



Vermont Farmers' Markets: 2012 Survey
Information compiled by Lauren Lenz and Erin Buckwalter

The Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT), is the parent organization for the VTFMA. Fifty-eight market organizations with 64 sites were members of the Vermont Farmers' Market Association (VTFMA) in 2012. Twenty-five of these sites operated year-round markets, one operated just in winter, and the remainder were summer-only. With input from the VTFMA board of directors, NOFA-VT sent a survey to all these farmers' markets at the conclusion of the 2012 market season. This survey asked about sales, the status of their markets, and areas where markets needed assistance. Forty-eight markets returned the surveys. Of those, 31 just operated a summer market, 1 just operated a winter market, and 16 operated year-round. 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 the information filled out.

Size and Venue

The number of vendors participating in a market at least once last summer ranged from 7 to 120.

Average number of vendors	Number of markets
1-10	8
11-20	18
21-30	9
31-40	5
41-50	4
51-60	1
61-70	0
71-80	0
81-90	2
91-100	0
>100	0
Total	47

Most markets are made up of agricultural products, processed and ready to eat foods, baked goods, and a variety of crafts. Some markets also allow services such as massage, clothing mending, and bike repair. Many markets provide a space for local and/or charitable organizations to promote themselves.

Finances

In 2012, 41 of the 48 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 for these 41 markets was \$8,309,040.32 (up from \$5,340,396.13 reported in 2011 from 54 markets). Agricultural products accounted for \$4,204,475.59, prepared foods \$2,417,671.36, and crafts and other services \$1,049,896.97. 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. Seventy-eight percent (28 out of 36 respondents) reported that their agricultural sales increased over the past year. Eighty percent (24 out of 30 respondents) saw an increase in craft sales. Of the markets that reported, 74% said their gross sales increased, 21% said their sales decreased, and 5% said they remained about 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, though not always in direct correlation. The biggest contributing factors toward a large budget are site fees and/or a paid manager.

Vendor Fees:

In 2012, total budget expenses ranged from \$474 to nearly \$55,000. Market income to offset these expenses came primarily from vendors' fees, which ranged from a total of \$50 to more than \$19,000. Most markets charge their vendors fees according to the amount of space used or the money they earn. This is calculated in different ways:

- Some markets charge a seasonal rate, from \$10 a season up to \$1,188 a season (with this price often dependent on booth size or type of vendor) for "regular" vendors. A flat weekly rate charge is available for less-permanent vendors, with fees ranging from \$5/week to \$40/week per space.
- Two markets charge a half season rate of \$80 or \$110.
- Some markets charge by day rates only (from \$10/week to \$50/week).
- Eight reporting markets charge a percentage of vendors' daily sales (often on top of a daily vendor fee). These percentages range from 3% to 6% a week.
- 62% of the reporting markets charge a yearly membership fee ranging from \$10 to \$130.

Manager Compensation:

According to surveys conducted in 2011, 54% (29) of reporting markets paid their manager/coordinator amounts ranging from \$200 to \$12,583, with the funds coming primarily from vendors' space fees. Comparatively, the 2012 survey revealed a significant increase in percentage of paid market managers and in overall compensation. Sixty percent of reporting markets paid their manager/coordinator a range of \$287 to \$27,000. The average of this pay range was \$5,541.27 and the median was \$4,500. Most managers are paid by the hour or given a fixed stipend, while some are given "perks" by the market such as a free vending space if they vend themselves, free products, etc. Of the 34 reporting markets, 22 markets paid managers/coordinators over \$2,000 for the year.

Range of manager pay	Number of markets
\$1-500	1
\$501-1,000	2
\$1,001-1,500	2
\$1,501-2,000	4
\$2,001-2,500	1
\$2,501-3,000	7
\$3,001-3,500	0
\$3,501-4,000	1
\$4,001-4,500	0
\$4,501-5,000	2
\$5,001-5,500	2
\$5,501-6,000	3
\$6,001-6,500	1
\$6,501-7,000	0
\$7,001-7,500	0
\$7,501-8,000	1
\$8,001-8,500	0
\$8,501-9,000	1
\$9,001-9,500	0
\$9,501-10,000	0
\$10,001-\$15,000	2
>20,000	2

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
Hoping to hire paid manager soon	6
Works well/has its perks	3

Works, but very time consuming	2
Board member/vendor also manages	1

Site Rental:

Fifty-four percent (26) of the reporting markets utilized donated space for the location of their market. Only one market responded that they own the market space. Of the number surveyed, 35% (17) responded that they rent the location where their market takes place. Rent is paid in a few different ways:

- Some markets pay a flat rate for the entire season/year. These prices range from \$100 to \$6,000, with the median pay being \$450.
- One market said they pay a percentage (80%) of the vendor fees 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 \$1,000 to \$3,900. The prices for winter are paid per market, with a range of pay from \$150 to \$237.50 a market.

Four markets replied that they use donated space in summer, but rent in winter (representing year-round markets). Their price of winter rent ranges from \$25 to \$75 per market, with the median price being \$50.

Other Budget Information:

Other expenses markets have include entertainment, advertising, production of market t-shirts and bags, bank charges (debit card transaction fees), portable toilets, market coupons (as incentive for shoppers to attend their market), education, EBT replacement machines and monthly fees (in 2012 these costs were covered by an appropriation from the VT Legislature), office supplies, general liability insurance, website development, special events, taxes, permits, and licenses.

Limited-Income Access Programs

The Economic Services Division of the VT Department for Children and Families (DCF) reports that 5,125 low income households statewide, mostly elderly persons and families with children, used Farm To Family Program coupons to buy \$123,939 worth of fresh fruits and vegetables at 66 Vermont farmers markets in 2012.

In 2012, 41 farmers’ market sites had the capacity to accept EBT cards so that customers could use SNAP benefits (formerly food stamps) to purchase food. When asked whether markets thought introduction of the EBT program drew in a new customer base, 66% responded yes. Some markets commented that the EBT program has expanded reach to elderly and low-income portions of the surrounding community, and has become increasingly utilized throughout the community in the past few years, while others said that they would like to see a more diverse crowd amongst their EBT customer base, or that they weren’t sure if the EBT program was reaching the community.

Product liability insurance

For the 2012 season, 23 out of 46 responding markets (50%) did not require their vendors to carry product liability insurance. Fourteen out of 46 markets (30%) did require product liability insurance to be carried by all vendors selling at the market, though one of these markets reported that they did not check to verify that vendors were indeed carrying insurance. Eight percent did not require their vendors to have insurance, but enforced vendor signage of market liability release forms. Ten percent recommended that their vendors carry this form, but did not check forms or enforce.

Type of organizational structure of markets

Forty-seven reporting markets reported on the structure of their organization. If there is a number after the answer, it indicates the number of reporting markets that expressed similar comments.

Don't know/no answer/none (11)
Sponsored by 501©3 or other organization (8)
LLC (7)
Non-profit (1)
VT State Non-Profit (12)
501(c)6 (3)
Sole Proprietorship (2)
Cooperative (2)
L3C

This information does a good job highlighting the fact that there are many different options for organizational structure for farmers' markets. Also of note is that this topic is very confusing for Vermont farmers' markets and many were unsure of their actual corporation status at the time of survey. Additional follow-up and clarification was required with the majority of reporting markets around this question.

Added Comments Managers Shared on Survey

Below is a compilation of the added comments from the surveys received.

Ways the market supports the community:

Hosting/Teaming with other local businesses to create special events (Bike Tours, Open Farm and Studio Tours, Harvest Festivals etc.) (13)
Free music (11)
Coupons for community members/Raffles (10)
Market information tent with recipes, EBT machine, market merchandise, places to sit away from the sun, rain, etc. (10)
Partnering with local nonprofits to have informational tents during market times/selling merchandise and collecting donations with proceeds benefiting non-profits (9)
Children's events/activities (storytelling, Children's Market, (7)
Weekly community newsletter/brochures/emails/press releases (6)
Demonstrations/classes (cooking, etc.) (5)
Use of website/social media (3)
Free drinks (2)
Community information booth (2)
Zero waste
Require all food service items to be compostable
Increased awareness of EBT
Convenient parking
Seed sales
Community clothing swap
Market manager with focus on making customers/vendors feel welcome, helping with EBT, solving any issues that may arise
Facilitating community connections/togetherness
Establish good connections with nearby business neighbors
Offering a diverse selection of vendors and products

Obstacles to success:

Figuring out how to increase vendor and customer participation (13)
Location (9)
Limited space for expansion (7)
Advertising (either costs or lack of know-how) (5)
Limited income/financial resources (5)
Limited Market Manager stipend/lack of Market Manager (5)
Limited parking (4)
Lack of board support/cohesiveness (3)
Overcoming past reputations/perceptions of farmer's markets as expensive (3)
Small staff/volunteers with limited time, resources (3)
Creating affordable prices for low-income population (3)
Need of sustainable source of revenue (moving away from grants) (2)
Small population size in area surrounding market location (2)
Competition with other markets, growers, CSAs (2)
Bad weather (2)
Struggling economy (2)
Day of week/time of day of market operation (2)
Website/social media management (2)
Consistent availability of produce year-round (2)
Lack of local government support
Simplifying the ordering/pick up of goods
Lack of understanding needs of local community (need data, info, experience)
Fundraising
Lack of education about foods commonly found at market and how to use them
Increase of personal vegetable gardens
Lack of organization
Diversifying products sold at market