



Vermont Farmers' Markets: 2010 Survey

Information compiled by Erin Buckwalter

87 summer farmers' markets operated at least one day a week throughout the state of Vermont in 2010. The Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT), with direction from the Vermont Farmers' Market Association sent a survey to all farmers' market managers or coordinators at the conclusion of the 2010 market season asking about sales, the status of their markets, and areas that markets needed assistance. 65 markets returned the surveys (75%). Of the 65 who returned their surveys, the responses differed significantly from being filled out completely to leaving much of the survey blank. The information in this report comes primarily from the surveys that had the majority of information filled out.

In 2010, the Castanea Foundation offered mini grant rewards of up to \$5,000 to Vermont Farmers' Markets to help them improve their sustainability. 32 markets took advantage of this offer and were awarded a total over \$91,000.00 in funding. Grants ranged from \$1,500 to \$4,000 each. Funds were used for a variety of needs; ranging from light infrastructure (pop-up tents, benches and signage), market promotion, manager stipends, or heavy infrastructure to help with drainage on the market site. In most situations, this infusion of extra market income allowed the market's vendors to have a very successful season.

Size and Venue

The number of individual vendors that attended a given market at least once last summer ranged from 6 to 376.

Average number of vendors	Number of markets
1-10	2
11-20	12
21-30	17
31-40	9
41-50	10
51-60	2
61-70	2
71-80	1
81-90	1
91-100	2
>100	3
Total	61

Most markets are made up of agricultural products, processed and ready to eat foods, baked goods, and a variety of crafts. Some markets allow services such as massage and bike repair. Many markets provide a space for local organizations to promote themselves. Vendors drove up to 50 miles to sell at markets. The average mileage driven was 20 miles.

Finances

In 2010, 49 of the 65 reporting markets collected gross receipt data of their vendors. The totals reported were divided into 3 major categories: agricultural sales, food sales, and crafts. The total reported gross sales amount is \$7,993,334 (up from \$6,917,041 reported in 2009 from 45 markets). Agricultural products account for \$4,974,775 reported (up from \$4,360,648 in 2009, a 12% increase); Processed foods \$2,062,120.25 (up from \$1,719,422 in 2009); and Crafts and other services \$779,868.28 (down from \$887,117 in 2009). Some of the reporting markets did not break down their total sales into any categories, which accounts for the discrepancy of these subtotals not equaling the total amount reported. 28% (13) of reporting markets reported agricultural sales of less than 50% of their total (the lowest being 22%). 72% (34) of reporting markets had 50% or more in agricultural sales, and of those markets, 16 had sales over 60% (the highest being 83%). Six markets had craft (and other services) amounts over 20%. Processed food sales average 30% of gross receipts at the six markets that reported that income. Of the markets that reported, 23% of them said their sales decreased, 73% said their sales increased, and 4% said they remained the same compared to the previous year.

Most markets determined their gross sales using an anonymous reporting form for each vendor. The form has the date and an area to write in a dollar amount for agricultural products, prepared food, and craft sales sold during the market. The form is either returned at the end of the market or at the following market.

Operating Budgets:

Market (organizational) budgets vary as much as market size, although not in direct correlation. The biggest contributing factors toward a large budget are site fees and/or a paid manager. In 2010, 51 reporting markets used their spaces for free. Last year, budget expenses ranged from \$277 to nearly \$55,000 expenses. Market income to offset these expenses comes primarily from vendors' fees (this year, many markets included the grant funds they received as part of their income). Most markets charge their vendors fees according to the amount of space used or the money they ear. This is calculated in different ways:

- Some markets charge a seasonal rate (from \$10 a season up to \$800 a season) for "regular" vendors and a flat day rate charge (from \$5/week to \$35/week per space).
- Some markets charge by day rates only (from \$5/week to \$25/week).
- Eight reporting markets charge a percentage of vendors' daily sales. These percentages range from 3% to 6% a week.
- 53% of the reporting markets charge a yearly membership fee ranging from \$15 to \$80.

Manager Compensation:

For many market managers, the only compensation they receive is the gratitude of their fellow market vendors. Some are paid by the hour, some a fixed stipend, some are given "perks" by the market such as a free vending space if they vend themselves, free products, etc. 59% (37) of reporting markets paid their manager/coordinator amounts ranging from \$348 to \$14,600, with the funds coming primarily from vendors' space fees.

Of those 37 reporting markets, 16 markets paid managers/coordinators over \$2,000 for the year. The higher manager incomes come from the largest markets in the state with vendor numbers over 35 each week.

Other Budget Information:

The Economic Services Division of the VT Department for Children and Families (DCF) reports that 5,083 low income households statewide, mostly elderly persons and families with children, used Farm To Family Program coupons to buy \$123,039 worth of fresh fruits and vegetables at 59 Vermont farmers markets in 2010.

In 2010, 27 farmers' markets had the capacity to accept EBT cards so that customers could use SNAP benefits to purchase food (up from 18 in 2009). Some of these markets also hosted technology to accept bank debit cards. Total reported sales were over \$110,000 from EBT and debit card transactions. 3SquaresVT/SNAP transactions totaled over \$55,000.

Other expenses markets have include entertainment, advertising, porta-potties, general liability insurance, office supplies, bookkeeping, market coupons (as incentive for shoppers to attend their market), website development, and tents for the manager. Some markets ask local businesses to donate funds to help pay for entertainment at markets.

Added Comments Managers Shared on Survey

Below is a compilation of the added comments from the surveys received. If there is a number after the comment, it means the number of reporting markets expressing the same comment.

Ways the market supports the community

- Brings people downtown to support local businesses too (5)
- Donation of market products or \$ (4)
- Market offers free space for local non-profits (3)
- The community is not supportive or slow to support (3)
- Market offers a 'gleaning' project (2)
- Market offers EBT/Harvest Health coupons
- Market provides business incubation
- Provide events and music for the community

Ways the community supports the market:

- Donated use of space/infrastructure (different at each site but may include electricity, restrooms, insurance, etc.) (20)
- Businesses or non-profits in town sponsor events or give donations (11)
- Brings people downtown to support local businesses too (5)
- Collaborate on advertisements (4)
- Town/Non-profit assisted in managing market or paying for manager (3)
- Donated advertising (3)
- Collaborate on events (3)

Landlords/town helped with or made site improvements (3)
Free parking offered (2)
Member hours at Co-op to volunteer at market
Allowed to put signs on private property with permission
Local children made picnic tables
Town has recycling center at market for all refuse
Market can hang banners across Main Street
Articles about market in local town magazine
Businesses allow advertising, use of restrooms
Local restaurants purchase produce at market
Town/city rewriting jurisdiction to allow for markets
Police help if needed
Local café hosts market meetings
Non-profit allows market to use non-profit status

Does a diverse cross section of host community attend the market?

Yes - 29 responses

EBT, Farm to Family, and/or Harvest Health coupons really help (16)
Easily accessible for those without reliable transportation (2)
Gleaning program (2)
Diversity of music helps
Specific outreach done to assisted living communities and low income housing residents
Sent info about market through the school
Ads on the local radio station help
Market provides pleasant gathering/meeting spot
Weekly FPF post helped bring in more people
Highly visible spot

No – 12 responses

Few locals attend/mainly tourists (3)
Maybe with EBT or Farm to Family, more people would come (3)
Shoppers not utilizing EBT (2)
Perception it's too expensive (2)
Many community members have their own garden
Locals not in the habit of shopping at the market
Not for lower income consumers
Had to give up market table due to cost
Hope to improve with coupons for low-income/seniors
Only wealthy attend

Didn't know – 5 responses

Ways the market has improved sales:

Special events (22)
Better signage/advertising (19)
Coupons (13)
EBT/Debit (10)
Live music (8)

Cooking Demos/tasting days (7)
Improved website (5)
Manager/Events/Info tent (5)
Changed market day or location (4)
Email list (4)
Flyers/Flier every door or postcards (4)
Harvest Health (3)
Gleaning (3)
Benches or covered seating area for customers to rest (3)
Farm to Family (3)
Press releases/newspaper articles (3)
Raffles (3)
Market “kickoff” event (3)
Youth market (3)
Community Booth/Non-profit table (3)
Children’s activities (2)
More vendors (2)
Radio ads (2)
Improved parking/Special parking accommodations for seniors and handicapped
Customers (2)
Focused manager/great market committee (2)
New logo
Signs in multiple languages
Master Gardener & Composter booth
Have “shopping carts”
Dog friendly
Part of published guide
Market info tent
End of year customer survey
Refrigerator magnets
Front Porch Forum
Joined Chamber of Commerce
Reached out to local College students
Display in town business windows of vendors products
“Open” sign next to permanent sign
Facebook
Market dollars to use as gift certificates
Offering coffee

Obstacles to Success

Need more variety of vendors/committed vendors (15)
Parking (12)
Competition with other markets, growers, CSAs (10)
Advertising (either costs of lack of know-how) (8)
Limited space for expansion (8)
Having a strong customer base (both summer and winter and diverse populations) (7)

Limited volunteers (5)
Bad weather (4)
Lack of permanent site (4)
Struggling economy (4)
Cost to manage the market (3)
Location (3)
Not having an active board or inexperienced (3)
Overcoming past reputation (2)
Perceptions that farmers' markets are expensive (2)
Having vendors &/or Board Members share market responsibilities (2)
Entertainment costs (2)
Need to have more affordable prices for lower income population (2)
Restarting with new staff
Need to increase EBT/FF sales
Permanent toilets needed
Highlighting community groups at the market
Lack of community/local government support