



Farmers Markets Count when it comes to **Biodiversity**

Interim results from a global campaign to measure how and by how much farmers markets affect biodiversity preservation and promotion.



Credits: Feria de Productores

What: A census of the food biodiversity in farmers markets

Where: 52 farmers markets in 16 countries

When: The week of World Biodiversity Day, 22 May 2025

Who: Local farmers market managers surveyed the markets they manage, where farmers sell directly to consumers on recurring bases.

Why: Objectives are three-fold

1. To take a snapshot of the food biodiversity available in World Farmers Market Coalition members' markets;
2. To cultivate a culture of evaluation among farmers market managers (who are often preoccupied with the miracle of staging recurring farmers markets with limited resources);
3. To demonstrate to consumers, farmers, partners, and the wider community that food biodiversity matters and that it is a priority of farmers markets to preserve and promote.

FMCOUNT! BIODIVERSITY STUDY 2025



Rationale: World Biodiversity Day is an annual United Nations-recognized date to commemorate the Convention on Biodiversity, signed at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, Brazil. This key milestone provides a diplomatic framework for preserving the biodiversity that remains on our planet. According to the World Wildlife Fund's Living Planet Report, vertebrate wildlife have declined by 69% since 1970. Wild creatures rely upon the very flora and fauna destroyed by monocrop agriculture – the very

products that dominate the global marketplace for food. They also happen to be the narrow scope of products that have gained ground globally to feed consumers and to feed the animals consumers eat. Monocrop plantations take up 80% of arable land. This robs local wildlife of habitats and local populations to cultivate and consume the traditional foods that once dominated their local diets. For instance, instead of obediently relying solely on the four grains that dominate the world's diet — wheat, rice, maize, and barley, why not consider the explosion of biodiversity of agri-foods on offer directly from farmers in farmers markets all over the world? Not only will you find wheat but you will find many different varieties of traditional wheat, adapted for generations to be grown in specific areas with affordable and regenerative inputs. Or, consider the Feria de Productores (farmers market) in Guadalajara, Mexico, where you will find maize. However, despite the imposition of imports and the agricultural consolidation from the North American Free Trade Agreement, this farmers market boasts 25 different varieties of maize. We think this is something to recognize, understand and celebrate. Meanwhile, in Italian farmers markets, fruit and vegetable varieties are available on an impressive scale (with an average of 34 fruit and 35 vegetable varieties per market). However, what also shows great promise is that on average shoppers can anticipate nine varieties of grains. These include oats, einkorn, and buckwheat.

How the campaign works: During the weeks leading up to World Biodiversity Day, we trained more than 150 farmers market leaders to conduct a scientific survey of the products available on the day of the market they measure. From these, 52 markets conducted the study. Equipped with a clipboard, digital camera, pen and paper, surveyors examined the farmers' vending stalls to count the variety of products by categories: fruit, vegetables, herbs, grains/seeds, legumes, and animal products (1). In addition to this internal census, farmers market leaders activated volunteers to provide samples of the taste diversity on offer for consumers, invited partners and public officials to educate the public about efforts underway that support biodiversity preservation, and communicated to the world of food through social media what biodiversity looks like in the community marketplace, using the #FMCOUNT.

THE AVERAGE BIODIVERSITY COUNTS IN FARMERS MARKETS AROUND THE WORLD



Italy - Norway - USA - UK - Moldova - Puerto Rico - Denmark - Spain - Ukraine - Turkey - Kenya - Australia - Israel - Lebanon - Mexico - Poland

What we are discovering: If you are looking for local food biodiversity, farmers markets are a great place to start. Whereas supermarkets rely upon the global cold chain, often bypassing local sourcing of fresh goods, farmers markets are the most direct local venue for fresh produce. More importantly, they are a window to the health of local food systems. If biodiversity is present, how did this happen? What local support mechanisms are in place? If it is not present, why not? How can we leverage the consumer-demand in farmers markets to reward farmers to revive local varieties that simply do not fit into the industrial modes of production and distribution?

Through personal interviews with farmers (to be released upon the completion of the full FMCOUNT campaign of farmers and consumers) and careful counting of varieties on offer, we learned that on average, farmers markets offer 140 different varieties of fruits, vegetables, herbs, grains, and legumes.

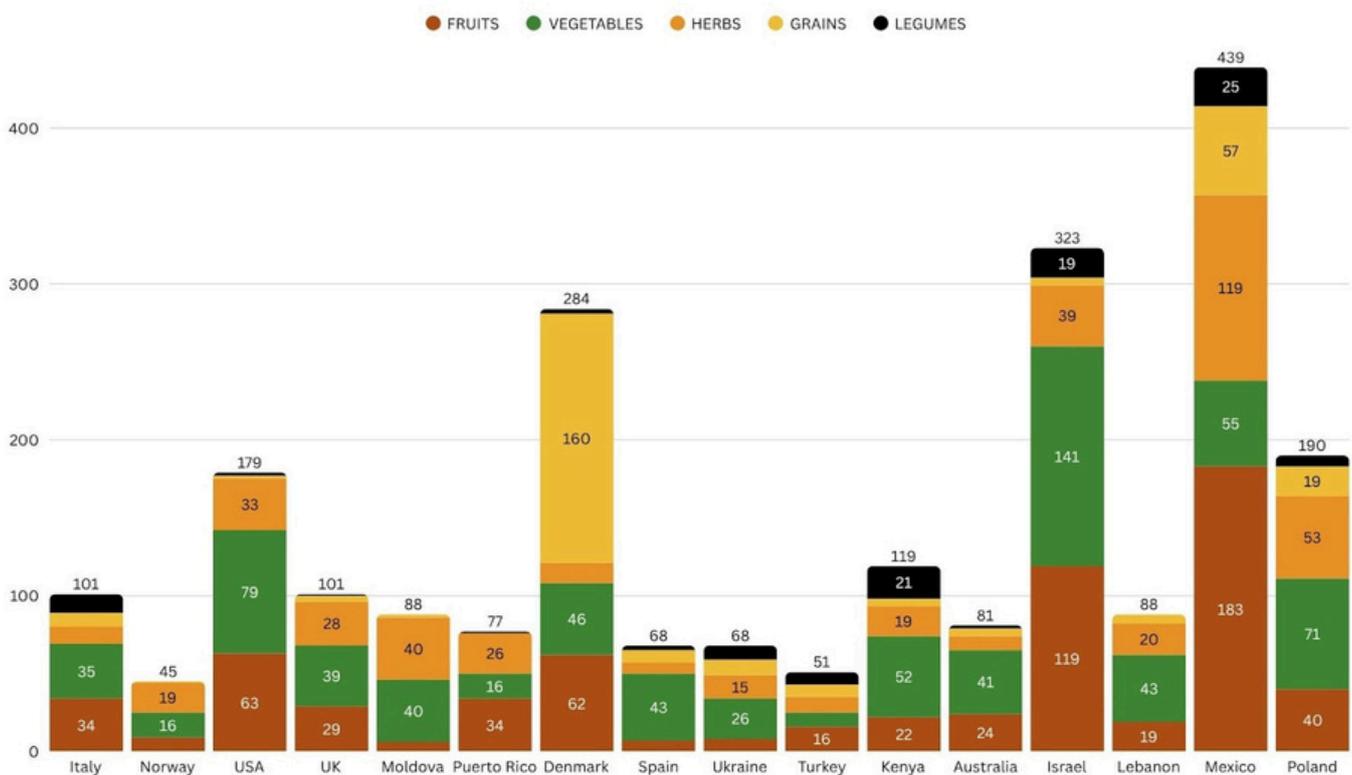
1. Some countries have reasons to celebrate their success in bringing local biodiversity to market. For instance, **Mexico** offers a fountain of life with 440 varieties. On the other hand, places like **Norway** and **Denmark** offer remarkable variety (considering their survey took place long before the bounty of the spring harvest arrives). Norwegian farmers markets somehow offered on average 46 varieties of products

whilst snow still covered many fields. This speaks to admirable innovation on behalf of farmers who deploy season-extending practices like high-tunnels, value-added processing, and preservation. Or consider Denmark (also prior to the time of warmer temperatures at the time of the survey). Its markets showcase biodiversity via farmers who grow seeds for shoppers to purchase and plant in their own gardens. Denmark calculated a whopping average of 160 seed varieties per market.

2. Scarcity is also part of the story. Whereas conventional retailers stock the shop with products from wherever they can be sourced, farmers markets operate on a strict policy of “grow it, to sell it.” As a result, shoppers learn to shop by season. There are times of plenty, and times of scarcity. For instance, if it is not broccoli season, there will be no broccoli at the farmers market. Conversely, when it is broccoli season, expect different varieties of broccoli (not just the one or two varieties available in supermarkets). This element of scarcity has also shown itself in the study. While World Biodiversity Day may fall in peak season (as it did for **Spain** with 43 varieties of vegetables), others tell the story of their climate, season, and the health of their local food system. For instance, while in **Turkey**, shoppers only found 9 varieties of vegetables at their farmers markets, conversely they could rejoice upon finding 21 varieties of legumes.
3. Local honey is almost universally available at farmers markets around the world. This is good for honey bees, just as it is good news for consumers seeking preventative methods to combat allergies. For instance, in **Poland**, farmers market shoppers can expect 9 different varieties of honey. The good news on the pollinators’ front is bigger than honey. Farmers who bring biodiverse products to market maintain diversified farms that create desirable environments for many types of pollinators.
4. Fruit, herbs, vegetables, grains and legumes exhibit great diversification of products on singular farms, creating hospitable environments for a variety of pollinators to thrive. While this may prove to be beneficial practices for business – providing shoppers with much choice, it is also

beneficial for the survival of pollinators valuable to the kind of ecosystem support that farmers choose to do (even if they are unable to recover profits from these ecological choices).

5. Farmers articulated that their decisions to revive varieties of plants that are disappearing are intentional. They do so, even if the promise of greater profits can be made by restricting their crop choices to a few commercial varieties.
6. Farmers markets want to evaluate their work. The primary obstacles are time, resources, and skills. Campaigns like this intend to address these gaps.



About the World Farmers Markets Coalition: Founded in 2021 during the United Nations Food Systems Summit preparatory meetings in Rome in response to weaknesses in the long chain supply system experienced during the 2019 COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukraine war, Italy's Campagna Amica national network of farmers markets assembled farmers market leaders from around the world to identify promising practices ripe for replication and adaptation, to cultivate leadership, to facilitate peer-to-peer learning, and to influence public policies from the local to the global level to realize the potential of the purposeful

reinvention of the ancient direct marketing mechanism that connects farmers to consumers whilst animating public space for public good.

About the Farmers Markets Count! Campaign: In order to test the theory that farmers markets contribute to biodiversity preservation, farmer livelihoods, and consumer food environments, we are activating farmers market leaders to measure their impact on three key dates in order to accrue evidence that farmers markets count and by how much:

- World Biodiversity Day, 22 May 2025
- World Rural Development Day, 6 July 2025
- World Food Day, 16 October 2025



Note: 1. While the findings from the animal products category proved illuminating with many breeds of land and aquatic creatures, this first outing also proved that this category was too complicated to be captured accurately with the limited training and support we could provide.



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