




## Rural Grocery Case Study:

# Market on Market

 Location:  
Gowrie, Iowa



This case study series showcases rural grocery stores across Iowa, highlighting four small-town groceries, their histories, and what it takes to run a small grocery store in rural America. The Center for Rural Affairs provides one-on-one counseling to store owners in southwest Iowa and advocates for rural food issues across the state. Visit [cfra.org/rural-grocery](http://cfra.org/rural-grocery) for more information.



### Timeline

**1951-2018**

Gowrie, Iowa, home to fewer than 1,000 people, has a local family-owned grocery store that serves the community.

**November 2018**

The owner of the grocery store retires and sells to a new proprietor who runs six other stores in rural areas.

**2019**

The new owner's other stores begin closing. Product shipments to Gowrie's store slow, and it becomes evident that its closure is imminent.

**January 2020**

Residents organize a committee to rally the town and determine how to prevent the store's closure.

A permanent group is selected to form an LLC and sell shares to community members. In 10 days, they raise the money needed to buy the store. The Gowrie Grocery LLC Board clearly states that investors may never see a return on their money, as this is not a money-making venture but rather an investment in the community.

**March 2020**

The original grocery store closes.

**April 25, 2020**

The store reopens under new ownership as Market on Market during the beginning stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. Navigating the challenges of the pandemic proves complicated, but the store stays open and serves the community.

**2025**

Market on Market continues to add to the liveliness of Gowrie. The community has further invested in itself through the creation of new walking and bike trails and the expansion of events like Hometown Christmas and the annual Fourth of July celebration and fireworks show.

# Importance of grocery stores in rural communities

For Gowrie, the threat of their local grocery store going out of business posed a significant risk to the well-being of the town. Decreased access to healthy food options can negatively affect overall community health. Residents unable to travel frequently, including the elderly, disabled, and people with limited incomes or without reliable transportation, are hit the hardest. When locals are forced to travel farther for essentials, they end up spending their money elsewhere instead of investing it back into their community.

“ It’s hard to say what would have happened to our community, but I hate to think what the result would have been if [our store] had shut down. It can be so easy to take having a local grocery store for granted. ”

–Kathy Carlson, Gowrie Grocery LLC Board member



## Advocating for local grocery stores

Market on Market faces the typical difficulties of a small rural business, like maintaining long-term staff and coping with surprise expenses. Its building is nearly a century old, which means significant maintenance expenses. The committee has replaced the roof, furnace, and point-of-sale system through grants and community support. However, unexpected costs still occur. This year, the freezer needed repair, which required a dip into the community fund.

Passing legislation through the Iowa Statehouse is necessary to support grocery stores in rural communities. Grant programs allocating funds across rural Iowa will benefit and uplift businesses like Market on Market, enabling them to make improvements and address the needs of their community members.

“ The needs are always changing, and we’re trying to meet those. The store has been making more lunches, and the board sees this as an area where we could grow. We would love to put in a deli or bring in an incubator business to the east part of the building, too. ”

–Kathy Carlson

## Goals

“ While the board has many ambitions for Market on Market, our ultimate goal is to stay open and meet the needs of the community. The reason so many of us joined the board in the first place was to serve our community, and we look forward to doing more of that in the future. ”

–Kathy Carlson

