Research Stimulus Fund

Final Report

Effective Structures for Farmers’ Markets in Ireland

DAFF Project Ref No: RSF 06 323
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End date: 28th February 2010

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Other Principle Collaborating Researchers: Dr. Robert Briscoe, Dr. Mary O’Shaughnessy, Prof. Michael Ward

Please tick below the appropriate area on the research continuum where you feel this project fits

BASIC/FUNDAMENTAL  APPLIED/PRE COMMERCIAL

x

Key words: Farmers’ markets; organisational structures.
1. **Rationale for Undertaking the Research**

There is a growing body of research available on farmers’ markets in general, much of it concerned with exploring the overall experience of participation for farmers and small producers. Although there is also a substantial body of work available on how markets should be run in terms of rules governing market size, types of produce, etc. there is little on the more substantive issue of who ‘owns’ and runs the market and actually sets these rules and regulations. Relatively little attention has been paid in the literature to the important issue of the ownership and governance of farmers’ markets and in seeking to identify the most effective structure(s) for farmers’ markets (in Ireland), this research broke new ground.

At the time the research began, farmers’ markets in Ireland had developed very rapidly, in quite an ad-hoc fashion, through a variety of arrangements and with minimal regulation, a situation which remains relatively unchanged today. The structural forms adopted were many although most could be described as either farmer/stallholder-led markets, private markets or what are classified in this research as patronage markets, i.e. those established and/or managed by benevolent third-party organisations such as local authorities, local development groups, etc. There was strong anecdotal evidence of uncertainty and in some cases, cynicism amongst existing stallholders, potential new entrants and consumers as to both how and on whose behalf many existing markets were being run and a pressing need to investigate which structure or model of organisation was most effective across a range of indicators, most sustainable in the long-term and most compatible with the core objectives of the farmers’ market model.

The overall aim of this research was to establish how farmers’ markets in Ireland can best be structured to increase the income, sustainability and market influence of small farmers and to enhance product quality. Within this broad aim, this research sought to meet five specific objectives:

1. To explore and describe the basic characteristics and ‘shape’ of the farmers’ market sector in Ireland
2. To appraise the current and potential future role of farmers’ markets in enhancing:
   - the income and sustainability of small farmers and food producers
   - small farmer and food producer influence and control in the marketplace
   - product quality
3. To examine and learn from the experience of farmers’ markets in the US and UK

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1 See, for example, Hamilton (2002) and McKelvey et al., (2009)
4. To examine the benefits and limitations of the various organisational forms/structures adopted by farmers’ markets in Ireland to date and to arrive at an optimum model
5. To explore the (current and future) role of cooperative structures and processes in maximising participant benefits from farmers’ markets

2. Research Approach
This research was carried out using the following methods:

- Detailed analysis of relevant literature and policy documents (secondary research)
- Comprehensive postal/e-mail survey of farmers’ markets. A detailed survey was developed and piloted, which sought to elicit information on:
  - The basic biography and characteristics of each farmers’ market in Ireland – history to date, size and scale, produce offered, income generated, numbers of farmers participating, anticipated growth, etc.
  - The structure, organisation and management of each farmers’ market in Ireland – the organisational forms employed, the decision-making input of farmer/producers, etc.

This was completed by 46% of farmers’ markets operating in Ireland.

- In-depth case-studies with a representative sample of 22 markets throughout the country. The purpose of the case studies was to explore in-depth – and with a range of stakeholders in each market – some of the key questions posed by this research.

- Interviews with selected key informants in the farmers’ market and artisan food sectors, support bodies, farmer organisations, etc. These organizations included An Bord Bia, Teagasc, the Irish Food Market Traders’ Association, farmers’ groups, the Irish Organic Farmers and Growers Association and Irish Country Markets Association.

- Study visits to farmers’ markets and intermediary bodies involved with farmers’ markets in both the USA and UK: A total of 15 meetings with a range of key informants – farmers’ market managers and directors, researchers and development workers in the field, staff/directors from support bodies and federations, state government staff, etc. – were carried out in both Upstate New York and the Bay Area of California. The research carried out in the UK consisted of formal interviews (and in some cases, repeated interviews) with five key informants from farmers’ market support organisations and a small number of farmers’ markets. This was complemented by attendance at a number of relevant conferences², where the more informal networking and conversation helped

develop a deeper insight into the practices and issues of different types of farmers’ markets ‘on the ground’.

3. **Research Achievements**

The research project has provided each of the following:

- A detailed and up-to-date overview of all aspects of the farmers’ market sector in Ireland

- A realistic assessment of the current and potential future role of farmers’ markets in enhancing the income and sustainability of small farmers and food producers, increasing their influence and control in the marketplace and improving product quality

- Detailed information on the structure, organisation and management of farmers’ markets in Ireland

- An assessment of the benefits and limitations of the various organisational forms/structures adopted by farmers’ markets in Ireland to date and conclusions as to the optimum model

- An assessment of the particular role of more cooperative structures and processes in maximising participant benefits from farmers’ markets

- Important insights into the experience of farmers’ markets in the US and UK

- A set of policy recommendations and guidelines for the more effective governance and management of both individual farmers’ markets and the sector overall

4. **Impact of the Research**

The research has determined the following:

1. The stallholder-led model is the optimum model of market organisation, and is the most effective now and the most sustainable in the long-term

This research also provided significant insight into the overall nature and development the farmers’ market movement. Amongst the most notable findings to emerge in this context are:
2. The cultural impact of farmers’ markets is significant, although it almost certainly exceeds their actual economic value or relevance in the context of the Irish agri-food industry:

3. Farmers’ markets clearly play a significant role in enhancing the income, market control and quality of life of the farmers and food producers who participate in them. 70% of stallholder participants in this research make more than 50% of their income from selling at markets³.

4. Notwithstanding the difficulties in securing farmer participation, existing farmer participants in this research were actually amongst the most positive about their experiences in selling at farmers’ markets. Participation has brought increased income, a sense of control and agency and of social connectivity not typically experienced in mainstream farming in recent decades. Many of the farmer participants in this research have been rejuvenated by their participation in markets and the shift in direction has contributed significantly to the economic and social sustainability of the farm enterprise.

5. Irish farmers’ markets of all types grapple with the difficulties of achieving balance between variety and integrity.

6. Perhaps the most prominent characteristic of the farmers’ market form as it has emerged in Ireland is its apparent pliability. It has evolved to accommodate a range of structural forms and geographical settings, stallholders operating at different levels and with a variety of motivations, a wide range of consumer expectations and divergent market conditions.

7. The vast majority of the research participants were optimistic both about their own future participation in markets and about the future health of the sector overall, even in the context of a general economic downturn.

There are a number of benefits and potential benefits arising from the research. Given the quite limited amount of research which has been conducted on farmers’ markets in Ireland to date, this research firstly provides a useful overview of the farmers’ markets sector, of its import (or otherwise), and of the key trends and issues shaping its development. More importantly, in its exploration of the ownership and governance structures of Irish farmers’ markets, this research addresses an important gap in the research. The insight it provides into the benefits and limitations of the various structural forms – and the conclusions it draws as to the more effective structure(s) – should contribute to enhanced practice in market organisation. Recommendations arising out of the research may be embraced at the level of existing and new markets, but should also be of significant interest to support bodies, intermediary organisations, etc. seeking to support and develop farmers’ markets. Finally, this research also draws important attention to the ongoing relevance and appeal of cooperative processes and structures in the food supply chain, and in particular in the local foods sector.

³ For the purposes of this discussion, we refer here to income from economic/trading activity alone and not to pensions or social welfare transfers or in the case of farmers, direct payments from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.
5. **Exploitation of the Research**

The outcomes of this research are likely to be seen in the medium to long term rather than in the short term as they begin to assist new and existing farmers’ markets themselves and those who provide supports to the development of farmers’ markets, including policy-makers, in determining effective operating and decision-making structures within and even among markets. This serves to highlight the importance of the on-going dissemination task that is required to bring the results of the research to the attention of those who participated in it (particularly in Ireland), those who might be considering the farmers’ market option as a route to market, and key stakeholders in the sector.

6. **Summary of Research Outputs**

(a) **Intellectual Property applications/licences/patents**

Not applicable

(b) **Innovations adopted by industry**

Not applicable

(c) **Number of companies in receipt of information**

Not applicable

(d) **Outcomes with economic potential**

Not directly applicable.

(e) **Outcomes with national/ policy/social/environmental potential**

A set of policy recommendations and guidelines for the more effective governance and management of both individual farmers’ markets and the sector overall have been drawn up.

(f) **Peer-reviewed publications, International Journal/Book chapters.**

To date:

(g) **Scientific abstracts or articles including those presented at conferences**
(h) National Report

(i) Popular non-scientific publications

(j) Workshops/seminars/ open days at which results were presented (excluding those in (g))

1. Presentation to the 2009 UCC Department of Food Business and Development & Centre for Cooperative Studies Summer School, entitled ‘The Place of the Cooperative in New Food Economies’.


3. Presentation to a seminar organised by Cavan Partnership/Breffni Development (October, 2009). The overall theme of the seminar was the role of cooperatives and social enterprises and the title of the presentation was the ‘The Role of Co-operatives in Agriculture and Food’.

4. The PhD researcher attended and participated in a one-day seminar on Making Local Food Work: Community Enterprise and the Future of Food held in Bristol in September, 2009.

5. Presentation to the International Co-operative Alliance Research Conference, September 2009. Paper title: ‘Putting the Cooperative Approach at the Centre of Local Food Economies: The Case of Farmers’ Markets in Ireland, the USA and UK’.

7. Permanent Researchers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution Name</th>
<th>Number of Permanent staff contributing to project</th>
<th>Total Time contribution (months)</th>
<th>Average time contribution per permanent staff member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UCC</td>
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<td>10.25</td>
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| Total            |                                               |                               |                                               |
8. **Researchers Funded by RSF**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Researcher</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Total Time contribution (months)</th>
<th>Average time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Contract Researchers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Masters postgraduates</td>
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<tr>
<td>Temporary researcher</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td>36</td>
<td>36</td>
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</tbody>
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9. **Postgraduate Research**

Total Number of PhD theses: __1__

Moroney, Aisling, UCC  
Effective structures for Farmers’ Markets in Ireland  
Submitted in December 2010.  
Viva voce examination successfully completed on 12th May 2011.

Total Number of Masters theses: __0__

10. **Project Expenditure**

Total expenditure of the project: €82,787.38  
Total Award by RSF: €84,125  
Other sources of funding (specify): €

1.
2.
11. Future Strategies
As indicated earlier, widespread dissemination of this research is essential to maximize its practical impact on the farmers’ market ‘industry’ in the medium to long term. It is planned that when the final research report is uploaded on to the DAFF website, a number of dissemination actions will be taken:

- Distribution of Executive Summary document to all participants in the research and to any other relevant agencies, representative bodies, etc.
- Dissemination of press release highlighting key project findings to relevant media outlets (Farmers’ Journal, Farming Independent, Organic Matters, Irish Farming Examiner etc.)

Further academic publication is also planned.

The research team are interested in conducting action research that would work on implementing the recommendations of the research with groups of producers/farmers, subject to the availability of appropriate funding. (Two members of the team have successfully applied to Teagasc for a Walsh Fellowship to explore co-operative models to increase the bargaining power of small producers and this work is about to commence with a strong action research focus.) Using the economies of scope built in this research, the research team would also like to conduct a similar detailed study of consumers at farmers’ markets, subject to funding, building on recent work by An Bord Bia in this area.
12. **Industry Collaboration**
Informal linkages with the following were established throughout the course of the research:
New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets; New York Federation of Farmers’ Markets; Cornell University; Ithaca farmers’ market; Windmill Craft and Farmer’s Market; Saratoga Springs Farmers’ Market; Centre for Co-operatives, University of California; Farmers’ Market Coalition; Davis Farmers’ market; Sacramento Farmers’ Market Pacific Coast Farmers’ Market Association; Ferry Plaza Farmers’ Market; Plunkett Foundation, FARMA (UK), Thames Valley Farmers’ Market Association, Kings Norton Farmers’ Markets, the Irish Food Market Traders’ Association, An Bord Bia, Teagasc.