



Background

The USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) houses much of the USDA's primary initiatives and programs supporting farmers markets. Within AMS's Marketing Services Division (MSD), a staff of economists, agricultural marketing specialists, engineers, and architectural design experts research, study, and analyze direct-marketing opportunities and offer technical assistance to farmers and producers, including farmers market stakeholders. MSD also administers the Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP), a grant program supporting outreach and marketing opportunities for farmers markets.

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 size producers. Farmers markets help small and medium size producers incubate their businesses and opportunities and can offer supplemental income sources to producers who participate in other distribution models.

Consumers. Farmers markets allow consumers to have access to locally produced, farm-fresh food and the opportunity to personally interact with producers and learn about their products.

The community. Farmers markets are integral in 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 Farmers Market Trends Are Being Monitored By AMS?

Since 1994, MSD has been counting the country's operational farmers markets via the National Farmers Market Directory (<http://apps.ams.usda.gov/FarmersMarkets/>), and identifying important farmers market trends. Between 1994 and 2009, the number of farmers markets has tripled from 1,755 to 5,274. The results of the 2010 Directory will be announced during National Farmers Market Week (August 1-7, 2010).

The Directory also captures information about when and where farmers markets operate, if they participate in food assistance programs like SNAP, WIC and FMNP, and what kinds of products are being sold at the markets. Likewise, the Directory also tracks seasonal operations of farmers markets to determine how off season markets are performing.

The National Farmer Market Managers Survey, another of the Division's farmer market initiatives, examines the operations, management, sales, and organization of farmers markets based on the real experience of farmers market managers. According to the last Survey (conducted in 2005), 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. The Survey is currently being conducted for the third time and is due to be released in early 2011.



What Services Do AMS Staff Offer To Farmers Market Stakeholders?

Technical assistance in market facility development. MSD staff analyze the feasibility of planned renovation or construction of projects at several types of food market facilities, including farmers markets. They also develop conceptual designs of facilities, estimate costs, assess expected levels of market patronage, 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.

Outreach. AMS staff frequently participates in, and provide support to, industry, producers and academic conferences and training sessions about direct to consumers efforts throughout the country. Staff also partner with agricultural producers, Extension economists, State agency personnel, and other organizations 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 FY 2009, 86 grants totaling more than \$4.5 million were awarded to eligible entities. FY 2010 grants will be announced in September, 2010. The FMPP grant program is slated to offer \$10 million in grant support beginning in FY 2011.

Farmers market operations. MSD staff manage the seasonal outdoor and winter indoor farmers markets at USDA headquarters in Washington, DC. They also offer customized guidance on request to market organizers and planners on how to establish and operate farmers markets. In addition, AMS has issued reports on how to start a farmers market on Federal property, and how to implement EBT usage at farmers markets to increase access to customers using Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.

Organizational support. AMS helped create the Farmers Market Coalition (FMC) (<http://www.farmersmarketcoalition.org>), which serves as a national information network for the farmers market sector and provides a centralized mechanism for developing, expanding, and supporting farmers markets. AMS also spearheads the "Farmers Market Consortium," a quarterly gathering of key farmers market funders and technical assistance providers, to facilitate the exchange of information about farmers market programs and available assistance 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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