

POSITION PAPER

FARMERS MARKETS

PROTECTING LIFE THROUGH
DAILY EXCHANGES THAT
CONNECT PEOPLE,
PRODUCTS, AND PLANET



WRITTEN BY:

World Farmers Markets Coalition



ABOUT THE COALITION

The World Farmers Markets Coalition (WorldFMC) is the largest global organization representing farmers markets. Based in Rome, this non-profit works closely with UN food agencies and other partners to amplify farmers' voices and strengthen local food systems. We connect farmers and consumers, promoting sustainable production, thriving communities, and care for the environment.

Our network spans over 28,000 markets in 80+ countries, with 100+ member associations representing 330,000 farming families and 400+ million consumers worldwide. We recognize farmers as stewards of the planet and guardians of biodiversity.

By defending local food systems, we ensure fair livelihoods, access to nutritious food, and preservation of traditions. Farmers markets foster relationships, fair prices, and dignity within the food chain. Supporting farmers also restores biodiversity, protects ecosystems, and preserves agricultural heritage.

WorldFMC is a global community proving that markets are more than food, they are about livelihoods, biodiversity, culture, and the bonds that connect humanity.

WHAT ARE FARMERS MARKETS?

Farmers markets represent a form of trade that is gaining more attention and recognition globally.

To be clear, there are many types of markets in the world, both formal and informal. These include wholesale markets and retail markets, territorial markets, public markets, fresh markets, and even online platforms. Despite geographic or architectural differences, in all of these markets intermediaries play a crucial role, facilitating transactions between farmers and consumers. Not only can intermediaries reduce profit margins for farmers, but they also create a gap between those who produce and those who consume.

Farmers markets are different. They *offer direct contact*, minimizing, if not, eliminating intermediaries altogether. This approach allows farmers to receive a fair price for their products, ensuring them a decent income and promoting economic sustainability. This direct contact between farmers and consumers creates a system that values local production and freedom, for both farmers and consumers. They act as cultural hubs by sharing culinary traditions, hosting cooking demonstrations, increasing awareness on safe food, goods and agricultural practices, and local agriculture.

With the global context characterized by long and complex supply chains, farmers markets emerge as a sustainable and socially responsible model — an option that exemplifies the promise of short supply chains.



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This short supply chain approach has several recognised advantages. It:

- *Restores dignity*: Long denigrated as low-skill and low-value work, the agricultural sector returns farmers to the centre of food system decisions as protagonists.
- *Fair price*: Short supply chains ensure a fair price for farmers, earning a larger percentage of the final price paid by consumers.
- *Access to fresh products*: Consumers gain access to fresh, high-quality products at affordable prices, contributing to a healthier and more sustainable diet.
- *Stimulating the local economy*: Short supply chains promote local trade, supporting small and medium-sized enterprises and contributing to job creation in a manner that brings back circularity to the economy.
- *Promoting Environmental Responsiveness*: Short supply chains foster greener responsiveness by encouraging environmentally conscious production, distribution, and consumption practices.

MORE THAN LOCAL ECONOMIES: THE VALUES OF FARMERS MARKETS

Farmers markets are a *strategic, visible, and practical tool to increase farmer profits, revitalize rural economies, and give consumers access to fresh and healthy food*. It is important to consider farmers markets as starting points in the local food revitalization, as opposed to as an end point. Though they may appear simple and informal, it is important to remember that they require governance, management, and an hospitable regulatory environment, in order to succeed.



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When successful, they lay the groundwork for additional local food successes. While farmers markets may differ from place to place, they share these following attributes:

- *Direct contact between farmers and consumers:* The direct contact between farmers and consumers not only fosters greater transparency about the origin and quality of products through conversation and physical proximity, but it also cultivates trust between both sides of the supply and demand equation. Consumers learn directly from farmers about their cultivation practices, just as consumers learn countless insights about seasonality, climate, and the lives of rural people.
- *Protect biodiversity:* Whereas the long supply chain food system demands uniformity from its farmers, the farmers market rewards farmers who incorporate traditional crops that have lost out to newer, industrial crops, and who practice active-listening and grow crops consumers request. The revival of ancient grains, heritage breeds, and heirloom fruits and vegetables starts at the farmers market.
- *Bridge between rural and urban areas:* Farmers markets serve as public spaces that facilitate social cohesion. While trips to the supermarket may resemble a solo military sortie, farmers market visits are characterised by groups of friends, families, and newcomers descending upon the habitual ritual of shopping for the table. This asset brings value to the urban dweller in search of community, just as it does to the farmer in search of commercial and political allies.
- *Create a local food system:* Farmers markets promote virtuous economies by stimulating local trade and supporting small and medium-sized enterprises.



This not only helps keep profits within the community but also strengthens the economic and social fabric of cities and rural areas, creating a virtuous circle of growth and development. Farmers markets are the starting point and a necessary step toward a local food system.

- *Nexus in multifunctional agriculture:* Farmers markets provide the platform for learning and an environment conducive for business diversification. Farmers mitigate the risks associated with long supply chains (selling to one or two customers with limited leverage for price and conditions) by expanding their customer base to many retail and wholesale consumers. This singular act sets in motion the process whereby additional direct-to-consumer opportunities emerge: agritourism, subscription farming, social farming, and on-farm sales. Farmers markets trigger the promise of multifunctional agriculture.

THE NEED FOR A CLEAR DEFINITION OF FARMERS MARKETS

It is essential for relevant authorities to adopt a clear definition of farmers markets as soon as possible. This is necessary to implement policies that support local agriculture and ensure recognition for farmers markets within national, subnational, and local food policies. Only through concrete and well-defined measures will it be possible to properly value and support this pivotal sector.

We, the World Farmers Markets Coalition, the largest network of farmers markets in the world, recommend the following definition:



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A farmers market is a recurring and organized gathering where local farmers or their staff sell their fresh, locally grown and processed agricultural products directly to the consuming public. These markets provide vibrant spaces for communities to connect with their food sources, foster relationships between consumers and farmers, while supporting local economies and sustainable practices.

Farmers markets represent a different trade model that offers numerous economic, social, and environmental benefits. By promoting organised direct contact between farmers and consumers, we ensure fair wages, protect the environment, and play a critical role in improving the quality of life for communities of farmers and consumers. In short, supporting farmers markets means investing in a more fair and sustainable future for everyone.

Local food systems are not an alternative to global ones; they are complementary and help make the global system fairer, more sustainable, and better aligned with people's needs.

This document is a culmination of an extensive international interactive process with farmers market leaders and researchers led by the World Farmers Markets Coalition Academy to define farmers markets. While farmers markets may vary greatly depending on context and scale, they also hold intrinsically similar characteristics. This definition is intended to serve as a useful reference for designing farmers market programs internationally.



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