

Michigan Ranks in Top 10 in Nation for Farmers Markets

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New USDA Guide shows 16 percent growth trend with Midwest showing largest gains

LANSING - Today, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) released its 2010 National Farmers Market Directory and Michigan ranks fourth in the nation for the most operational farmers markets. Currently, there are 271 operational farmers markets in Michigan listed in the USDA directory. California claimed the top spot with 580, followed by New York with 461, and Illinois with 286.

"Between 2008 and 2009, we saw a 13 percent increase in the number of farmers markets operating in the state," said Governor Jennifer M. Granholm. "Dollars spent at area farmers markets are more likely to stay in Michigan, benefiting local communities and strengthening our economy."

As the state's second largest industry, Michigan's agri-food sector generates \$71.3 billion annually, making it a building block for diversifying the state's economy. Production agriculture, food processing and related businesses employ more than one million people. Michigan produces more than 200 commodities, making it second only to California in terms of agricultural diversity.

"This is a great opportunity to celebrate National Farmers Market Week by honoring our community farmers markets," said Don Koivisto, director of the Michigan Department of Agriculture. "Michigan's farmers markets offer consumers fresh and locally grown and produced foods for their dining room table. Buying locally also provides an opportunity to meet the people who feed us and learn how our food was grown and produced. Not to mention, the best tasting foods ripen closest to home."

Of Michigan's 271 farmers markets, 57 are authorized to accept Bridge Cards electronically this year. This number has grown from 29 in 2009 through the efforts of the Michigan Farmers Market Food Assistance Partnership, led by the Michigan Food Policy Council (MFPC) and the Michigan Farmers Market Association (MIFMA). The partnership's work and 2010 growth has been funded through a grant as part of the USDA's Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food Initiative.

"This work supports our local economy and Michigan producers while increasing the accessibility to local and fresh food for our low-income families," said Granholm. "Many fruits and vegetables can lose up to 50 percent of their nutrients in just five days time, so buying locally grown food not only tastes better but is a healthier choice."

Michigan is a state steeped in agricultural heritage. It is home to about 10 million acres of farmland and 56,014 farms averaging 179 acres each. More than 90 percent of Michigan farmland is owned by families. Additionally, according to the 2007 USDA Census of Agriculture, there has been significant growth in the number of small farms over the past few years.

To find a full list of farmers markets in Michigan, visit the Michigan Farmers Market Association's website at www.mifma.org and click "Find a Farmers Market."

Results from the USDA National Farmers Market Directory are based upon voluntary reporting from farmers market managers. The USDA National Farmers Market Directory is available online at <http://apps.ams.usda.gov/FarmersMarkets>

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