

# Farmers Markets

Farmers markets have quickly become a major sales outlet for agricultural producers nationwide. USDA's 1996 *National Farmers Market Directory* lists 2,411 farmers markets, 656 more than in 1994. This upward trend is continuing, based on information collected for the upcoming 1998 directory, which indicates a 10 percent increase in the number of farmers markets since 1996. Farmers markets are definitely meeting the needs of a growing number of farmers with small- to medium-sized operations.

## Who benefits from farmers markets?

- **Small farm operators:** Those with less than \$250,000 in annual receipts who work and manage their own operations meet this definition (94 percent of all farms).
- **Farmers and consumers:** Farmers have direct access to markets to increase farm income. Consumers have access to locally grown, farm-fresh produce.
- **The community:** Urban communities where fresh, nutritious foods are scarce gain easy access to food. Farmers markets also help to promote nutrition education, wholesome eating habits, and better food preparation, as well as boosting the community's economy.

## Statistics indicate:

- Farmers markets are an important source of revenue. In a 1995 USDA survey of 772 farmers markets, over 6,000 farmers said they sell their products only at farmers markets.
- Customer acceptance of farmers markets continues to rise as consumers search for fresh farm products. A 1996 survey of New Jersey farmers market customers revealed that they have greatly increased their consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables in the past five years. Consumers said they went to farmers markets for fresh food and direct contact with farmers.
- Farmers markets increase opportunities, help farmers to develop business skills, and improve the quality of life for farm families. A New York farmers market study showed that 86 percent of vendors surveyed either had no business before they started selling at farmers markets or had started a business on a small scale at home.

## WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program

USDA's Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Farmers Market Nutrition Program was established in 1992 to provide fresh, nutritious, unprepared foods, such as fruit and vegetables, from farmers markets to women, infants, and children who are nutritionally at risk and to expand the awareness and use of farmers markets by consumers. Federal funding for the WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program for this year has doubled nationwide to \$12 million (with an increase to \$15 million requested for next year). Alaska, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, and Mississippi join the program this year, while 24 States will greatly expand existing programs.

## **Food stamps**

The use of food stamps at farmers markets nationwide is huge--estimates range from \$75 million to \$100 million annually.

## **School meals**

Sales from farmers markets to school meals programs are being promoted by USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service, Rural Development, and Food and Nutrition Service in California, Florida, Georgia, and North Carolina.

## **USDA supports farmers markets**

- USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service will coordinate planning and operation of 20 farmers markets at USDA headquarters in Washington, D.C., in conjunction with 46 similar markets at the U.S. Departments of Energy, Transportation, State, Labor, and Capitol Hill.
- USDA's Farm Service Agency opened its first 1998 farmers market on June 1, in Kansas City, Mo., with seven small and limited-resource farmers participating (nine additional markets are scheduled throughout the summer). USDA's food gleaning initiative generated 196 pounds of perishable produce and 96 pounds of nonperishable baby food and supplies at the first market. USDA is leading a government-wide initiative to increase food gleaning and food recovery nationwide.
- AMS developed a brochure on establishing farmers markets on Federal property. It is available in hard copy or on the AMS farmers market Internet home page. More information can be obtained by calling 1-800-384-8704.
- USDA makes it easy to find a listing of the farmers markets in your State. Go to Internet site <http://www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets> and click on a picture of your State to bring up an alphabetical listing.

## *July 1998*

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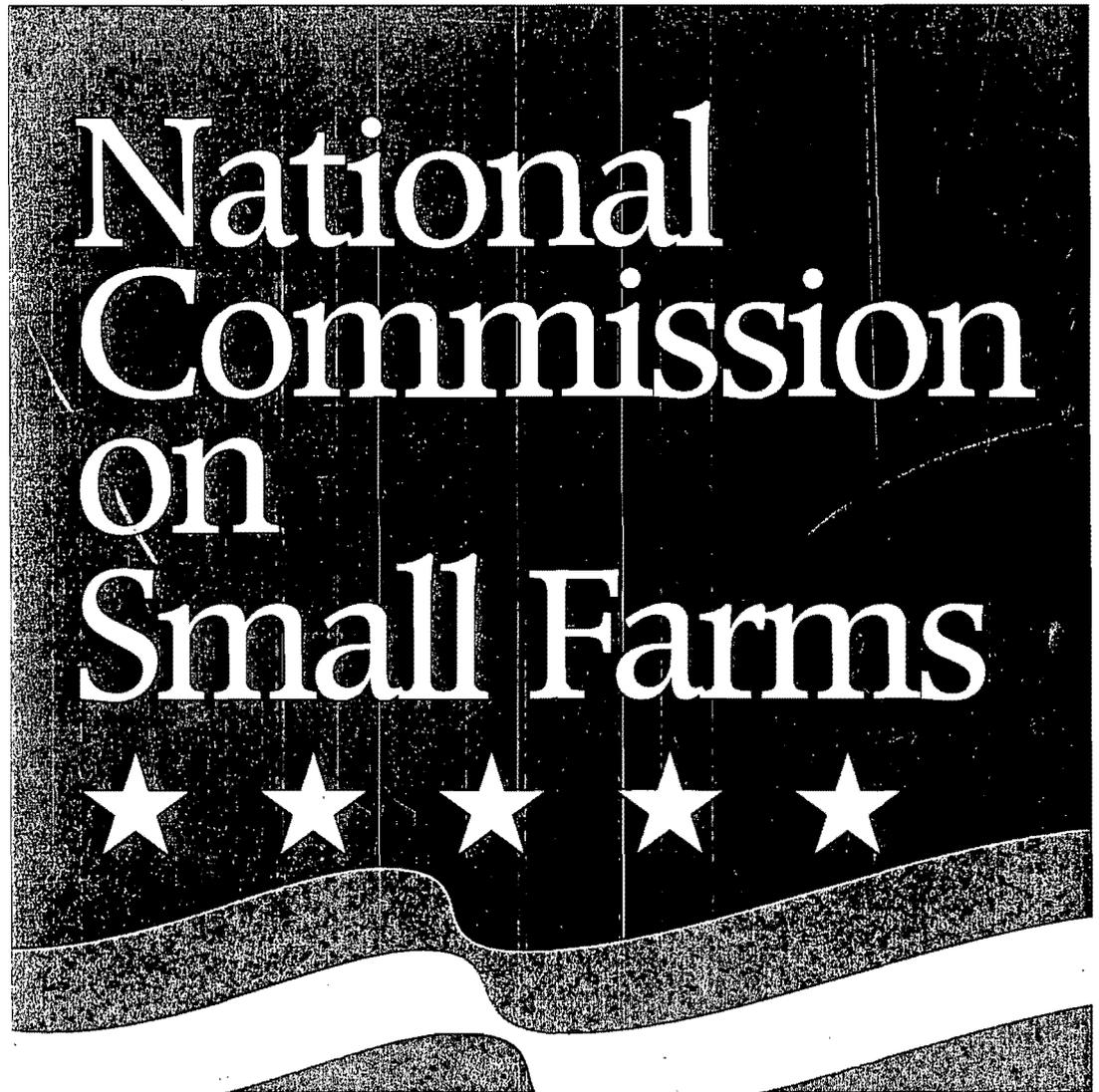
United States  
Department of  
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National  
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# A Time to Act

*A Report of the USDA National  
Commission on Small Farms*

*January 1998*



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