

POSITION PAPER

# URBAN FOOD POLICY:

FARMERS MARKETS AS  
DRIVERS FOR LOCAL  
FOOD SYSTEMS





# 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.*

# URBAN FOOD POLICY: FARMERS MARKETS AS DRIVERS FOR LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS

Urban food policies are increasingly recognized as essential for promoting sustainable food systems, enhancing food security, and fostering community well-being. This focus on "local" emphasizes the importance of proximity in commercial and social relations.

This emergence emphasizes "local," making proximity an important factor for commercial and social relations. Although it may not be visible or apparent, this also means that new policies are being incubated locally. Despite the lack of guarantee that these local food policies incorporate urban, peri-urban, and rural stakeholders, it is the experience (of farmers markets facilitating these stakeholders commercially and socially) that makes farmers markets uniquely qualified to incubate local food policies that unite town and country.

Conversely, other local food initiatives may also incubate useful and replicable policies; however, it is the farmers market's practical and visible nature that helps to clarify that urban food policies are (and if they are not, should be) local food policies. There is no universal definition for what is local. Distinct is relative; however, as a useful guide, it is the practical proximity of the farmers market that defines local food as the purposeful commercial, social, and ecological relationship that connects urban to rural, supply to demand with dignity.

Cities have always depended on rural areas for food, highlighting a longstanding connection between urban and rural communities. Today, farmers markets serve as visible bridges in this relationship.



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## THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS

Farmers markets define local food systems as an important expansion upon what can be understood narrowly as solely urban food systems. Moreover, the World Farmers Markets Coalition understands the role of farmers markets as strategic points to leverage deeper and wider transformations of local territories. Farmers markets play a crucial role in fostering social cohesion, inclusivity, and sustainability within communities. Beyond their economic contributions, these markets serve as vital social spaces that build trust among producers, vendors, and consumers; bridge rural–urban divides; and provide a shared platform where both rich and poor engage equally in food exchange. By promoting inclusive participation in and strengthening of community ties, farmers markets contribute to social equity, mutual understanding, and the collective pursuit of sustainable local food systems.

Farmers markets contribute directly to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 2 on Zero Hunger and SDG 11 on Sustainable Cities and Communities. Across regions farmers markets are proving that local solutions can advance global commitments.

**Fair Income for Farmers.** Farmers markets contribute to fair income by allowing producers to sell their goods directly to consumers. This model eliminates intermediaries, ensuring that a larger portion of the sale price goes to the farmers. By providing a platform for equitable transactions, farmers markets help create a more just economic environment for local producers. Their oversight contributes to maintaining transparency and promoting equitable distribution of market value along the chain.



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Strengthening their institutional capacity can enhance farmers market efficiency, protect farmer welfare, and foster trust between producers and consumers.

**Health and Nutrition.** Access to fresh, local food is essential for public health. Farmers markets increase the availability of fruits and vegetables, encouraging healthier eating habits. Not only does access to fresh produce result in lower rates of diet-related diseases, such as obesity and diabetes, it is the opportunity to learn at farmers markets that provide consumers with added value. By connecting people with seasonal and diverse produce, farmers markets encourage balanced diets and reduce reliance on highly processed foods.

**Environmental Sustainability.** Emphasizing biodiversity underscores the ecological dimension of farmers markets, reinforcing their role in preserving indigenous crops, enhancing ecosystem resilience, and fostering dietary diversity within local communities.

## **THE ROLE OF FARMERS MARKETS IN URBAN FOOD POLICY**

**Community Engagement.** Farmers markets serve as social hubs, bringing together diverse communities. By fostering direct relationships between consumers and producers, they enhance social cohesion. Farmers markets are an important gateway for immigrants, newcomers, and youth. By engaging residents in food-related discourse, markets empower communities to advocate for their food needs and preferences.



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**Education and Awareness.** Farmers markets are platforms for nutrition education, cooking, and sustainable practices. Workshops inform consumers about local food benefits and preparation, thereby strengthening the link between individual food choices and health outcomes, as well as formulating positions on the institutionalization of chronic diseases via urban policies.

**Bridging Urban and Rural.** The relationship between urban, rural, and peri-urban areas is increasingly recognized as essential for fostering sustainable communities and food systems. Farmers markets play a pivotal role in bridging these areas by facilitating direct connections between local producers and urban consumers. They provide a platform where farmers can sell their goods, promoting local agriculture and ensuring that fresh, sustainable food reaches city dwellers. Additionally, these markets foster social interactions and community engagement, reinforcing the ties between town and country. By highlighting the importance of local food systems, farmers markets cultivate a deeper understanding of the interdependence between urban and rural environments.

**Policy Integration.** For urban food policies to be effective, they must integrate local food initiatives like farmers markets into broader frameworks. This includes providing support through funding, infrastructure improvements, and regulatory adjustments that facilitate the establishment and operation of farmers markets.

Farmers markets are vital components of urban food policies, offering economic, health, and environmental benefits. By integrating local food systems into urban planning and policy



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frameworks, cities can create resilient, sustainable food environments that meet the needs of all residents. While new policies may scale up to national levels, they certainly can and should scale out to other municipalities grappling with the crises of chronic diseases, social isolation, food insecurity, and unhealthy relationships with per-urban and rural residents.

## **ACTIONS TO TAKE**

In order to create real and effective local food system, We, the World Farmers Markets Coalition, the largest network of farmers markets in the world, call international, national and local authorities to implement the following actions

- **Support for Farmers Markets:** Urban policies should prioritize funding and resources for establishing and maintaining farmers markets, particularly in underserved areas.
- **Community Education Programs:** Implement educational programs that promote healthy eating and cooking skills, utilizing farmers markets as a strategic venue.
- **Partnerships and Collaborations:** Encourage partnerships between local governments, farmers, and community organizations to create a comprehensive urban food strategy.
- **Regulatory Support:** Streamline regulations that hinder the operation of farmers markets, ensuring they can thrive in urban settings.
- **Research, Evaluation and Learning:** Invest in research to evaluate the impact of farmers markets on local economies, health outcomes, and community engagement, using findings to inform future policies.



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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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