



Farmers' Markets in New York City

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Highlights

- The U.S. Department of Agriculture reports that the number of farmers' markets in the nation has risen sharply, growing from 2,863 in 2000 to 7,864 in 2012.
- In New York State, the number of farmers' markets has more than doubled since 2000, increasing from 235 in 2000 to 521 in 2012.
- According to a 2009 survey, 20 percent (7,335) of all New York State farms sold food and greenhouse products directly to consumers.
- The 2007 Agricultural Census found that the share of New York farms selling food directly to buyers was more than twice the national share.
- In New York, the value of direct-to-consumer farm sales reached \$362 million in 2009, an increase of 57.4 percent since 2000.
- In 2009, New York farmers derived 10 percent of their income from direct-to-consumer sales.
- A number of studies have found that the direct sale of farm products to consumers have benefits for the economy and the community.
- New York City has 138 farmers' markets, with 48 markets in Brooklyn, 39 in Manhattan, 32 in the Bronx, 17 in Queens, and 2 in Staten Island.
- GrowNYC operates the 54 Greenmarkets around the City; Just Food manages the 22 City Farms Markets; Harvest Home runs another 17 markets; and local community and nonprofit groups run the rest of the City's markets.
- According to the Farmers' Market Federation of New York, 248 markets statewide accepted food stamp purchases in 2011—up from 16 markets in 2006. New York's farmers received \$2.6 million in food stamp dollars from direct-to-consumer sales.
- Many farmers' markets donate food to the City's food pantries and homeless facilities. For example, in 2011, GrowNYC's Greenmarkets donated more than 825,000 pounds of food to City Harvest and other organizations.

Since the 1970s, farmers' markets have multiplied and become more popular in New York City and throughout New York State as the locally grown food movement has gained momentum.

A farmers' market is often defined as a public site used by two or more local or regional producers for the direct sale of farm products to consumers. In addition to fresh fruits and vegetables, markets may sell dairy products, fish, meat, baked goods, and other minimally processed foods.

As of August 2012, New York State reported that there were 521 farmers' markets statewide, more than twice the number in 2000. Over one-quarter of the markets (138) were in New York City. Since 2006, New York City has added 58 farmers' markets—an increase of 73 percent. Both the State and City have undertaken initiatives to make farmers' markets more attractive to low-income households.

With the rising popularity of farmers' markets, consumers are demonstrating their growing preference for fresh, less-processed, locally grown food. In New York City, farmers' markets have been embraced as an important part of a wider effort to promote a healthy, sustainable food system, from production to waste disposal.

In addition, farmers' markets in New York City provide jobs, help revitalize neighborhoods and create destinations that benefit nearby businesses. They also provide critical economic support to farmers throughout New York State, with large numbers coming from the Hudson Valley. For many farmers, these markets are an essential source of income.

Economic Benefits of Farmers' Markets

A study performed by the National Agricultural Statistics Service and the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets reported that 20 percent (7,335) of all farms in New York were engaged in direct-to-consumer sales (including sales of greenhouse products) as of 2009.

In New York, the share of farms that sell directly to consumers is higher than the national average. The 2007 Census of Agriculture (the U.S. Department of Agriculture's most recent census) showed that the share of New York farms that sold food products directly to consumers was more than twice the national share.

Even though the number of farms in New York declined by more than 2 percent from 2000 to 2009, the number of farms that market directly to consumers rose by 10 percent, from 6,667 in 2000 to 7,335 in 2009.

Farmers' markets have become increasingly important for sustaining regional farms. The value of direct-to-consumer sales in New York reached \$362 million by 2009, up 57.4 percent since 2000.

As regional farms increase their sales, businesses that supply goods used for farming also get a boost. Spending in the community then increases as employment and income expand.

A recent report by the Union of Concerned Scientists cited three studies that found that direct sales of farm products generated increased economic output in the community by a multiplier of between 1.55 and 1.78 times the amount of direct sales.

For New York City, most of the expanded economic impact occurs in the surrounding agricultural regions, such as the Hudson Valley, though some City residents also are hired to work at the markets. The City's markets provide additional benefits to nearby businesses by attracting customers to the area.

In New York City, the Union Square Greenmarket, one of the City's most well-known farmers' markets, drew 60,000 consumers a day in the peak season, according to a survey. This survey also reported that 60 percent of shoppers made purchases at neighboring businesses.

Better Access for Low-Income Households

Both the State and City have undertaken initiatives to make farmers' markets more attractive to low-income households. These initiatives seek to improve access to fresh, healthy food, and also enlarge the customer base for farmers' markets.

The number of farmers' markets in the City that have portable point-of-sale terminals that accept food stamps has grown from just a few in 2006 to more than 100 markets in 2011. Sales made using these terminals at farmers' markets and other venues statewide rose from \$59,300 in 2006 to nearly \$2.6 million in 2011.

The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) pioneered a program called **Health Bucks**, which encourages low-income residents to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables at farmers' markets. A food stamp recipient gets \$2 in Health Bucks (which, as of 2012, are accepted at all farmers' markets) for every \$5 of food stamp purchases at the market. In 2011, the City distributed more than \$130,000 Health Bucks, up from \$113,000 in 2009.

New York State has introduced a program similar to the City's Health Bucks program called **Fresh Connect Checks**. This is part of the State's Fresh Connect Program, which aims to assist farmers and improve access to local, fresh food in underserved communities. In 2012, the State issued \$300,000 in Fresh Connect grants statewide for projects designed to further these objectives.

The State Department of Agriculture and Markets also runs New York's very successful **Farmers' Market Nutrition Program**, which provides special coupons or checks to seniors and women with infants and children to enable purchases at farmers' markets. The program accounted for more than \$5 million in sales statewide in 2010.

The **Green Carts** program, a related program run by the DOHMH, has provided additional licenses for entrepreneurs (many of whom are immigrants) to operate fruit and vegetable food carts in underserved communities. In addition, the DOHMH's **Healthy Bodegas Initiative** has worked with more than 1,000 bodegas in underserved neighborhoods to promote healthy options, including stocking fresh fruits and vegetables, which are often provided via local farmers' markets.