



Farmers' Markets to Compete to be Favorite

“America’s Favorite Farmers Markets” Contest voting starts in June.

Photo courtesy CJThomas Does your farmers' market deserve big praise for its ability to connect local farms and farmers to public health and economic development?

If you think it's doing top-notch work, now's the time to rally behind your market to earn the most votes in American Farmland Trust's first “America’s Favorite Farmers Markets” contest.

Farmers market managers can register to join the contest by visiting www.farmland.org/marketmanager.

Market shoppers will vote to support their favorite farmers' market starting in June. Results will be announced during Farmers' Market Week August 2 – 8, 2009.

The contest is a nation-wide challenge to see which of America's 4,685 farmers markets can rally the most support from its customers, according to the organization.

The contest helps promote further the fresh local food, local farms and farmland connections.

“Farmers markets are one of the best ways for consumers to support local farms and farmers,” says Julia Freedgood, managing director for American Farmland Trust's Growing Local Initiative.

Since 1994, when it began to track farmers' markets, the number of farmers' markets nationwide has grown by nearly 3,000, reports the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service.

The 2007 U.S. Agricultural Census reports a 49 percent growth in sales from farms directly to consumers since 2002—representing \$1.2 billion that stayed in local communities.

A concern cited by American Farmland Trust, however, is how much farmland is being developed each year: more than a million acres, it says. Most development takes place near cities where the demand for local food is the greatest.

Freedgood says, “We need to make the connection: there's no local food without local farms and farmland.”

American Farmland Trust, a national organization working with communities and individuals to protect the land, plan for agriculture and keep the land healthy, is working to support policies and programs to protect farmland, reduce barriers between farmers and consumers and encourage communities to plan for agriculture and regional food systems.

The “America’s Favorite Farmers Market” contest will help raise awareness also.

At the end of the contest, one large, medium, and small farmers market will win the title of “America’s Favorite Farmers Market” for 2009.

The reward will be a shipment of No Farms No Food® tote bags for the winning market managers to distribute to the shoppers that made it happen.