

Garden Column for the Salisbury Post
Darrell Blackwelder
January 31, 2008

Vendors and participants of the Salisbury-Rowan Farmers Market will be meeting Wednesday evening to plan and discuss next season's market. With the market heading into its 4th season, vendors are constantly trying to improve provide products that meet the needs of what can be fickle customers.

In an effort to improve the market, Dr. Shelia Brownlow, professor at Catawba College and market board member, developed a questionnaire to gather information that will help determine market goals and objectives for 2008. Master Gardener Volunteers interviewed a total of 43 people w at the Salisbury Rowan Country Farmers Market on July 28, 2007. A similar survey was conducted in 2006 with some similar information. Below are some of the results of the survey:

Who shops the Market? Most shoppers were women, and over half were judged to be 55+ years. This profile indicated older females were the major shoppers also in the 2006 survey.

Where does the Market shopper live? Zip code surveys demonstrated that most shoppers were from Salisbury.

When does the Market shopper visit the Market? Over half of the respondents in the 2007 survey and nearly all in the 2006 survey indicate that they visit the Market all months that it is open; a significant proportion, however, use the Market in *only* June, July, and August.

What Market items draw customers? In June-August customers come for one-three items, mostly generally corn, tomatoes, and berries); the shoppers who frequent the Market during all months were more likely to either provide an extensive list or to indicate 'all'. Thus, the summer-only shopper—about half of the shoppers—come for a specific item or items; the all-year shopper comes for more items.

Why do they go to the Market? Many respondents indicated local produce, variety, friendliness, social atmosphere, good

prices, freshness and convenience was major factors. Supporting local business was also a frequent response.

WIC Vouchers-These vouchers from NC Department of Agriculture (NCDA) were accepted for the first time last summer. Monica Wood, with NCDA Farmers Market, indicated that of the \$12,736 in vouchers issued, \$6,804 were redeemed-about half of the allotted funding. Even though only half was spent it was about average, according to Wood and a very good response for the first summer.

One of the biggest conclusions from these questionnaires and other sources reveal more people need to take advantage of the market, especially those under 50. More information is needed so the market can successful reach this audience. Below is a short 5 question online questionnaire that is completely anonymous that will help the market board plan for 2008. The site is

<http://ceres.cals.ncsu.edu/surveybuilder/Form.cfm?testID=5071>

or go to the Salisbury-Rowan Farmer's Market website at www.rowansalisburyfarmersmarket.com and click on questionnaire.

Darrell Blackwelder is an agricultural agent in charge of horticulture with the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service in Rowan County. For archived garden columns or other information, visit the Rowan County Master Gardener web site at www.rowanmastergardener.com , e-mail Darrell_Blackwelder@ncsu.edu