

Vermont Farmers' Markets 2005

Vermont had 55 active farmers' markets in 2005. The Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT) and the department of Community Development and Applied Economics at the University of Vermont collaborated on a survey of market managers during the winter of 2006. Managers were mailed surveys asking about the sales and status of their markets, and their opinions about market potential. Follow-ups and some surveys were also conducted by phone. This report is based on the sample of 39 reporting markets (85%).

In 2005 the estimated sales from all markets were \$3,511,000 (plus or minus 3%). Average sales per market were almost \$97,000, but size of markets varied widely. Just the four largest markets (in Norwich, Burlington, Brattleboro, and Montpelier) accounted for over half of total sales in the state, and reported average sales of \$459,000 each. Markets reported an average of 24 vendors, but again with a large range of 5 to 89 vendors. The larger markets have both more vendors and higher average sales per vendor. As shown in Table 2, market issues vary considerably by size of market.

Total estimated sales were made up of 59% agricultural products, 22% prepared foods, 18% crafts, and 2% other products. Most markets accept Farm-to-Family coupons, but 80% of markets estimate that such purchases account for less than 10% of total sales.

Based on the USDA Census of Agriculture, Vermont already has the highest state per capita direct sales of food products from farmers to consumers, at 5.5 times the national average, and farmers' markets are an important (though not the exclusive) direct sales outlet. Yet 69% of managers responding believe that their markets are still growing. More respondents believe that attracting additional shoppers is very important to growth than believe that attracting more farmers is very important. Almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of market managers believe that the number of farmers' markets in their areas is currently about right, suggesting that markets neither unduly compete with each other nor that there is a lack of market opportunity for vendors and consumers.

Though farmers' markets are clearly an established part of Vermont's agricultural economy, market status is still tenuous in many locations. The majority of markets struggle with small numbers of vendors and consumers, and low sales per vendor. Only 29% of reporting markets are formally incorporated. No reporting markets own their sites, with 65% operating on public land and 35% on private land, but only 13% reporting any kind of formal lease for this space. Of those responding to the survey 91% said they could use some kind of outside help with their markets. And 75% of these cited help with promotion and advertising as a need.

For more information about this report, please contact NOFA-VT, info@nofavt.org or 802-434-4122.