

NORTH CAROLINA FARMERS MARKET 2024 CENSUS



NC FARMERS MARKET NETWORK

NC STATE

EXTENSION

WHAT A YEAR



Farmers markets are an extraordinarily strong part of North Carolina's agriculture industry. Markets provide a low-cost way for farmers to connect with their community and sell their goods directly to consumers. We see farmers markets across the state, mountains to sea. Known for its sweet potatoes, strawberries, tomatoes, pork, peanuts, and more, North Carolina hosts farmers who produce a wide range of farm products, prepared foods, craft products - all available at local farmers markets. Markets are unique places that are all at once sites of commerce, community-centered events, and important "third spaces."

The mission of the North Carolina Farmers Market Network (NCFMN) is to work with and for farmers market communities to create a thriving network of marketplaces for local food and farm products through education, innovative services, programs and partnerships, including providing resources to support historically underserved populations.

NCFMN emerged from passionate farmers market managers, coordinators, and Board members who cared deeply about their markets. The organization has grown steadily since its inception thanks to a dedicated group of organizers and market managers, engaged committees, and a diligent Board of Directors.

We did some incredible things in 2024: the Board of Directors developed a strategic plan to guide NCFMN in future years; we began planning our first statewide conference; we held regional meetups across NC, where market managers could network and share resources; we hired a contractor to support marketing and communications; we hosted monthly calls for market managers to promote professional development, networking, and resource-sharing; and we stewarded the Governor's proclamation for NC Farmers Market Week.

In November 2024, we began gathering data about farmers markets across the state via our census. The following report contains a wealth of information about farmers markets across North Carolina: **while markets differ in a variety of ways, they are united in their commitment to promoting NC agriculture and agricultural products.**

Thank you to the many people that made this census happen: Hannah Dankbar, the Local Food Program Manager at the NC State Extension and her hardworking team; to the NCFMN Board of Directors; and to farmers market representatives across NC who promote our agricultural producers week by week, year by year.

In partnership,

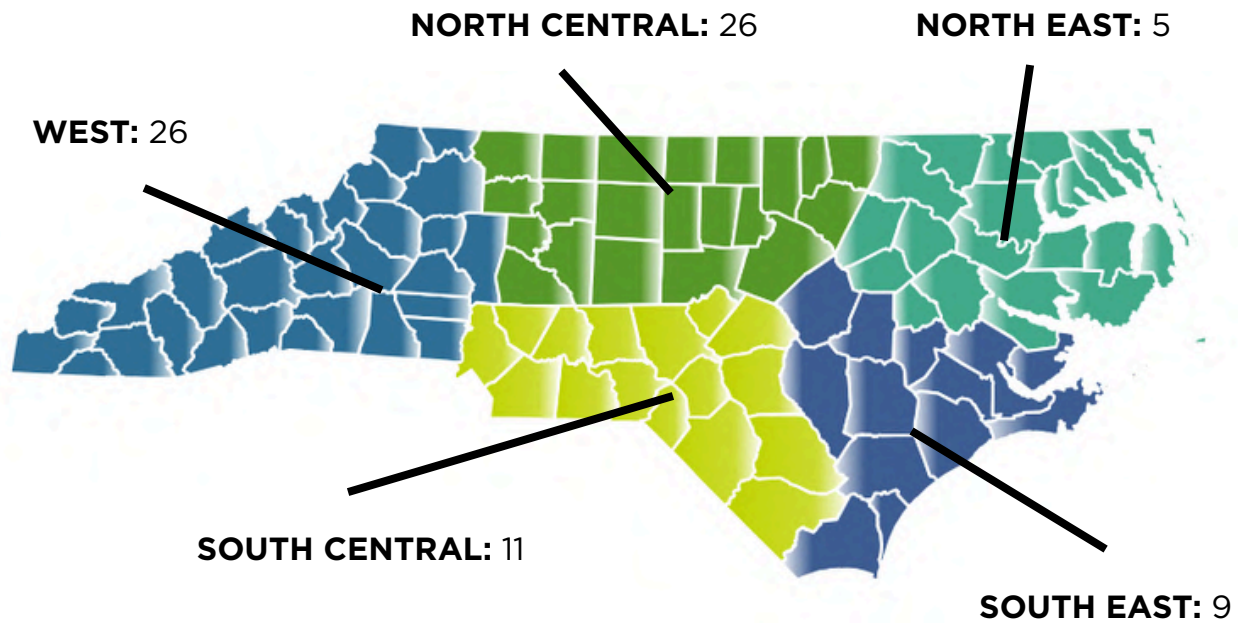
Maggie Funkhouser (2024 Chair, NCFMN Board of Directors and Manager, Carrboro Farmers' Market)

& Sydney Blume (Current Chair, NCFMN Board of Directors and Double Up Food Bucks Coordinator & Farmers' Market Manager, Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture)

MARKETS ACROSS OUR STATE

64 market organizations, representing 74 farmers markets, completed this census. 55 are single-market organizations, and 19 markets are included in multi-market organizations. **NCFMN estimates that there are 202 active markets across 89 counties in North Carolina, which means we can estimate a 36% response rate for this census.**

You'll find the geographic span of markets who filled out the survey below. Future versions of this survey will strive to reach even more markets from across the state.



ATTENDANCE & SALES

OPERATION DAYS

Farmers markets were open 25 days over the course of a year, on average.

37 markets had to cancel their market one day due to hazardous weather and 8 markets explicitly stated that the closure was due to Hurricane Helene, others closed due to local regulations and events.

45% of markets reported an increase in vendor counts between 2023 and 2024.

16% responded that their vendor count remained the same, and 9% reported a decrease. The average number of vendors selling on any one day at a market was 24. **The estimated total vendors statewide was over 4800.**

CUSTOMER COUNTS

According to the 49 census responses, **the average total number of customers at a market was 22,577 adults in 2024.**

Calculating customer counts can be tough, especially with so many other demands during the time the market is open! Less than half of the markets reported to use actual customer count data. Commonly, markets will use multiple counts throughout the day and multiply it by the average time a customer shops.

Based on our estimates of 202 markets in North Carolina, that means **over 4.5 million customers went to farmers markets in 2024!**

VENDOR SALES

A standardized method for measuring vendor sales and other impacts is needed in order to more accurately capture economic impacts of farmers markets across the state, but we do know that even small farmers markets are big business. The average of total sales was \$303,377 among the 43 markets that shared their vendor sales data for the census.

Based on our estimates of 202 markets in North Carolina, that means **over \$61 million was spent at farmers markets in North Carolina in 2024!**



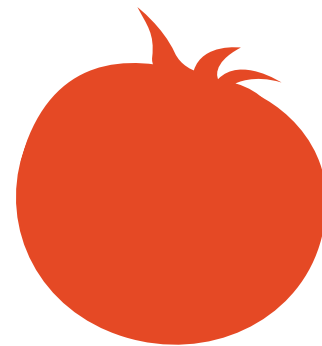
“We have farmers that have told me they would no longer be farming except for the success of their sales at our market.”

-Census respondent

MARKET POLICIES

LEGAL STRUCTURE

Most markets operate as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, with Government programs as the second most common in the state.



GOVERNANCE

Over half of the markets that responded indicated that an elected board or designated leaders made the majority of market decisions. Others make decisions collaboratively with the board and manager, or just by the market manager.

Most markets reported having some form of governing documents. In addition to materials to document market policies and procedures, many markets had policies clarifying geographic boundaries to qualify as “local”, explaining expectations for market attendance, and other related policies to help vendors and markets have a shared understanding for what is expected at the market.

84%, responded that they have a written policy about where products come from. Some markets conduct farm inspections to check that the type of products are produced to ensure honesty at the market. **Many have geography policies defined by mileage, 100 miles is most common.**

DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

NCFMN members frequently discuss strategies for making their markets feel more accessible and welcoming to all community members. Markets were asked if they included diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in their market rules, regulations, or practices. There was a near even split among the 51 respondents, with twenty-nine markets responding yes.

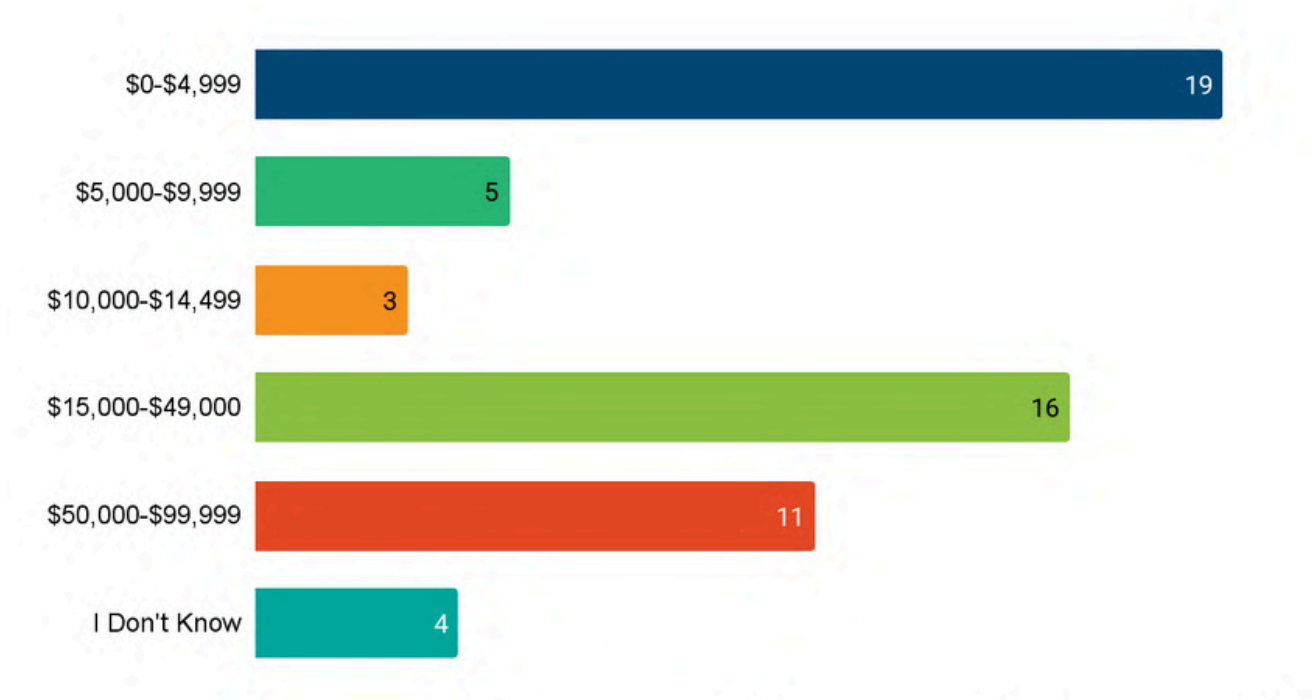
When asked how, some markets responded that they fall under their county’s DEI policies, so they automatically include it. Other markets that said they practice it, but don’t have it in writing, are either working on putting it into a written document, or they don’t feel the need to put it into a document because they already incorporate it into their practices.

Some of the most common reasons for selecting “no” include that they are trying to get it into writing or they don’t feel the need for DEI because they don’t discriminate.



MARKET OPERATIONS

MARKET BUDGET



Operating budgets of farmers markets across North Carolina. Responses represent the number of market organizations that responded.

VENDOR STALL FEES

On average, 48% of market budgets come from vendor fees. All markets charged a flat fee; no market gets a percentage of vendor sales. The highest percentage of responding markets charge somewhere between \$10-\$25 a day for a 10x10 stall. Other responses included seasonal fees or membership fees to generate income.

“I hope that we will find grants, sponsorships, and other fundraising avenues to be able to pay a market manager to do the majority of weekly things needed to run the market, rather than being pretty dependent on the weekly work of volunteers.”

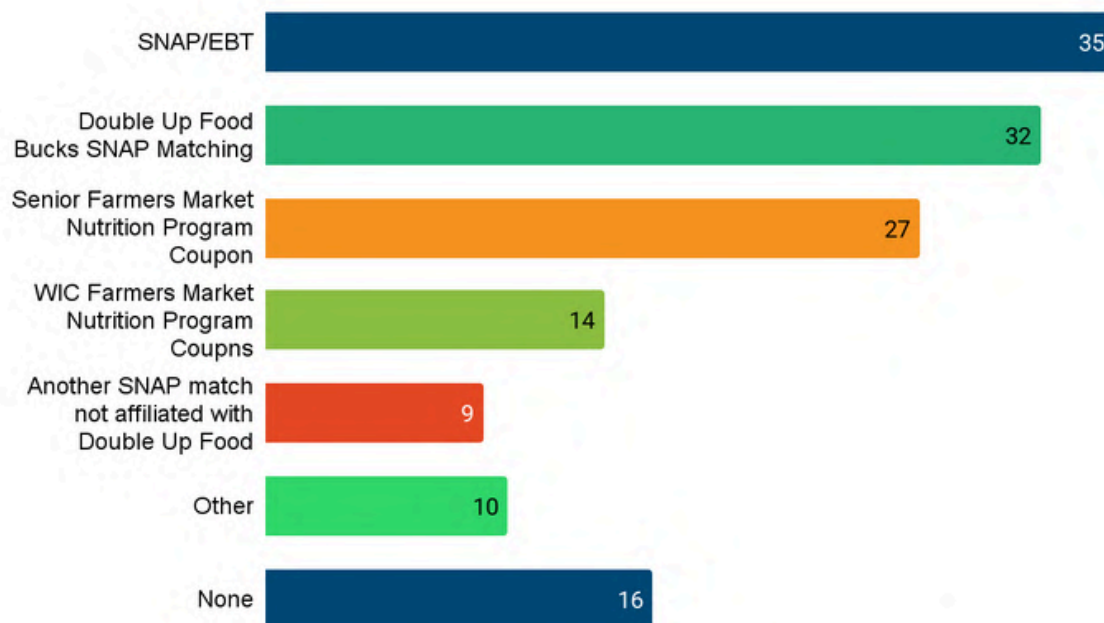
-Census respondent

MARKETING

Farmers markets commonly use social media, newsletters, emails, websites, radio advertisements, and physical flyers or signs. Markets also gather customer feedback, with most markets simply using word of mouth, followed by social media interactions. Others also use Google reviews, responses to weekly emails, and comment forms on a market's website.

NUTRITION ASSISTANCE

Providing food and nutrition assistance at farmers markets is one strategy to make farmers markets more accessible to consumers, especially consumers with lower incomes. **The average total SNAP sales at a farmers market in 2024 was \$7,144, with an estimated total of nearly \$1.4 million across the state!**



Nutrition assistance programs offered at North Carolina farmers markets. Responses represent the number of market organizations that responded.



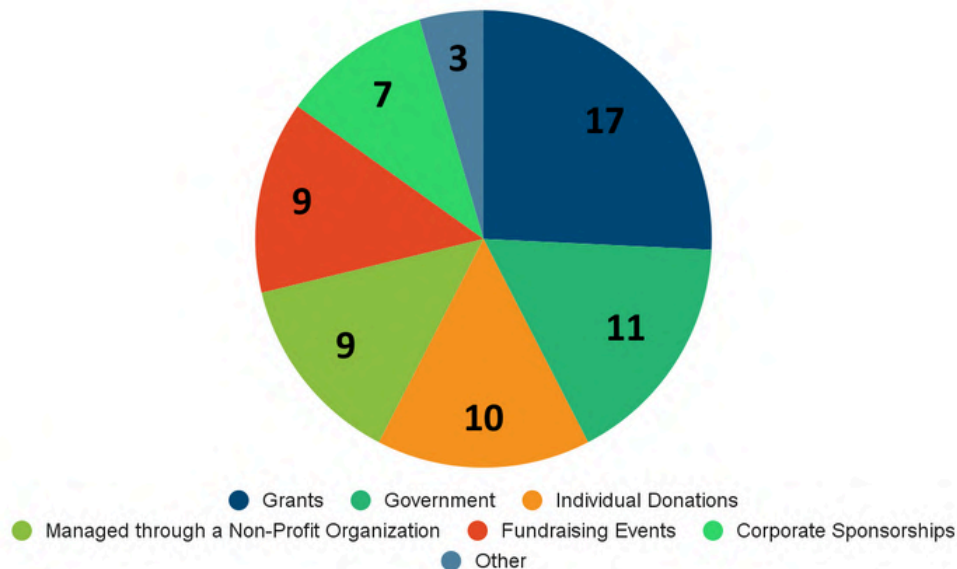
“So many of our Double Up Food Bucks programs. SNAP, WIC and Senior participants thanked me for the double up tokens.

They all said they did not know how they would feed their families without the extra help.”

-Census respondent

SNAP MATCH

Providing a match for SNAP sales allows consumers to stretch their food spending twice as far. If a market is interested in offering this type of match, they are responsible for finding a funding source. Most of the matching dollars come from grants.

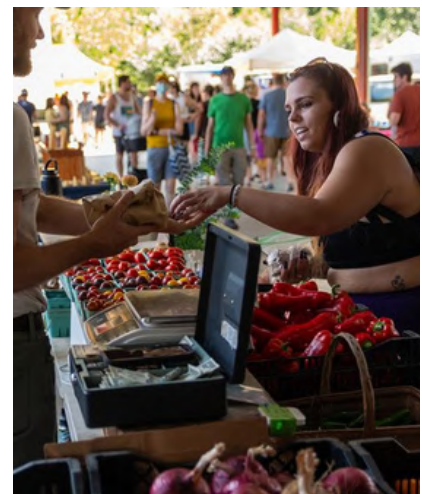


Market organizations are split on whether they limit these matching incentives to fruits and vegetables only. They are also split about having a cap on purchases with nutrition assistance funds. The average cap amount per purchase is \$37.50 with a range of \$15 to \$75.

Tracking matching funds is an additional, and often labor intensive, administrative task for markets. Markets reported a variety of strategies to track these funds, including using tokens, spreadsheets, and paper documents.

“It is very joyful to see customers, particularly families and children, getting excited about fresh local food, and in particular utilizing our double SNAP program.”

-Census respondent



INTO THE FUTURE

Farmers markets serve as invaluable platforms for local farmers, artisans, and entrepreneurs to showcase their products and connect directly with consumers. These markets provide a vital avenue for small businesses to thrive, fostering economic growth and sustainability within local communities. By offering fresh, locally sourced produce, handmade goods, and unique artisanal products, farmers markets not only contribute to the local economy but also promote a sense of community pride and identity. These community assets don't just happen, they are the direct result of caring market managers and other market leadership.

Moving forward, NCFMN will support farmers markets and the role they play in creating vibrant community spaces and market channels. The census also included questions about NCFMN to help inform future work of the organization. NCFMN is committed to providing statewide resources and training for farmers markets managers, boards, and vendors to support place-based market development.

Special recognition and gratitude are extended to key contributors who played a pivotal role in the survey's development, including the Oregon Farmers Market Association (OFMA), Farmers Market Coalition (FMC), Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP), Kelly Crane, Anne Elise Russel, and Tori Davis. Their expertise and collaboration were invaluable in shaping the survey's content and structure. By engaging a wide range of stakeholders, this census survey aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of farmers market dynamics, current operations, and opportunities for growth and improvement.

Report prepared by Hannah Dankbar and Tori Davis.
Design by Hannah Fuller.

STAY IN TOUCH!

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