NEBRASKA

RURAL

FARMERS MARKET

HANDBOOK

Advice & Inspiration For Nebraska's

FARMERS MARKETS

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CHAPTER 1: **What Is a**

FARMERS MARKET?

The USDA defines a farmers market as, "a multi-stall **market at which farmer-producers sell agricultural products directly to the general public** at a central or fixed location, particularly fresh fruits and vegetables (but also meat products, dairy products, and/or grains)."

Today, farmers markets often include prepared food, arts and crafts, cut flowers, baked goods, and handcrafted items. In addition, **they act as an important gathering place for the community.**

A Rise, a Fall,

A RENAISSANCE

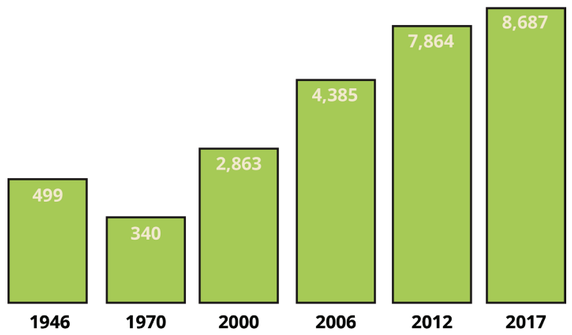
THE HISTORY OF FARMERS MARKETS

Humans have been selling and purchasing farm-fresh food (and more) at markets for thousands of years. In North America, Indigenous peoples established vast trading networks, exchanging food and other goods with European traders and neighboring tribes, setting the stage for permanent markets.

The first recorded farmers market in the United States opened in 1634 in Boston, Massachusetts. Others soon followed in the surrounding colonies. The Easton Farmers Market in Easton, Pennsylvania has been in operation since 1752—claiming the title of "America's longest continuous running open-air market." In 20th century America, farmers markets saw dramatic growth during the Great Depression, but started to decline after World War II as grocery stores became more commonplace and convenient. In the 1980s, interest in farmers markets picked up again.

The rise and fall of farmers markets reflects, in part, changes in economic conditions, consumer preferences, and national policy. Today, there's growing interest in "local"—preserving local farmland, protecting the livelihood of local growers, and diversifying local economies—as well as farm workers' rights, food safety, and training the next generation of farmers. Farmers markets can play a prominent role in this new food landscape.

National Count Of Farmers Market Directory Listings



Farmers Markets Throughout American History

1600s

1600s: **"Street markets"** are so commonplace that markets aren't given specific names—nobody pays much attention to one being established.

1634: The **first farmers market** establishment formally recorded in the English colonies is in Boston by order of Governor John Winthrop.

Late 1800s: Pattern of **declining importance** of city produce markets as transportation improves, cities grow, and agriculture becomes specialized.

1900s

Early 1900s: Most cities with **30,000+ residents** sponsor municipal markets.

1913: **USDA Office of Public Markets** is established.

1914: **USDA Cooperative Extension Service** is established.

1916: The **first self-service grocery store** opens in Memphis, Tennessee. This is the first time customers select items directly off the shelf instead of asking the store clerk for items behind the counter.

1940s

Mid 1900s: **Rise in markets across the country** as families seek extra income and self-sufficiency.

1946: Four economists with the USDA identify **499 farmers markets** in the United States.

1948: Farmers markets of all classes account for sales of **less than 10% of the total fruit and vegetable production** in the United States. Markets are formally defined as "Places where farmers congregate to sell their own products."

1950s

1950s: Better roads, western irrigation infrastructure, and refrigeration usher in **supermarkets and wholesalers**, leaving many small farms and markets out of the food system.

1970: Estimates at the national level log only about **340 farmers markets** across the country, many populated by resellers—not farmers—and many on the verge of collapse.

1970s

1975: U.S. House Resolution 2458: Defines a Farmers Market as "Any marketplace where at least ten **farmers congregate for the purpose of selling their agricultural commodities directly to consumers** in a manner designed to lower the cost of food for the consumers while providing an increased income to the farmers."

1990s

1996: USDA defines a farmers market as "a common facility or area where several **farmers/growers gather** on a regular, recurring basis to sell a variety of fresh fruit and vegetables and other farm products directly to consumers."

2000: More than **$888 Million in sales** recorded at 2,863 U.S. farmers markets.

2000+

2006: **USDA's Farmers Market Promotion Program grant began receiving funding.** This competitive grant program awards about 11 million dollars per year to eligible projects that assist in the development, improvement, and expansion of domestic direct to consumer outlets like farmers' markets.

2020: Farmers markets **adjust to COVID-19 pandemic, providing critical access to fresh foods.**

Farmers Markets in NEBRASKA TODAY

ROOM TO GROW

MARKET TRENDS AT A GLANCE

NEBRASKA HAS ROUGHLY
1 MARKET PER 19,191 PEOPLE.
NE Dept of Ag, 2020

BETWEEN 2000-2020, A
154% INCREASE
IN THE NUMBER OF FARMERS MARKETS IN NE
NE Dept of Ag, 2020

85%* OF NE'S FARMERS MARKETS ARE IN
RURAL AREAS

60%* OF NE'S RURAL FARMERS MARKETS HAVE
NO FORMAL STATUS/STRUCTURE
(LLC, NON-PROFIT, ETC.)

35%* OF NE'S RURAL FARMERS MARKETS ARE
501(c)3 NON-PROFITS

66%* OF NE'S RURAL FARMERS MARKETS HAVE
LESS THAN 10
VENDORS ON A TYPICAL DAY

42%* OF NE'S RURAL FARMERS MARKETS PROCESS
CREDIT CARDS

*Of those surveyed, from a Spring 2020 rural farmers market manager survey, done by FMPP project partners.

With Nebraska's rich agricultural resources, entrepreneurial spirit, and community connections, farmers markets have grown and multiplied across the state—in towns of all sizes—in recent decades.

LINCOLN'S HAYMARKET

Lincoln's Haymarket was home to a farmers market predecessor in Nebraska beginning in 1867. The "Market Square" was deeded to the City of Lincoln in that year as a place for the public to buy hay and produce. Soon after, the Market Square came into competition with indoor grocery stores, which could remain open year-round and which sold staples such as canned goods.

In the 1890s, truck farms arrived on the scene, selling produce in open air markets as well as delivering to grocery stores. These enjoyed peak popularity until the 1920s, when the ubiquity of the automobile put a premium on parking space and drove the truck vendors from the square, as well as minimized the need for hay for horses. The Haymarket square was replaced with a filling station.

Some murmurings were heard in the 1960s in favor of bringing back the open air markets, most likely due to the nation's growing interest in all-natural "health food." But farmers markets achieved their most lasting and indelible impression on the landscape beginning in the 1990s, and they have continued to this day, providing generations of Nebraskans with quality fresh, local ingredients for their tables.

For more information about operating as a registered market, check out **Chapter 3: Planning Your Farmers Market.**

SNAPSHOT OF NEBRASKA'S FARMERS MARKETS

As of 2022, there are 93 operating farmers markets across the state of Nebraska. The Nebraska Department of Agriculture (NDA) maintains a public database of farmers markets. To add your farmers market to the database, **contact the Ag Promotion and Development program at NDA at 402-471-4876 or ne.gov/go/neproduce**

LINCOLN HAYMARKET FARMERS MARKET