



FARMERS MARKETS

Parks and Recreation
Connecting Communities to Healthy Foods

SURVEY RESEARCH FINDINGS



NRPA National Recreation
and Park Association

Because everyone deserves a great park



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INTRODUCTION

An exciting trend in healthy living is the expansion of local farmers markets in communities across the United States. From centrally located ones in urban communities to those on main streets in small rural towns, Americans are taking advantage of the fresh produce, baked goods, proteins and other healthy food options farmers markets offer. When combined with Community Support Agriculture (CSA) programs, there are many more opportunities for people to connect with locally and regionally sourced healthy foods.

For many people, visiting a farmers markets is a fun, family weekend tradition. Farmers markets are also critical sources of fresh fruit, vegetables and healthy proteins for people residing in areas that otherwise lack nutritional food options. Farmers markets are places that bring family, friends and neighbors together through education, entertainment and community engagement.

Over the last decade, the farmers market industry has grown significantly, boosted by increased consumer demand, a rising interest in healthy food options and the greater ease of sellers to accept supplemental nutrition assistance programs' payments. Farmers markets also promote opportunities for community engagement and economic development.¹ Consumers, farmers and vendors all recognize the significant role a local agricultural system plays in promoting access to fresh and healthy food and addressing the social determinants of healthy living.

PARKS AND RECREATION AND FARMERS MARKETS

In many communities, local park and recreation agencies play significant roles in supporting farmers markets and bringing markets to their communities. Park and recreation agencies are well-suited to leverage their role as trusted providers of health and wellness opportunities. They are often partners in efforts to expand local agriculture initiatives in communities. In fact, one in five park and recreation agencies in the country manages a farmers market.²

In addition to managing or hosting farmers markets, parks and recreation plays a critical role in providing access to healthy foods in many communities. For example:

- Local agencies are some of the largest providers of healthy, federally funded meals for youth and adults
- Community gardens are a staple in many communities
- Agencies provide nutrition education, healthy cooking and food preparation classes for youth and caregivers.

Local park and recreation agencies are building on this foundation to support new and exciting ways to expand access to healthy foods, including starting and expanding farmers markets.

Farmers markets are critical sources of fresh fruit, vegetables and healthy proteins

Local park and recreation agencies play significant roles in bringing farmers markets to their communities

¹ 2015 U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) survey

² Source: The 2019 NRPA Agency Performance Review (<http://www.nrpa.org/apr>)

Farmers markets at park and recreation sites are a “win-win” for local governments, community partners, farmers, vendors and consumers. Partnerships among local governments, nonprofit organizations and local agriculture communities promote collaboration and can also leverage local resources, providing economic and health benefits for farmers, vendors and consumers. Farmers markets serve as additional venues for community engagement and cultural reflection, bringing together people from diverse backgrounds and providing an opportunity to engage with key stakeholders and community members across multiple generations.

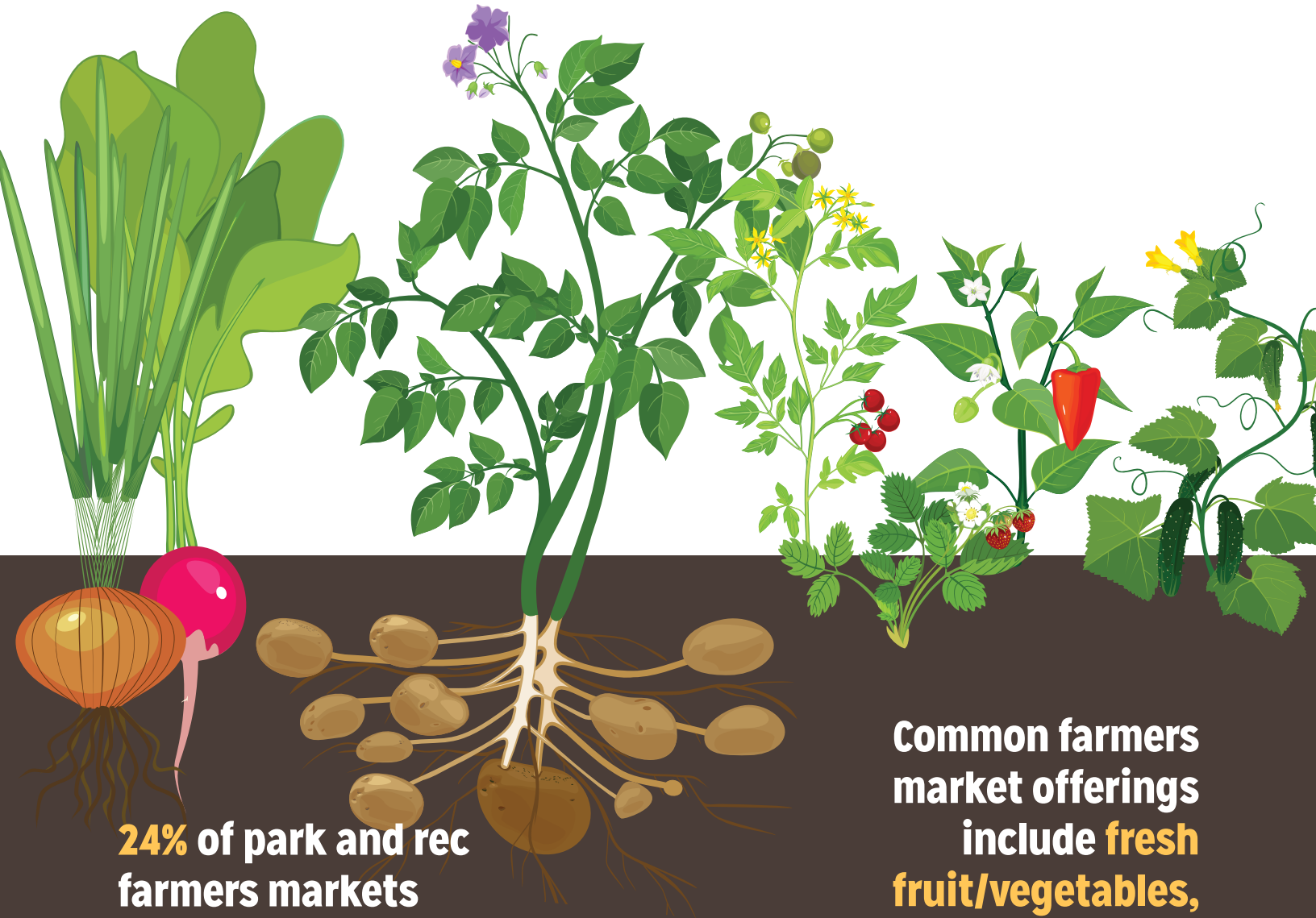
Farmers markets also create job opportunities since market produce frequently is sourced within a 100-mile radius of a market’s location. They also provide a way to reach those at-risk families and older adults experiencing hunger by accepting the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP), the Women, Infant and Children Farmers Market Nutrition Program (WIC FMNP) and other potentially cost-saving programs.

What is today’s role of park and recreation agencies in bringing farmers markets to their communities? What obstacles keep them from further expanding their offerings? To answer these questions, in February 2019 the Research team from the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) surveyed park and recreation agencies across the country asking about the roles the agencies play in bringing farmers markets to their areas, their partners, products and their reach across their communities. The responses from 296 park and recreation agencies are the basis of this report.

Farmers markets at park and recreation sites are a “win-win” for local governments, community partners, farmers, vendors and consumers



Parks and Recreation Connecting Communities to Healthy Foods



24% of park and rec farmers markets operate **throughout the year**

4 in 5 agencies work with partners to make their farmers markets successful

Common farmers market offerings include fresh fruit/vegetables, baked goods and organic foods

2/3 of park and rec farmers markets accept supplemental nutrition benefit payments (e.g., SNAP)

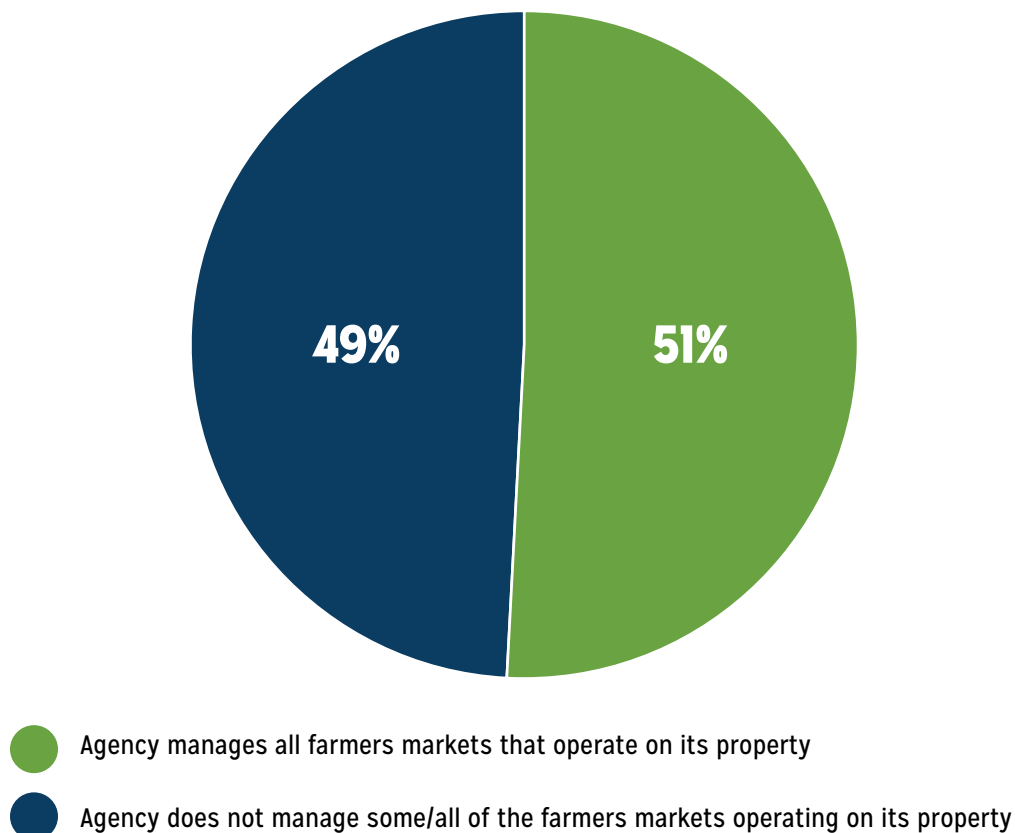
KEY FINDINGS

Farmers markets exist in large cities, small towns and every size locale in between. But while many of these farmers markets take place on park and recreation agency property, it does not mean the local agency operates the market. In fact, just over half—51 percent—of park and recreation agencies that host farmers markets on their properties manage those markets. For the other 49 percent of park and recreation agencies that host farmers markets, a separate entity manages some or all of them including:

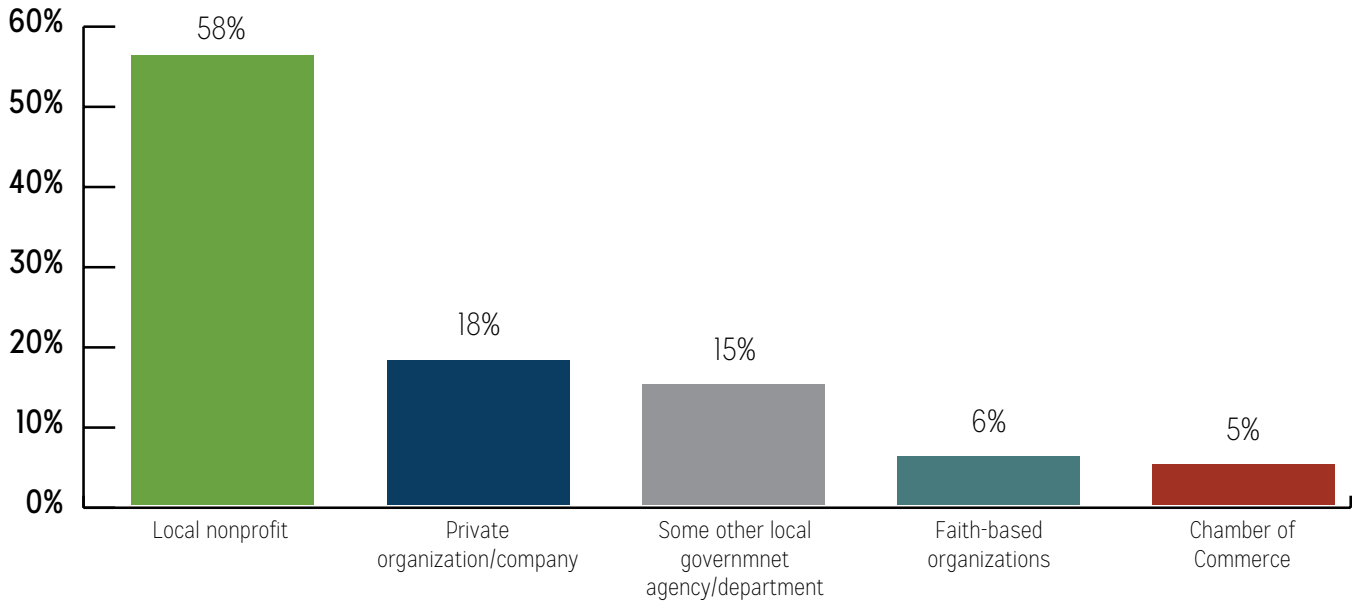
- A local nonprofit (cited by 58 percent of respondents from agencies that do not host farmers markets)
- A private company/organization (18 percent)
- Some other local government department/agency (17 percent)
- Faith-based organization (six percent)
- The local chamber of commerce (five percent)

Farmers markets exist in large cities, small towns and every size locale in between

Park and Recreation Agencies Manage Some, But Not All, of the Farmers Markets Operating on Their Properties
(Percentage Distribution)



Local Nonprofits Are the Most Likely Sponsors of Farmers Markets Hosted on Park and Recreation Agency Property
(Percent of Agencies with Farmers Markets that They Do Not Manage)

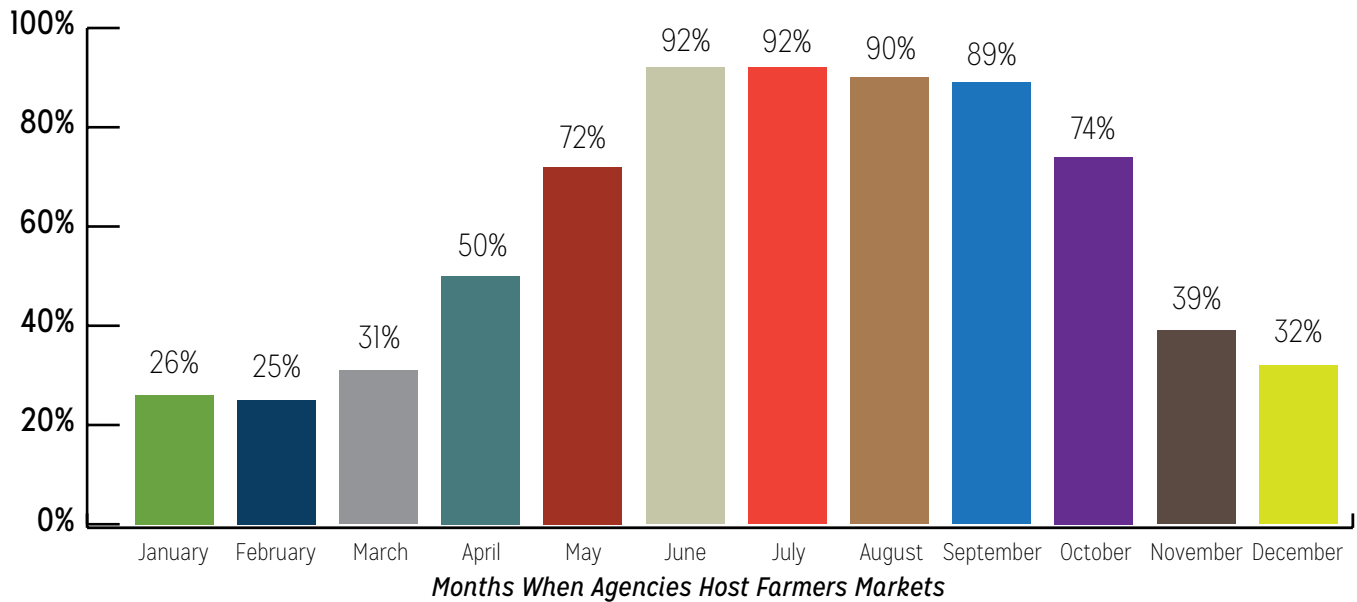


Most park and recreation agency-hosted farmers markets occur during late spring through mid-autumn. Still, some farmers markets are held year-round in many locales; 24 percent of park and recreation agencies that host farmers markets do so every month of the year. But where markets tend to be more seasonal, park and recreation agencies are most likely to operate their farmers markets during the warmer months of:

- May (for 72 percent of agencies)
- June (92 percent)
- July (92 percent)
- August (90 percent)
- September (89 percent)
- October (74 percent)

24 percent of park and recreation agencies that host farmers markets do so throughout the year

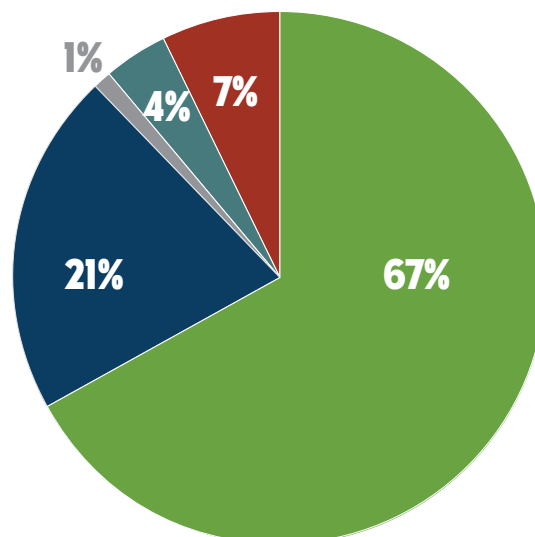
Farmers Markets Are Not Just a Summer Phenomenon
(Percent of Agencies that Host Farmers Markets)



Successful farmers markets are those that serve the public on a regular basis. Hence, park and recreation agencies tend to hold their farmers markets on a weekly, if not more frequent, basis. Two-thirds of agencies that host farmers markets hold markets once a week. For a quarter of agencies that host them, farmers markets are held even more frequently. Twenty-one percent of agencies operate their farmers markets twice a week with another five percent of agencies hosting markets at least four times a week. Only seven percent of park and recreation agencies host their farmers markets less frequently than on a weekly basis.

Park and recreation agencies tend to hold their farmers markets on a weekly, if not more frequent, basis

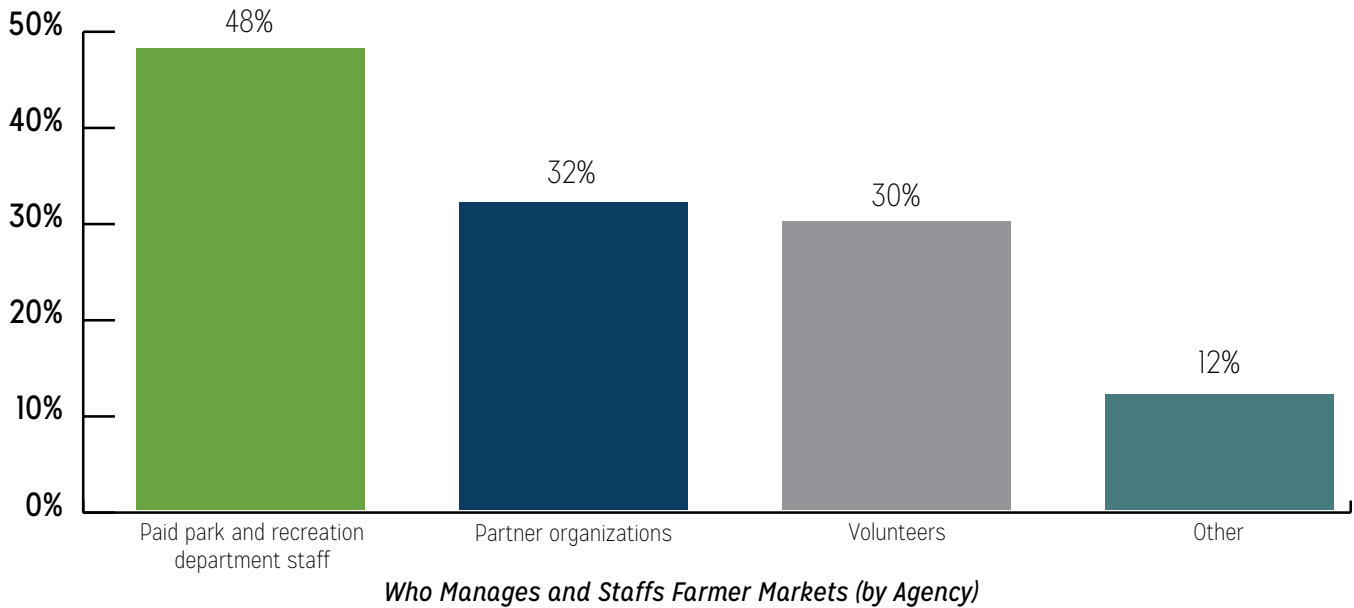
Park and Recreation Agencies Typically Host Farmers Markets on a Weekly Basis, Some More Frequently
(Percentage Distribution of Agencies that Host Farmers Markets)



● Once a week
 ● 2 or 3 times a week
 ● 4 or 5 times a week
 ● 6 or 7 times a week
 ● Less than once a week

Park and recreation agencies that host and manage farmers markets offer this important community service utilizing a mix of agency and non-agency staff. Nearly half of agencies hosting farmers markets staff these events with paid park agency personnel. One-third of agencies staff its farmers markets with local volunteers; three in ten agencies rely on partner organizations to support their farmers markets.

Park and Recreation Agencies Manage Their Farmers Markets with a Mix of Agency Staff, Volunteers and Partner Organizations
(Percent of Agencies that Host Farmers Markets)



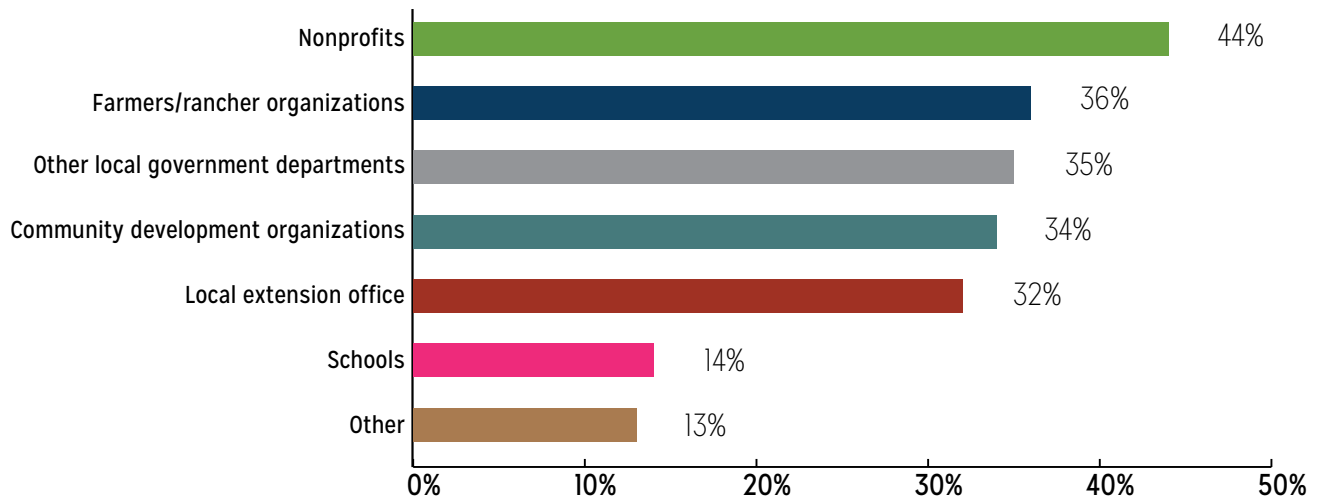
Four in five park and recreation agencies that host farmers markets work with partners to ensure that these markets are successful. Nonprofits are common partners, working with 44 percent of park and recreation agencies that host farmers markets. A third of park and recreation agencies works with each of the following types of partners:

- Farmers/rancher organizations (for 36 percent of agencies)
- Other departments/agencies of the local government (35 percent)
- Community development organizations (34 percent)
- Local extension offices (32 percent)

Four in five park and recreation agencies that host farmers markets work with partners to ensure that these markets are successful

Four in Five Park and Recreation Agencies Partner with Other Organizations to Make their Farmers Markets Successful

(Percent of Agencies that Host Farmers Markets)



In New Orleans, Louisiana, a number of entities—including the New Orleans Recreation Development Commission (NORDC)—are working together to expand access to farmers markets across the city. NORDC partners with Market Umbrella, a nonprofit focused on establishing and expanding farmers markets to promote positive, social and economic benefits across the community by creating and operating markets at local park and recreation sites in low-income and food-insecure communities.

Grant funding supports a system through which individuals attend health management and physical activity programs to receive vouchers that can be used at markets to purchase healthy foods. Further, Market Umbrella has a “double-up bucks” program: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients can double the value of their electronic benefit transfer (EBT) to purchase additional fruit and vegetables. Accepting benefits, like the Women, Infants and Children Farmers Market Nutrition Program (WIC FMNP), the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) or SNAP, promotes access to healthy foods for food-insecure individuals and expands the customer base for markets.

FARMERS MARKETS OFFERINGS

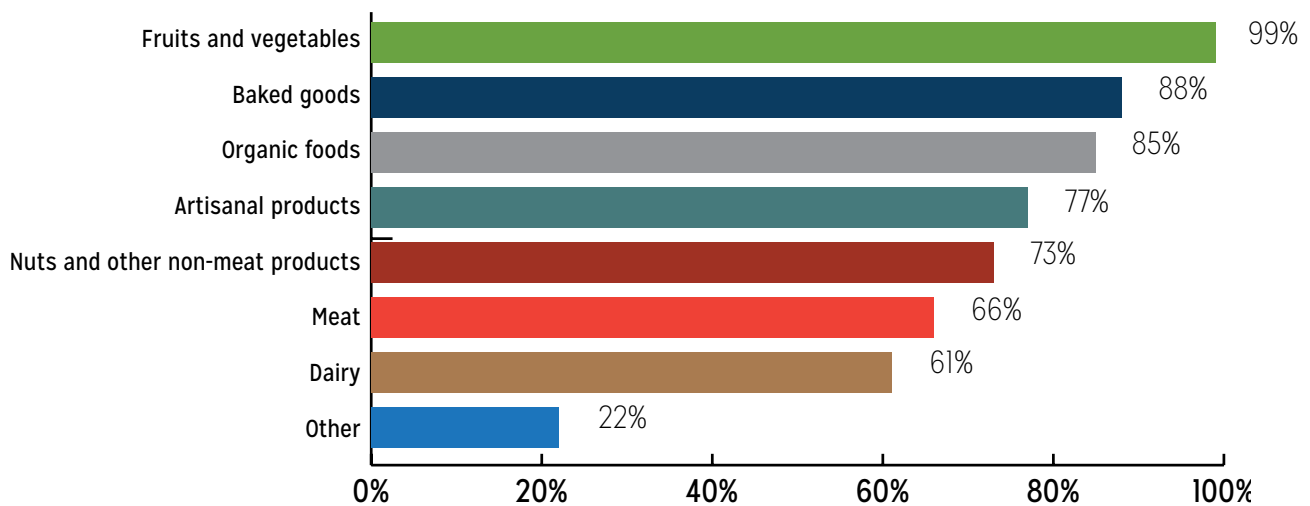
Farmers markets offer a wide variety of fresh and nutritious food to their communities, including fresh produce and healthy proteins. In some underserved communities, farmers markets may be the only sources for such options.

Not surprisingly, virtually all farmers markets feature fresh fruits and vegetables. Other common farmers markets offerings are baked goods (88 percent), organic foods (85 percent) and artisanal products (77 percent). Farmers markets also bring a variety of protein products to local communities including:

- Nuts and other non-meat protein (cited by 73 percent of respondents)
- Meat (66 percent)
- Dairy products (61 percent)

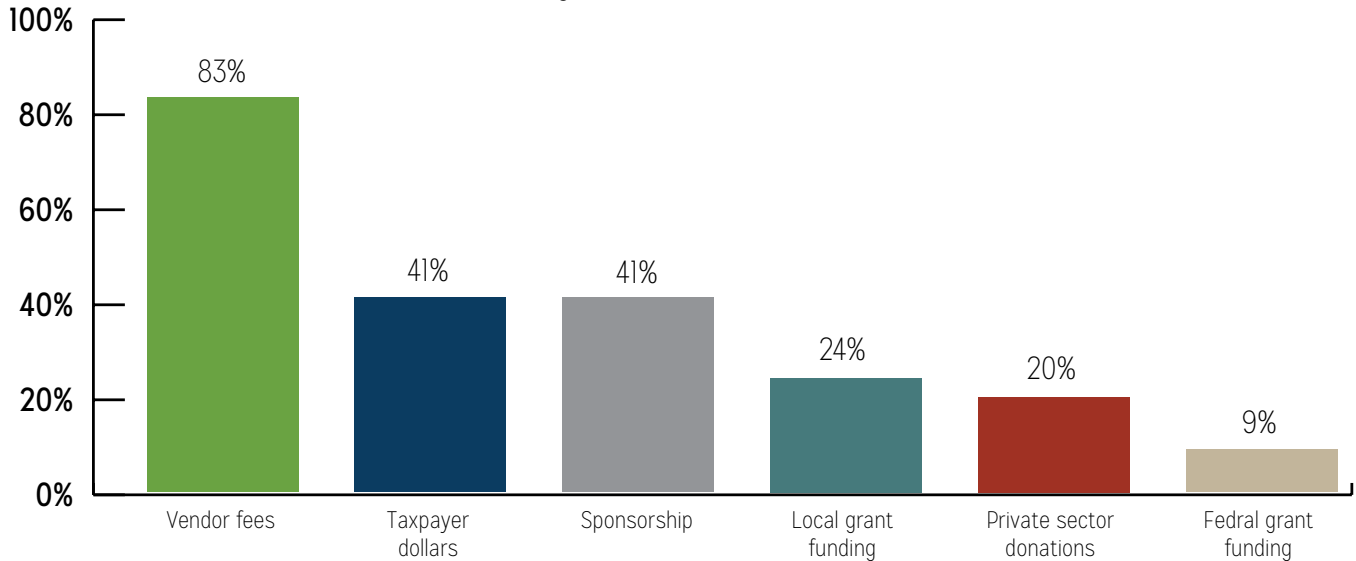
Farmers markets may be the only source for fresh produce and healthy proteins in some underserved communities

Farmers Markets Offer Local Residents a Diverse Set of Offerings
(Percent of Agencies that Host Farmers Markets)



A large majority of park and recreation agencies relies on fees charged to vendors to cover the operating costs of farmers markets. Eighty-three percent of park and recreation agencies recover any costs incurred by the farmers market operation through fees charged to vendors. Two in five park and recreation agencies recoup at least some of the costs of operating farmers markets through taxpayer dollars; 41 percent of agencies financially support their markets through sponsorship dollars. Grants are another funding resource for farmers markets, with 24 percent of agencies receiving local grant support and nine percent taking advantage of federal grant resources.

Vendor Fees, Taxpayer Dollars and Sponsorships Are Major Funding Sources for Farmers Markets
(Percent of Agencies that Host Farmers Markets)

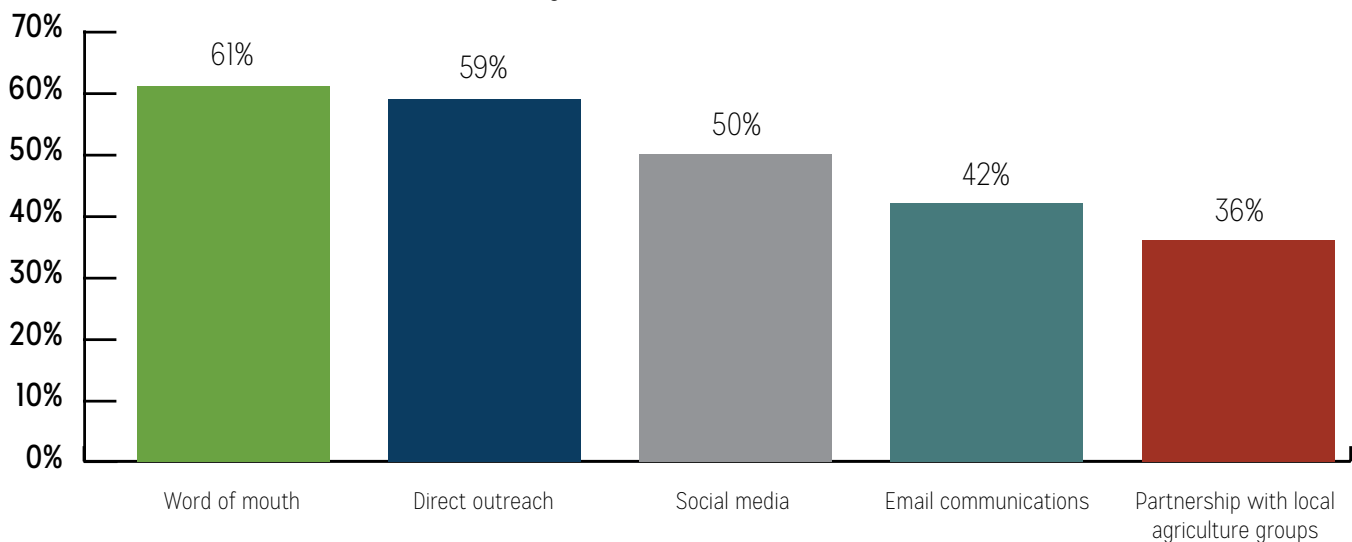


Successful farmers markets consistently attract a large number of vendors and farmers that offer a diverse set of offerings to the public. Consequently, park and recreation agencies that host farmers markets use a variety of methods to recruit vendors for their markets. The most widely used methods are those that rely on human interaction—word of mouth (cited by 61 percent of respondents) and direct outreach (59 percent).

Beyond those two methods, nearly half of agencies uses their social media channels to reach potential vendors and farmers, 42 percent utilize email communications as an outreach tactic and 36 percent of park and recreation agencies partner with local agricultural groups to reach potential farmers market vendors. If your park and recreation agency is starting a farmers market, developing a solid outreach and engagement plan for recruiting local vendors will be critical to your market’s success.

Successful farmers markets consistently attract a large number of vendors and farmers that offer a diverse set of offerings

Park and Recreation Agencies Use Multiple Methods to Recruit Vendors for Their Farmers Markets
(Percent of Agencies that Host Farmers Markets)

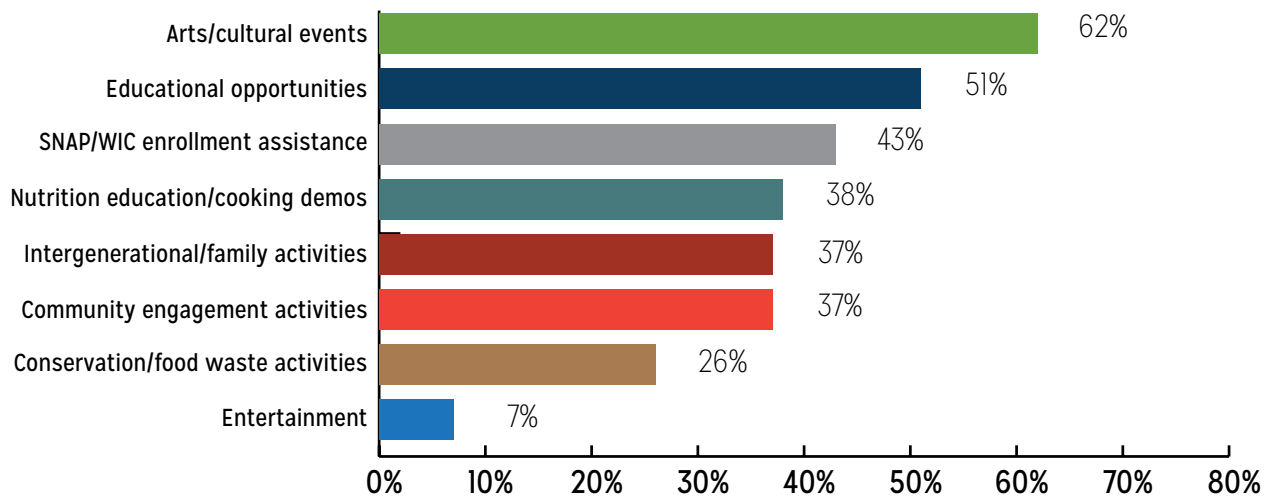


While fresh produce, baked goods and proteins are main attractions at farmers markets, the selling of food is by no means the only “attraction” that brings attendees to the markets. Farmers markets can also be places to entertain and educate residents while building a broader sense of community.

For example, 62 percent of park and recreation agency-hosted farmers markets link arts and cultural events at these markets; 37 percent of agencies provide intergenerational/family activities. Just over half of these farmers markets provide educational opportunities such as library services, health screenings and vendors providing informational pamphlets. Similarly, 38 percent of park agency-hosted farmers markets teach residents about healthy eating through nutrition education and cooking demos. Forty-three percent of agency-hosted farmers markets assist in enrolling patrons in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and/or Women, Infants and Children (WIC) benefits programs.

Farmers markets also are places to entertain and educate residents while building a broader sense of community

Farmers Markets Offer Activities Beyond the Selling of Food
(Percent of Agencies that Host Farmers Markets)



Farmers markets are just one way that park and recreation agencies connect their communities to local/regional agriculture. Three-quarters of park and recreation agencies offer additional agricultural activities for their communities. Fifty-six percent of park and recreation agencies that host farmers markets also manage community gardens that allow residents to grow their own produce. Forty-two percent of park and recreation agencies deliver agricultural-themed programming for children.

Agencies can further expand their activities offered in conjunction with farmers markets by reaching out to local community partners. For example, university-affiliated extension offices and SNAP-ed offices often provide nutrition education; local arts/cultural institutions may provide entertainment; conservation-focused entities may support composting at market sites.

Three-quarters of park and recreation agencies offer additional agricultural activities for their communities

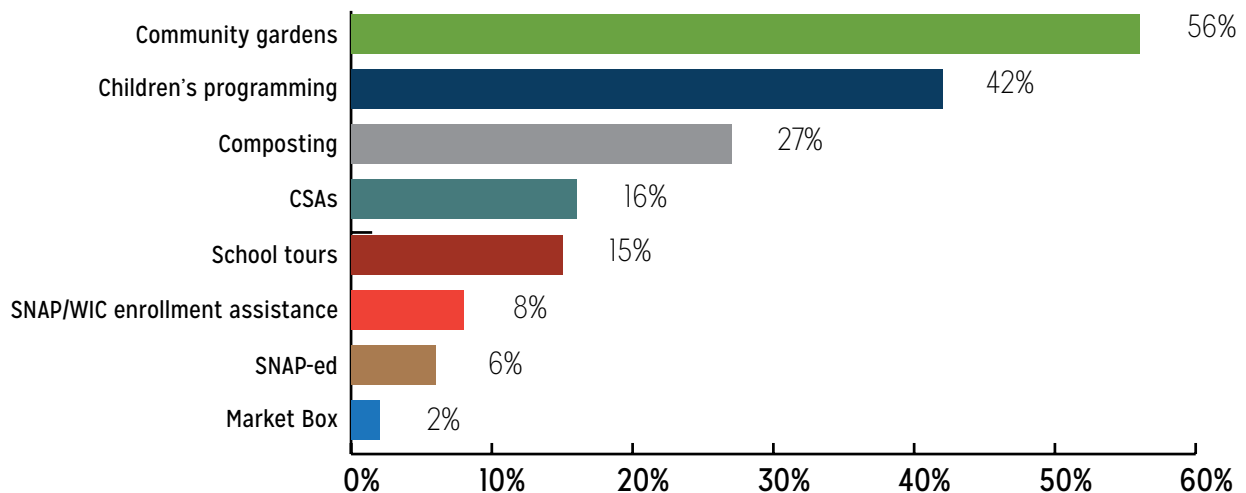
The Salt Lake County (UT) Parks and Recreation is bringing fun and experiential nutrition education activities to its local markets. The agency is engaging kids and caregivers in taste testing, arts and crafts that connect to fruits and vegetables, and organizing other fun activities from NRPA’s “Foods of the Month” curriculum. Providing this education at farmers markets is another opportunity to engage families—meeting caregivers where they are and reinforcing healthy behaviors that are being taught in afterschool and summer camp programs.

Liz Rich, with the Salt Lake City Corporation, says, “Our families have made it a weekly tradition to visit the market with their children as they leave for the day. The kids are incentivized to eat healthy and they receive a \$2 produce voucher sponsored by Intermountain Health Care. Having a weekly farmers market within feet of our facility reinforces our “Commit to Health” literacy program, promotes healthy choices and purchases for the family and creates an opportunity for the community to come together. These are all powerful components in establishing healthy relationships with food.”

Additional agricultural programming delivered by park and recreation agencies include:

- Composting (offered by 27 percent of agency-hosted farmers markets)
- Community Supported Agricultural (CSA) systems (16 percent)
- School tours (15 percent)
- SNAP/WIC enrollment assistance (eight percent)

Beyond Farmers Markets, Park and Recreation Agencies Offer Additional Agricultural Activities to their Communities
(Percent of Agencies that Host Farmers Markets)



CHALLENGES IN HOSTING FARMERS MARKETS

Three in four survey respondents report that their park and recreation agencies face at least one challenge in operating their farmers markets. Interestingly, there is not a single universal issue that all agencies face. However, approximately a quarter of respondents indicates their agencies face the following challenges:

- Insufficient marketing resources
- A lack of staff capacity
- Generating vendor engagement
- Sparking volunteer engagement.

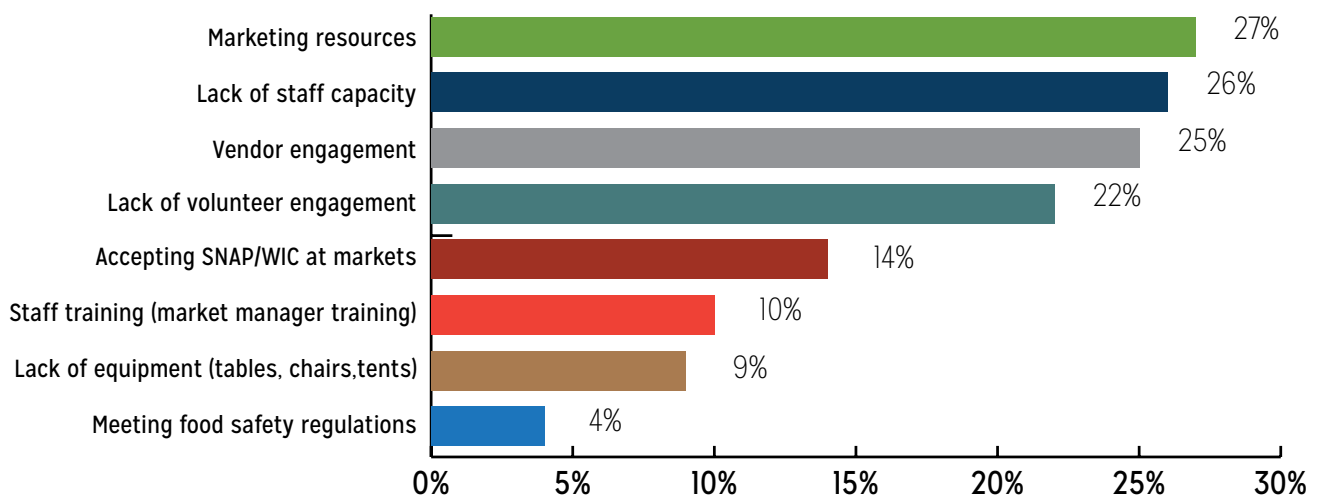
Fewer park and recreation agency leaders see the following as challenges:

- Being unable to accept SNAP/WIC at markets (cited by 14 percent of respondents)
- Training staff, including the market manager (10 percent)
- A lack of equipment such as tables, chairs and tents (nine percent)
- Meeting food safety regulations (four percent).

One of the greatest benefits of farmers markets is the ability to bring fresh and healthy food options to underserved communities that may otherwise lack the opportunities to purchase and consume nutritious foods. As a result, it is critical that farmers markets accept payments from residents who are receiving assistance.

Three in four survey respondents report that their park and recreation agencies face at least one challenge in operating their farmers markets

Three in Four Park and Recreation Agencies Face Challenges that Keep their Farmers Markets from Being More Successful
(Percent of Agencies that Host Farmers Markets)



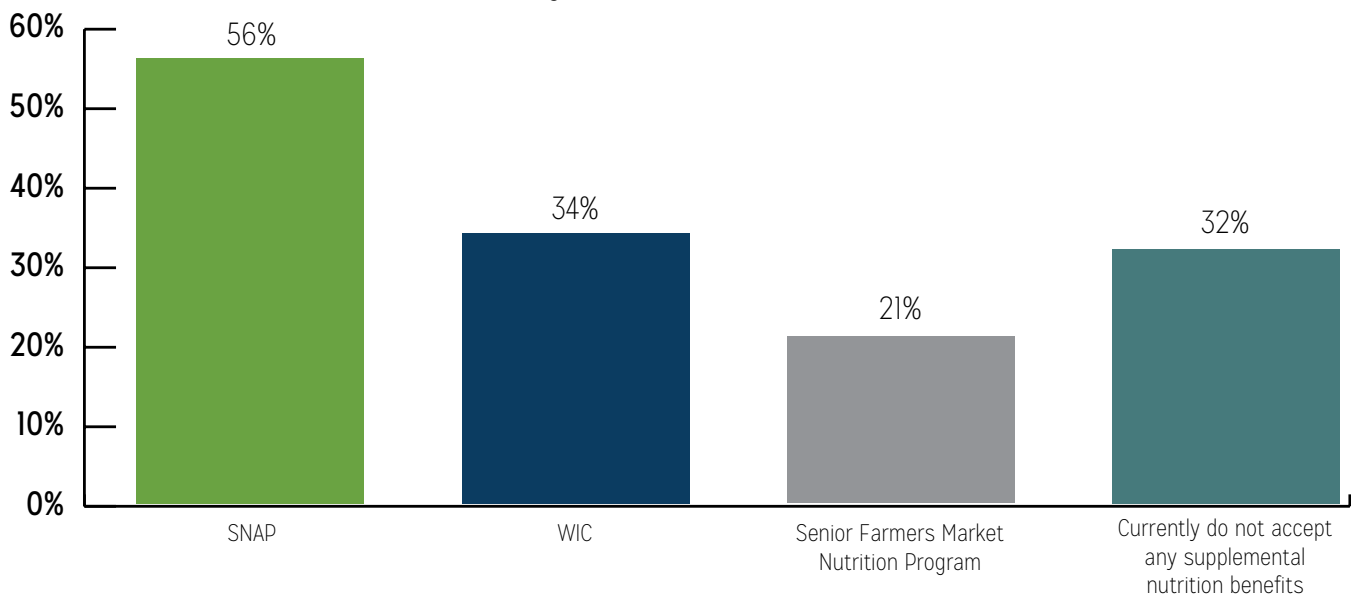
Two-thirds of park and recreation agency-hosted farmers markets accept some form of supplemental nutrition benefit. Vendors at 56 percent of park and recreation agency-hosted farmers markets accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits while a third of farmers markets accepts WIC (Women, Infants and Children). Less common are agencies that are able to process Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program benefits (21 percent).

Park and recreation agencies face several challenges that prevent them accepting supplemental nutrition benefits more widely from their residents. Forty-three percent of market vendors are unable or unwilling to do so. Slightly more than a quarter (26 percent) of vendors lack the equipment/technology needed to process such payments at the point-of-sale, while a similar share lack knowledge about how to accept the benefits.

Agencies have resources available to them to overcome these barriers, including financial resources and grant funding through the USDA Food and Nutrition Services, the USDA Agricultural Marketing Services (<https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/fmpp>) and state farmers market SNAP contacts (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/ebt/state-farmers-market-snap-contacts>).

Two-thirds of park and recreation agency-hosted farmers markets accept some form of supplemental nutrition benefit

Two-Thirds of Park and Recreation Agency-Sponsored Farmers Markets Accept Supplemental Nutrition Benefits
(Percent of Agencies that Host Farmers Markets)



CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Farmers markets are a staple in many communities throughout the United States. These markets afford thousands of people with access to fresh, local/regional produce and many other healthy food options. They support local economies, bring communities together and help families build and reinforce traditions based around healthy living in their communities.

Park and recreation agency-managed sites are prime locations for farmers markets—they are centrally located, offer a variety of healthy living activities, provide a connection to the outdoors and easily bridge the public and private sectors. These markets may be managed by local park and recreation agencies themselves or may be run solely by third-party partners. Additionally, many farmers markets accept nutritional assistance benefits such as SNAP and SFMNP, thus supporting access to healthy, fresh, local foods across generations and income levels. Partnering with vendors and federal entities, the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA)—as well as local park and recreation agencies—are working to help increase the number of park and recreation locations accepting these vital benefit for many families.

The benefits of farmers markets are substantial, and park and recreation agencies are ideal partners in these efforts. So, what can local park and recreation agencies do to encourage this service in their communities? Agencies considering starting or expanding agriculture opportunities in their communities should review the following considerations:

- **Think strategically about location**—where is access to fresh and healthy food limited in your community? How will people access your farmers market? Is there parking or public transportation available? Are there volunteers or rideshare services that can transport people?
- **In underserved communities, access to fresh fruits and vegetables often is limited or not available.** Accepting supplemental nutrition program benefits (SNAP, WIC, SFMNP) is a great way to ensure that vulnerable families in your community can afford healthy foods. Also, consider starting a “double-up” program so that families can maximize their benefits.
- **What partnerships can you leverage to support the market?** Reach out to local businesses, nonprofits, the faith-based community or other community-serving organizations to promote the market and leverage resources. Are there groups that can provide tables and chairs? Can your local extension office provide a cooking class or nutrition education?
- **What are your marketing and administrative needs?** Do you have the budget to support a market manager? Where and how can you promote your farmers market? Have you thought about rules and regulations (vendors, consumer relations, permits, etc.)

The benefits of farmers markets are substantial, and park and recreation agencies are ideal partners in these efforts

- If your agency does not have the resources to start a farmers market, consider **starting a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) initiative** at an existing park and recreation site instead. Partner with local producers to coordinate a program that works for your community members, considering frequency, cost and demand.



ABOUT NRPA

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) is a national not-for-profit organization dedicated to advancing parks, recreation and conservation efforts that enhance quality of life for all people. Through our network of 60,000 recreation and park professionals and advocates, NRPA encourages the promotion of healthy and active lifestyles, conservation initiatives and equitable access to parks and public space.

NRPA brings strength to our message by partnering with like-minded organizations including those in the federal government, nonprofits and commercial enterprises. Funded through dues, grants, registrations and charitable contributions, NRPA produces research, education and policy initiatives for our members that ultimately enrich the communities they serve.

NRPA places immense importance on research and data to raise the status of parks and recreation and conducts research with two goals. First, NRPA creates data to help park and recreation agencies make optimal decisions on operations, programming and spending. Second, NRPA generates data and insights that support park and recreation professionals making the case for greater and more stable funding to policymakers, key stakeholders, the media and the general public. The NRPA Research team works closely with internal subject matter experts, respected industry consultants and the academic community to develop its reports and data resources. Learn more at www.nrpa.org/Research







 **NRPA** National Recreation
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Because everyone deserves a great park

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