

# What Do Farmers Market Organizations Do?

## Activities, Services, and Programming



### Key Findings

- Farmers market organizations dedicate resources to supporting a wide range of activities beyond strictly coordinating logistics for markets.
- Farmers market organizations dedicate more of their internal resources towards developing, advertising, and conducting community-focused programming than producer-focused programming.
- Such initiatives have many impacts, including improving food access for low-income customers and expanding the pool of potential customers, but they also increase the administrative burden on farmers market organization staff.

### 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.

### Farmers market organizations offer programs for diverse audiences, from community members to producers

A key goal of the environmental scan was to identify the range of activities undertaken by market organizations. Programs hosted by market organizations during the 2020, 2021, and 2022 seasons were reviewed and coded for programs either aimed at the broader community or aimed at producers (i.e, farmers, fishers and ranchers). Nearly all organizations (94%) offered some type of community-focused programming (Figure 1), whereas only 20% offered programming aimed at producers (Figure 2).

Many organizations offered multiple types of programming. Among the organizations that offered community-focused programming, events and activities aimed at children were the most common (offered by 136 organizations), followed by cooking or nutrition programs (offered by 126 organizations) and gardening programs (offered by 111 organizations). School-based or partnered programming was offered by a small number of organizations (28) (Figure 3).

In contrast to the breadth and creativity of programming aimed at community members, relatively few organizations offered events or programming for producers (Figure 4). Farmers market organizations may partner with other local organizations, such as Cooperative Extension, to cross-promote workshops targeting producers rather than develop their own programs.

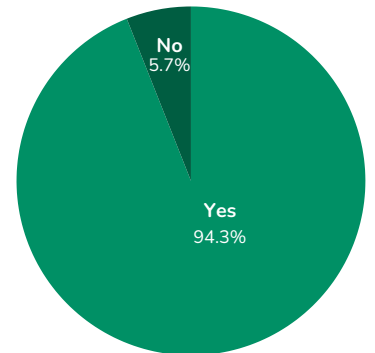


Figure 1. Do organizations advertise community programs?

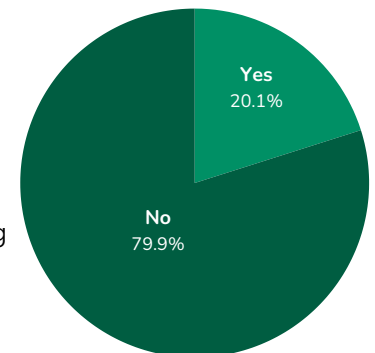
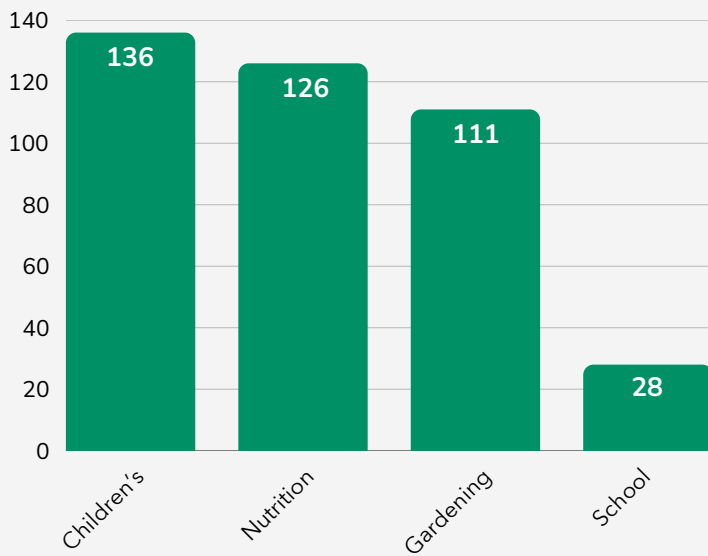
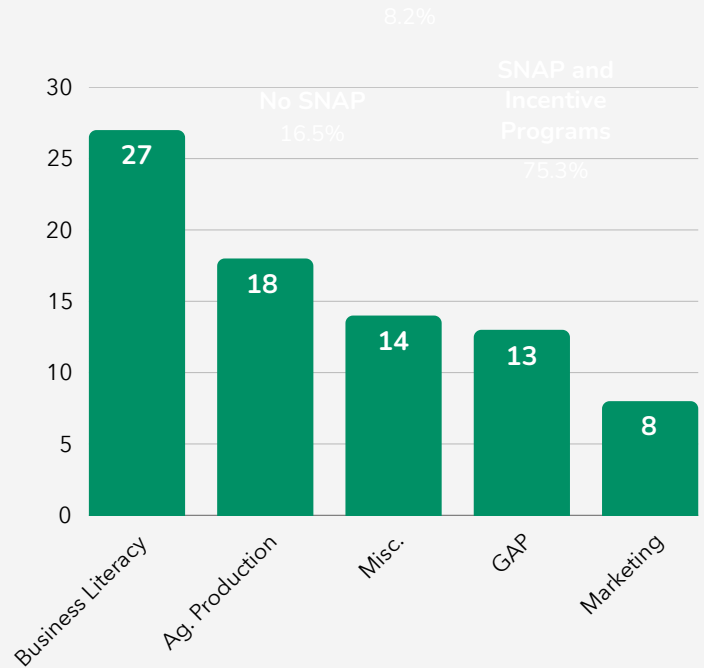


Figure 2. Do organizations advertise producer programs?



**Figure 3. Types of Community Programs**  
Number of Organizations Offering Each Type of Program



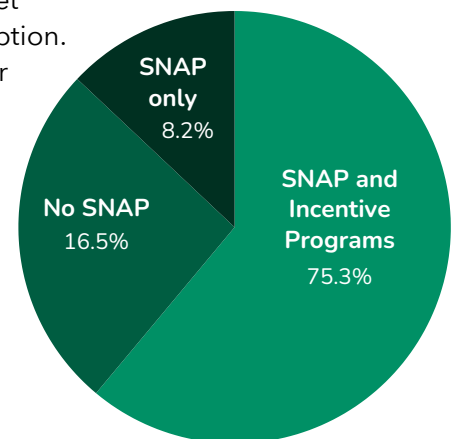
**Figure 4. Types of Producer Programs**  
Number of Organizations Offering Each Type of Program

## Nutrition assistance and incentive programs are widespread and resource intensive

Interviewees frequently discussed the increased staff time that managing nutrition assistance programs required (i.e., facilitating market acceptance of EBT benefits). Following the early 2000s transition of paper nutrition assistance coupons into electronic benefits transfer (EBT) cards, farmers market organizations across the country quickly got on board with facilitating redemption. Many interviewees praised these initiatives as successful, offering a win-win for farmers and consumers.

The environmental scan documented whether farmers market organizations advertised accepting nutrition assistance and found that the vast majority of organizations not only advertised that they accepted SNAP but offered additional incentives for redemption, as well (SNAP+) (Figure 5).

Many farmers market organizations dedicate significant staff time and resources to facilitating SNAP and incentive program redemption. This can reduce available staff time for other programs or market activities. While most vendors applauded efforts to bring in as many new customers as possible, others expressed the desire for managers to focus on recruiting more customers overall rather than focus on those eligible for nutrition assistance. This reflects tensions and ambiguity that can impact farmers market organizations as they negotiate serving multiple constituencies of vendors, customers, and partners.



**Figure 5. SNAP Benefits and Incentives Acceptance**  
Proportion of Organizations Advertising SNAP Acceptance and Incentive Programs

This research brief presents results from Cooperative Agreement 22-TMMSD-GA-0009, funded by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service. The study was conducted by Hilary B. King (Emory University), and Andrea Rissing (Arizona State University), with assistance from Scott Schnur (Emory University) and Susan Kiskis (Arizona State University). Contents do not necessarily represent the official views of the USDA. For more information, contact Hilary B. King at [hbking@emory.edu](mailto:hbking@emory.edu).