

# Farmers Market Services



## Background

The USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) is home to many of the Department's leading farmers market research, technical assistance and grant programs. AMS's Marketing Services Division, comprised of an interdisciplinary group of agricultural marketing specialists, economists, engineers, and facility design experts, has been examining direct marketing practices and opportunities, including farmers markets, and providing technical assistance to small and mid-scale agricultural producers, handlers, and distributors, for decades. AMS also manages the Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP), a grant program that supports the creation and development of direct marketing outlets and offers a set-aside for projects that initiate the use of electronic benefits transfer (EBT) at farmers markets, the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, which provides matching grants to States for produce, tree nut and horticultural crops, and the Federal-State Marketing Improvement Program, which provides matching grants to state agencies for agricultural market research.

## Who Benefits From Farmers Markets?

**Small and Medium-sized Producers.** Farmers markets are often the first point of entry into the marketplace for small and medium-sized producers. Farmers markets help small and medium-sized producers incubate their businesses, develop and test new product lines, obtain better prices for high-value product than alternative distribution channels, and obtain a reliable source of farm income.

**Consumers.** Farmers markets allow consumers to have access to locally-produced, healthful farm-fresh food, to develop face-to-face relationships with the farmers who grow the food, and the opportunity to contribute directly to local farm viability.

**The Community.** Farmers markets often serve as an integral part of creating robust local economies, thriving neighborhoods and vibrant civic design plans. They also provide easier access to fresh, healthful food in communities where access to fresh, nutritious food may be otherwise limited.

## What Types of Farmers Market Research Does AMS Offer?

**USDA National Farmers Market Directory.** AMS has been monitoring growth in the number of active U.S. farmers markets for eighteen years, in order to monitor and identify emerging trends in the farmers market industry. This data is available from the USDA National Farmers Market Directory search engine, located at <http://apps.ams.usda.gov/FarmersMarkets>. Since 1994, the number of farmers markets in the USDA National Farmers Market Directory has more than quadrupled to a reported 7,864 in August 2012. The results of the annual Directory update are announced each year during National Farmers Market Week, the first full week in August.

In recent years, many improvements have been made to the Directory's search features in order to allow the public to more easily locate markets and learn more about individual market operations. The Directory's search engine not only allows users to find where and when farmers markets operate in their local communities, but they can also learn if these markets participate in food assistance programs like SNAP, WIC and FMNP, and what types of products are being sold at these markets. Likewise the Directory also tracks operations of winter and year-round farmers markets to determine how off season markets are performing.



**USDA National Farmer Market Managers Survey.** This national survey assesses the operations, management, sales, and organization of farmers markets based on the real experience of farmers market managers. According to the last Survey (published in 2009), sales at farmers markets were slightly over \$1 billion annually and more than 25 percent of vendors at surveyed markets derived their sole source of farm income from farmers markets. A followup survey was conducted in 2010, and results are slated to be released in 2013.

**Other Research Resources.** AMS's Marketing Services Division maintains an extensive archive of publications and presentations on farmers market and direct to consumer farm marketing activities, authored both by staff member and research partners. Located at <http://www.ams.usda.gov/MarketingServicesPublications>, the archive includes materials on such topics as distribution channels options for direct farm marketers, geographic differences in direct marketing trends, starting a farmers market on Federal property, and implementing EBT for SNAP redemption at farmers market facilities.

**Farmers Market Webpage.** A "one-stop shopping" electronic portal, the AMS farmers market webpage provides links to the entire array of AMS research and technical assistance resources on farmers markets. It may be found at <http://www.ams.usda.gov/FarmersMarkets>.

## What Types of Services Does AMS Provide for Farmers Markets?

**Technical Assistance in Market Facility Development and Design.** AMS facility experts and marketing specialists analyze the feasibility of planned renovation or construction of projects at several types of permanent food market and warehouse facilities, including farmers markets. They also develop conceptual designs of facilities, estimate equipment requirements and costs, and prepare detailed demographic profiles of local communities using the latest research tools. Such research is typically carried out on a collaborative basis with the State government, local government or non-profit agency closely associated with the market being studied.

**Technical Assistance in Organizing/Starting Farmers Markets.** AMS facility design and marketing specialists provide guidance to market planners and managers interested in establishing new farmers markets, sharing their firsthand experience and acquired knowledge in identifying and recruiting vendors, developing and enforcing market guidelines, designing and modifying market layouts and signage, and creating market programs and consumer assessment tools.

**Outreach.** AMS staff frequently participate in, and provide support to, industry, producer and academic conferences and training sessions about direct to consumer marketing efforts throughout the country. Staff also partner with agricultural producers, Extension economists, State agency personnel, community-based organizations, and other stakeholders interested in supporting direct farm marketing ventures.

**Farmers Market Promotion Program.** In FY 2006, MSD received funding to administer the Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP), (<http://www.ams.usda.gov/FMPP>) a grant program designed to facilitate and promote farmers markets and other direct-to-consumer market channels for agricultural products. Grants are awarded on a competitive basis following comprehensive review. In September 2012, more than 130 grants totaling more than \$9 million were awarded to eligible entities in 39 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Since its inception in 2006, FMPP has awarded more than \$32 million in grants.

**Organizational Support.** AMS spearheads the "Farmers Market Consortium," (<http://www.ams.usda.gov/WFMFarmersMarketConsortium>) a network of Federal, non-profit and private funders and technical assistance providers to the farmers market community, which meets quarterly to facilitate the exchange of timely information about farmers market programs and available resources within and outside government circles. Current members of the Consortium include several USDA agencies, the Office of Refugee Resettlement from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and several non-profit organizations, such as the Project for Public Spaces, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and Winrock International's Wallace Center for Agricultural and Environmental Policy.

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<http://www.ams.usda.gov/WholesaleFarmersMarkets> or <http://www.ams.usda.gov/MarketingServicesPublications>

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