



# Sara Hardy Downtown Farmers Market

## 2016 Impacts

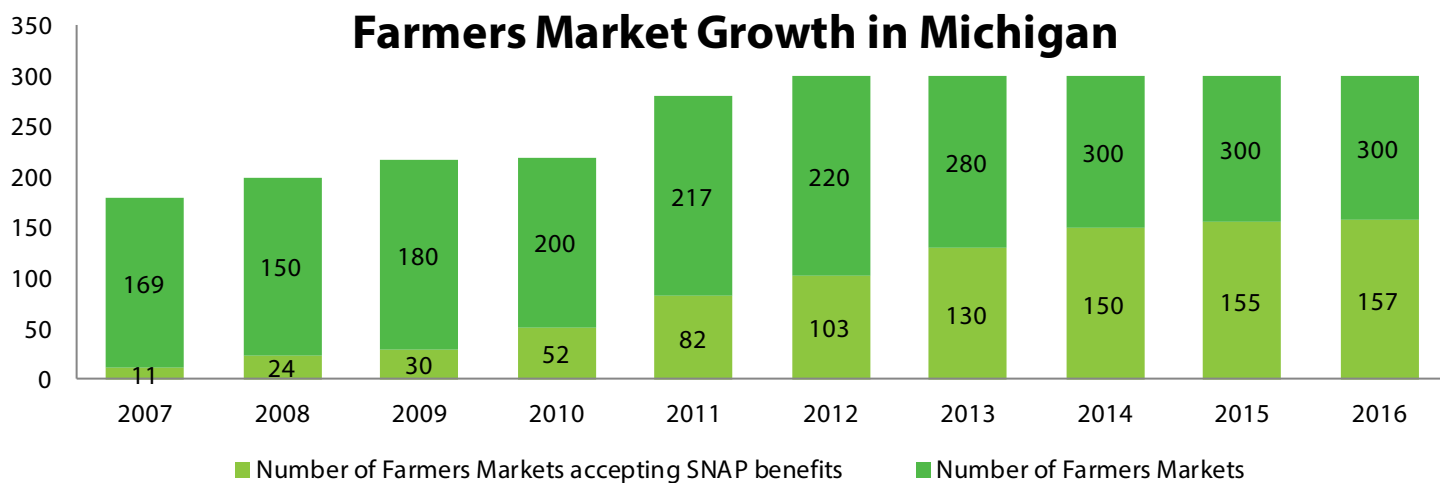


*This work was performed with funding from a USDA Rural Development Business Grant and a Specialty Crop Block Grant.  
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# INTRODUCTION

In 2006, the Michigan Farmers Market Association (MIFMA) was formed to provide a central resource for farmers markets and the farmers and vendors that sell at farmers markets, working toward a mission of advancing farmers markets to create a thriving marketplace for local food and farm products. MIFMA defines a farmers market as a public and recurring assembly of farmers or their representatives selling direct-to-consumer food and products which they have produced themselves.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the market may include a variety of vendors as determined by market management. A farmers market is organized for the purpose of facilitating personal connections that create mutual benefits for local farmers, vendors, shoppers and communities.

Over the last 10 years, the number of farmers markets in Michigan has doubled, from 150 in 2006 to more than 300 in 2016. This growth can be attributed to the wide range of benefits farmers markets provide their communities including, but not limited to, acting as the center of a thriving regional food system, supporting food and farm based businesses, serving as a community gathering place, increasing healthy food access, and protecting farmland and the environment.



Michigan markets are central to strong regional food systems because they promote farm vitality and provide communities of all sizes direct access to farmers and their products. Michigan farmers markets operate as incubators for unique and varying food and farm businesses. By fostering a mutually beneficial relationship between customers and farmers, farmers markets give small businesses a unique outlet to develop a customer base and increase profits. Low-income areas can also be reinvigorated through exposure to diverse products found within these markets, especially to a wide variety of fruits and vegetables which are often difficult to access in underserved areas. Benefiting from one of the most diverse selections of local agriculture in the nation, Michigan farmers markets expose communities to an ever-changing selection of products throughout the year.

Farmers markets generate economic benefit not only for the farmers and small businesses that participate, but also for neighborhood and nearby businesses, as well as the surrounding region. Farmers markets attract shoppers to a downtown or commercial area where they will often linger and make additional purchases during their shopping trip, thus spreading economic impact throughout the community. Farmers markets also distribute impact through a community by supporting small businesses, which are more likely to purchase goods and services from local or regional suppliers for the inputs they need.

<sup>1</sup> MIFMA definition of a farmers market: <http://mifma.org/aboutus/>



By creating a thriving marketplace on a weekly basis, farmers markets also foster community development. Farmers markets create an active public space that offers community members a unique experience to gather, interact, and build relationships. As a community gathering place, markets can shape growth, foster development, and strengthen communities.

Michigan farmers markets also expand access to local, nutritious foods which affects the health of the entire community. MIFMA strives to ensure all residents have access to locally grown, fresh, nutritious food. In 2006, only three of Michigan's farmers markets accepted the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). In 2016, 157 farmers markets in Michigan, just over half of all markets in the state, accepted SNAP. In addition to SNAP, customers have the opportunity to utilize many different food assistance benefits at Michigan farmers markets, such as Double Up Food Bucks, WIC Project FRESH, Market FRESH for Seniors, and Hoophouses for Health. Accepting a variety of food assistance benefits allows markets to serve a wide and diverse customer base and provides an inclusive environment for community members. When food assistance benefits, such as SNAP, flow through farmers markets, federal and philanthropic dollars circulate through local communities and benefit local businesses.

Farmers markets also help to protect Michigan agriculture, farmland, and greenspace. Farmland is protected and well cared for when farming is profitable. Supporting farm vitality helps keep and restore farmland to production, as well as enabling farmers to utilize management practices that protect the environment and incorporate and care for greenspace.

While the benefits of farmers markets are diverse and expansive, the economic impact of Michigan farmers markets has not been measured or documented. For this reason, MIFMA identified the need for standardized, accurate data collection at a local and state level in order to recognize and document the contributions farmers markets make to Michigan's food and agricultural industry.



Successful farmers markets reflect on the benefits they provide, measure their impact, and share the outcomes. Having strong data leads to strong markets. Strong markets measure various impacts to share with vendors, customers, community partners, and other local stakeholders. The impact farmers markets have on their communities is significant. When a market is focused on attracting visitors, facilitating a thriving local marketplace, and administering various food assistance benefits, measuring and communicating about their impact is often an overlooked and undervalued investment of time, energy, and resources. Strong farmers markets understand the importance of identifying important metrics, utilizing sound measurement instruments and practices, being accurate and timely with measurement, and tracking metrics over time. Initiating this kind of thoughtful and comprehensive approach to data collection at farmers markets will help markets evaluate and share their impact.

For these reasons, MIFMA conducted a pilot project in 2016 with funding from a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Business Development Grant (RBDG). Through this pilot, MIFMA sought to assess the economic contribution farmers markets make to Michigan's rural communities. The pilot project supported seven farmers markets in six rural communities in collecting data and assessing economic contribution. Each of these participating communities is considered rural according to the following USDA Economic Research Service definition: a nonmetropolitan area, based at the county level, which includes a combination of open countryside, rural towns (places with fewer than 2,500 people), and urban areas with populations ranging from 2,500 to 49,999 that are not part of larger labor market areas (metropolitan areas).<sup>2</sup>

Participating communities benefited from this project by gaining access to data they could use to inform future decisions. Area small businesses also benefited by learning how the farmers market contributes to their independent stores' consumer attendance and sales. Participating markets benefited by collecting data that can demonstrate the market's impacts on the community and can be used to inform future decisions about expansion, the addition or enhancement of facilities, and/or to identify and evaluate new opportunities.





Data was collected over the course of the 2016 farmers market season in a variety of ways including: customer surveys, a pre- and post-season vendor survey to summarize season sales and trends, a daily vendor sales log, and data collection by market managers to document daily trends such as customer counts and vendor attendance.

Market managers who participated in this study faced many barriers including hesitation from farmers and vendors to report sales, taxing weather conditions, cumbersome reporting requirements, and limited staff time available for this project. To make strides in assessing the impacts of their markets, most managers had to overcome a lack in budget resources and staff time to collect useable information. The participating farmers market managers understood the value of the data being collected and took the time to make it a part of their daily operational duties.

Valuable records are attained by making data collection part of ongoing market operations. Utilizing the information gained from data collection helps to enforce market operations by showing what outside factors may be effecting market dynamics. Data collection also informs management strategy by identifying where energy should be focused. This helps market managers be strategic about the limited time they have to offer.

## METHODOLOGY

Throughout the 2016 market season, market managers were asked to collect data through a farmers market profile, two connected Excel workbooks (one for master data entry and one to track vendor sales), a vendor profile survey, vendor sales slips, visitor/customer survey, and a visitor count log.

Vendors were asked to take a pre-season vendor profile survey that asked for information about acreage owned and/or leased, distance traveled to the market, products offered, and in which farmers markets they participate. Vendor sales were tracked each market day by collecting vendor sales slips. Sales slips accounted for cash, credit/debit, and food assistance program sales. Although these were required pieces of data, reporting was inconsistent due to lack of participation from all vendors. Market managers also tracked vendor attendance, volunteer hours, and visitor counts. Visitor surveys were also distributed throughout the market season to capture feedback from unique customers. The number of customer surveys to be collected was determined by using estimated annual visitor attendance and a survey sample calculator with a confidence level of 95% and a confidence interval of 10. Farmers market visitors were asked about what transportation method they used to reach the market, their zip code, the amount of money spent at the farmers market and at surrounding businesses, products they were purchasing, and frequency of visits to the market.

# MARKET PROFILE

## Sara Hardy Downtown Farmers Market

**Sponsoring Organization:** Traverse City Downtown Development Authority (DDA)

**When:** May-October, 7:30 a.m. – 12 p.m. Saturday, 8 a.m. – 12 p.m. Wednesday

**Where:** Corner of US-31 & Cass St. Lot B (Traverse City 49684)

**Style:** Pavilion in Parking lot with Additional Vendors Pop-up in Park/Parking Lot

**County:** Grand Traverse

**County Population:** 91,636

**Website:** [www.downtowntc.com/events-attractions/sara-hardy-farmers-market](http://www.downtowntc.com/events-attractions/sara-hardy-farmers-market)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/SaraHardyFarmersMarket/](http://www.facebook.com/SaraHardyFarmersMarket/)

**Market Management:** Full-Time Year-Round Market Manager and Part-Time Seasonal Staff

**Market Manager Status:** Certified Market Manager

**Average Number of Weekly Vendors:** 50

**Total Number of Vendors Throughout Season:** 101

**Average Number of Visitors Each Market Day:** 2,520 visitors on Saturday; 1,190 visitors on Wednesday

**Types of Currency Accepted:** Cash, Check, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)<sup>3</sup>, Double Up Food Bucks<sup>4</sup>, WIC Project FRESH (WIC FMNP)<sup>5</sup>, Market FRESH (Senior FMNP)<sup>6</sup>, Hoophouses for Health<sup>7</sup>



**Senior Project FRESH/  
Market FRESH**

<sup>3</sup> SNAP EBT: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, a nutrition assistance program administered by the United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service to help low-income people and families to buy the food they need for good health. Benefits are distributed on debit-like Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards and transfer to retailers through an electronic system. [www.fns.usda.gov/snap/](http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/)

<sup>4</sup> Double Up Food Bucks: A SNAP incentive program developed by Fair Food Network that doubles the value of SNAP benefits spent at participating markets and grocery stores. [www.fairfoodnetwork.org/projects/double-up-food-bucks/](http://www.fairfoodnetwork.org/projects/double-up-food-bucks/)

<sup>5</sup> WIC Project FRESH: Federally recognized as Women, Infants, and Children Farmers Market Nutrition Program (WIC FMNP). A program providing participating WIC clients with coupons to purchase eligible, locally grown, fresh, unprepared fruits and vegetables at authorized farmers markets. [www.michigan.gov/mdhhs](http://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs)

<sup>6</sup> Market FRESH: Federally recognized as Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (Senior FMNP). An educational program providing senior participants with coupons to purchase locally grown, fresh fruits and vegetables at participating farmers markets. [www.michigan.gov/marketfresh](http://www.michigan.gov/marketfresh)

<sup>7</sup> Hoophouses for Health: A program designed to increase access to Good Food for vulnerable families while at the same time expanding the Good Food infrastructure and season extension capacity of Michigan farmers. [www.hoophousesforhealth.org](http://www.hoophousesforhealth.org)

# MARKET DESCRIPTION

The mission of the Sara Hardy Downtown Farmers Market:

“The Sara Hardy Downtown Farmers Market (the Market) is operated by the Traverse City Downtown Development Authority (DDA) and is managed by SEEDs (The Market Manager). The purpose of the Market is to create a sales venue for local area farmers, provide opportunity for consumers to purchase quality farm-grown goods, to provide a community gathering place, and to promote and stimulate economic development and create traffic in the Downtown area.”

The Sara Hardy Downtown Farmers Market is operated by the Michigan Municipal Corporation and operates under the Traverse City Downtown Development Authority. The market is run by the Market Manager, assisted by staff, and served by a Farmers Market Advisory Board. Taken over by the DDA in 1984, the Sara Hardy Downtown Farmers Market provides Traverse City with a local gathering place where customers can buy nutritious local foods.

The market is located across from the Lake Michigan Shoreline in downtown Traverse City. This location provides visitors with access to various local attractions and businesses, as well as the opportunity to experience northern Michigan agriculture through the farmers market. Permanent, outdoor cover protects vendors and visitors throughout the market season. The Sara Hardy Downtown Farmers Market hosts various activities and partners with other organizations to promote the local economy and foster community growth. One such event is a Bike the Farmers Market day where a local non-profit provides a bike valet.



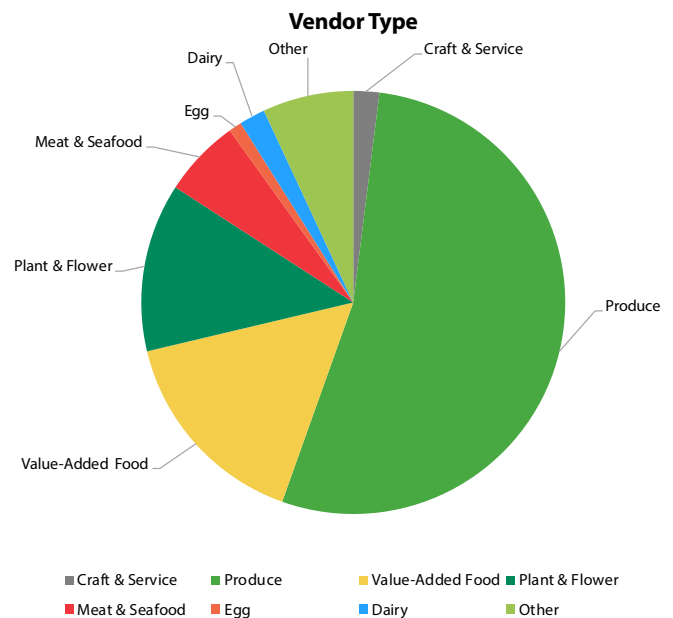


# VENDORS

The Sara Hardy Downtown Farmers Market brings together farmers and small businesses in Downtown Traverse City. The market is open to producer-only vendors.

Vendors at the market accept a variety of food assistance programs to allow customers of all income levels to enjoy access to fresh nutritious foods.

- Through the course of the 2016 season, 101 vendors attended the Sara Hardy Downtown Farmers Market.
  - Produce: 54 Vendors (53%)
  - Value Added: 16 Vendors (16%)
  - Plants and Flowers: 13 Vendors (13%)
  - Meat and Fish: 6 Vendors (6%)
  - Crafts and Services: 2 Vendors (2%)
  - Dairy: 2 Vendors (2%)
  - Egg: 1 Vendor (1%)
  - Other: 7 Vendors (7%)
- Total Number of Individuals Employed Through Vendor Businesses: 265
  - Seasonal Employees: 156
- Total Acres Owned or Leased by Farmer Vendors<sup>8</sup>: 1,046 acres
  - Owned: 804 acres
  - Leased: 242 acres
- Average Number of Miles Vendors Traveled to the Market: 20 miles
- 3 Farm Vendors are Considered Beginning Farmers as They Have Less Than 10 Years of Farming Experience
- 3% of the Vendors' Businesses are Owned by Individuals are Under the Age of 35 (1% for farmers)
- 4 Vendors are Certified Organic



<sup>8</sup> This number represents acres of land owned or leased by farm vendors who reported owning or leasing land in the vendor pre-season survey.



**265 employees**

*are supported by our vendors' businesses.*

*Small businesses create new, meaningful employment opportunities.*



**20 miles**

*average distance food travels from farm to our market.*

*That's fresh!*



**1,046 acres**

*of farmland in production by our vendors.*

*America loses an acre of farmland every hour to development.*



# VISITORS

During the Sara Hardy Downtown Farmers Market 2016 season, 105 visitor surveys were collected. From these surveys, we were able to identify the shopper frequency, means of transportation to the market, and products purchased.

An average of 2,190 people visited the Sara Hardy Downtown Farmers Market each week resulting in approximately 76,600<sup>9</sup> total visits throughout the season. The market attracted customers from all over Michigan, however, 53% of the 105 visitors surveyed came from Traverse City zip codes (49684, 49685, 49686). The other 29 visitors surveyed came from 29 different zip codes all around the country, including 5 from outside Michigan. The market is primarily serving locals but also serves as an attraction for visitors to Downtown Traverse City from across the United States. Along with attracting various customer types, the market is attracting people to the downtown area and supporting area vibrancy. Seventy-three percent of those surveyed came to the area specifically for the market.

- Estimated Average Visitor Count Per Market Day: 2,190
- Estimated Annual Visitor Count: 76,600
- 88% of Visitors Used a Personal Vehicle to get to the Farmers Market
- 12% of Visitors Walked, Traveled by Two-Wheeled Motor Vehicle, or Biked to the Farmers Market
- 86% of Visitors Purchased Produce<sup>10</sup>
- 30% of Visitors Purchased Prepared Foods
- 58% of Customers Shop at the Market Frequently (weekly or more)
- 77% of Visitors Planned to do Additional Shopping Eating or Other Activities in the Area
- 73% of Visitors Surveyed came to the area specifically for the Farmers Market
- Based on spending estimates made by visitors completing a survey, an estimated \$3,364 is spent by farmers market customers in the surrounding community the day of the market.<sup>11</sup>
  - Based on spending estimates made by visitors completing a survey, an estimated \$1,780 is spent by farmers market visitors in the surrounding community the day of the market.<sup>12</sup>

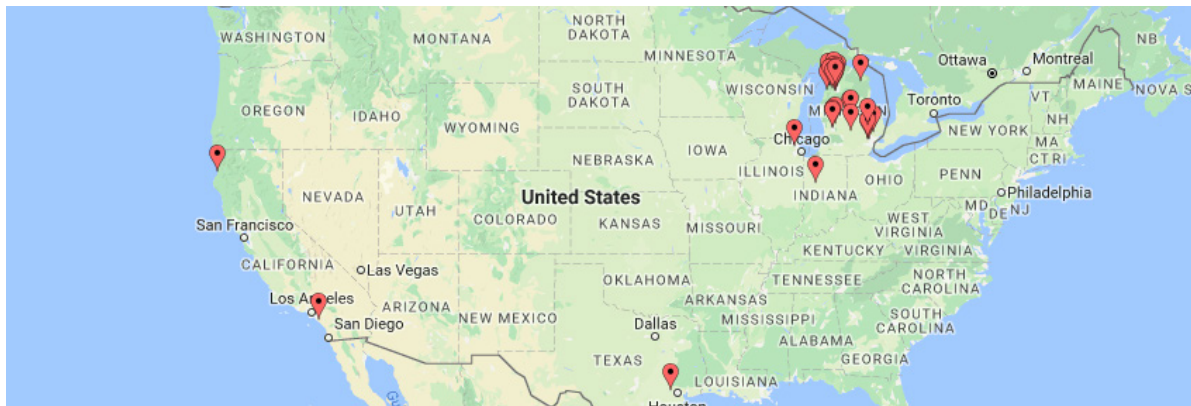


## 77%

### of visitors

*plan to spend money at neighboring businesses on market days.*

*Local businesses benefit from customers drawn to the area on market days.*



<sup>9</sup> This number does not represent unique visitors. The average number of visitors was calculated by taking monthly visitor counts periodically throughout the market day.

<sup>10</sup> This number represents the percentage of people who reported buying food in a specific category through the customer survey, who claimed buying produce and prepared food.

<sup>11</sup> This number represents the estimated dollar sum from customers who reported spending a specific dollar amount in the area on the day they were surveyed at the farmers market.

<sup>12</sup> This number represents the estimated dollar sum from customers who reported spending a specific dollar amount in the area on the day they were surveyed at the farmers market.

# SALES

From the 105 visitor surveys that were collected, the following metrics were also analyzed: average customer purchases, visitor frequency, and products customers purchased. To help understand the overall sales at the market, visitors were asked to report the amount they were spending or planned to spend at the market that day. Comparing the vendor documentation of sales and the customer reports of purchases demonstrates a clearer understanding of the sales conducted at a market.

Throughout the season, customers reported spending anywhere between \$0 to \$200 on a market day with an average of \$33<sup>13</sup> per visit. The median amount customers reported spending was \$22.50. The most frequent customer report of spending was \$20 per visit. Customers who came to the market also reported shopping at businesses outside the market. Through surveys, customers indicated they spent between \$3 and \$200 at other downtown businesses, with an average of \$50 spent in the area surrounding the market per customer.

Based on visitor surveys, a snapshot of spending at the market and other nearby businesses can be created. In future seasons, the market plans to collect additional sales data directly from vendors in an effort to further quantify the spending at and impact of the market.

- Estimated Weekly Sales (based on customer spending): \$105,300
- Estimated Annual Sales (inference based on estimated customer reporting): \$2,527,700



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**\$2,527,700**  
**in estimated sales**

*directly to the vendors' local  
farms and businesses.  
Returning 3x more of their sales to  
the local economy than chain retailers.*

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<sup>13</sup> This average was calculated based on customers who reported spending a dollar amount at the market.



# SUMMARY

The 2016 pilot project conducted by MIFMA sought to assess the economic contribution farmers markets make to Michigan's rural communities. At the end of the pilot project, it was evident that farmers markets impact their community in many ways, including but not limited to, acting as the center of a thriving regional food system, supporting food and farm based businesses, and serving as community gathering places. The pilot project allowed for impacts to be measured over a market season and for the results to be used to aid market managers in future decision making.

Measuring impacts at the market level strengthens the entire Michigan farmers market community. By conducting the 2016 program, MIFMA has begun to form standardized data collection processes that can be utilized by any/all Michigan farmers markets. Utilizing standardized data collection processes also allows for data to be equitably compared between markets and for data to be aggregated from several markets in order to show impacts at a county, regional, and/or statewide level. This kind of data can be a powerful advocacy tool for market managers in their local community, as well as for a statewide farmers market association, like MIFMA, that advocates at a state and federal level for programs and policies which support farmers markets and the farmers and vendors that sell at farmers markets.

In addition to identifying a variety of benefits from this data collection process, the 2016 pilot project also identified several challenges with this type of record keeping and impact measurement. Confusion regarding reporting requirements, the availability and investment of staff time to gather data, and cooperation from vendors were all challenges experienced by participating markets. Feedback from market managers encouraged MIFMA to find efficient, streamlined data collection tools for farmers markets. This need lead to the adoption of use of the Farmers Market Metrics Portal<sup>14</sup>.

In partnership with the national Farmers Market Coalition, MIFMA launched the Farmers Market Metrics Portal in 2017. The Farmers Market Metrics Portal is a web-based tool used by market managers to track and communicate farmers market data. This tool allows market managers to easily input daily data, track market vendors, and communicate impacts to their community.

The use of the Farmers Market Metrics Portal allows Michigan farmers markets to collect standardized data and measure impacts in a user-friendly environment. Standardizing these processes will allow MIFMA to understand the scope of impacts that farmers markets in Michigan have on jobs, tourism, agriculture, food access, and the economy.

Looking forward, MIFMA 's goal is to help Michigan farmers markets understand the importance of data collection and to demonstrate how collecting and sharing data can benefit their markets. Utilizing the Farmers Market Metrics Portal will allow markets to collect data independently while creating a common place to keep all Michigan farmers market data and an efficient way of measuring impacts of farmers markets across the state. The portal will allow farmers market managers to identify yearly trends due to consistent data collection each season.

Farmers markets have significant and meaningful impacts on their communities that reach far beyond vendor shopper sales and interactions, but the quantifiable data to support those impacts has always been lacking. Thanks to this project, the data gathered and the tools and resources developed, MIFMA hopes to build an even stronger case for farmers markets in Michigan and the tremendous impact they have on their local economies and the social wellbeing of their communities.

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<sup>14</sup> The Farmers Market Metrics Portal was developed by the Farmers Market Coalition (FMC). In partnership with FMC, MIFMA and participating Michigan farmers markets have access to this portal. <https://farmersmarketcoalition.org/programs/farmers-market-metrics/>





## About the Michigan Farmers Market Association

The Michigan Farmers Market Association (MIFMA) was started in 2006 as a statewide association to promote local food consumption in Michigan by connecting more farmers to consumers through farmers markets. Today, MIFMA works with its membership to maintain its mission and attain its vision.

**Mission:** MIFMA advances farmers markets to create a thriving marketplace for local food and farm products.

**Vision:** MIFMA places farmers markets at the forefront of the local food movement and works to ensure all residents have access to healthy, locally grown food and that Michigan farmers markets receive policy support.

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