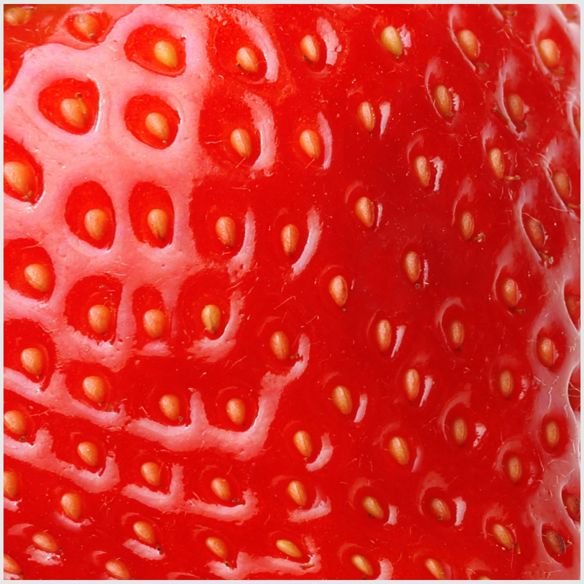
Agricultural Marketing Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

2019 National Farmers Market Manager Survey

Survey Overview



Developed through a Wheaton College and USDA partnership.

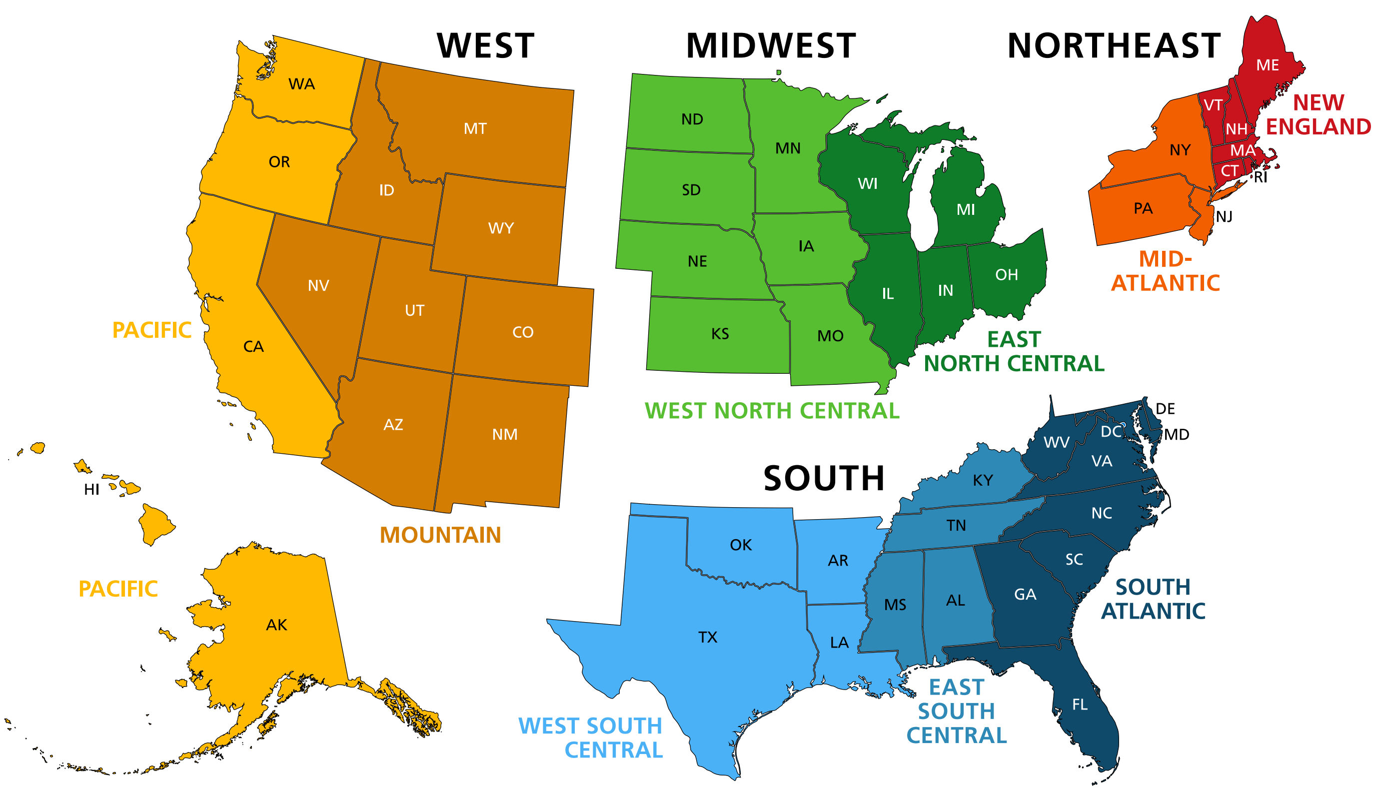
Introduction

In 2020, the United States Department of Agriculture – National Agricultural Statistical Service (USDA-NASS) conducted a survey of farmers market managers in the U.S. under an agreement with the Agricultural Marketing Service (USDA-AMS).

The survey collected data from the managers of U.S. farmers markets that were operating in 2019 in the 48 contiguous states. For this survey, a farmers market was defined as a collection of two or more farm vendors selling agricultural products directly to customers at a common, recurrent physical location.

The sample of farmers markets was generated from two sources: (1) the Farmers Market Directory maintained by USDA-AMS, and (2) from a list of markets identified on the internet through a targeted web scraping process. These two lists combined provided a sampling frame of 12,000 markets. After accounting for duplicates and errors, a final frame of 10,000 farmers markets was created. The markets were then coded by region, as defined by the [U.S. Census Bureau Categories](#) and by urbanicity (urban, rural, or suburban).

UNITED STATES CENSUS REGIONS AND DIVISIONS



Data collection took place from March to June 2020 and asked about market practices during 2019. All market managers received a paper survey in the mail which also provided the options of taking the survey online or over the telephone. Non-respondents were sent a postcard in April 2020 asking them to complete the survey. USDA-NASS and AMS each sent out news releases to further publicize the importance of the survey. After the survey closed, NASS performed a series of methodology and quality measures to evaluate the data, as explained on the [NASS website](#).

This series of research briefs summarize key findings from the survey and provides conclusions and recommendations for key stakeholders of farmers markets in the U.S. Stakeholders who may find this information useful include farmers market managers, farmers and other producers, vendors, researchers, policymakers, and researchers.

Top Insights

- **Farmers markets differ substantially across the U.S. by geographic location and urbanicity.**
  Farmers market managers revealed considerable diversity in the number of vendors present, the types of products available and amenities offered to vendors and customers. Acceptance rates for Federal Nutrition Programs (FNP) differed by locality, as did average sales and number of vendors. Half of markets accept at least one form of FNP benefits, differing between regions and urbanicity levels in the types of FNPs accepted.

- **Many vendors made their primary revenue from new and novel products.**
  Nearly 22% of vendors sold products from the “other food products” and “miscellaneous” categories, which include tofu and/or meat and dairy substitutes, nuts, mushrooms, wild harvested/foraged, prepared foods, seeds of edible plants, fermented and pickled foods, crafts/woodworking, soap/body care, pet food, or a service.

- **Markets that offer amenities such as business development resources and health and fitness programs are generally larger.**
  There is a positive relationship between the size of a market (based on the average number of vendors, market sales, and number of shopping households) and its amenities.[1] The likelihood that a market offered support with merchandising, marketing, and food handling safety to their vendors increased with market size. Markets with the highest average sales and highest number of customers were more likely to offer health and fitness and food waste/conversation programs.

- **Farmers market managers are often volunteers, rather than paid employees of the market.**
  Work arrangements between markets and managers came in a variety of forms. Volunteer managers were the most common arrangement (34%) and only 29% reported paid managers.

- **Farmers market managers reported that market participation benefited vendors, but the perceived benefits were generally limited.**
  Overall, 6 out of 10 market managers reported that participation in their market provided benefits to vendors. However, these benefits tend to take place only during the market session. Market managers reported that vendors received institutional benefits (i.e., benefits only available while present at a market), such as increasing the number of products sold. Further, market managers overwhelmingly reported that they did not know how market participation might be benefiting vendors at an operational level (i.e., within the business entity itself) or responded that they did not think that participation benefited vendors at an operational level. For example, few respondents reported that they felt participation at a farmers market allowed vendors to transition from part-time to full-time production, increase their number of employees, or initiate “value-added” production to boost revenue.

1 We are not claiming a causal relationship between any of these indicators and market size. However, based on this data analysis, we can hypothesize that the presence of these strategies at a market may help to increase the number of vendors, average sales, and number of shopping households. We think it would be worthwhile for future research to look at the effect of these strategies on markets.