

## *Top Trends in Farmers' Markets*

### ***Market Growth.***

The USDA reported that there were 2,863 farmers' markets operating in 2000, up 63% from the 1,755 markets just six years earlier. The farmers' market renaissance over the last 30 years has revived a rich tradition of vibrant, entrepreneurial culture. It is happening as communities seek to reconnect with their roots, revitalize the local farm scene, provide fresh produce to urban populations, gain access to organic products, and create vibrant communities. Farmers' markets are bringing a farm and quality food consciousness into the minds of millions of people.

### ***Larger Growers Entering the Markets.***

With the flood of produce imports coming into the country from overseas, even larger commercial growers are taking a second look at high-return marketing outlets like farmers' markets. Felix Fly, manager with the West Tennessee Farmers' Market in Jackson, Tennessee, says the number of farmers applying to sell in their farmers' market blossomed in 1999. "Normally we have 12 or 14 new vendor applicants each year, but this year we've had 51 by August," he said. "Due to the low prices this year in cattle, cotton, soybeans, hogs, and corn, we've found a lot of growers trying something new. I just got a call from someone growing pumpkins who had never grown them before." Similarly, a Louisiana citrus grower who formerly had been selling all his produce wholesale finally came to the Crescent City Farmers' Market after repeated requests from the manager. Selling out within an hour, he called his wife to bring more fruit, "Oh my God, I've been doing it all wrong!"

### ***Meeting the Demand for Pesticide- & GMO- Free Food.***

The growth in farmers' markets is fueled by public awareness on how to eat better. Customers want to

know where their food is grown and who grew it. More and more customers are becoming aware of genetically-engineered crops ("genetically-modified organisms," or "GMOs"), and they are willing to spend extra for pesticide- and GMO- free food. According to Jeff Cole, Executive Director, Massachusetts Federation of Farmers' Markets: "We're hearing more questions and concerns from customers regarding GMOs. They don't know where the products are coming from in the supermarkets, or what's been used in producing them, and they have difficulty getting answers to those questions in supermarkets. At the farmers' markets they're dealing directly with the producer and they can get answers to their questions and see the face of the person who grew it."

### ***Ethnic Foods Are Hot!***

According to Steve Salts, truck farmer and author of the upcoming book, "Around the World at Farmers' Market," ethnic foods can be a profitable item for growers who take the time to educate themselves about the native foods and cultural backgrounds of their ethnic customers.

Ethnic groups have generally been considered a lower-priced market compared to Anglo-American customers, because they are accustomed to buying at open-air markets at comparatively low prices. Yet Salts says that customer loyalty, volume, and consistency can make up for this. The coveted "yuppie" market, Salts points out, rarely buy in appreciable quantity. "We find that so-called ethnic customers buy and use fresh veggies greatly in excess of their percentage of the total farmers' market customers, and patronize farmers' markets more than do Anglo-Americans." The proportion of ethnics in the population is growing rapidly, Salts points out, and if present trends continue, the Census Bureau projects that non-His-



panic European Americans will be a minority by the year 2050, with the nation 25% Hispanic, 10-12% Asian-Pacific Islander and 16% black.

### ***Farmers' Markets Go Online.***

An increasing number of markets are establishing internet web sites where they can post news about upcoming events at the market, feature up and coming crops, and post seasonal recipes for their customers. Many of them also send out a weekly e-mail newsletter to their internet-savvy customers, and even establish links on their web sites to individual farmer/vendors' web pages.

Some growers who sell at the markets are also finding that internet e-mail is a quick and inexpensive way to keep in regular contact with their farmers' market customers. Regular customers send weekly e-mail orders to the farm and then find it pre-bagged and waiting for them at the market — this saves them from having to come early to purchase items that usually sell out. In addition, customers can e-mail special requests for the farmer to bring to the market.

### ***Community Rejuvenation and Economic Revitalization.***

Farmers' markets transform cities. City planners nationwide now recognize the value of the farmers' market. They have evidence that it revitalizes a downtown area like nothing else, by creating an active meeting place and income-producing community. More and more cities are viewing farmers' markets as a positive addition to their cities. The National Main Street Program has incorporated markets as a vehicle to rejuvenate declining downtown areas.

### ***The "New" Farmers' Market: Educating the Public about Local Food and Agriculture.***

"The New Farmers' Market" takes its title from the last section in the book which talks about how the vibrancy of urban centers goes hand-in-hand with the vitality of the surrounding rural areas — with farm-

ers' markets as their meeting place.

At the U.S. Conference of Mayors Annual meeting in June, 2001, the policy "Promoting the Preservation of Urban Influenced Farmland" was adopted. This policy recognizes that the preservation of nearby farmland helps provide food supply stability while contributing to the overall quality of life in metropolitan areas.

Co-author Vance Corum states: "The farmers' market renaissance over the last 30 years has revived a rich tradition of vibrant, entrepreneurial culture. It is happening as communities seek to reconnect with their roots, revitalize the local farm scene, provide fresh produce to urban populations, gain access to organic products, and create vibrant communities.

Amongst the public education programs featured in "The New Farmers' Market" are Taste Festivals, Shop with the Chef, Meet the Producer, Cooking With Kids, the Farmers' Market Salad Bar Program, and the Senior Nutrition Program.

As Pam Roy, executive director of the Friends of the Farmers' Markets in Santa Fe, New Mexico, says: "We want people to be conscious about where they buy their food and why. We want to let people know they can be involved in their local food system, and that by buying a tomato that is grown locally in the community instead of the supermarket variety, they're supporting the local economy."

Excerpted with permission from "The New Farmers Market: Farm-Fresh Ideas for Producers, Managers & Communities," by Vance Corum, Marcie Rosenzweig, and Eric Gibson. To order, send \$24.95 + \$4.50 shipping to: "QP Distribution," 22260 "C" St., Winfield, KS 67156. Credit card orders call 888-281-5170. California residents add \$1.75 tax. 8 X 10, 272 pps.

