



On May 30, 2019 the Maine Food Strategy and Data Innovation Project convened a discussion about food system data needs in Maine. The goal of the day was to hear from businesses, practitioners, service providers, and economic developers on what their needs are, and the best ways to address them.

There were 27 attendees ranging from farmers, value-added food businesses, non-profits, city planners, business development professional, and industry groups. The below results are a synthesis of group discussion, small group work, and individual input. This information is subjective to the participants at the event, and is meant to be understood as a way to begin conversation, focus future work, and catalyze projects and partnerships between organizations and businesses.

Included in this document: the event agenda; presentation on creating visualizations from the Data Innovation Project; materials on resources and how to better use existing data; and focusing questions templates. You can access the raw data by emailing mfs@mainefoodstrategy.org.

SYNTHESIS OF PARTICIPANT DISCUSSION ON NEEDS, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FOOD SYSTEMS MARKET DATA IN MAINE

Concerns

- Data quality: Relevance, fragmented data, customer data and accuracy –
 - Completeness, quality of responses, software
 - Needed data may not get down to the community level small producers need, like city level, so large data sets may not be helpful for small Maine farmers
- A lot of discussion on the “Maine brand” and impacts: Impact of the Maine Brand – is there a true value/impact? Does impact this go beyond state boundaries?



Morning Workshop Presentation

Constraints

- Data literacy: Business and organizations ability to navigate data and needs and make meaning; analysis
- Data capacity: Capacity of business to learn it and use it effectively, and capacity of business and those that have data to scrub it, find it, supply it, and give it to those that want it. Sometimes too much data to sift through

Thank you to the Data Innovation Project for facilitation and content, and to our generous event sponsors Maine Department of Community and Economic Development, and Maine Technology Institute.

What was learned

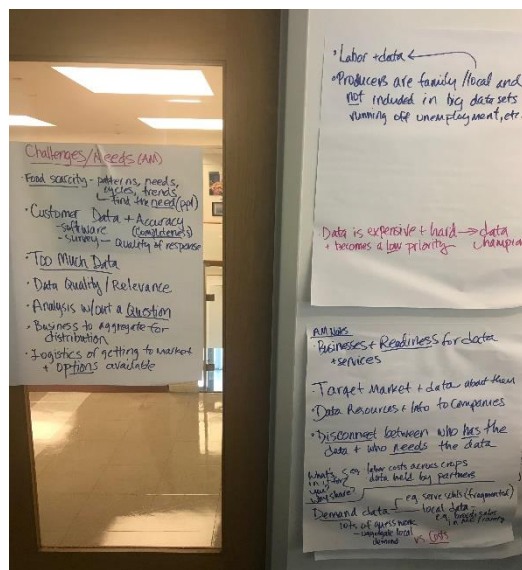
- Data needs and type differs by audience and organization
 - It is important to know the audience: Internal (organizational) vs external (stakeholders)
- There is disconnect between who have the data and who needs the data
- Data is expensive and hard, so it becomes a low priority, which can lead to inefficiencies and missed opportunities

Specific identified needs

- Understanding local demand for product
- Seasonal impact data: tourists, snow-birds, weather, etc.
- Consumer buying habits
- Economic impact of large conferences – Kneading conference, M6, others.
- More attention to pricing and labor issues

Potential Solutions to the needs and challenges

- Data education for businesses, how to access and use data
- Pooling resources: technology, equipment, distribution, paying for data collectively, commission a market study that benefits all, seek USDA grants – e.g., build a mini-Nielsen, co-operative work/cross-promotion, e.g., have others check on your products. Central entity to host consumer panels (for market research and other feedback),
- Repository of information: Inventory of who else does research to provide ideas and opportunities for collaboration, environmental scan of business data
- Retailer information on buying habits, especially close to home and local buying. The challenge is capacity for data mining. They will need incentives and engagement
- Tracking:
 - Benchmarking: Create standard industry benchmarks (or ranges) on costs of inputs, prices, mark-ups (wholesale, retail, etc.)
Depends on who you ask – producer, wholesaler, consumer WTP
 - Articulate incentives for sharing data and information (that all sides benefit)
 - Block chaining and traceability – start collecting data upstream and keep it through the supply chain to identify the source in the market and promote food safety. (Note, this needs a technology solution and people need to recognize the value since there is an associated cost)



Afternoon Needs-assessment discussion

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Who else is needed to engage with to meet these needs

- Retailers - Hannaford, Shaw’s, etc.
- Distributors – Connect through Maine Grocers and Producers Association
- Food Service – Hospitality Maine
- Farmers – Federation of Farmers Markets, Farm Credit East, MOFGA, Maine Farmland Trust, others
- Cooperative Extension

Next steps for market data needs

- Compile and share notes
- Reach out to other stakeholders to get their perspectives
- Pull farmers together in the fall to discuss their specific and unique data needs. Consider doing this at the Maine Ag Trade Show
- Develop small group/workgroups to tackle the emerging solutions
- Hold workshops on data for a specific sectors that can be more targeted and focused

Priorities

Below is a table ranking the suggested activities by Importance and Feasibility. The chart was adapted from a poster and report out from the small table discussions held by participants.

		Feasibility	
		High	Low
Importance	High	<p><i>Do it</i></p> <p>Benchmarking (3 tables agreed)</p> <p>Share existing data/promote best practices</p> <p>Research to incentivize local purchasing and investment in ME businesses (policy)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Aggregate demand-side data*</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Traceability (transparent supply chain)*</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Pricing data*</p>	<p><i>Develop It</i></p> <p>Bring together farmers to share, aggregate and pool resources</p> <p>Access general grocery data</p> <p>Farmer incentives to give pricing data</p>
	Low	<p><i>Easy to do, but less important</i></p> <p>Consumer Panel (3 tables agreed)</p> <p>Inventory of who is doing the work</p> <p>Using USDA Millennial Report</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Impact of Maine brand ● How to use consumer data they already have ● USDA grant (because they end...) ● Build a mini-Nielson ● Central entity to host consumer panels ● Repositories and directories

**Group was mixed on feasibility*

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