

From Farm to Bedside Table: Letting Collections Gain New Life in Real-World Settings



The authors showing off some of the materials at their Farmers Market table.

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Students read through library materials at the Farmers Market.

The goal

The academic library can be an intimidating space. We wanted students and community members to be able to explore our collections without the scrutiny of academics or the pressure of schoolwork, and discover that our collections can be a place for honing personal interests and the whole self.

Accordingly, we brought a collection of items to the campus Farmers Market. The Market takes place in a heavily-trafficked area, and the subjects of food, farming, and cooking are not ones that many students associate with the academic library.

The collection

Books related to every single vendor at the Market:



A student browses the Farmers Market collection in the kiosk's lobby location, next to the Biowall.

By the numbers:

5 separate divisions involved
20+ librarians and staff offered their time and expertise

The logistics

- **User Services:** Consulted about the logistics necessary for the cart to not disrupt the workflow of the Library Services Desk. We also put removable green dot stickers next to the bar codes of the books, as a further indication that these items should not go on the shelf.
- **Research & Learning:** Provided links to relevant sustainability and agriculture resources, as well as the platform for a LibGuide.
- **Digital Systems & Stewardship:** Set up a special item status to display in our WorldCat interface, and a new item code and circulation note in ALEPH.
- **Collections:** Changed the item statuses and item codes of the collection items.
- **Communications:** Provided guidance and feedback on the project. Student Outreach Team provided staffing at the event.

The event

The table was staffed by the librarian-GA pair that originated the project, as well as by student employees from the Student Outreach Team. We also hosted a UMD-based author at the table, who had just written a book about Chesapeake Bay-area foodways.

We were able to pique people's interest by asking them about the foods in their baskets. Since the Farmers Market is naturally structured so that attendees can wander and browse at booths, people were naturally drawn towards browsing the books.

The impact

- "I had no idea there were books like this in McKeldin!"
- Increase in circulation of cookbooks
- Many kiosk items circulated for first time in years
- Encouraged us to experiment with more food-based and collection-based events, which led to future successes
- Currently exploring other topics of interest and campus events that could follow this format