

Who Operates Farmers Markets and How Are They Funded?

Organizational Types, Structures and Funding



Key Findings

- Farmers markets are managed by different types of organizations. These vary in their focus and their organizational structure.
- Most market organizations rely on multiple streams of funding for market operations and programming.
- Many farmers market organizations are registered as non-profit organizations at state and/or federal levels. This structure eases market organizations' ability to solicit monetary and in-kind support through donations and grants.
- Many market operators would benefit from training to apply for grants and solicit sponsorships.

Study Purpose

The goal of the "Analyzing the Diversity and Impacts of Farmers Markets Managed by Organizations" cooperative research agreement was to increase the general public's understanding of the diverse forms that farmers markets in the United States take and the breadth of their activities. The project was conducted over two years (October 2022 to September 2024) and used mixed methods (an online environmental scan, listening sessions, focus groups, and semi-structured interviews) to explore the structures, activities, impacts and trends shaping farmers market organizations.

Organization Types and Structures

Farmers market organizations can exist primarily to manage one or more markets, or an umbrella organization may run farmers markets as one of many community programs. The environmental scan (ES) reviewed the websites of 194 farmers market organizations to determine their organizational type (Figure 1) and organizational structure (Figure 2).

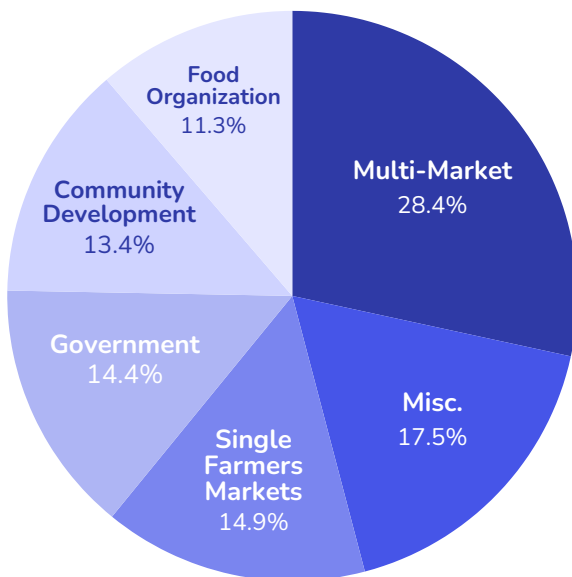


Figure 1. Organization Type
Proportion of Organization by Type

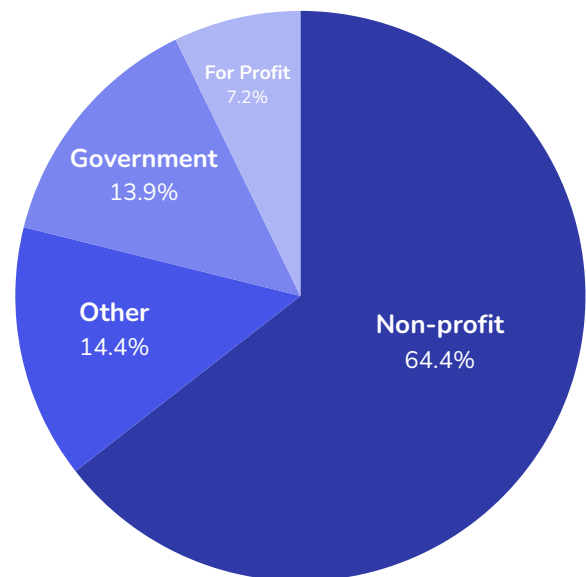


Figure 2. Organization Structures
Proportion of Organization by Structure Type



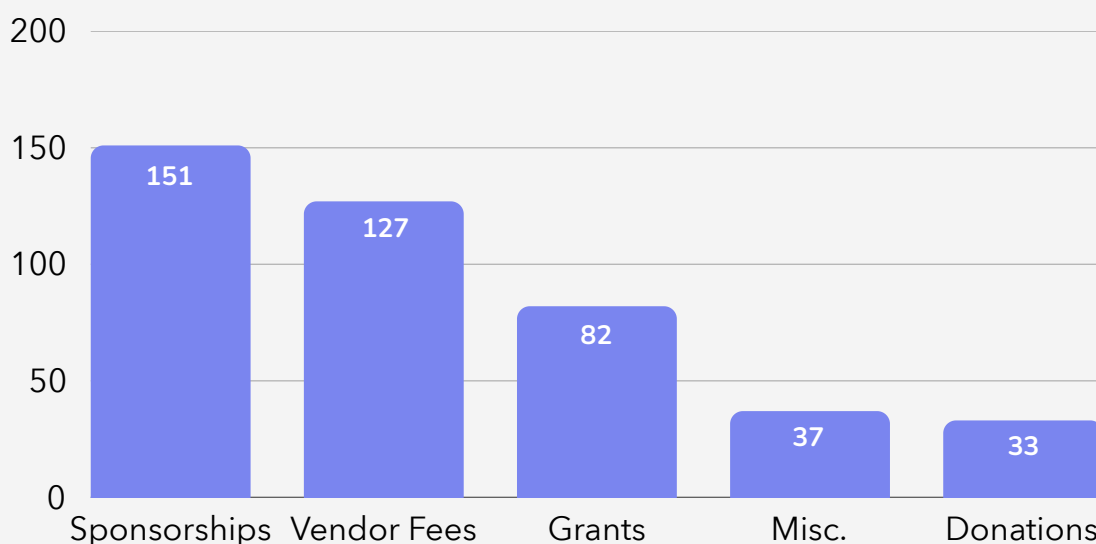
Many market organizations are structured as 501(c) nonprofits. Interviewees identified several forces that have contributed to the high representation of non-profit organizations, including:

- 1 A sector-wide push to expand market organizations' educational missions;
- 2 This organization structure's ability to meet grant eligibility requirements;
- 3 The culture and desire of many farmers market staff to serve their communities rather than focus on market organization as a business venture.

Organizations' Funding Strategies

Of the 194 organizations in the ES sample, 167 markets share information online about their funding strategies (Figure 3). These strategies are not exclusive; organizations often use multiple funding strategies.

Figure 3. Organizations' Funding Strategies



While the ES found high reliance on sponsorships and grants, our interviewees and participants expressed hesitation and intimidation at pursuing these funding sources. Sponsorships were seen as difficult to obtain, and applying for many grants was seen as challenging due to complex paperwork, some requirements for matching funds, and/or the ineligibility of operational expenses. Organizations operating at a certain level of professionalization were seen to have greater capacity to secure these sources of funding over independent or smaller market organizations.

Key Takeaway

Funding agencies can decrease the barrier to entry for applying for grants through, for example, earmarking funds for first-time applicants/recipients, streamlining applications, and/or sending representatives to conferences with market staff for targeted outreach and workshops.



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