

DESIGN FOR BEHAVIOR & EXPERIENCE

an investigation of the experience of waiting in farmer's markets

LOCATION

Foppema Farmstand in Copley Square — Boston, MA

OBSERVED INSTANCES OF WAITING

situations waiting occurs:

- customers checking out after other another
- cash/card/EBT transaction to complete
- customer waits to collect before asking for produce bag
- customers waits to collect items while customer checks out
- vendor waits for customer to collect belongings

high-level waits:

- seasonal waiting for produce items
- waiting until next market day
- food is waiting to be harvested, then purchased

points of interest:

- how customers interact while waiting
 - how layout affects customer behavior
 - slow EBT(Electronic Benefit Transfer)* system
- *electronic system that allows disbursement of federal funds from SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program)

TYPES OF CUSTOMERS

intentions: new, curious

honey

taste testers

stonefruit seekers

organic seekers

socializer

people: passerby, tourist

regular (pre-order, chef, fellow vendor)

transaction: cash/card

EBT

weigh-as-you-go

collect then weigh

SAMPLE TRANSACTION

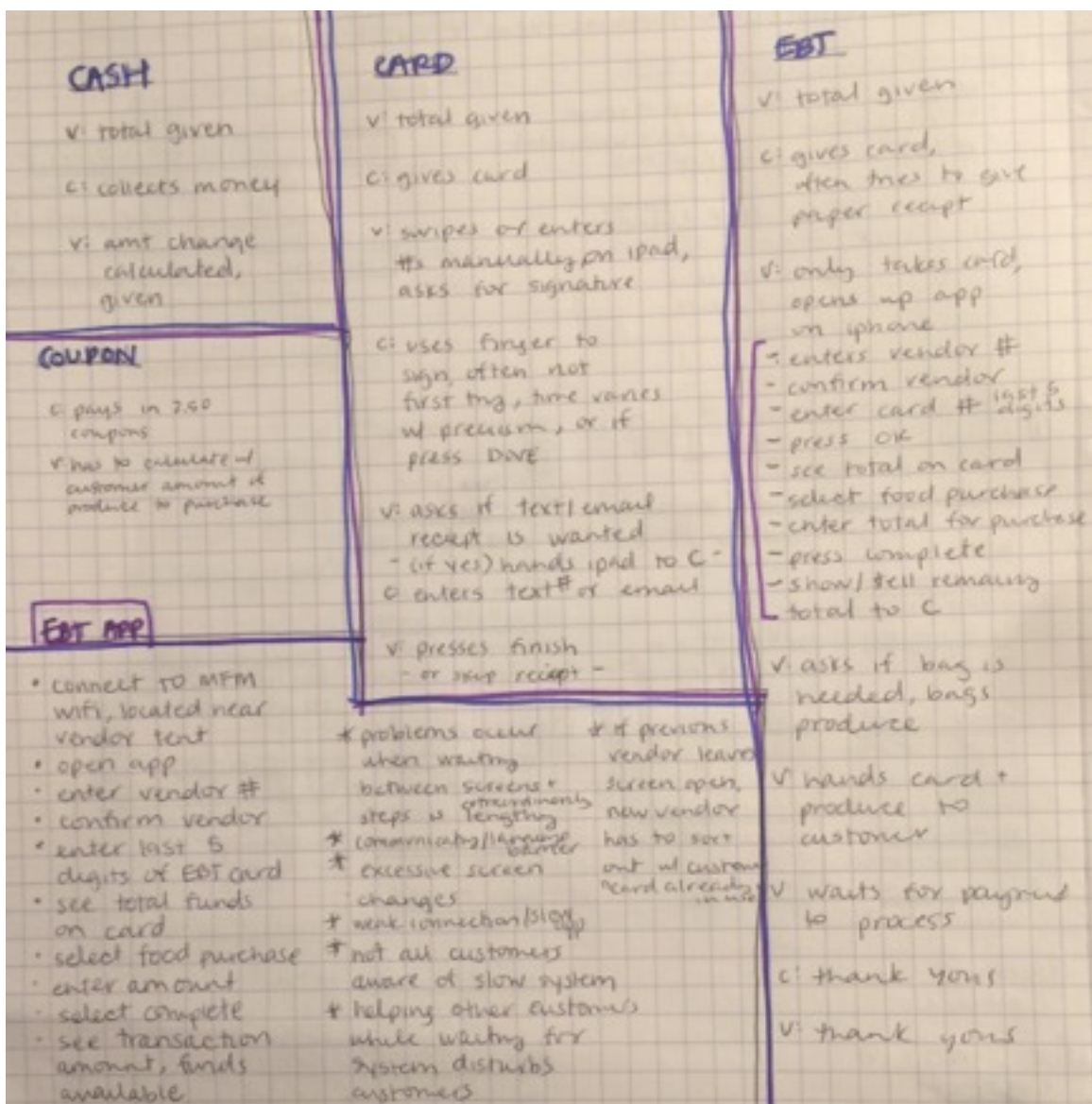
prepared, repeat customer (an older couple, on nearby errands, always buys only tomatoes and/or berries)

CUSTOMER

- approaches, grabs produce bag upon entry
- collect tomatoes, asks about raspberries
- places bag of tomatoes on scale
- woman counts exact cash from envelope, man collects change, gives both to vendor
- man takes bag, they depart with a chipper "see you next week"

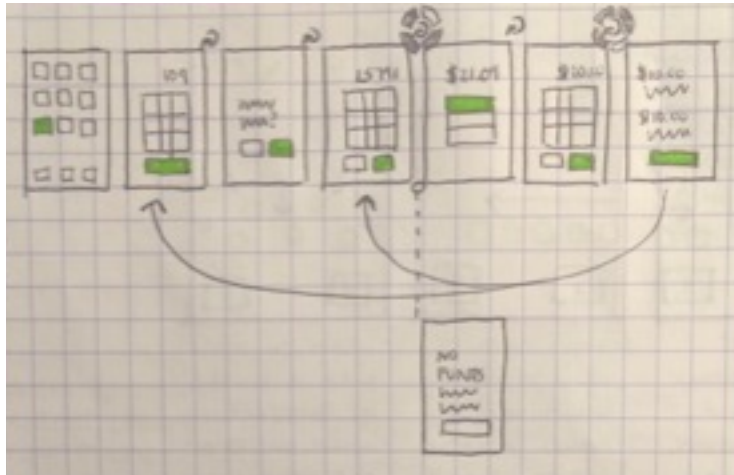
VENDOR

- provides casual, familiar greeting
- sets price on scale, relays total to customer
- puts tomatoes in handle-bag
- takes payment from man, passes over bag
- "thanks. have a good one!"



TRANSACTION TAXONOMIES

EBT SYSTEM



Load times between each screen can be up to a minute each, longer, and often time out. Which requires vendor and customer to go to SNAP tent and resolve issue.

Significant wait times can develop. Often these customers do not speak english, and it can be hard to communicate with them what it going on. Some are understanding, and voice their opinions on the system that often gives them trouble.

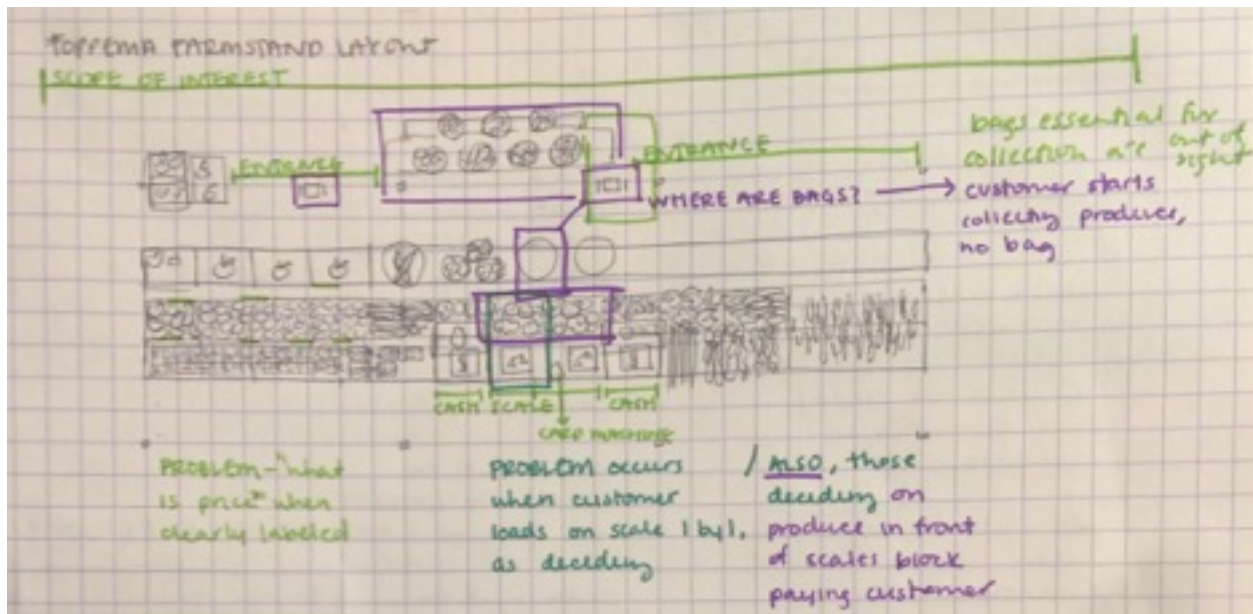
There is a long process to use your EBT card that not every SNAP customer is initially aware of. Customers must go to the market manager tent, to load money into a separate farmers market account, the money will then be doubled as per a farmer's market initiative. I talked more about this system with the market manager, Anna.

MARKET MANAGER INTERVIEW —

notes on conversation with Copley Farmers Market Manager, Anna

- Snap system, used to be tokens then bounty bucks, everybody likes that more
- Motivation for electronic switch, had most snap shoppers in all of Boston; makes sense for the office in terms of accounting, vendors have to wait less to be reimbursed EBT money
- Snap transaction at manager tent; comes with card "how much today" "10" have POS device to swipe, which all snap retailers use. Goes to laptop, in site made just for MFM, enters last of card and matching amount number. During, customer puts pin on pos machine. Give back receipt to customer.
- Not all farmers markets accept SNAP, and not all vendors treat these customers the same. By instituting a system to accept EBT, trying to create an equitable experience, SNAP shopper is human like everyone and there should be no difference experience
- Boston's Office of Food Initiatives runs MA FM, matched money comes from city of Boston
- an Ideal solution for EBT speed is addressing strength of wifi. But getting funding to provide the infrastructure for the system is the real issue
- In terms of availability of local food in winter, the number of winter markets could use to increase, matching programs need to run through winter as well, which is currently not being funded
- Match money is spent after the initial money, and it gets dumped out at the end of the year. Shopper could use to be educated about what money is being spent on their snap, as there are customers who will wait to use their money, thinking it will rollover into the next year.
- Every market is managed by someone different, different rules in each MA farmers market, non-profit runs markets in surrounding cities, there are also for-profit managers like SOWA market
- all markets have own starting point and story in terms of how they develop. MFM only manages some markets, they rent Copley from city parks and rec, some are on private property

STAND LAYOUT



Many issues of waiting occur due to the structure of the stand. Those who are unfamiliar will wait, wander, and ask where produce bags are, or how much produce is. Also, much different than the grocery store, there is no where to load your purchase for it to be totaled. When people have to search for their payment, there is no table or space for them to put down their bag.

There is also a difference in how customers expect to check out. Regular customers often come with their own reusable bag; they load all their produce in their bag and wait until they are done to relay what they have that is pre-priced, and give the vendor all that has to be weighed so it can be taken one by one and put back in their bag.

Other customers who may not be as regular, or did not expect to come to the market, will find any space on the stand and start loading their produce as they continue shopping. This requires the vendor to take care of produce before the ultimate check-out. This can be easy, but also inconvenient if there are other customers to be taken care of while this is happening.

There is possibility of intervention here, but each farm stand is different and standardization of them is not necessarily ideal. Many people attend farmers markets to experience the diversity in the stands, and in a way it can make them more exciting than the grocery store.

SEASONALITY

FARMER INTERVIEW —

notes on conversation with Jesse Foppema, farmer on Foppema Farms; had conversation about his feelings and experience as a farmer and business man in different seasons

- during winter, things like seed orders are made, decisions are made based on observed customer demand
- he goes to four farmers markets in a week, working on the farm before and between markets

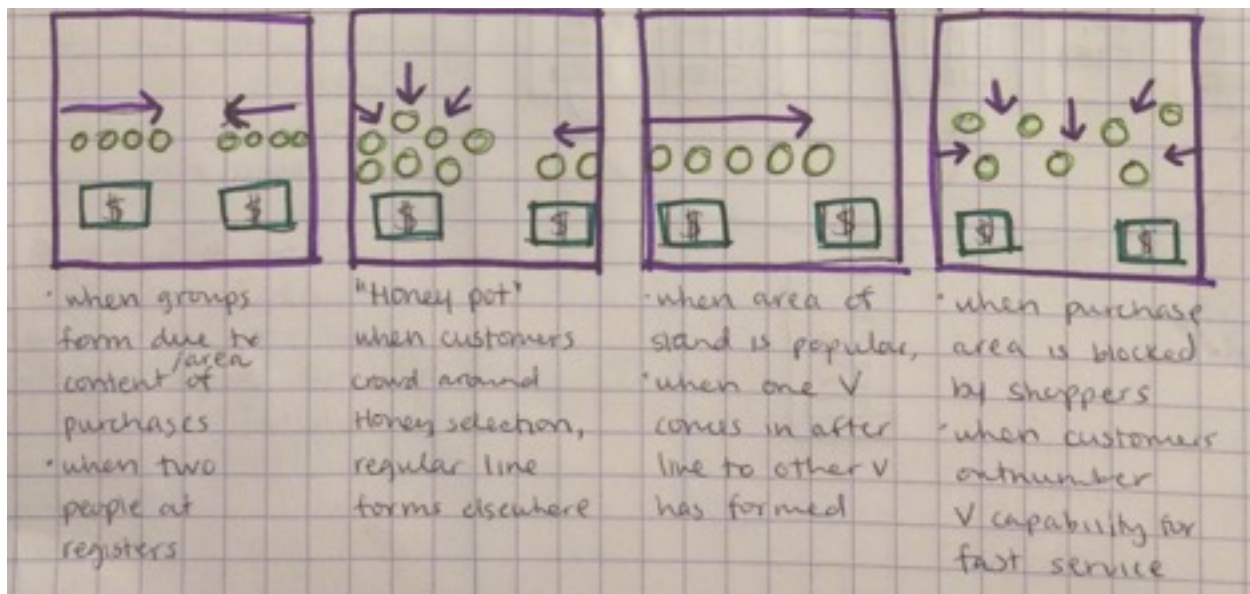
- feels relieved when the market season is done at thanksgiving time
- winter they cater to commercial bulk clients
- there are things to do on the farm, like pruning trees during dormancy
- so harvesting is done all year round, with the most work done in between May - November
- once the major harvests are done, he is happy to have less work to do, to not work 80 hours a week

CUSTOMER CLAIMS + CONVERSATIONS —

Casual conversations constantly happen as a vendor at the market, as it is a social atmosphere. Lots of people come explicitly to the market to socialize, with other people and especially with the farmers of the food they are buying. Their purchases become a conversation, in that they ask when a certain produce item will be coming, which recommendations the vendor has, how to use an item, how long it will keep. People also ask questions about the experience of the farmer — how's the drought treating you? are there really no peaches this year? do you spray your produce?

Customers also express their emotional attachment to the food being sold and its seasonality. When the market was first opening, there were so many smiling faces on how happy they were to see tomatoes, that these are the best they have ever tasted. They can't believe they had to eat them from the grocery store before this. Most people say how incomparable the taste is of all of the food. Most regular customers express their sadness as things like winter squash start coming to market — oh no! is the season coming to an end already?

PATTERNS OF WAITING



As a vendor, I've experience many different patterns in the way customers choose to queue or not queue. I think the most interesting arrangements are the second and fourth boxes. These patterns are influenced by the customers in line, how many vendors are behind the stand, and the content of the customer's purchase.

NEXT STEPS

Farmer's markets involve many layers of waiting, and after some exhaustive investigation into all of these layers I believe the waiting in terms of EBT transactions is the best lead to take. Many users are involved in a complicated system that does not seem simple to comprehend. Carrying out these transactions lack the infrastructure and interface for a consistently pleasant experience and can often extend waiting times during transactions.

I believe those who need to take advantage of the electronic benefits provided by the government should have access to the same experience as any other customer, down to the simplicity of transaction. The only difference in money to the farmer is the waiting time for reimbursement through the EBT system, otherwise a dollar is a dollar. A part of the growing acceptance of EBT in the farmer's market community is the idea that all levels of income deserve equitable access to fresh and nutritious food.

From my conversation with the market manager of Copley, I found that the Copley market has the most SNAP transactions of all Boston markets, and while the EBT system is not perfect, it is much better compared to some other markets. In continuing my narrowed research, I will delve into the SNAP program and the logistics of the EBT system. Talking to more EBT customers, and visiting more markets that accept EBT to observe how their system is run.