



Homegrown

USDA provides grants, market information to help farmers, large and small.

by *Shelby Mettlen*, assistant editor

Words like “sustainable,” “locally grown” and “farm fresh” tend to catch the eyes and ears of today’s consumers. With good reason, one could say, as they paint a picture in the mind’s eye of a simpler time — a time when the clock seemed to tick slower, everyone waved, and farmers produced just enough to feed themselves and to maybe trade with a neighbor.

Of course, agriculture has advanced a bit since those days. While modern ag practices are necessary to the sustainability of our world’s population, the consumer still has questions. There’s something quaint about visiting a farmers’ market, talking with the producers and carefully selecting locally grown produce and protein over friendly conversation.

Building the bond

Supervisory Market News Reporter for the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) Jodie Pitcock explains that the USDA recognizes the benefits farmers’ markets bring to local communities.

“From improving marketing opportunities and profits for farmers and ranchers to building stronger community ties, farmers’ markets are a gathering place where you can get to know your farmer,” he says.

Since 2009, the USDA’s Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP) has funded 844 projects across the United States, totaling more than \$68.2 million to support direct local food marketing efforts. The Local Food

Promotion Program (LFPP) was started in 2014 and has funded 403 projects throughout the country, totaling \$38 million to support local and regional supply chain activities including processing, aggregating, storing or distributing local and regional food.

The FMPP was developed to increase domestic consumption of and access to locally and regionally produced agricultural products. The program

aims to develop new market opportunities for farming and ranching operations serving local markets by developing, improving and aiding in expansion and outreach opportunities for domestic farmers’ markets, roadside stands, community-supported agriculture





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programs, agritourism activities and other forms of direct producer-to-consumer marketing opportunities.

The grant program illustrates USDA’s ongoing commitment to support local and regional food systems.

“Our mission is to support the critical connection between farmers and consumers and to continue the USDA’s support for local and regional food systems,” Pitcock says.

Support across America

The USDA supports local and regional food projects “from coast to coast,” in every state, as consumers continue to demand

more and more locally and organically grown produce and meat options.

“Farmers’ Market and Local Food Promotion Program grants help strengthen ties between urban and rural communities and meet the growing demand for locally and regionally produced food,” he explains.

Farmers markets are great venues to try new food items, including local meats, Pitcock says. They also provide an opportunity for the consumer to meet face-to-face with the farmer who produced the product and help them learn about the product, how it was raised and how to prepare it.

“The entire local food system is maturing,” he says. “As farmers’ market sectors mature, this results in more farmers benefiting by using food hubs to sell to restaurants, grocery stores, institutions and school districts.” This helps introduce new food products to communities and institutions across the country.

Providing information

In addition to local and regional grants, USDA AMS Market News provides farmers market reports in 17 states across the country. USDA Market News created these local and regional food reports to provide producers and consumers with instant access to prices from farmers markets, farmers’ auctions, food hubs, farm to school programs and direct-to-consumer sales.

For a century, USDA Market News has provided free, unbiased price and sales information to assist in the marketing and distribution of farm commodities, Pitcock says, each year providing thousands or reports with key wholesale, retail and shipping data. To view current local and regional pricing information visit <https://www.ams.usda.gov/market-news/local-regional-food>.

“Demand for local food is growing, and farmers’ markets play an important role in the local food economy, regional food development and American agriculture,” he explains. “According to the 2012 Census of Agriculture, 50,000 farmers [and] ranchers nationwide are selling to local retailers and 150,000 are selling their products directly to consumers.”

The reports give agricultural producers of all types the information necessary to evaluate market conditions, identify trends, make purchasing decisions, monitor price patterns, evaluate transportation equipment needs and accurately assess movement.

To access these reports and for more information, visit www.ams.usda.gov/market-news/local-regional-food.

More opportunities

Any agriculturally based product from beef to beets can be sold as part of a local market.

What’s the big deal?

Farmers’ markets are “economic engines,” says Jodie Pitcock, supervisory market news reporter for the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS). Why? Well, farmers’ markets, and the USDA programs that support them, offer a variety of benefits to consumers and producers. Here are a few great things farmers’ markets can provide:

- ▶ Valuable marketing opportunities for small to mid-sized farmers and ranchers.
- ▶ Broad economic benefits to rural and urban communities.
- ▶ An easier point of entry for new and beginning farmers.
- ▶ An increase in domestic consumption of locally and regionally produced agricultural products.
- ▶ An increase in consumer access to fresh, healthy food.
- ▶ A more steady stream of foot traffic and customers to brick and mortar stores.
- ▶ Jobs and marketing opportunities for local farmers and ranchers.
- ▶ Improvement of access to fresh, healthy food.
- ▶ A community gathering place where America’s food producers are building successful businesses and bringing fresh, local food to market.

To learn more about the creative projects to support local food systems, check out USDA’s Farmers’ Market and Local Food Promotion Program grants at <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/fmpps>.

To learn more on how to apply for the USDA’s various grant programs, visit www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants. The FMPP application period for 2016 closed on May 12, 2016, but additional funding opportunities for 2017 will be announced in the coming year. Grant applications for all AMS grant programs must be submitted electronically through www.grants.gov.

Under the current administration, USDA has invested more than \$1 billion in over 40,000 local and regional food businesses and infrastructure projects. The activities contribute to USDA’s Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food (KYF2) initiative, which coordinates efforts across the USDA and maps local and regional food system investments across the country. To view the map and visit a local grower or market near you, visit <http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdamedia?navid=kyf-compass-map>.

“At AMS, and across [the] USDA, we will continue to support efforts to increase access to fresh, local food while providing marketing opportunities to farmers, ranchers and local food businesses,” Pitcock says.

