

2022

SURVEY REPORT

FARMERS MARKET CENSUS

REPORT PREPARED BY



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Introduction

Farmers markets across the state of North Carolina offer an important link between producers and consumers in almost all of the state's 100 counties. No two farmers markets are alike - they may be operated by a non-profit, municipality, or other agency; they may be producers-only or allow other types of sellers; they may have paid staff members or volunteers manage the market; they may be located in an urban center, a neighborhood, or on a roadside. What farmers markets do have in common is the mission to connect local farmers and producers with shoppers who can engage with their products on a trusted, personal level.

The intent of this survey is to collect information about farmers markets in North Carolina for the purposes of gaining an understanding of how markets operate in the state to better communicate with stakeholders and inform the development of resources and programs. The data collected include frequency and seasonality of market operation, community events, budgets and funding, vendor numbers and product types, customer counts, leadership and governance, and much more.

At the time of the survey's administration, the North Carolina Farmers Market Network (NCFMN) was slowly but surely taking form as an official organization. Initially begun as a series of monthly Zoom calls to provide farmers market managers with resources during the COVID-19 pandemic, the NCFMN was working towards becoming an established non-profit with the capacity to provide training, workshops, resources, and best practices to managers and coordinators.

In 2023 the NCFMN was approved as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. The mission of the NCFMN is to work with and for farmers market communities to create a thriving network of marketplaces for local food and farm products through education, innovative services, programs and partnerships, including providing resources to support historically underserved populations.

Farmers markets in North Carolina offer many benefits such as preserving rural livelihoods and farmland; stimulating local economies; increasing access to fresh, nutritious food; supporting healthy communities; and promoting sustainability. In the following pages you will find a testament to the strength of NC's farmers markets as well as insight into everything that goes into making farmers markets happen.

Many thanks to Hannah Dankbar, the Local Food Program Manager at the NC State Extension, for her tireless work editing, administering, and analyzing this survey and its important results; and to the NCFMN Interim Board of Directors for their time invested in moving the NCFMN forward and promoting NC's farmers markets.

In partnership,
Maggie Funkhouser
Interim Chair, NCFMN Interim Board of Directors and Manager, Carrboro Farmers' Market
July 20, 2023

Acknowledgements

Special recognition and gratitude are extended to key contributors who played a pivotal role in the survey's development, including the Oregon Farmers Market Association, Farmers Market Coalition, Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP), Kelly Crane, and Pallavi Patil. Their expertise and collaboration were invaluable in shaping the survey's content and structure. By engaging a wide range of stakeholders, this census survey aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of farmers market dynamics, current operations, and opportunities for growth and improvement.

Methodology

This 2022 Farmers Market Census was an online survey to gather valuable data from farmers markets across North Carolina. The survey was constructed on Qualtrics and an anonymous link was sent out to farmers markets, Extension agents, and community development and agriculture support organizations via email and social media. The survey was conducted December 1, 2022, to January 31, 2023. In adherence to ethical research standards, the study followed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol 25574 to ensure participant privacy and informed consent.

2022 North Carolina Farmers Market Census Results

The 2022 North Carolina Farmer Market Census survey was conducted with the primary objective of gaining insights into the landscape of farmers markets across the state. This comprehensive survey aimed to uncover crucial information regarding the locations and quantity of farmers markets in North Carolina, as well as to examine their organizational structure and operational practices. Additionally, the survey sought to identify the significant impacts that these farmers markets have on local communities. By shedding light on these aspects, the census survey aimed to provide a deeper understanding of the opportunities for growth within the farmers market sector in North Carolina. Through this research, policymakers and stakeholders can make informed decisions to support and enhance the thriving agricultural community in the state. This is the first time this type of survey has been conducted across North Carolina. A version of this survey will be regularly circulated by the North Carolina Farmers Market Network (NCFMN) over time to maintain current data on farmers markets in the state.

Presence of Farmers Markets Across North Carolina

For this initial census survey of farmers markets in North Carolina 83 market organizations, representing 92 farmers markets, completed the survey. Responding to all questions was not required, so total response counts for each question vary.

Of the 92 markets 66 markets (72%) are single-market organizations and 26 markets (28%) are included in multi-market organizations. Based on an internal list of farmers markets across North

Carolina, based on programming efforts NCFMN estimates that there are 194 active markets across 93 counties in North Carolina. Given this estimate we estimate a 47% response rate for this initial market census representing 33 counties. Future versions of this survey will strive to expand the geographic reach of the data.

NCFMN is organized into five regional districts across the state. Figure 1 shows the number of markets represented in this survey from each of these districts.

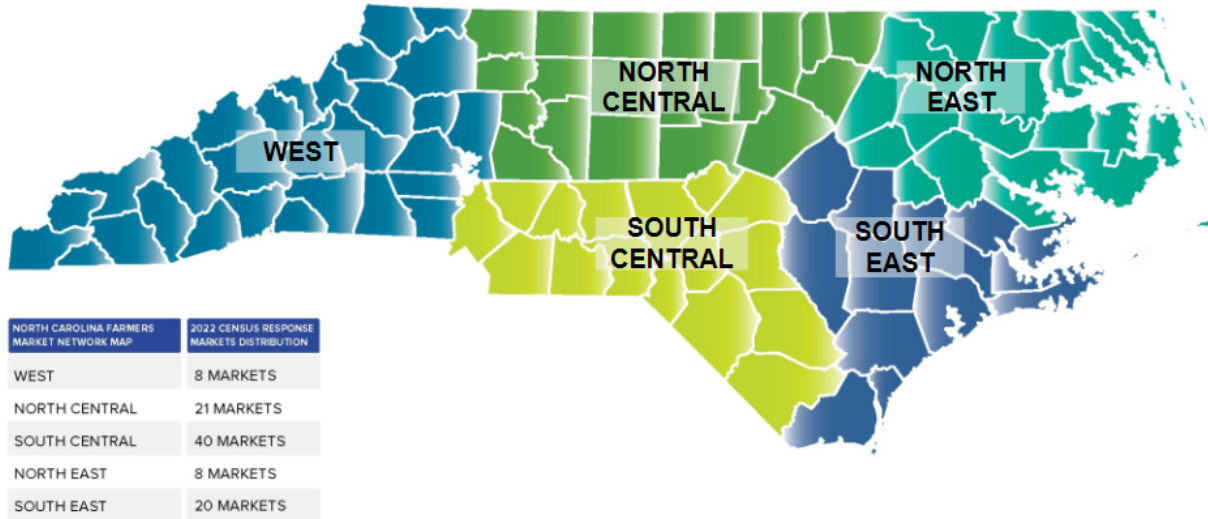


Figure 1. A map of the five regions within the North Carolina Farmers Market Network (NCFMN) with the number of survey responses by region.

Market Operations

The following section of the report provides a snapshot of how farmers markets across North Carolina operated and were structured in 2022. This series of questions captures insights on how often farmers markets are open and the types of frequency of events.

Market Operation Days

Markets were asked how often their markets were open. Figure 2 shows the distribution of the times markets are open across the state. The 68 market organizations who responded show a variety of availability across the state, with many markets operating year round.

Responses in the “other” category included every other week during peak growing season and varied frequency for an extended season.

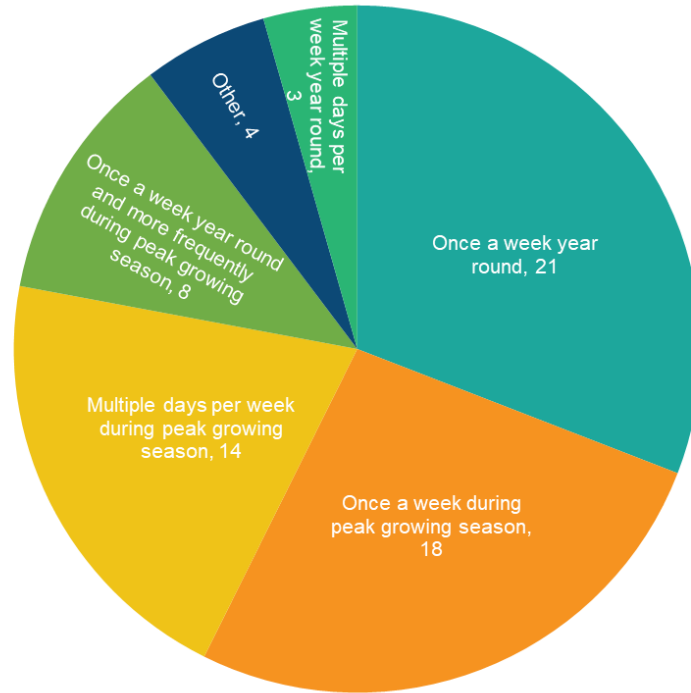


Figure 2. Frequency of open market days during 2022.

Market Events

Farmers markets serve as spaces for community residents to gather, relax, and connect with vendors. They are spaces for food and agriculture education, socializing, and celebration. Table 1 summarizes the types of events that farmers markets organize and how often they hold each type of event. The most frequent occurrence for each type of event is highlighted. Some categories did not have enough data to report and were left blank.

Table 1. Types and frequency of events at farmers markets. The most frequent response for each type of event is highlighted.

	Every week	1-2 times per month	Occasionally	Never	Total
Music	27	10	17		54
Kids activities	10	7	31	6	54
Tastings or cooking demonstrations	3	16	33	4	56
Community partner tabling/ fundraisers	10	18	22	5	55
Holiday events		7	46		53

Vendors and Consumers

Farmers markets serve as a space for market vendors and consumers to connect. Market organizations strive to attract diversity in both vendors and consumers to create a vibrant space where these two groups can connect and socialize. This section of the survey gathers information about the number of vendors and consumers who frequent farmers markets.

Market Vendor Overview

Farmers markets are an important direct to consumer market channel and are important spaces for farmers and small businesses, especially new and beginning farmers and small businesses, to connect with consumers. Of the 61 responses to a question asking how the total number of vendors changed between 2021 and 2022, 49 markets or 80%, of responses reported an increase in vendor counts between 2021 and 2022. While 9 markets or 15% responded that their vendor count remained the same. Not enough markets reported a decrease or no operation between the two years to report any findings.

There were 57 responses to the question asking for the largest number of vendors selling at your market/s on a given day. Multiple-market organizations were asked to report the grand total from all markets. The average response was 49 vendors and responses ranged from five up to 300 vendors.

Table 2. Summary of vendor counts at individual markets during 2022. Across North Carolina farmers markets reported averaging between three and 125 vendors with an average of 32 vendors.

	Response Count	Minimum	Maximum	Average
Largest Number of Vendors on One Day	57	5	300	49
Average Number of Vendors on One Day	57	3	125	32
Number of Vendors Who Attended At Least One Time	55	2	400	67

There are often a mix of vendors at farmers markets beyond farmers selling raw produce and animal products. Arts and crafts, prepared foods, and wellness products have become popular items to consumers over the past several years. A farmer selling unprocessed farm products was the most common type of additional sales items at a farmers market in North Carolina in 2022.

Table 3. Types and frequency of vendors found at farmers markets during 2022.

	Number of Markets Reporting This Type of Vendor	Average Percent of Vendors at Markets
Farmers (unprocessed farm products)	58	46
Prepared foods	50	13
Arts and crafts	54	20
Body care and wellness	50	8
Value added farm products	49	18
Fishery/ seafood	35	3

Market Sales

Farmers markets can serve as important direct to consumer market channels for farmers and other small businesses. Markets were asked to report the total gross sales for their vendors during 2022. Thirty-six markets reported an estimated median of \$190,000 in sales for their vendors. However, 20% of markets were not able to answer this question. The majority of respondents reported that they provided a best guess to the amount of sales.

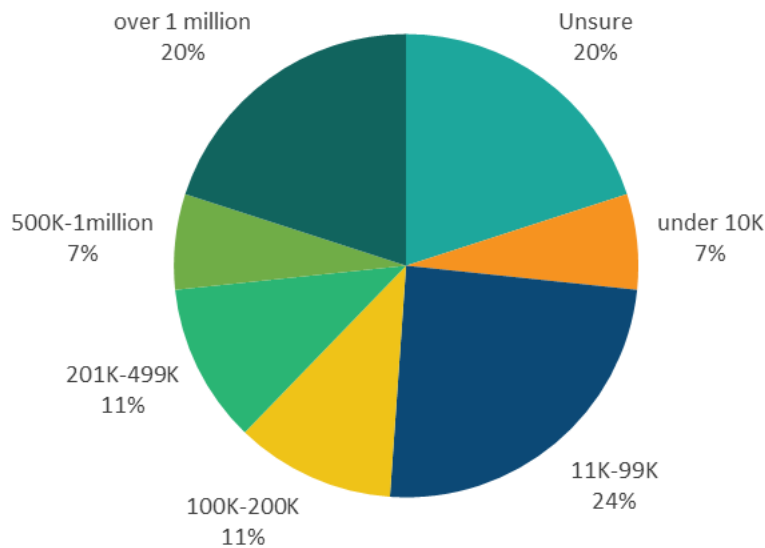


Figure 3. Distribution of total gross sales for all vendors at a farmers market during the 2022 season.

Table 4. Summary statistics describing total gross sales for vendors at a market in 2022.

<i>Summary Statistics</i>	
Mean	\$ 2,792,840.11
Median	\$ 190,000.00
Mode	\$ 400,000.00
Minimum	\$ 150.00
Maximum	\$ 50,000,000.00
Sum	\$ 100,542,244.00
Count	36

On average, farmers markets in North Carolina generated **\$2,792,840.11** in vendor sales during 2022.

A standardized method for measuring vendor sales and other impacts is needed in order to more accurately capture economic impacts of farmers markets across the state. When asked how total gross sales were calculated, multiple methods were used. Other responses included various methods of gathering existing data and estimating for the season.



Figure 4. Description of how farmers market managers calculate the total sales of vendors at their market.

Consumer Counts

Farmers markets serve as third spaces. These are spaces outside of home and work where community members can gather and interact with each other. Healthy and local foods, crafts, and other products draw a wide audience of consumers across communities. Market staff sometimes conduct customer counts while the market is open. The survey asked market managers to estimate their total adult count during 2022. With 50 market organizations responding, the median adult crowd count was 15,000.

A total of **6,183,441** people visited farmers markets in North Carolina during 2022.

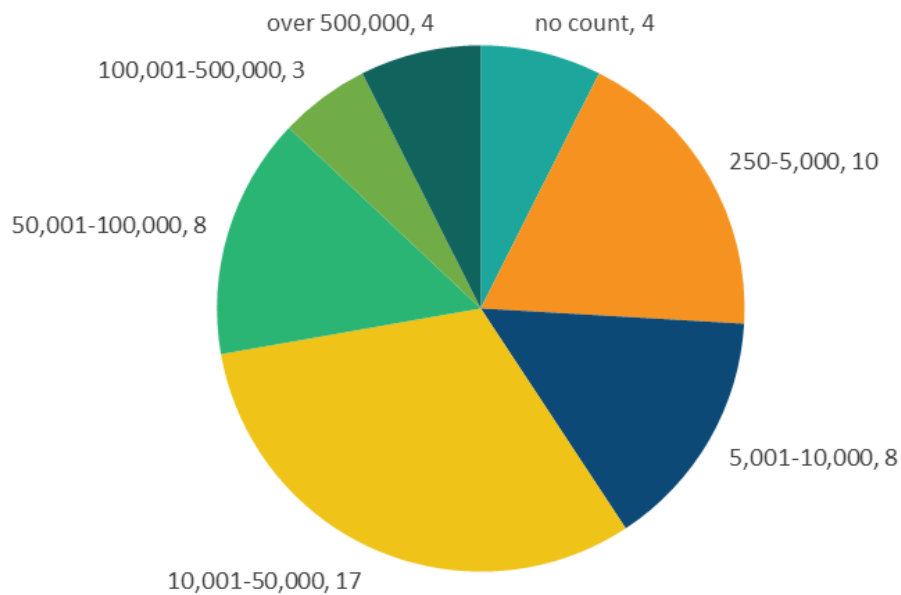


Figure 5. Distribution of total customer counts during 2022.

Table 5. Total adult crowd at farmers markets in North Carolina during 2022.

<i>Summary Statistics</i>	
Mean	123,669
Median	15,000
Mode	15,000
Minimum	250
Maximum	1,500,000
Sum	6,183,441
Count	50

Calculating customer counts can be a difficult task, especially with other time demands during the time the market is open. There are different methods for calculating customer counts. Of the 53 markets who responded to the question asking how they developed the crowd count provided above, 18 markets reported extrapolating a count for the whole year based on a sample of days. Twelve markets provided a best guess since they did not have data available. Eleven markets reported having full season counts. Twelve markets responded with other methods including tracking cars and multiplying by 2.5, based off of previous data collection, based off of coupons distributed, and a mix of actual counts and estimates.

Market Employment and Structure

Farmers markets can be structured and governed in different ways. This section of the survey analyzes how markets in North Carolina are structured and what type of employment opportunities they provide.

Market Employment

In addition to creating a marketplace for small businesses, farmers markets also create jobs. Farmers market managers worked an average of 1,006 hours on their market or 19 hours per week year round. Fifty-three markets reported having an average of two paid positions in their market organization. This response ranged from zero to 17. Other positions that were reported include assistant managers, social media, safety and maintenance, vendor operations, marketing, and other positions.

Table 6. Employment by farmers markets during 2022.

	Paid, Full-Time	Paid, Part-Time	Volunteer, Not-Paid	Do Not Have
Market Manager	14	28	10	4
Executive Director	4	3	11	35

Turnover in market employment is commonly cited as a challenge across markets. Farmers markets were asked whether there was any turnover in their manager or executive director in the past twelve months. The majority of farmers markets that responded to this question reported no turnover.



Figure 6. Farmers markets reported low turnover in market employment in 2022.

One reason that is commonly cited to explain turnover is the level of pay for market managers. Markets were asked to report the hourly wage of market managers. A wide range of responses were reported from no pay to over \$20 per hour.

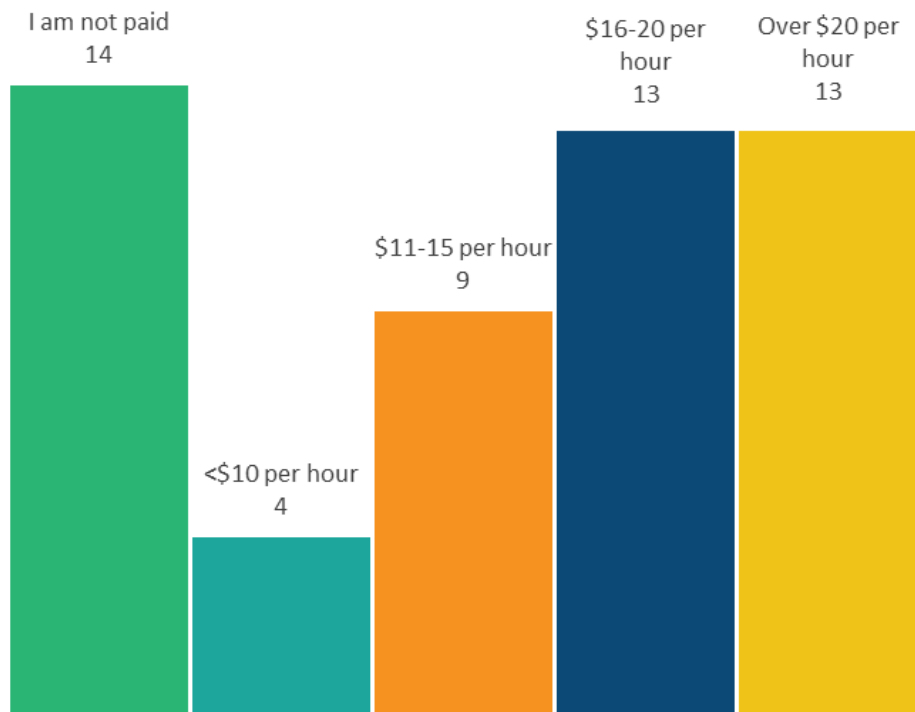


Figure 7. Reported pay of farmers market managers by hour during 2022.

Volunteers at the Market

In addition to volunteers to help run the market, volunteers can also be used to help manage events, educational programs, and other parts of a farmers market. Thirty-six markets reported using an average of 12 volunteers per year. Volunteers come from across the community, 4-H club members, Master Gardener Volunteers, and other Extension groups.



Figure 8. Farmers markets reporting using volunteers during 2022.

Market Legal Structure

Of the 65 market organizations who responded to a question asking about their legal structure, 29 organizations, or 45%, reported being a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. This structure is common because of tax exemptions and becoming eligible for grant opportunities. Seven organizations responded with a variety of structures such as LLC, cooperative, and other structures.

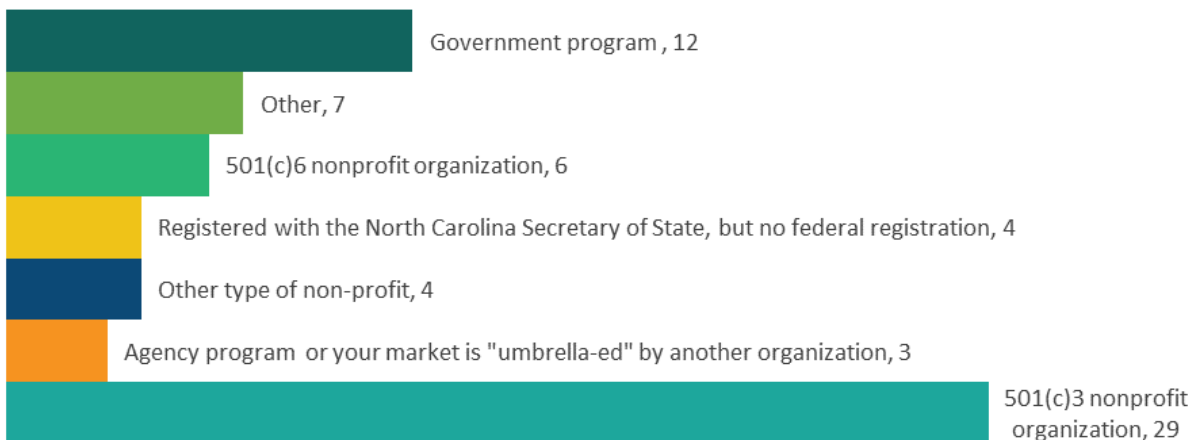


Figure 9. Farmers markets across North Carolina have adopted a variety of legal structures.

Organization Decision Making

Farmers markets are organizations that have to make a variety of administrative and programmatic decisions. Figure 10 below shows that markets use a variety of structures and people to make these decisions.

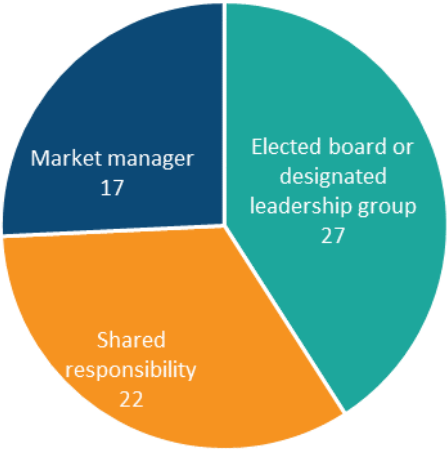


Figure 10. Distribution of models of decision making.

Market Leadership and Boards

Boards of farmers market organizations can be made up of vendors, farmers, local businesses, and community members. Some market bylaws define who should make up the board. Figure 11 shows who is on the board of farmers market organizations in North Carolina. Forty-three markets reported the number of board members they have. This number ranged from 3 to 20 with an average of 8.

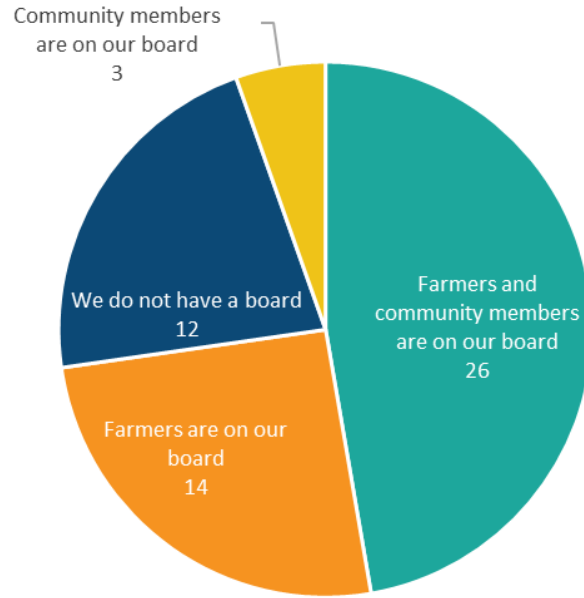


Figure 11. Types of members on farmers markets boards during 2022.

Organization Materials

Having multiple people and groups involved in a farmers market means it is important to have documents clearly explaining expectations, operations, and other details. The table below shows what type of materials different markets have. Responses under “other” included vendor and market handbooks.

Table 7. The types and frequency of organizational materials farmers markets currently have available.

Response	Count
By-laws	51
Board meeting or other governance body minutes	44
Organizational budget	42
Staff job descriptions	40
Articles of Incorporation	29
Safety or emergency plans	24
Anti-discrimination policy	24
Job descriptions for volunteers and/or board members	23
Diversity, equity, and inclusion policy	21
Finance policies	19
Conflict of interest policy	17
Business or strategic plan	15
Staff handbook	11
Handbook for volunteers and/or board members	11
Bi-lingual versions of any above	5
Other	9

Vendor Materials

In addition to materials to document market policies and procedures, having similar documents to outline policies and procedures to clarify expectations for vendors. Clarifying geographic boundaries to qualify as “local”, explaining expectations for market attendance, and other related policies helps vendors and markets have a shared understanding for what is expected at the market.

Table 8. Types and frequency of materials available for farmers market vendors.

Response	Count
Paper application for vendors	43
Online application for vendors	42
Definition of local	36
Vendor handbook	27
Required percentage of farm-direct ingredients for value-	18
Bi-lingual version of any of the above	7
Only accept food and farm vendors	5

Market Finances

Managing a farmers market costs money. Markets operate on different types of budgets that come from a variety of sources. This section of the survey highlights the variety of budgets and fundings sources that farmers markets work with and specifies how market organizations spend money to manage their markets.

Operating Budget

Farmers markets were asked for their total operating budget for their organization in 2022. Of the 55 responses, 47% of the markets operate on \$49,000 or less per year. This response includes single and multiple market organizations.

Responses for \$250,000-\$499,999 and \$500,000-\$999,999 were omitted due to the low number of responses.

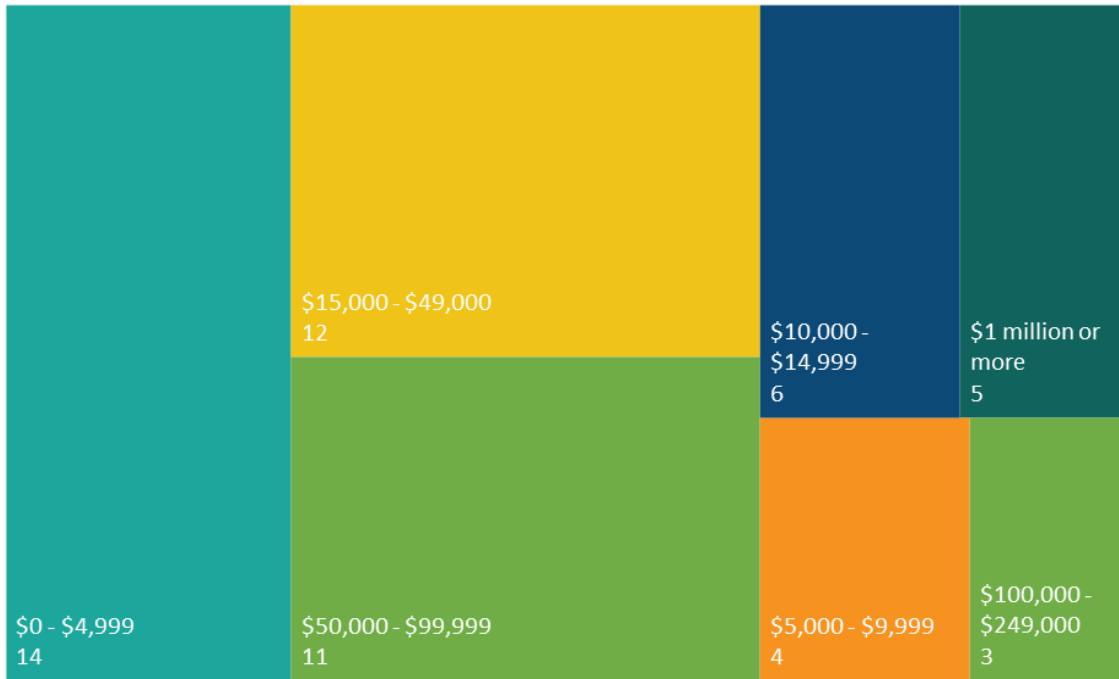


Figure 12. Total operating budgets of farmers markets across North Carolina.

Farmers Market Revenue and Funding Sources

The operating budgets reported above come from a variety of sources and can vary from year to year. Farmers markets were asked how their market organization's revenue changed in 2022 compared to 2021. Four markets reported their market did not operate in 2022. Of the 62 farmers market organizations that were open both years and responded to this question, the majority, 72%, reported that their market revenue increased from 2021 to 2022.

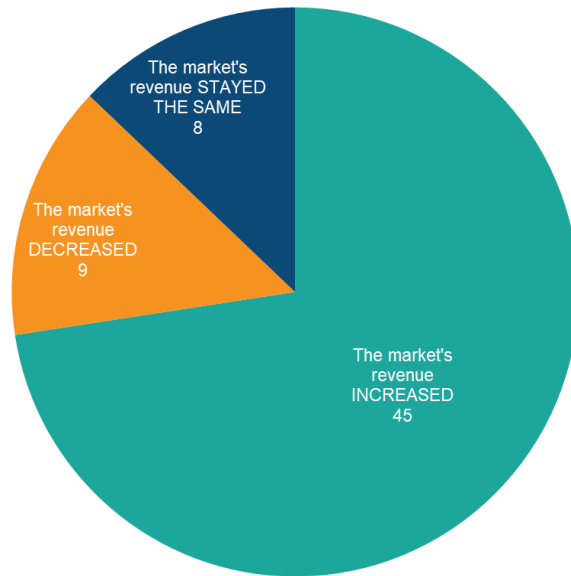


Figure 13. Distribution of markets who experienced changes in their operating budgets between 2021 and 2022.

Farmers markets can generate income or access funding from outside sources, and often generate funding from multiple sources. Markets were asked to select all of the sources from which they generate funding. Table 9 shows vendor fees, sponsorships, and grants as the most frequent sources of funding. Vendor fees, “other” and grants account for the largest portions of market budgets. Responses under “other” included government funding and volunteer efforts.

Table 9. Funding sources for farmers markets. The three most frequent responses were highlighted in the response count column and the top three budget percentages were highlighted in that column.

Funding Source	Response Count	Average Percent of Budget
Vendor Fees	55	62%
Sponsorships	26	21%
Grants	30	28%
Donations	25	6%
Fundraising Events	23	16%
Merchandise	20	14%
Other	17	37%

Vendor Fees

Vendor fees are a common source of income for farmers market organizations. Farmers markets were asked how much the market charges a vendor per day for a 10'x10' stall. Of the

66 market organizations that responded, a fee of \$10-25 was the most common response. Answers under “other” included a different fee schedule for market members or local vendors, higher annual fees, and commission based assessments.

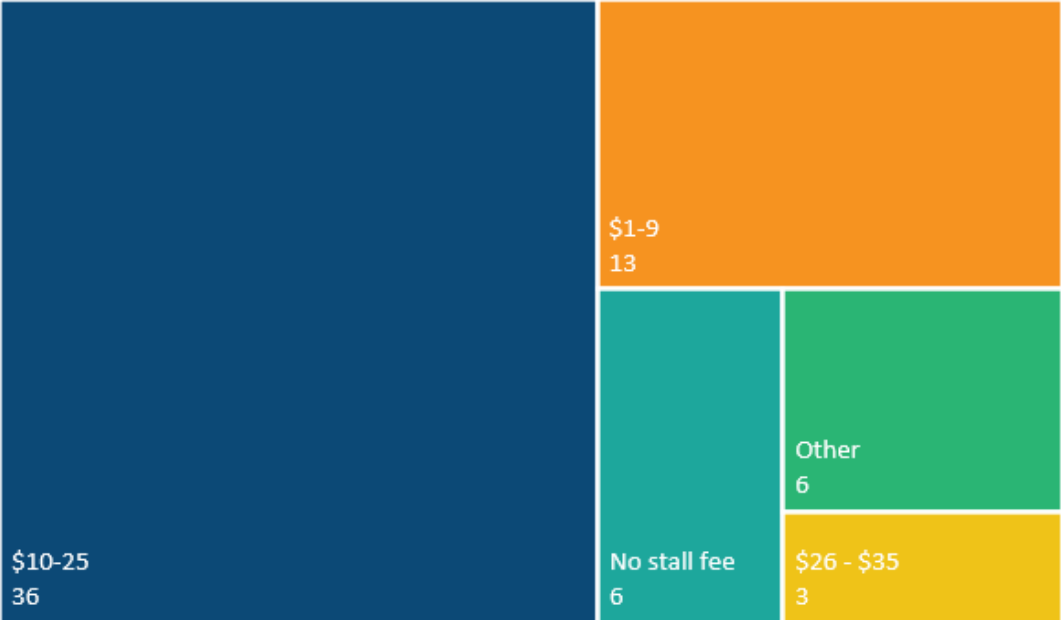


Figure 14. Sixty-six markets reported their vendor fees. The majority of markets reported charging vendors less than \$26 per week for a stall.

When asked how often vendor fees are charged, 63 markets responded. Approximately half, 48%, reported charging vendor fees on a weekly basis.

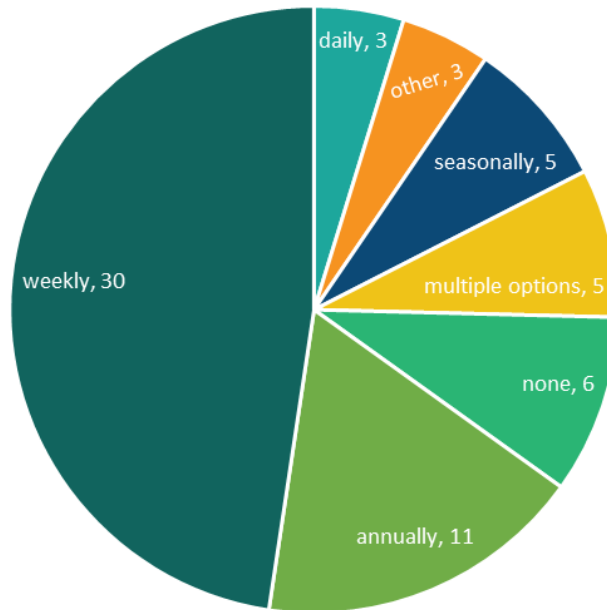


Figure 15. Frequency of how often vendors are charged stall fees in 2022.

Market Spending

Market organizations were asked how they spent their budget and to estimate the percentages of their annual budget used for each of the sources. The top spending category is on staff; followed by site, permit, and operation fees, and other materials and equipment.

Table 10. Spending categories for farmers markets. The top three responses are highlighted.

Spending Category	Response Count	Average Percent of Budget
Staff	53	54%
Site, Permit, Operation Fees	27	18%
Music, Events, Engagement	38	13%
Marketing & Promotion	53	16%
Card Transaction Fees	27	5%
Other Materials & Equipment	44	18%
Other	16	17%

Financial Management Systems

Market organizations were asked what tools they use for financial management. Of the 64 responses, spreadsheets, such as Excel and Google Sheets, were the most used. Other responses included using multiple tools, outsourcing financial management, a check book, and not having a system.



Figure 16. Financial management systems used by farmers market managers in 2022.

Card Transactions

Electronic payments are popular with consumers, however, not all markets are set up to accept these types of payments. Of the 85 markets who responded, approximately 44% accept credit and debit cards while approximately 18% do not accept any form of electronic payment.

Markets were asked which types of card transactions they accept. Credit and debit cards were the most popular, followed by SNAP/EBT. North Carolina will pilot the e-WIC program with 29 markets beginning in summer 2023. Nutrition assistance programs will be explored in more detail further on in this report.



Figure 17. Number of farmers markets that accept each type of electronic payment.

Processing electronic payments requires an external service provider. Markets were asked which service they use to process payments if they accept electronic payments. Square and Totilpay were the most common answers. Paypal and other providers were included under “Other”.

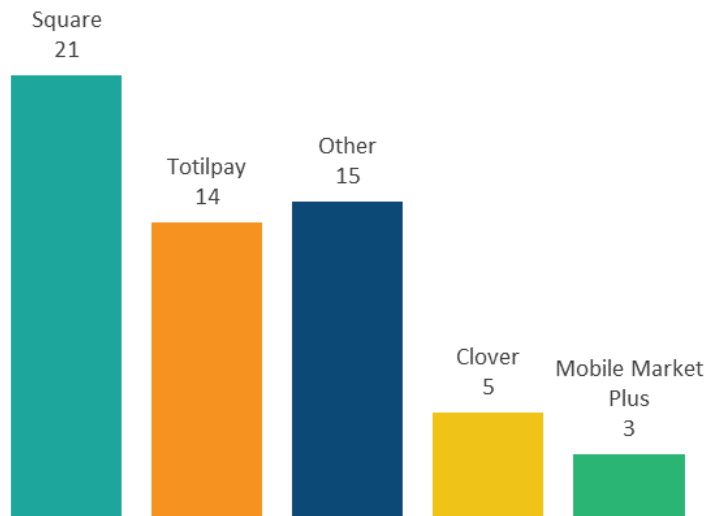


Figure 18. Farmers markets reported a variety of service providers to process the payments. Square is the most commonly used service.

Market Policy & Programming

As organizations, farmers markets can define policies and programming to meet the interest and needs of their communities. This includes defining “local”, whether products can be resold if they are originally from outside of the local range, and incorporating efforts to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion at the market.

Geography Policy

Some farmers markets find it beneficial to have a written policy defining their geographic range of where products can be sourced from. Of the 60 markets that responded to a question asking if there is a policy defining where products can come from 47, or 78%, responded that they do have a written policy. Some markets conduct farm inspections to check that type of products are produced to ensure honesty at the market.

Twenty-nine markets have geography policies defined by mileage with an average of 67 miles. The most common policy is for 50 miles. Another 13 markets have a geography policy defined by political boundaries, either county or state.

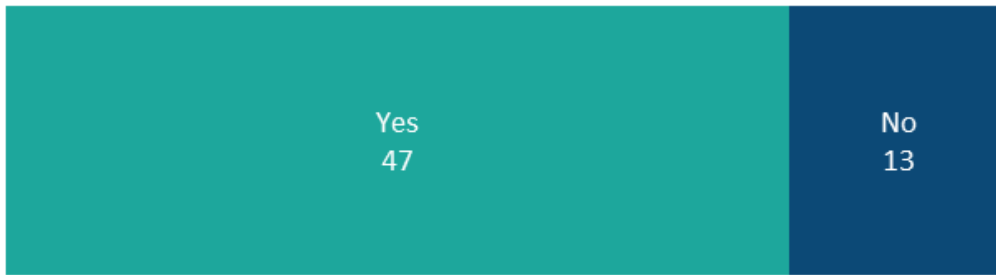


Figure 19. Breakdown of markets who have a policy defining where market products can be sourced from.

Resale of Products

Similarly, farmers markets can create policies defining whether it is allowable to resell products that were purchased from outside of a geographic area. When asked if they allow products to be resold 43, or 72%, of responding market organizations reported they do not allow products to be resold.



Figure 20. Breakdown of farmers markets that do and do not allow products to be purchased from outside a geographic area.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Farmers market organizations can make intentional decisions to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion at their markets. These decisions can be incorporated into formal rules and regulations, or be integrated into practices. This section covers how farmers markets approach incorporating diversity, equity, and inclusion into their organization.

When asked if diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is incorporated into a market’s rules, regulations, and/or practices, 33 or 57% of the 58 market organizations that responded said yes, while 25 or 43% said no.



Figure 21. When asked if DEI is incorporated into a market’s rules, regulations, and/or practices, a slight majority responded yes.

When asked how DEI is incorporated into their markets, incorporating practices into governing materials was the most common response. Some examples of incorporating DEI into governing materials include: stating a commitment to DEI in vendor applications, incorporating into a mission statement, incorporating a code of conduct into market rules, and other strategies.

The “open to all category” includes responses where markets reported that their market is open to everybody and they have a diversity of vendors and consumers at their market. A couple of example responses include:

“Our market rules and regulations does [sic] not specifically mention DEI but we have equal opportunity for anyone who is interested in our market. We have people of color, women owned businesses, and LGBTQIA+ vendors over the years. we do not discriminate against any persons who shop at our market for any reason. We are there for the community.”

“We look at the vendor’s product, not the vendor. We have vendors from all over the world with different backgrounds. Our vendors are just as diverse as our customers. All vendors are given the same opportunities and are held to the same requirements.”

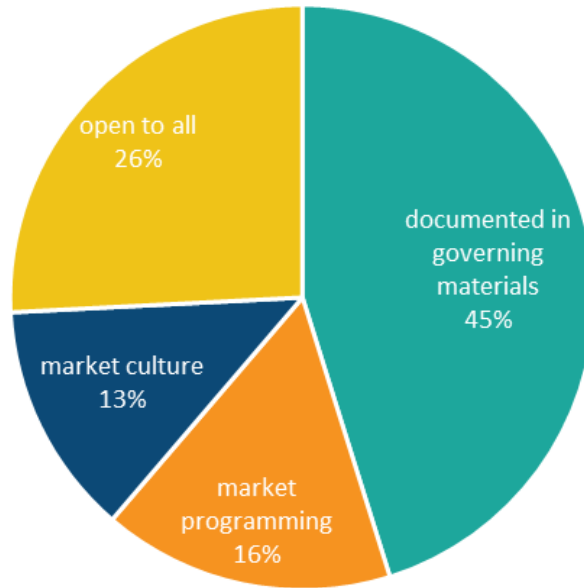


Figure 22. Description of how farmers markets incorporate DEI into their markets.

Vendors and Market Leadership

Part of evaluating how DEI is incorporated into farmers markets includes evaluating the diversity of vendors and market leadership. Markets were asked what percentage of their vendors and leadership are Black, Indigenous, People of Color, Women (or women-owned), part of the LGBTQ+ community, or part of another historically marginalized group. Forty-nine markets responded to each question and reported an average of 49% of vendors and market leadership fall within these groups.

Table 11. Market organizations were asked to report the percentage of vendors and market leadership that identify as Black, Indigenous, People of Color, Women (or women-owned), part of the LGBTQ+ community, or part of another historically marginalized group.

VENDORS are BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), women-owned, LGBTQ+, differently abled, and/or part of another historically marginalized group	MARKET LEADERSHIP are BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), women, LGBTQ+, non-binary or genderqueer, differently abled, and/or part of another historically marginalized group
49%	49%

Nutrition Assistance

Providing food and nutrition assistance at farmers markets is one strategy to make farmers markets more appealing to consumers, especially consumers with lower incomes. There are a

variety of food and nutrition assistance programs that are supplemented by federal, state, and local programs. Farmers markets are responsible for tracking these programs to track how much is spent under these programs.

Availability of Nutrition Assistance Programs

A variety of nutrition assistance programs were available at farmers markets in North Carolina during 2022. Figure 23 shows how many markets offered each type of program. Other responses included: cash match, community garden cash, produce to pantry, produce prescription, and eat a rainbow.

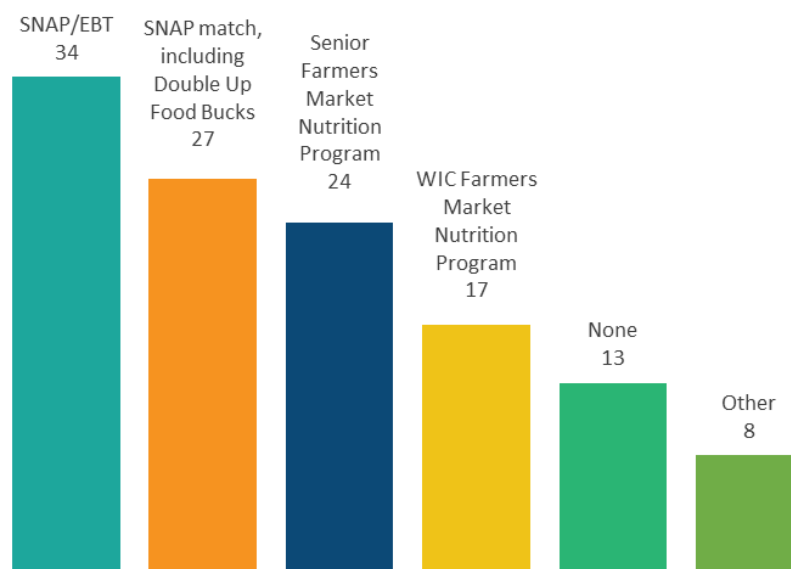


Figure 23. Nutrition assistance programs offered at North Carolina farmers markets.

Of the 34 market organizations who reported offering SNAP/EBT, 27 provided additional information about their program. These markets reported a total of \$433,791 in sales, for an average of \$16,407.96 during the year with a maximum of \$50,000.

An average of **\$16,407.96** in SNAP benefits were distributed at markets that provide the program.

Table 12. Summary statistics describing the amount of SNAP/EBT sales at farmers markets in North Carolina during 2022.

Market Count	27
Total	\$433,791
Average	\$ 16,407.96
Minimum	\$ 250.00
Maximum	\$ 50,000.00
Markets Not Sure of Sales Amount	3

SNAP Match Funding

Providing a match for SNAP sales allows consumers to stretch their food spending twice as far. If a market is interested in offering this type of match, they are responsible for finding a funding source. As shown below, most matching dollars come from grants. Other responses included special events, other local organizations, and cash reserves.

Market organizations are split on whether they limit these matching incentives to fruits and vegetables only. Of 39 market organizations who responded to a question asking about limiting incentives to the purchase of fruits and vegetables, 18 said they do limit purchases to produce and 21 said they do not limit purchases.

Markets were asked if there is a cap on purchase amounts per customer at each market. Of the 39 market organizations that responded, 24 said they do not have a cap and 15 market organizations said they do have a cap. For the market organizations that reported having a cap per customer at each market the average was \$24 with a range of \$1 to \$42.

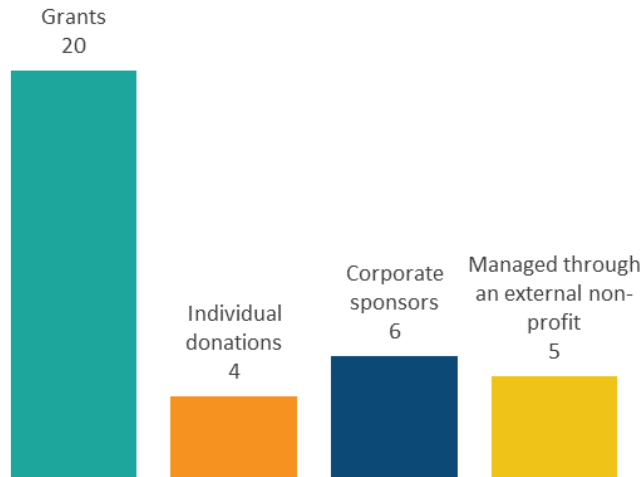


Figure 24. Description of where funding comes from to match SNAP purchases.

Tracking SNAP Match

Tracking matching funds is an additional administrative task for markets. Markets reported a variety of strategies to track these funds, including using tokens, spreadsheets, paper documents, and vendor receipts.

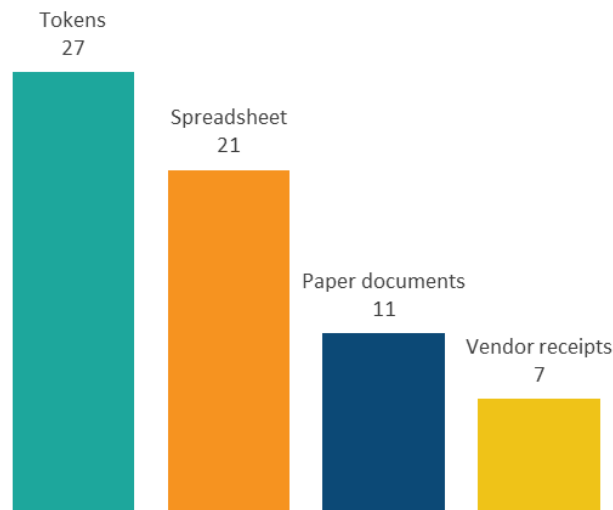


Figure 25. Strategies used by market organizations to track SNAP match incentives.

Expanding Nutrition Assistance Programs

Markets who do not currently offer SNAP were asked if they would be interested in doing so. Most market organizations who responded were interested in offering the program, with several markets noting they would need technical assistance to get the program started.

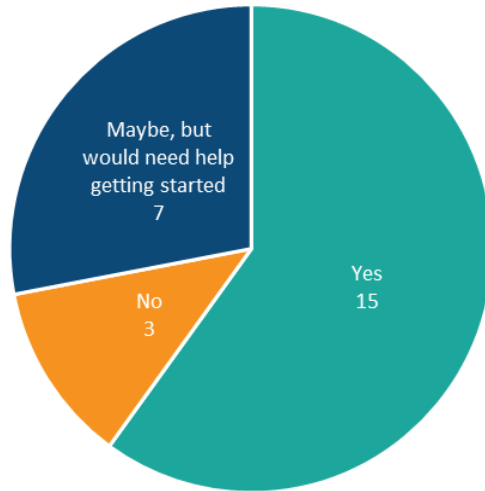


Figure 26. Interest in offering SNAP from markets who do not currently offer the program.

Market Promotion and Feedback

When asked to rank nine different marketing assets, social media, signs and newsletters to customers were ranked as the most effective. Community calendars, posters, and rack cards were ranked as the least effective.

Customer Feedback

Creating welcoming spaces for consumers and vendors is part of the job for market managers. Markets reported using online and in-person strategies to gather feedback from consumers.

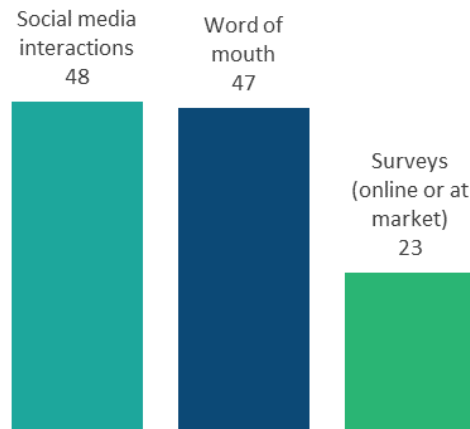


Figure 27. Strategies used by farmers markets to gather consumer feedback.

Joys & Challenges of Managing a Farmers Market

Managing a farmers market comes with joys and challenges. Forty-two respondents shared what they are most excited about for the 2023 market season. Responses addressed being excited about working with new and returning vendors, providing a space for small businesses to sell their products, bringing in consumers, expanding nutrition assistance programs, expanding events and programs at the market, and building capacity for their market.

Market organizations shared their excitement for the 2023 season by saying:

“I love my job and always tell people I have the best job [in the} town. I'm very happy that we are now accepting SNAP and hope to expand our nutrition incentive programs.”

“Interviewing new vendors. I always like to see the new businesses just starting out. There are so many talented people in the community, and I like being able to provide them with a place to sell items they made and are passionate about.”

“I look forward to our market expanding with more vendors and more customers. We had a great season in 2022 and are looking forward to another great season in 2023. I hope that we continue to bring in more diverse vendors and more unique products. I also look forward to planning new events with our existing partners and creating new partnerships with organizations.”

“Continuing to enrich the community in which we live, continuing to provide a viable and thriving marketplace for vendors, continuing to integrate the market into all sectors of the business community, continuing to respond to the needs of our citizens.”

Managing a farmers market also comes with challenges. Markets were asked what is most challenging about managing a farmers market with an option to select all and provide additional answers. There were a total of 130 responses. Other responses included facility management, pay, and staff capacity.

While markets reported being most excited about engaging with vendors, it is also named as one of the biggest challenges.

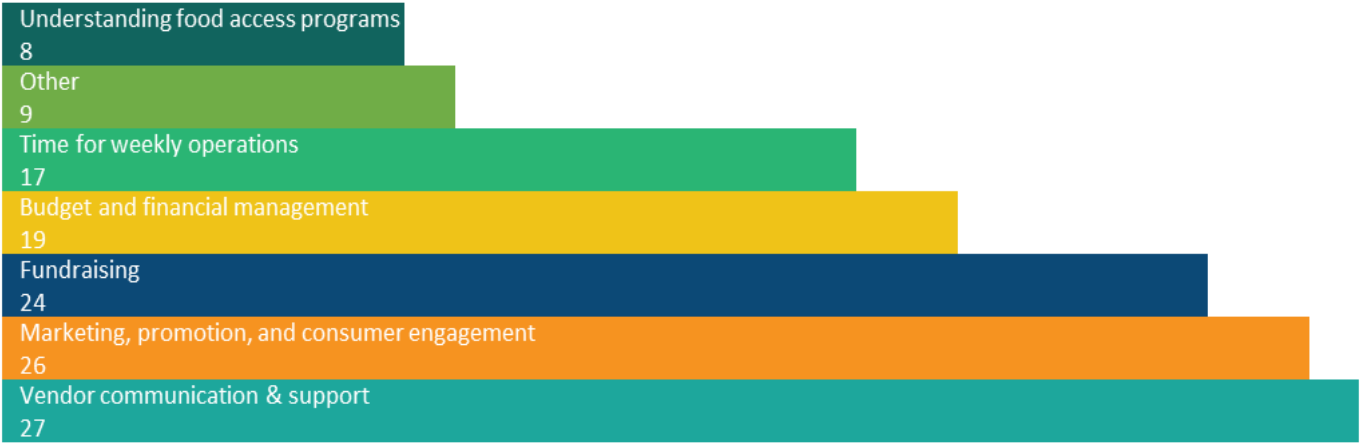


Figure 28. Challenges of managing a farmers market in 2022.

North Carolina Farmers Market Network

Before 2022 North Carolina was one of about a dozen states that did not have a statewide farmers market association, and that changed with the foundation of the North Carolina Farmers Market Network (NCFMN). Knowing what type of resources and opportunities are in demand can help the organization prioritize which programs and resources to provide as they get established. As part of this survey forty market organizations responded that they were interested in joining the statewide organization.

Markets were asked which training or resources would help their market and to select all that apply. Figure 29 below shows that marketing resources and networking opportunities are the most in-demand. Other responses included social media training, funding, and fundraising training.



Figure 29. Types of training and resources prioritized by markets for the North Carolina Farmer Market Network to implement.

Markets were also asked about specific topics to include in training and resources. This was an open ended question with 30 responses. Some responses included multiple topics. The topics were coded and included: marketing, nutrition assistance programs, food and farm trends, local food systems, measuring market impacts, financial management, conflict resolution, market funding, and others.

When asked what type of updates market organizations would like to receive from NCFMN, grant announcements and training opportunities were the most common responses.



Figure 30. Types of updates market organizations would like to receive from NCFMN.

Conclusion

This is the first attempt at gaining a comprehensive understanding of how and where farmers markets operate within North Carolina. The findings of this survey highlight the importance of farmers markets as vibrant spaces that provide support for small businesses, consumers, and communities. Farmers markets serve as invaluable platforms for local farmers, artisans, and entrepreneurs to showcase their products and connect directly with consumers. These markets provide a vital avenue for small businesses to thrive, fostering economic growth and sustainability within local communities. By offering fresh, locally sourced produce, handmade goods, and unique artisanal products, farmers markets not only contribute to the local economy but also promote a sense of community pride and identity. These community assets don't just happen, they are the direct result of caring market managers.

Moving forward, NCFMN will support farmers markets and the role they play in creating vibrant community spaces and market channels. NCFMN is committed to providing statewide resources and training for farmers markets managers, boards, and vendors to support place-based market development. Findings from this survey and future surveys will help prioritize next steps for the organizations and will be used to communicate the statewide impacts of farmers markets across the state.

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