence aid towards ensuring consumer safer and ultimately consumer confidence. On this front, the BC government should be lauded and urged to consider additional programs that empower BC farmers. In this regard, the City of Vancouver can develop mini-guidelines that further empower VFM. In general, the City of Vancouver should provide favorable policies for farmers' markets within its region to ensure their growth and expansion.

## ***6.2 Government Support for Portland Farmers Market in Portland, US***

Even though Portland Farmers Market does not receive any city, federal, or state funding (Portland Farmers Market, 2023), the market obtains support of various kinds from the relevant authorities in both the public and private domains. Portland Farmers Market is a not-for-profit organization that is governed by a board of directors in a voluntary capacity to help with paid staff. The organization is “funded through vendor fees, the generous support of market sponsors, countless hours of volunteer time” (Portland Farmers Market, 2023). The market is comprised of five vibrant markets located within Portland to provide a direct connection to over 200 vendors who have deep roots in Oregon (2023).

While there is no direct funding, the City of Portland has been committed to supporting Portland Farmers Market by undertaking research studies that are geared toward growing and developing the markets in the region. In 2008, the City of Portland commissioned a study to examine how the capacity of farmers markets within the region could be expanded: “the study entailed looking at both local consumer demand and regional farmer/vendor supply” (Barney & Worth Inc., 2008). The study which was sponsored by the Office of Sustainable Development and Portland Development Commission focused on factors of supply and demand that would shape the future of farmers markets in the region. This meant that the study would provide important information to the market managers, City Policymakers, and other interested parties on answering the question of “where do we go from here?” (2008, p. 2). Ever since the research was conducted, Portland Farmers Market has expanded from the two original markets, which were Shemanski Park Farmers Market and Lents International Farmers Market, to a total of five markets by 2023. These markets are well established within the Portland region serving a diverse and wide range

of consumers that in aggregate total over 10,000 in any given week spread across the five different markets (Zipprich, 2023). The 2008 study initiated by the City of Portland has had a profound impact on Portland Farmers Market by improving its capacity and allowing for effective decision-making that has seen the market flourish since then. In essence, as discussed under the Alberta Farmers Market section, government authorities, in this case, the City of Portland authorities, can play an important role in providing valuable information that promotes the growth of the markets by allowing policymakers, market managers, and vendors to make informed decisions. For example, it was deemed that the demand for farmers markets is high and more markets needed to be established after research had been conducted in five peer communities: Sacramento, San Francisco Bay area, Santa Monica, Seattle, and St. Paul (MN), where the markets are well established and “enjoy significant support from their city governments and also from other public agencies” (Barney & Worth, 2008, p. 2). So, while the governments may not provide direct funding to the Portland Farmers Market, conducting market research is quite an expensive undertaking; thus, by doing it, the city government supports the local food system.

Apart from informational assistance, the City of Portland also offers technical assistance to startup markets in Portland. Barney and Worth (2008) remark that the City of Portland is inclined towards ensuring that startup businesses within the Portland region succeed by tasking the Office of Sustainable Development with this goal. Navigating the legal and regulatory aspects of operating a business in farmers' markets can be complex. The office assists startups in understanding the necessary permits, licenses, and regulations related to selling products at farmers markets (2008). In essence, the City of Portland promotes the undertakings and growth of the Portland Farmers Market by offering a helping hand to new startups within the markets. This has the cumulative impact of sustaining the already established businesses as well as raising the growth potential of the farmers market, and it is for this reason that three markets have emerged since 2008: the Kenton, Kings, and Lents international markets (Zipprich, 2023).

While Portland farmers do not benefit directly from government funding, the same government undertakes research projects that help in the expansion and growth of the farmers market in the area. BC provincial government could learn from the government of Portland by undertaking consistent projects aimed at enhancing farmers markets. For instance, programs like the BC Farmers' Markets Online, aforementioned, should be at the forefront of government policies so that BC farmers markets are empowered in producing and selling their products just like in the case of the Alberta government which offered to develop the smartphone applications that help Albertans find their preferred farmers markets and vendors online.

### ***6.3 European Union Urban Markets (URBACT Markets)***

Moving beyond the borders of North America, another aspect of support for farmers markets is encapsulated by the URBACT. URBACT is a “European exchange and learning program promoting sustainable urban development” (Costa et al., 2015). The URBACT is a program initiated by the European Union (EU) to help urban cities to find solutions to the challenges they face in attaining sustainable development goals (2015). In line with the URBACT, the URBACT Markets is a continuation of the tradition of achieving sustainable urban food systems within the

major cities in the EU. However, URBACT Markets could not be a successful program without the backing of the EU and its member states.

One of the challenges that the URBACT helps to resolve within the urban markets is the lack of proper investment in market structure or renovation. According to Costa et al (2015) “In some cities there is a lack of investment in market infrastructure or market renovation” (p.19) which might emanate from a lack of commitment from policymakers and politicians to improve market infrastructure and could be due to misunderstandings of the benefits of markets because of insufficient data to support market usefulness (2015). Therefore, the URBACT bridges this knowledge gap by providing the necessary data to policy-makers and politicians so that they can make informed decisions geared toward supporting urban markets. Costa et al note that urban markets cannot be successful without commitment and support from the political class and the decision-makers (2015). Thus to help urban markets to develop and grow, the EU through the URBACT, provides the information that supports the benefits of these markets which ultimately leads to improved infrastructural backing from respective authorities. They further assert that the role of municipalities and public bodies is key to the success of markets and cannot be neglected (2015, p. 23). This statement implies that the EU has been playing the negotiator role as well as the information provider role to catalyze the growth of the urban markets.

Another important aspect of successful urban markets is the skills and knowledge of the market vendors. Costa et al (2015) note that market traders always underline the lack of training on how to operate and manage businesses (p.36). This means that most traders fail in their undertaking in the farmers' market due to a lack of managerial skills. Thus, by providing avenues and means through which traders can acquire training, the URBACT promotes the growth and development of the urban markets. For instance, the Barcelona City market traders are provided with “a training program in business management and technology capacity training” which include several business units like “Marketing tools 2.0, How to use Facebook from a business perspective, learn how to create and manage a blog or website” (2015, p. 36). These programs are offered free of charge and they help to equip the traders thereby enhancing the rate of success in the Barcelona markets. In essence, Costa et al. underscore the importance of government support for the success of urban markets.

One prominent feature of the Urban Markets, plus the other markets discussed earlier, that is Alberta Farmers Markets and Portland Farmers Market, is the fact that they are in stable physical locations with considerable infrastructure. One of the main challenges faced by BC farmers markets and in particular VFM is the need to get special events permits on a yearly basis. This has hampered their growth since the markets can be canceled any time midseason in addition to the limited infrastructure that leaves customers with inadequate experience. For instance, VFM notes that “Our organization regularly advocates for long-term, accessible spaces with improved access to water, washrooms, bike racks, vendor parking, power, and cover but with limited results” (Market News, 2022, par. 7).

#### ***6.4 Summary of the Importance of the Support System to the Farmers Markets***

While farmers markets might be different in terms of their geographical location, cultural makeup, and their customer composition, they all can benefit from some form of support from

either the public or the private sectors so that they can grow, develop and remain stable. The following table compares the aforementioned farmers markets in terms of their characteristics.

### Government Support and Market Development Strategies in Farmers Markets: A Comparative Analysis

Characteristic	Alberta Farmers Market	URBACT Markets	Portland Farmers Market	BC Farmers Markets
<i>Government Support</i>	Receive favorable policies and guidelines	Provided with a wide network for accessing other cities' markets and support in achieving sustainability goals through infrastructure development	Uptake of market research initiatives that help in expanding and developing the markets	Provided with online marketing assistance program in terms of the BC Farmers' Markets Online
<i>Government Funding Opportunities</i>	Receive grants, tax cuts & credits, government loans	No direct funding to the farmers' markets	No direct funding to the markets	Received BC Farmers' Market Expansion Program fund of up to \$475000 and \$15000 for each applicant
<i>Technical Assistance</i>	Government officials provide informational support on how to manage the markets effectively	Provided with business managerial training opportunities like how to use Facebook for business	City authorities provide support on how to run and manage startup businesses as well as legal advice	Not an effective or laid-out program to provide technical know-how to farmers' markets
<i>Market Access Support, Licensing, and Regulations</i>	Alberta farmers are given preferential treatment in terms of registration and licensing	EU enables a network of access to the city markets by advocating for upscale infrastructure among the URBACT markets	City authorities conduct market research for the markets in Portland	No current or formers market research to aid in farmers' market expansion
<i>Number of markets</i>	140 approved farmers' markets	Urban markets from 13 cities in different countries across Europe	5 markets within Portland	145 BC Association Farmers' Markets
<i>Locations</i>	Have guaranteed crowd and location (there are a certain number of shoppers/visitors in the markets since they have a stable/fixed location.)	Comprises of stable markets located within the cities for instance the City of Barcelona Institut Municipal de Mercats de Barcelona	Have five stable locations that include Portland State University Market, King Market, Shemanski Park, Kenton	Of particular interest is the VFM which has no stable location

Characteristic	Alberta Farmers Market	URBACT Markets	Portland Farmers Market	BC Farmers Markets
			Market, and Lents International	

*Note: Information is from the sources cited in this section and listed in the reference section*

Drawing from the above discussion, it is apparent that government support is essential for the growth and development of farmers' markets in most jurisdictions. Starting with Alberta, the provincial government has played a pivotal role in the success of the farmers' market by providing a conducive environment through favourable farmers market policies. Similarly, Portland and Urban Markets receive government support in terms of infrastructure development and research initiatives. Therefore, BC farmers markets do need considerable government support to be successful like these other markets. For instance, the BC government should consider the 80/20 rule and uptake of research initiatives to help the markets expand and grow. On a more specific level, the City of Vancouver should empower VFM by providing them with permanent locations that will help to alleviate the problem of market cancellations among other issues like lack of investment in opportunities due to uncertainties with locations. In general, comparing the market to VFM, BC, and the City of Vancouver needs to adopt some of the best practices outlined in the examples above.

## **7. Challenges Encountered by Vancouver Farmers Market**

One of the major challenges facing the City of Vancouver is food insecurity. To begin with, food insecurity within the large BC province is a cause of concern according to a recent report by the BC Centre for Disease Control. According to the Food Costing in BC report 2022, the “cost and affordability of healthy eating remains a serious challenge for many people” (Vancouver Neighborhood Food Networks, 2023, par. 1). Specifically, the average monthly cost of obtaining a nutritious food basket for a family of four within the BC region ranges from \$1100- 1400, with Vancouver region registering the second highest figures at \$1311 among the 6 regions surveyed (BC Centre for Disease Control, 2023). As previously discussed within this paper, VFM has been at the forefront in trying to alleviate the issue of food insecurity within the Vancouver region by boosting the local food system. However, VFM faces significant challenges towards its goals of providing a sustainable local food system. Moreover, there are several other critical issues to consider. These challenges encompass everything from acquiring Special Events Permits to addressing the lack of proper infrastructure, and even the disregard of VFM as a potential avenue to tackle equity and resilience issues in Vancouver's food system. In the following sections, we will delve into these relevant topics and provide recommendations to help VFM achieve its vision of establishing a sustainable local food system.

### ***7.1 Acquisition of Special Events Permits***

One of the main challenges that face VFM at the municipal level is the need for acquiring special events permit every year for each of the nine markets it operates. Despite being in operation for over 25 years, VFM is still required, just like any other markets within the City of Vancouver, to

obtain a special event permit which is issued on a market season year basis (Market News, 2022). This situation of permit acquisition is exacerbated further by the fact that the spaces available for the vendors are “underserved” (2022, par. 7). This point will be discussed in a subsequent section. The requirement to obtain yearly special events permits is a rigorous process that is both time consuming and also expense burdening. The processes of getting approval for the markets is time consuming since it requires “streamlin[ing] [of] the application process to various departments in conjunction with the Farmers’ Market Development Checklist” (City of Vancouver, 2015, p. 2). This means that despite the fact that VFM markets have been in operation for over 25 years, they are still required to submit application documents yearly for the sites they are using. The application procedure is bureaucratic and challenging.

Additionally, since VFM operates in temporary spaces, they are required to:

Submit a site management plan during the application phase that: a. Identifies location of way-finding signs and barricades for public safety prior to opening dates. Farmers market operators may be required to hire traffic control professional (private service or traffic authority) to direct traffic (City of Vancouver, 2015, p. 2)

From the statement above, the yearly application processes are a costly undertaking since it involves additional operational expenses for the city authorities to approve the operation of any one of the nine VFM markets. In essence, therefore, the processes of obtaining special events permit for the VFM has been a costly procedure both in terms of finances and time.

### ***7.2 Lack of Proper Infrastructure***

Another challenge that VFM faces is the lack of proper infrastructure in the public spaces provided by the city authorities. While the capacity of the VFM markets have been burgeoning, the amenities available to both the vendors and the shoppers at these markets have been limited. This statement is supported by the VFM 2022 Annual Report which states that “In 2022 our markets served nearly 500,000 customers . . . an increase of almost 12% over 2021 as we emerged from the global COVID-19 pandemic” (VFM Annual Report, 2023, p. 7). VFM further illuminates the problem of limited infrastructure by asserting that “Our organization regularly advocates for long-term, accessible spaces with improved access to water, washrooms, bike racks, vendor parking, power and cover but with limited results” (Market News, 2022, par. 7). As mentioned in previous discussions, Vancouver Farmers Market operates in various locations throughout the city, nine markets exactly, often utilizing public spaces like parks and streets. This decentralized approach leads to limited infrastructure such as storage facilities, restrooms, and seating areas. The absence of adequate infrastructure can create inconvenience for both vendors and visitors, hindering the overall market experience. The fact that the VFM markets experience limited infrastructure in most of its markets has the potential to limit its growth capacity since most shoppers would not want to return to a market where they had a negative experience. Additionally, the lack of enough spaces for the vendors is a limiting factor in the growth of the VFM. In their website, VFM attests that there is lack of spaces for the vendors as the acceptance processes is majorly based on space availability among other factors (Vendor Acceptance Information, 2023). Thus, limited infrastructure is another major problem for VFM.

### ***7.3 Disregard of VFM as a Potential Avenue to Address Equity and Resilience in Vancouver Food System***



In the City of Vancouver, VFM markets are not fully recognized or appreciated for their potential to promote fairness and strength in the food system (Market News, 2022). Farmers markets are events where local farmers and producers come together to sell their fresh produce and products directly to the community. They play an important role in connecting the people who grow the food with the people who buy it. This helps create a fair environment and economic opportunities for small businesses (2022). However, the City's current discussions about farmers markets only focus on the idea that they are too expensive and not easily accessible for regular grocery shopping by residents (Market News, 2022; Final Community Project Report, 2015). This narrow perspective overlooks the other positive aspects of farmers markets, such as their community-oriented approach and their ability to support local businesses. In essence, the city authorities have not provided VFM markets the attention they deserve, given the significant role VFM plays in the local food security system.

## **8. Recommendations for Addressing the Challenges Facing Vancouver Farmers Market:**

- The City of Vancouver, like the Province, should legally recognize farmers markets as essential services. This acknowledgement should be followed by their inclusion in the City's Community Infrastructure plans. Farmers markets are more than just venues to buy and sell items; they are crucial neighborhood amenities that should be held in areas that are secure, friendly, and widely accessible.
- The input of market vendors and shoppers should be solicited to better integrate the goals of major policies with farmers markets. The Vancouver Plan's implementation should be structured to encourage increased equity, resilience, and reconciliation through farmers markets. Initiatives to ensure fair representation and inclusion of various vendors, products, and communities at markets could fall under this category.
- The City of Vancouver should explore enacting minor regulation reforms to alleviate the difficulties of time, expense, and instability encountered by farmers markets. Furthermore, creating permanent spaces for farmers markets in parks or on city grounds might substantially increase their stability and avoid the uncertainty of being cancelled or relocated by the city or parks in the middle of the season. Farmers markets may better plan and invest in their operations by securing stable premises, resulting in a more reliable and sustainable presence in the community.

Incorporating these recommendations can support and strengthen the role of farmers markets in Vancouver's food system, resulting in more fairness, resilience, and economic prospects for small enterprises while also assuring citizens' access to fresh and locally produced food.

## **9. Conclusion**

In conclusion, farmers markets play a critical role in promoting sustainable local food systems and enhancing food security. The Vancouver Farmers Market (VFM) stands as a key player within the local food system, providing a direct connection between producers and consumers.

However, the market faces challenges, including the lack of stable locations, limited government support, and inadequate infrastructure.

To ensure the sustainability of VFM and strengthen its contribution to the local economy, it is crucial for the BC provincial government and the City of Vancouver to provide substantial support. Lessons can be learned from successful models in other regions, such as Alberta, Portland, and the European Union (EU), where government support has significantly contributed to the growth and success of farmers markets.

By implementing policies that offer stable locations, regulatory support, and financial assistance, the BC government and the City of Vancouver can empower VFM to flourish. Such support can help VFM attract more vendors, improve infrastructure, and provide a better shopping experience for consumers. Ultimately, a thriving Vancouver Farmers Market will contribute not only to the local economy but also to the broader goals of food security and sustainability within Vancouver.

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