



Vermont Farmers' Markets: 2011 Survey *Information compiled by Erin Buckwalter and Lauren Lenz*

The Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT), is the parent organization for the Vermont Farmers' Market Association (VTFMA). Fifty-seven market organizations with 60 sites were members of the Vermont Farmers' Market Association (VTFMA) in 2012. With input from the VTFMA board of directors, NOFA-VT sent a survey to all these farmers' markets at the conclusion of the 2011 market season asking about sales, the status of their markets, and areas that markets needed assistance. Fifty-four markets returned the surveys. Thirty-three of these were just summer markets, two were just winter markets, and 11 operated year-round. Of the 33 summer markets, six offered special holiday markets in addition to their regular summer markets. The survey responses differed significantly among these markets: some were filled out completely while others left much of the survey blank. The information in this report comes primarily from the surveys that had the majority of information filled out.

In 2011, the Castanea Foundation offered mini grant rewards of up to \$5,000 to Vermont farmers' markets to help them improve their sustainability. Thirty-nine markets took advantage of this offer and were awarded a total over \$50,550.00 in funding. Grants ranged from \$800 to \$4,000. Funds were used for a variety of needs ranging from light infrastructure (pop-up tents, benches and signage), market promotion, manager stipends, and 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.

In addition to the mini grants, farmers' markets also received capital grants in 2011. The Vermont Farmers' Market Capital Improvement Grant (VFMCP) aimed to fund a minimum of five awards to farmers' markets in Vermont to support capital improvements and projects that build community collaborations with farmers' markets. The VFMCP was made available through the collaborative efforts of the NOFA-VT, the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (VAAFM), and the VTFMA. The grant was funded by a legislative appropriation as part of the 2010 Capital Bill. There was \$24,746 available for capital grants and there was no restriction on the amount of the request. Nine markets took advantage of the capital grants and were awarded a total over \$24,700.00 in funding. Grants ranged from \$700 to \$4,250. Funds were used to improve market space, surrounding green space, lighting, signage, and storage facilities.

Size and Venue

The number of vendors participating in a market at least once ranged from 6 to 423.

Average number of vendors	Number of markets
1-10	3
11-20	10
21-30	10
31-40	9
41-50	7
51-60	7
61-70	2
71-80	1
81-90	1
91-100	1
>100	1
Total	52

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 185 miles to sell at markets. The average mileage driven by vendors was 20 miles.

Finances

In 2011, 43 of the 54 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 \$5,340,396.13 (compared to \$7,993,334 reported in 2010 from 49 markets). Agricultural products account for \$3,156,376.07 of that reported; prepared foods \$1,518,271.80; and crafts and other services \$643,006.62. 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. Sixty-seven percent (28 out of the 42 respondents) reported that their agricultural sales have increased in the past three years. Seventy-nine percent (33 out of 42 respondents) saw an increase in non-agricultural sales (crafts, prepared food, and other items). Of the 45 respondents, 69% said their gross sales increased, 24% said their sales decreased, and 7% 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.

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.

Vendor Fees:

In 2011, budget expenses ranged from approximately \$225 to \$61,680.37. 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 vendor fees according to the amount of space used or the total money earned. This is calculated in a few different ways:

- Some markets charge a seasonal rate (from \$10 a season up to \$1800 a season, also sometimes depending on footage) for "regular" vendors and a flat day rate charge (from \$3/week to \$30/week per space).
- Some markets charge by day rates only (from \$5/week to \$25/week).
- Five reporting markets charge a percentage of vendors' daily sales. These percentages range from 3% to 5% a week.
- 71% of the 49 reporting markets charge a yearly membership fee ranging from \$10 to \$180.

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 are given a fixed stipend, some are given "perks" by the market such as a free vending space if they vend themselves, free products, etc. Fifty-four percent (29) of reporting markets paid their manager/coordinator amounts ranging from \$200 to \$12,583.36. Of those 29 reporting markets, 19 markets paid managers/coordinators \$2,000 or more for the year. Most of the higher manager incomes come from the largest markets in the state with vendor numbers over 35 each week.

Range of manager pay	Number of markets
\$1-500	4
\$501-1,000	4
\$1,001-1,500	2
\$1,501-2,000	1
\$2,001-2,500	2
\$2,501-3,000	5
\$3,001-3,500	2
\$3,501-4,000	1
\$4,001-4,500	2
\$4,501-5,000	1
\$5,001-5,500	1
\$5,501-6,000	2
\$6,001-6,500	0
\$6,501-7,000	0
\$7,001-7,500	0

\$7,501-8,000	1
\$8,001-8,500	0
\$8,501-12,000	0
>12,000	1

Markets that answered that their manager held a volunteer position were also surveyed on how this situation was working and any additional comments they had concerning this position. Their answers are as follows.

How volunteer position is working	Number of markets
Agreeable/okay for now	7
Good/works well	6
Not enough income to pay, but would like to	1
Managed by team of volunteers	1

Site Rental:

Sixty-one percent (33) of the markets surveyed utilized donated space for the location of their market. Only 2 markets responded that they own the market space. Of the number surveyed, 33% (18) responded that they rent the location where their market takes place. Rent is paid in several different ways:

- Nine markets pay a flat rate for the entire season/year. These prices range from \$100 to \$6,000, with the average pay being \$1933, and the median pay being \$600.
- Four markets pay per week, with a range of \$13 to \$345.
- One market pays \$100 a week, only when indoor space is needed due to inclement weather.
- One market replied that they use donated space in summer, but rent in winter.
- One market responded that they pay a percentage (20%) of the market profit as their rent.
- Other markets pay a different price for renting in the summer and winter (as locations change). The prices paid for summer ranged from \$90 to \$1,000. The prices for winter range from \$450 to \$1150 a season.

Other Budget Information:

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

Limited-Income Access Programs

The Economic Services Division of the VT Department for Children and Families (DCF) reports that 5,179 low income households statewide, mostly elderly persons and families with children, used Farm To Family Program coupons to buy \$124,881 worth of fresh fruits and vegetables at 61 Vermont farmers market sites in 2011.

In 2011, 37 farmers' markets had the capacity to accept EBT cards so that customers could use SNAP benefits to purchase food (up from 30 in 2010). Some of these markets also hosted technology to accept bank debit cards. 3SquaresVT/SNAP transactions at farmers' markets totaled over \$60,000.

Product liability insurance

For the 2011 season, 35 out of 50 responding markets (70%) did not require their vendors to carry product liability insurance. However, eight markets said that they strongly encouraged vendors to obtain insurance, and two markets said that they are thinking about requiring it. Fifteen out of 50 markets (30%) did require product liability insurance to be carried by all vendors selling at the market, though one market reported that they did not check to verify that vendors were indeed carrying insurance. One market has vendors sign a liability waiver, another suggests it, and one other requires all vendors to carry all appropriate licenses for the state of Vermont, but does not enforce.

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 indicates the number of reporting markets that expressed the same comment.

Ways the market supports the community

Special events and festivals (includes live music) (25)

Increased signage (20)

Use of coupons/discounts/raffle (17)

Advertisement through newsletters, websites, social media (12)

Children/youth festivals and activities (11)

EBT Machines/Farm to Family/Harvest Health coupons (8)

Donations (monetary and food) to local organizations and establishments (7)

Fundraising events for/promotion of local organizations/causes (7)

Picnic tables, trash cans, portable toilets, and other amenities (4)

Market information booth (4)

Demonstrations and workshops (4)

Outreach to low income individuals (2)

Community space

Sliding pay scale so all vendors can afford to participate in market

Youth vendor participation

Affordable "supporting memberships" available to community members interested in voting in the annual meeting

Ways the community supports the market:

Free Parking

Encouragement from customers

Location

Community volunteers

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

Yes - 34 responses

EBT usage (12)

Locals, summer residents/tourists (13)

Yes, but would like to see more (6)

Farm to Family coupons (9)

Local food shelf involvement
Low-income population (3)
Fundraisers

No – 11 responses

No but trying (3)
Need access to EBT/coupon programs (3)
Primarily only serving middle to upper classes (3)
Primarily only serving older population and students
Too small of a market

Not sure – 3 responses

Obstacles to Success

Location/venue/time of market (21)
Increasing/strengthening of customer base (11)
Competition with neighboring markets/CSA's/home growers/grocery stores (10)
Marketing/outreach (social media, advertising) (10)
Increasing and diversifying vendors/products offered (9)
Parking (9)
Involving and supporting the low-income community/EBT users (6)
Perception that local agricultural prices are too high/customers habits towards convenience (6)
Committed/reliable vendor involvement (5)
Economy (4)
Weather (4)
Lack of funding/income (4)
Limited funding to pay manager (4)
Lack of community volunteers/involvement (3)
EBT access/information (2)
Online marketing (2)
Lack of affordable produce (2)
Need to increase relations with community groups
Operating EBT program after grant funding runs out
Revision of NOFA market guide
Organization of events
Adhering to market rules