



## Number of Farmers' Markets Jumps in 2009

### Farmers' market growth indicates consumer interest in buying local.

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The 5,274 farmers' markets set up across the U.S. this year indicate an increasing consumer interest in buying local. It seems that in a struggling economy, hobby farmers who seek to sell their crop locally have something to bank on. The popularity of farmers' markets is on the rise in the U.S., having increased 13 percent from 2008, according to an announcement from Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack earlier this month.

According to the USDA, farmers' markets open opportunities for local farmers to generate income and keep that revenue plugged into the local economy.

"Farmers' markets connect the community to the local farmers who produce the fresh food, and play an important role in the direct marketing of produce to local farmers," Vilsack said.

Farmers peddled their homegrown veggies, freshly baked breads and more at 5,274 farmers' markets, up from 4,685 in 2008, according to American Farmland Trust. The non-profit agricultural protection organization applauds the community effort to support local farmers by consuming fresh food and points out how this indicates the importance of local markets in people's lives.

"Farmers' markets play a crucial role in bringing fresh food to areas where it's not always available," said Julia Freedgood, managing director of AFT's Growing Local initiative. "By getting to know the farmers who grow their food, people are able to better understand where their food comes from, something that is hard to do in most grocery stores. This relationship between farmer and consumer underscores the fact that food comes from farmland nearby, and how without that land there would be no food."

Vilsack agreed that the growth demonstrates the consumers' interest in purchasing local goods. Both the USDA and AFT have implemented programs supporting farmers' markets. The USDA's "Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food" initiative and "No Farms No Food" outline the impact farmers' markets have on their communities economically and nutritionally.

However, the rise in local farmers' markets means something bigger in the realm of food security, notes Stacy Miller, executive secretary of the Farmers Market Coalition.

"It also represents growth in the number of people participating in nutrition and food assistance programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and in the degree to which communities are building partnerships and connections that support local food systems and access to local food," Miller said.

The recent boom of farmers' markets is reminiscent of the growth in the 1980s when the link between a strong agricultural economy, farmland protection and nutritious food was established by pioneers in the industry, said Freedgood.

"It is important to reflect on past successes but also to look ahead at how to engage a new generation in understanding the importance of protecting farmland. Farmers' markets are a great way to accomplish this," Freedgood said.