

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Westside Farmer's Market to Host Rapid Market Assessment

This Thursday, August 9, 2007, the Westside Farmer's Market will host a Rapid Market Assessment (RMA). Facilitated by Michigan State University (MSU) and the Michigan Farmers Market Association (MIFMA), the RMA will gather and organize information which will help to guide the market's future. A team composed of representatives from other farmers markets, MSU, and MIFMA will spend the day at the market. Team members will conduct customer counts, administer dot surveys to get customer feedback on several important issues, and collect constructive comments and observations.

One of the key issues to be explored during this assessment is that of food safety. The Westside Farmer's Market has been involved in the process of drafting information bulletins regarding food safety at Michigan farmers markets and will be one of the markets involved in piloting the newly developed materials. MSU, MIFMA and Michigan Food and Farming Systems have enjoyed working with area markets to ensure food safety and help provide appropriate and necessary food safety information to farmers market customers.

Following Thursday's RMA, the data collected will be compiled and analyzed and a report issued to the market. A RMA is a little like a photograph of the farmers market at a particular time.

The Westside Farmer's Market is one of a dozen Michigan farmers markets that will host a Rapid Market Assessment this season and one of five farmers markets piloting the food safety information. It is also a charter member of MIFMA. Russ Lewis, market manager, says, "This Rapid Market Assessment is an opportunity for us to get feedback from a team of experts about our market to make it even better in the future." Later in the season, he will participate in an RMA at another Michigan farmers market.

The Westside Farmer's Market serves Grand Rapids by providing locally-grown, fresh, high-quality produce and products while providing an opportunity for local farmers and producers an economic outlet within Grand Rapids. The market operates on Thursdays from noon to 6 PM and Saturdays from 8 AM until noon in the rear parking lot of St. James Catholic Church next to the West Side Library.

The Rapid Market Assessment approach was developed by Dr. Larry Lev, professor of agricultural economics at Oregon State University. Dr. Lev adapted research approaches that he learned while working overseas to use with farmers markets in Oregon. After fine-tuning the approach, he has shared RMA directions to use with farmers markets everywhere. MSU conducted four pilot RMA's during 2005. Reports from those assessments are available at www.farmersmarkets.msu.edu in the section "For Market Managers."

For additional information about MIFMA's activities or how to become a member, please contact Dru Montri at 517-432-3381 or montridru@anr.msu.edu. For additional information about Michigan State University educational programs for and about farmers markets, please contact Dr. Susan Smalley, 517-432-0049 or smalley3@msu.edu. To participate in the RMA, come to the market this Thursday.