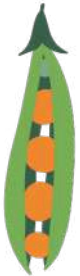




Farmers MARKETS COUNT!

A GLOBAL CALL TO ACTION



**CAMPAIGN TO EVALUATE
THE IMPACT OF FARMERS MARKETS
UPON BIODIVERSITY,
RURAL DEVELOPMENT, AND CONSUMER
FOOD ENVIRONMENTS**



FMCCOUNTN!

Acknowledgement

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Farmers Markets are not niche food spaces. They are strategic infrastructures for resilient, biodiverse, and community-based food systems.

FARMERS MARKETS AS STRATEGIC FOOD SYSTEM INFRASTRUCTURE

In 2025, the World Farmers Markets Coalition coordinated a global campaign to measure and communicate the contribution of Farmers Markets (FMs) to biodiversity preservation, rural development, and consumer food access. The initiative aligned with three UN-recognised observances: World Biodiversity Day, World Rural Development Day, and World Food Day.

Through coordinated data collection activities involving farmers markets across multiple countries, the campaign generated a first international evidence base demonstrating that “Farmers Markets Count”, both because they matter and because their impacts can be measured.

KEY FINDINGS

Biodiversity

Farmers Markets play an important role in preserving agricultural diversity and supporting resilient local food systems.

Headline Results

- 16 countries participated in the biodiversity campaign.
- 54 Farmers markets were surveyed.
- Markets commercialised an average of 63.75 distinct food products.
- Each product was represented by an average of 2.72 varieties.
- Vegetables were the most represented product category, followed by Herbs, Fruits and Animal Proteins.

- Italy involved the largest number of participating markets (20), while Israel, Denmark and Norway recorded the highest average varietal richness.

Farmers Markets create viable market opportunities for locally adapted varieties, traditional foods and diversified production systems, contributing to the conservation of agrobiodiversity and the resilience of local food systems.

Rural Development and Farmer Livelihoods

The campaign confirms that Farmers Markets contribute to strengthening local economies and supporting family farming.

Headline Results

- 82% of markets operate year-round
- 88% operate at least once per week
- 94% of farmers accept digital payments
- 91% of farmers travel less than 90 minutes to reach the market
- 79% of vendors are formally registered businesses
- 56% of interviewed vendors are women
- 12% of farmers are under 30 years old

The results challenge the perception of Farmers Markets as informal or marginal economic spaces. Instead, they emerge as structured and professional retail environments capable of generating income opportunities, supporting women-led enterprises, and strengthening peri-urban food systems.

The strong geographical proximity between producers and consumers also highlights the importance of protecting agricultural land near urban centres.

Consumers and Food Access

The consumer survey, based on 792 shopper interviews, reveals high levels of loyalty and strong integration of Farmers Markets within local food environments.

Headline Results

- 88% of shoppers are repeat visitors
- 60% shop at farmers markets weekly
- 87% reach the market within 30 minutes
- 64% discovered new ingredients at the market
- The largest shopper group (48%) is aged between 31 and 50 years old

Consumers identified the following as their primary motivations for shopping at farmers markets:

- Taste and quality (34%)
- Organic and chemical-free production (27%)
- Local food (20%)
- Only 8% identified price as their primary reason for visiting.

The findings indicate that consumers increasingly associate Farmers Markets with quality, trust, local food culture, and food education.

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

The 2025 Farmers Markets Count campaign demonstrates that farmers markets contribute simultaneously to environmental sustainability, rural livelihoods, public health, and local economic resilience.

The evidence suggests that farmers markets should be increasingly recognised within:

biodiversity strategies;
local food policies;
rural development programmes;
urban planning initiatives;
public health and food access frameworks.

As global food systems face growing ecological and social pressures, Farmers Markets offer locally embedded solutions capable of reconnecting producers, consumers, and territories.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Governments and public institutions should:

1. Support Farmers Markets as local food infrastructures through funding, public space allocation, and procurement policies.
2. Recognise Farmers Markets within biodiversity and sustainable agriculture strategies.
3. Invest in evaluation systems and capacity-building initiatives to strengthen evidence-based policymaking.

LOOKING FORWARD

The Farmers Markets Count campaign represents an important first step toward building a shared international framework for evaluating the multifunctional contributions of Farmers Markets.

Beyond food sales, Farmers Markets preserve biodiversity, support local economies, foster social cohesion, and reconnect people with the cultural and ecological value of food.

As attention increasingly turns toward resilient and sustainable food systems, Farmers Markets emerge as strategic local infrastructures capable of delivering environmental, social, economic, and cultural value simultaneously.

Introduction



1. INTRODUCTION

Short food supply chains have gathered momentum in the past decades and have emerged as a sound alternative to the globalised mode of food provisioning (Chiffolleau et al., 2025)¹. More precisely, farmers markets (FM) represent the most important organized local food supply chain which is expanding in either developed or emerging economies. This report aims to emphasise the “multifunctional” role of FM, meant as farmers’ organizations whose purpose is securing society with multiple commodity (satisfying material needs) and non-commodity output (satisfying other non material and societal needs).

Framed within the paradigm of multifunctional farming (Van Huylenbroek et al., 2007²; Renting et al., 2009)³, the role of FM is emphasised and read through the lens of multiple economic, social, and environmental outputs. Contributing to food security, by offering fresh products, with low environmental impacts (Zero Km food supply chains), and preserving local tradition and contributing to maintaining employment and food production in rural areas, represent some of the most important functions the FMs grant to the society and that society recognizes as inherent to agriculture.

In order to identify these multiple outputs, the report presents the results of an empirical investigation that has involved FM adhering to the World Farmers Markets Coalitions. More precisely, the focus of the analysis concerns the following issues:

- The contribution of FM to preserve biodiversity in rural areas.
 - FM as an engine for boosting rural development.
 - FM as territorial staging systems to empower consumers-producers linkages.
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1 Chiffolleau, Y., Wallet, F., Prosperi, P., Collewet, F., & Morizot-Braud, F. (2025). Short food supply chains, an alternative economy for sustainable food systems: A mixed approach over time. *Agricultural and Food Economics*, 13, 66. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40100-025-00403-4>

2 Van Huylenbroeck, G., Vandermeulen, V., Mettepenningen, E., & Verspecht, A. (2007). Multifunctionality of agriculture: A review of definitions, evidence and instruments. *Living Reviews in Landscape Research*, 1, 1–43. <https://doi.org/10.12942/lrlr-2007-3>

3 Renting, H., Rossing, W. A. H., Groot, J. C. J., van der Ploeg, J. D., Laurent, C., Perraud, D., Stobbelaar, D. J., & van Ittersum, M. K. (2009). Exploring multifunctional agriculture: A review of conceptual approaches and prospects for an integrative transitional framework. *Journal of Environmental Management*, 90(Suppl. 2), S112–S123. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2008.11.014>

Methodology



2. METHODOLOGY

In 2025, the World Farmers Markets Coalition launched a campaign among its members in order to achieve the following objectives: 1) To raise awareness of the positive contributions farmers markets have upon biodiversity, rural development, and consumer food access by coordinating member farmers markets to conduct counting exercises in their markets on market days that correspond to notable UN-sanctioned dates – World Biodiversity Day (May), World Rural Development Day (July), and World Food Day (October); 2) To cultivate a culture of evaluation among member farmers markets in order to self-evaluate impact and to communicate to local partners, stakeholders, and decision makers the value of farmers markets.

In order to launch the year-long campaign (with three distinct phases to corresponding UN-sanctioned dates), the World Farmers Markets Coalition International Secretariat developed communications materials branded with the campaign theme that trades on the double entendre that “farmers markets count.” The Secretariat also provided the digital platform for inputting and tabulating the data using the organisation’s Google platform, together with considerable advance training.

As is the case with farmers market management in general, the particulars of farmers market evaluation are more complex than what may be assumed.

The relationship farmers market management holds with its internal customers (farmers) varies depending on the context of the market itself. Some markets are established by farmers and farmers organisations, and therefore maintain very close relationships with members. Italy’s Campagna Amica is one such example. On the other hand, many farmers markets are social enterprises led by consumers and urban food advocates. As a result, relationships between farmer and market association may be weaker in these instances. As a result, the farmers market management may not possess the same degree of intimate knowledge of the farmer’s business, and internal decision-making processes. Regardless of which organisational model a farmers market pursues (private or public, daily stalls or annual membership for vendors, etc.), farmers maintain a healthy degree of autonomy regarding how the farmer manages his/her business on the farm and in the market.

Prior to each campaign moment, the Secretariat provided training via distance learning, digital toolkits, and 1:1 mentoring. In each participating association, market staff and volunteers conducted the counts (of biodiversity, farmers, and consumers via hand-counts and interviews). They uploaded results onto the Secretariat’s Google platform, posted images and stories (branded as part of the campaign) on social media, and importantly internally with peers on the World Farmers Markets Coalition’s member WhatsApp channels.

While these measurement and marketing exercises were originally conceived to be simple, and light evaluation, the WorldFMC Secretariat acknowledges that even these efforts – to count the varieties of vegetables or breeds of animals on offer at farmers markets – place considerable strain on the farmers market capacities. These capacity constraints are also recognised by the World Farmers Markets Coalition itself, since the data recorded on these discrete UN-sanctioned days provide insight that the field could spend many months evaluating but will likely not have the time or resources to complete. This points to the necessity of organisations that operate in the peculiar space where informality meets formality to define early on which quantifiable objectives take priority.

2.1 DATA COLLECTION

Data were collected through a series of structured surveys administered by farmers markets participating in the WorldFMC initiative. Each data collection period (May, July, and October) extended for more than ten days around the respective UN observance dates—World Biodiversity Day, World Rural Development Day, and World Food Day—to provide sufficient time for participating markets to engage in the initiative.

The survey instruments were developed by a team of experts within the WorldFMC and consisted of distinct tools tailored to each counting exercise.

Biodiversity Counting

For Biodiversity Counting, a Google Form survey accompanied by a Biodiversity Polling Sheet was developed to facilitate data collection and reporting. Market-level biodiversity data were collected using a printable spreadsheet designed specifically for field use. Market managers and volunteers completed the printed forms during market days, recording information on the varieties of vegetables, fruits, herbs, grains, legumes, and animal products available at the market. For each category (e.g. fruit) and product typology (apple), the total number of varieties present was documented.

Following data collection, information was transferred into a digital spreadsheet and uploaded through the Google Form, which also included additional general questions regarding the participating market association.

In the weeks preceding World Biodiversity Day, the WorldFMC team of experts trained more than 150 farmers market leaders on survey implementation and the use of the data collection tools. Of these, 54 markets across 16 countries completed the study.

Enumerators (market managers and volunteers) were also asked to select a representative product whose story illustrated the biodiversity of their market. Additional qualitative information was collected through the Google Form supplementary questionnaire to provide stakeholders with a deeper understanding of the human dimensions of food biodiversity within each local context. Photographs and videos were also gathered to complement these narratives.

Rural Development and Farmer Livelihood Counting

For the Rural Development and Farmer Livelihood Counting conducted in July, market managers were provided with two primary instruments: the Rural Development Poll Sheet and the Rural Development Interview Sheet.

General information on farmers and fishers present at each market was collected using the printable Rural Development Poll Sheet. Market managers and volunteers administered a series of questions directly to farmers and fishers during market operations. The survey targeted only primary producers actively working the land or water and selling their products at the farmers market; food processors such as bakers and similar vendors were excluded.

The completed forms were subsequently transferred to a digital spreadsheet and submitted through a Google Form. Enumerators were then instructed to select one farmer or fisher who was broadly representative of the producers attending the market that day and conduct an in-depth, one-on-one interview using the Rural Development Interview Sheet.

These data were likewise uploaded through the Google Form, which included additional general questions regarding the participating association.

A total of 150 farmers markets registered to participate in the training webinar; however, only 34 completed the data collection process.

Shopper Counting

For the Shopper Counting conducted in October, two main instruments were developed: (1) a Shopper Intercept Poll, designed to collect information directly from market visitors, and (2) a Shopper Count, aimed at recording the total number of visitors attending each market on the day of data collection.

As in the previous counting, data were collected using Google Forms. This instrument was selected given its accessibility, ease of use, and suitability for participants with varying levels of technical expertise.

Prior to data collection, standardised guidelines were developed, and a training session was delivered by the WorldFMC team of experts to ensure consistency in data collection procedures across participating markets. More than 100 farmers markets registered to participate; however, only 22 completed the data collection process. Across these markets, 792 shoppers were surveyed, and a total of 27,964 visitors were recorded through manual counting.

To improve the accuracy of visitor counts, participating markets were provided with hand-held tally counters and detailed instructions aimed at minimising potential sources of bias, including double counting and inconsistencies in counting procedures. Participation in the initiative was voluntary and open to both members and non-members of the World Farmers Markets Coalition. Targeted outreach efforts were undertaken to encourage participation from markets across different regional constituencies and to enhance geographic representation.

The Shopper Intercept Poll consisted of nine questions designed to capture key characteristics of market visitors on the day of data collection. Variables included demographic characteristics (e.g., age and gender), distance travelled to reach the market, frequency of attendance, and motivations for visiting and purchasing at farmers markets. Shoppers were approached using a random intercept method; however, no formal systematic sampling protocol was implemented due to limited enumerator capacity.

All interviews were conducted anonymously, and no personally identifiable information was collected. Consequently, formal written informed consent was not required.



2.2 LIMITATIONS

The relatively low completion rate - approximately 20% of the markets that participated in the training sessions - represents a key limitation of this study. This may have introduced self-selection bias, as markets with greater organisational capacity, stronger engagement with the initiative, or more available resources may have been more likely to complete the data collection process. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted with caution and cannot be assumed to be fully representative of the global farmers market movement.

In addition, the distribution of responses across countries was uneven, with a substantial proportion of observations originating from a single country, particularly Italy. This imbalance limits the geographical representativeness of the sample and may influence the overall results. Nevertheless, the study includes data from a diverse range of countries, including Kenya, Australia, Moldova, Norway, the United States, the United Kingdom, Puerto Rico, Spain, Ukraine, Türkiye, Denmark, Italy, Israel, Lebanon, Mexico, Poland, Colombia, the Netherlands, Malta, Bangladesh, and Peru, providing a degree of international coverage and enabling exploratory cross-context comparisons.

Further limitations relate to the methodologies employed to measure biodiversity and shopper attendance at participating markets.

With regard to biodiversity, challenges emerged particularly in the classification and counting of animal products and grain varieties, resulting in inconsistencies that required extensive data cleaning and validation. An important lesson for future iterations of the initiative is the need to systematically collect the names of individual varieties, rather than only their numerical totals, in order to avoid duplication and improve the accuracy and comparability of biodiversity indicators across markets.

For the shopper counting exercise, methodological challenges arose from the physical characteristics of many participating farmers markets, which are typically held in open public spaces with multiple entry and exit points. This setting inherently increases the risk of both double counting and undercounting visitors. Although standardised protocols, detailed guidance, and hand-held tally counters were provided to minimise these sources of error, some degree of measurement uncertainty is likely to remain.

More advanced technological solutions, such as automated visitor counting systems or digital tracking tools, could enhance the accuracy and reliability of future data collection efforts. However, the implementation of such approaches was beyond the scope of the present initiative due to financial, technical, and organisational constraints.



Results



3.1. FARMERS MARKETS COUNT FOR BIODIVERSITY

Preserving biodiversity is becoming a priority at international level and calling for urgent actions aimed to maintain and limit its loss. For instance, the EU strategy for biodiversity sets up clear objectives before 2030, with the purpose of:

- creating protected areas all across Europe covering at least 30% of the EU's land and sea surface,
- restoring of degraded ecosystems across the EU by 2030 through a series of specific commitments and measures, including a 50% reduction in the use and risk of pesticides by 2030 and the planting of 3 billion trees within the EU,
- Allocating dedicated financial resources to protect and promote biodiversity.

Against this backdrop, Farmers Markets (FMs) represent critical infrastructures for the preservation of global agrobiodiversity. In recent decades, the progressive industrialisation and specialisation of agrifood systems have significantly reduced the diversity of crops, breeds, and local food traditions available to consumers. According to the World Wildlife Fund's Living Planet Report, vertebrate wildlife populations have declined dramatically since 1970, while agricultural intensification has contributed to the erosion of local genetic resources and the disappearance of traditional food varieties. In response to this trend, international institutions and public policies, including the European Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, increasingly recognise the need to support territorial food systems capable of protecting biodiversity while simultaneously strengthening rural economies and food sovereignty.

Within this context, Farmers Markets (FMs) emerge as strategic infrastructure and critical "in-situ" conservation hubs. By creating direct market access for small-scale farmers, artisanal producers, and diversified farms, FMs reward production systems based on varietal richness, seasonality, and local adaptation. Unlike highly standardized large-scale retail chains, which frequently privilege uniformity, shelf-life, and logistical efficiency at the expense of variety, FMs provide vital commercial space for minor crops, heirloom varieties, traditional breeds, wild herbs, and locally adapted foods that would otherwise remain economically marginal or disappear entirely from mainstream food distribution systems. The direct relationship between producers and consumers also supports cultivated biodiversity. On the one hand, shopping at farmers markets exposes consumers to a wider range of products and varieties; indeed, the shopper survey revealed that 64% of respondents reported discovering new ingredients through their market visits. The increased awareness encourages experimentation and broadens consumption patterns. On the other hand, direct interaction with consumers can motivate farmers to cultivate a more diverse range of crops in response to emerging preferences and demand. This dynamic is particularly evident when producers engage with visitors from different geographical regions, facilitating the exchange of knowledge, tastes, and agricultural traditions that encourage the introduction and preservation of diverse varieties.



GLOBAL AGROBIODIVERSITY METRICS

To assess this contribution empirically, the World Farmers Markets Coalition (WorldFMC) coordinated a global biodiversity census during the week of World Biodiversity Day (May 2025). The campaign generated one of the first internationally comparable datasets on the diversity of products and varieties commercialised through Farmers markets. Three key indicators summarise the scope of the initiative:

- **Geographic Scope:** The study encompasses 16 countries, reflecting a global commitment to local food systems.
- **Market Network:** A total of 54 farmers markets were analyzed, serving as the primary infrastructure for this biodiversity preservation.
- **Product Diversity:** Participating Farmers markets commercialised an average of 63.75 distinct food products, with each product represented by an average of 2.72 varieties. Together, these indicators reveal that farmers markets support biodiversity at two complementary levels: by offering consumers a broad range of food species and by maintaining significant intraspecific diversity through multiple locally adapted varieties.

These figures demonstrate that farmers markets constitute an extensive network for documenting and supporting agricultural biodiversity. Although participation was uneven across countries, the dataset captures a remarkable diversity of products and varieties, providing one of the first internationally comparable assessments of agrobiodiversity commercialised through farmers markets.

PRODUCT DIVERSITY ACROSS COUNTRIES

Table 1 provides an overview of the geographical distribution of participating farmers markets together with two complementary indicators of market diversity: the average number of distinct products available per market and the average number of varieties recorded per product. Together, these indicators demonstrate that farmers markets conserve biodiversity both across species (product diversity) and within species (varietal diversity), highlighting their contribution to resilient and diversified food systems.

Italy recorded the highest level of participation, with 20 farmers markets contributing to the biodiversity census, followed by the United Kingdom (7 markets), Norway (6 markets), and both Australia and the United States (5 markets each). This broad participation reflects the strong engagement of national farmers market networks within the WorldFMC campaign.

Substantial differences emerge in the average number of products available per market. While several countries reported fewer than 60 products per market, Mexico recorded the highest average (179 products), followed by Poland (111) and Moldova (109). These results highlight the considerable heterogeneity that characterises farmers markets worldwide, reflecting differences in market size, local production systems, product specialization and survey coverage.

The average number of varieties per market also varies considerably across participating countries. Israel (5.81), Denmark (5.05) and Norway (4.39) recorded the highest levels of varietal richness, suggesting the presence of highly diversified product assortments.

By contrast, lower average values were observed in Türkiye, Puerto Rico and Spain. These differences should not be interpreted as direct measures of national agrobiodiversity, since they are influenced by the number of participating markets, the composition of products surveyed and the intensity of data collection. Nevertheless, they illustrate the wide diversity of market contexts represented within the campaign and demonstrate the capacity of farmers markets to support diversified food systems under very different environmental and socio-economic conditions.

Table 1. Product diversity by country

COUNTRY	FARMERS MARKETS SURVEYED	AVERAGE NUMBER OF PRODUCTS PER MARKET	AVERAGE NUMBER OF VARIETIES PER MARKET
AUSTRALIA	5	46,60	1,96
DENMARK	1	56,00	5,05
ISRAEL	1	63,00	5,81
ITALY	20	39,00	2,45
KENYA	1	59,00	2,61
LEBANON	1	49,00	2,41
MEXICO	1	179,00	2,68
MOLDOVA	1	109,00	2,06
NORWAY	6	14,33	4,39
POLAND	1	111,00	2,03
PUERTO RICO	1	59,00	1,44
SPAIN	1	55,00	1,44
TURKIYE	1	50,00	1,24
UK	7	47,00	2,53
UKRAINE	1	37,00	2,92
USA	5	46,00	2,91
TOTAL	54	63,75	2,72

CATEGORICAL BREAKDOWN OF BIODIVERSITY

To better understand the composition of agricultural biodiversity commercialised through farmers markets, products were grouped into six broad food categories: Vegetables, Fruits, Herbs, Animal Proteins, Grains and Legumes. Table 2 summarises the descriptive statistics of the recorded varieties for each category.

Vegetables represent the largest component of the database, accounting for 841 product records, followed by Herbs (483), Fruits (449) and Animal Proteins (427). Together, these four categories comprise more than 85% of all observations collected during the campaign. This distribution is consistent with the traditional role of farmers markets as outlets for fresh, seasonal and locally produced horticultural products, while also highlighting the important contribution of animal products, grains and legumes to diversified local food systems. Overall, the results confirm that farmers markets offer consumers a broad and balanced food basket, supporting both dietary diversity and the conservation of agricultural biodiversity.

The analysis also reveals differences in varietal richness across product categories. Animal Proteins (mean = 2.73), Fruits (2.71) and Vegetables (2.60) exhibit the highest average numbers of recorded varieties per product, while Herbs, Legumes and Grains show lower average values. However, all categories display considerable variability, indicating that biodiversity is not uniformly distributed across products. Vegetables, in particular, recorded the highest maximum value (63 varieties for a single product), confirming that horticultural crops remain one of the principal reservoirs of cultivated biodiversity within farmers markets.

The relatively large standard deviations observed for several categories further indicate that while many products are represented by only one or two varieties, others exhibit exceptionally high levels of diversification. This uneven distribution is consistent with the characteristics of agrobiodiversity, which tends to be concentrated in crops that have undergone long processes of local adaptation, farmer selection and seed conservation.

Table 2. Summary statistics of recorded varieties by product category

PRODUCT CATEGORY	NUMBER OF RECORDS	MEAN VARIETIES	SD	MIN	MAX
ANIMAL PROTEINS	427	2,73	3,77	1	40
FRUITS	449	2,71	4,11	1	47
GRAINS	177	1,90	2,28	1	25
HERBS	483	1,81	2,95	1	50
LEGUMES	108	1,81	1,96	1	15
VEGETABLES	841	2,60	4,23	1	63
TOTAL	2.485	2,41	3,73	1	63

SAFEGUARDING BIODIVERSITY THROUGH DIRECT SALES

Ultimately, the findings confirm that Farmers Markets are not simply places of economic exchange, but strategic institutions for biodiversity governance. By bypassing the restrictive, homogenizing standards of Large-Scale Organized Distribution (GDO), FMs create the precise economic conditions that allow biodiversity to remain financially viable for producers. They provide a structural opportunity for family farmers to cultivate diversified production systems, experiment with local varieties, preserve traditional seeds and breeds, and maintain farming practices closely connected to territorial ecosystems. At the same time, FMs also provide a social opportunity for consumers to engage with cultivating biodiversity, increase their knowledge and diet diversification.

This biodiversity census is more than a statistical exercise; it represents tangible evidence of the resilience of our global food heritage. Ultimately, every recorded variety marketed through FMs reflects the continued cultivation, commercialization, and transmission of agricultural diversity. By creating viable market opportunities for diversified production systems, FMs contribute to strengthening the resilience and adaptive capacity of local food systems.

3.2. FARMERS MARKETS COUNT FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND FARMER LIVELIHOODS

The role of FM goes beyond the simple impact on the agricultural sector, to involve in a wider perspective high impacts on the development of rural areas. Accordingly, FM is identified as an engine for improving quality of life in rural contexts, through empowering farmers and the local communities. A dedicated section of the questionnaire concerns how FM impacts on rural development.

This section highlights findings from the second phase of the global campaign, timed to coincide with **World Rural Development Day** (July 6, 2025). The focus was to measure how farmers markets (FMs) function as economic anchors for family farmers and rural communities.

The empirical base for this analysis consists of a study conducted across **33 Farmers Markets**, where a total of **34 in-depth interviews** were carried out.

To ensure the highest level of accuracy, surveyors interviewed one representative farmer per market (with the exception of one market where two farmers were interviewed), specifically targeting "true farmers", those directly responsible for working the land.



STRUCTURED AND PROFESSIONAL ECONOMY

The data challenges the misconception that farmers markets are merely informal or "pop-up" hobbyist events. Instead, they represent a formalized, tech-savvy, and stable retail sector:

- **Market Size:** The study highlights that 79% of surveyed WorldFMC members operate as 'Mini' or 'Small' markets (with 30 or fewer vendors). This data proves that the farmers market model remains highly sustainable and effective even at a micro-scale, where lower visitor thresholds are sufficient to support local producers.
- **Year-Round Stability:** 82% of markets operate throughout the year, providing farmers with a reliable, non-seasonal income stream that is vital for farm financial planning.
- **Operational Frequency:** The survey highlights a high degree of operational regularity, which is fundamental for establishing reliable income streams for family farms. The vast majority of markets (88%) operate at least once a week, providing a stable cadence that allows farmers to balance direct-to-consumer sales with essential on-farm production tasks. Within this frequent-operating group: 45% of markets open once a week; 24% open twice weekly; 18% operate three times per week. A smaller segment of the coalition caters to different logistical needs or seasonal constraints, with 3% operating bi-weekly, 6% once a month, and a marginal 3% holding market days on a quarterly basis. This variety in scheduling demonstrates the model's flexibility in adapting to local contexts while maintaining a strong overall commitment to consistent market access.
- **Digital Integration:** A near-universal 94% of participating farmers accept digital payments, demonstrating a high level of financial literacy and modernization.

PROXIMITY AND THE "PERI-URBAN" CONNECTION

FMs reveal their relevance as an engine for rural development, through strengthening rural-urban linkages. As a matter of fact, the campaign reveals a critical logistical link between rural production and urban consumption:

- **Short Supply Chains & Proximity:** Farmers markets rely on a tight geographical link, with 91% of farmers traveling less than 90 minutes to the market (and nearly half under 30 minutes). This data underscores the critical need to preserve agricultural land in peri-urban areas, vital regions that are increasingly threatened by rapid urban sprawl.
- **Optimized Logistics and Proximity:** Demonstrating a commitment to sustainability, 88% of participating farmers manage their logistics within a single day, minimizing their environmental footprint and operational expenses. This efficiency is complemented by the 12% of vendors who live within the city itself, fostering a truly 'Zero-Km' relationship between urban consumers and local producers, which virtually eliminates post-harvest losses to transportation.

DEMOGRAPHICS OF DIRECT GROWTH: YOUTH, GENDER, AND OWNERSHIP

FMs serve as a primary gateway for diverse demographics to enter the marketplace and maintain independent livelihoods:

- **Youth Participation and Generational Renewal:** While agriculture is recognised as an aging sector (especially across countries of the Global North), the study reveals that 12% of respondents are under the age of 30. This presence of young farmers indicates that farmers markets are increasingly viewed as a viable and attractive career path for the next generation of agricultural entrepreneurs, ensuring the long-term vitality of rural economies.
- **Gender Inclusivity:** Women are central to the success of farmers markets, accounting for 56% of all survey participants. This significant majority underscores the role of these markets as accessible and inclusive platforms that empower women-led enterprises, allowing them to gain direct control over their financial outcomes and hold a prominent voice in the local food system.
- **Direct Ownership and Authentic Engagement:** A significant 76% of interviewees are the primary owners of their farm businesses, while an additional 18% are family members of the producer. Together, this means that in 94% of cases, those selling at the market are the ones directly responsible for the production. This high rate of personal participation eliminates intermediaries and fosters a unique bond of transparency and trust between the farmer and the consumer, which is the hallmark of the farmers market experience.
- **Formalization:** 79% of these vendors are formally registered businesses, confirming their role as legitimate pillars of the local economy.

GLOBAL CONSISTENCY

A key takeaway from this phase is the **global uniformity** of these patterns. The data shows that farmers markets provide a consistent, structured, and inclusive platform for family farmers regardless of the country's economic stage.



3.3. FARMERS MARKETS COUNT FOR SHOPPERS

FMs operate within localized modes of food provisioning, by reconnecting producers and consumers, and enhancing the multifunctionality of agriculture, through offering safe food and preserving local cultures.

The third phase of the 2025 campaign, timed to coincide with World Food Day (October 16), focused on the consumer dimension. This "census of shoppers" aimed to provide a snapshot of how FMs serve the growing demand for fresh, healthy, and local food, while demonstrating how these markets actively shape the local food environment. The results are based on 792 shopper interviews.

Exceptional Loyalty and Frequency

The data reveals a level of consumer commitment that far exceeds traditional retail benchmarks:

- **Customer Loyalty:** A striking 88% of visitors are repeat shoppers. This high retention rate highlights the market's role as a consistent community hub rather than a sporadic event.
- **Shopping Habits:** 60% of respondents shop at the market at least weekly, and an additional 18% visit monthly. Only 18% described themselves as occasional shoppers, proving that FMs are a primary food source for the majority of their visitors.

Urban Proximity and the "15-Minute City" Concept

The survey underscores the role of Farmers Markets as essential neighborhood infrastructures, perfectly aligned with modern urban planning goals of proximity and reduced mobility impact:

- **Hyper-Local Access:** A remarkable 50% of shoppers travel less than 10 minutes to reach the market, while an additional 37% travel less than 30 minutes.
- **Convenience and Sustainability:** In total, 87% of all visitors access the market in under half an hour. This high level of proximity suggests that FMs are deeply integrated into the daily life of urban residents, encouraging low-carbon transport methods (such as walking or cycling) and strengthening the social fabric of the local community.
- **Regional Draw:** Only 13% of shoppers travel more than 31 minutes, indicating that while FMs primarily serve their immediate neighborhoods, they also maintain a significant appeal for visitors from the wider regional area.

Demographics and Market Evolution

The "census" of shoppers dispels long-standing myths about the typical farmers market customer:

- **Generational Appeal:** The largest demographic group (48%) is aged between 31 and 50, representing the core of household spending. Furthermore, 19% of shoppers are under 30, indicating that FMs are successfully attracting a younger generation of health and environmental-conscious consumers.
- **Gender Participation:** Women continue to be the primary decision-makers in this food environment, making up approximately 58% of the interviewed shoppers (consistent with global food procurement trends).

Social Dynamics and Community Engagement

The survey highlights that Farmers Markets function as significant social hubs, transcending their role as mere retail outlets to become venues for shared experiences:

- **A Balanced Social Split:** The community is almost evenly divided between those who visit the market alone (40.15%) and those who arrive with others (39.90%).
- **The "It Depends" Factor:** Nearly 20% of shoppers indicate that their mode of attendance varies, suggesting that the market adapts to different lifestyle needs, from focused solo shopping trips to social outings with family or friends.
- **Building Social Capital:** The fact that 60% of visits involve others or vary socially suggests that FMs are vital "third places" in urban and rural environments. These markets foster social cohesion by providing a public space where people can interact, share culinary discoveries, and strengthen community bonds while they shop.

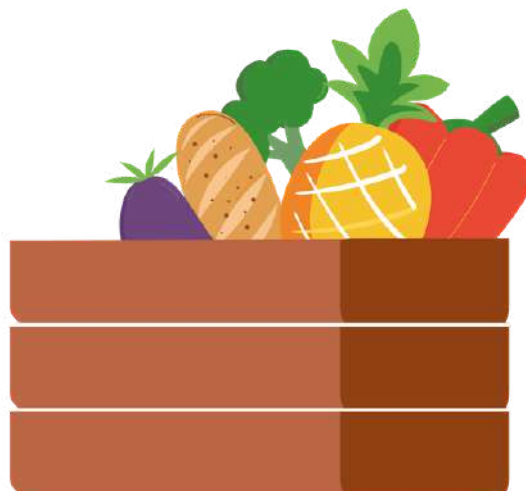
Motivations: Beyond the Price Point

While FMs are often perceived as "expensive," the survey reveals a complex "value proposition." Price is rarely the main driver:

- **Quality First:** 34% of shoppers identified "Taste and Quality" as their primary motivation, followed by 27% who prioritize "Organic/Chemical-free" production.
- **The Localization Factor:** 20% shop at FMs specifically because the food is "Local."
- **Price Perception:** Only 8% of shoppers cited "Price" as their main reason for visiting. This suggests that consumers view FMs as a place to invest in health, community, and superior flavor, perceiving a higher overall value compared to industrialized retail.

While price may not be the primary driver for consumers, the FM model invites consumers to begin a journey to reassess value.

Most farmers markets facilitate an internal free market, where prices are determined by the farmers themselves. This is one of the great appeals to farmers: remove the middlemen and regain more control over one's business. While this in theory may result in lower prices for consumers, the reality depends upon competition within markets, the ebb and flow of products during the season (where prices vary depending upon supply and demand), and the economy of scale of participating farmers. Perhaps the most recognizable attribute of the FM model is that consumers gain control to select from whom they wish to purchase. Prices vary, together with quality and growing practices. Consumers learn what chefs deem essential to smart menu planning: purchase products at peak season for better price and quality, and consider the spoilage rate of products to determine actual price (rather than just the sticker price at the point of sale). FM products are valued precisely because they are fresher, last longer, and do not spoil as quickly. Regarding prices, it is also worth noting that FM product pricing is less volatile than those products that travel through the complex long supply chain. A recent study published in Canada's *The Conversation* suggests that FM pricing remained much the same during the era of pandemic-induced polycrisis, whereas supermarket prices swing wildly⁴.



The Educational Hub: Discovering New Ingredients

FMs function as critical spaces for food education and biodiversity promotion:

- **Culinary Discovery:** 64% of shoppers reported discovering new ingredients at the market. This interaction between the producer and the consumer facilitates the exchange of knowledge, cooking tips, and information about traditional or seasonal varieties that are often absent from supermarket shelves. This may culminate with consumers eating a more biodiverse diet and producers expanding the on-farm diversification of product and varieties grown.

Shaping the Food Environment

The data from Phase 3 confirms that Farmers Markets are strategic tools for reshaping consumer preferences. By removing intermediaries, FMs foster a unique environment of transparency and loyalty. They do not just sell food; they build a "culture of quality" and a resilient food system where the consumer is an active, informed participant rather than a passive buyer.



Conclusions



4. FARMERS MARKETS AS STRATEGIC INFRASTRUCTURES FOR SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

The findings presented in this report provide important evidence of the multifunctional role that Farmers Markets (FMs) play within contemporary food systems. Across diverse geographical and socio-economic contexts, the results consistently demonstrate that farmers markets contribute not only to food distribution, but also to biodiversity preservation, rural development, social cohesion, and consumer engagement.

By reconnecting producers and consumers through short food supply chains, FMs create locally embedded food environments capable of responding to some of the most pressing challenges affecting global agrifood systems, including biodiversity loss, the marginalisation of small-scale farmers, the weakening of rural economies, and the growing disconnection between food production and consumption.

4.1. PRESERVING AGROBIODIVERSITY THROUGH LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS

The findings provide strong evidence of the contribution that farmers markets (FMs) make to the conservation and promotion of agrobiodiversity. The global biodiversity census coordinated by the World Farmers Markets Coalition demonstrates that farmers markets constitute an extensive international network supporting diversified food systems across a wide range of geographical, environmental and cultural contexts. The results show that participating markets offer a broad diversity of food products while maintaining considerable varietal richness, confirming their role as key repositories of agricultural biodiversity.

Unlike highly standardised retail systems, farmers markets create economic opportunities for heirloom varieties, traditional breeds, wild herbs and locally adapted products that often struggle to access conventional distribution channels. By providing direct market access for small-scale producers, they enable the continued cultivation and commercialisation of locally adapted crops and traditional genetic resources, thereby contributing to the

conservation of biodiversity while strengthening local economies and food cultures.

Beyond their economic function, farmers markets also foster greater consumer awareness of biodiversity by encouraging the discovery of diverse foods, seasonal products and regional varieties. The direct interaction between producers and consumers creates opportunities for knowledge exchange, supports more diversified diets and reinforces the social value of local food systems

Overall, the findings suggest that farmers markets should be increasingly recognised within biodiversity, food system and sustainable agriculture policies as strategic infrastructures for the in situ conservation of agrobiodiversity. By linking biodiversity conservation with viable market opportunities, farmers markets strengthen the resilience, adaptability and sustainability of local food systems while preserving the biological and cultural heritage on which future food security depends.

4.2. SUPPORTING RURAL LIVELIHOODS AND TERRITORIAL RESILIENCE

The results also demonstrate the important contribution of farmers markets to rural development and the economic sustainability of family farming and rural communities. The high proportion of year-round markets, the widespread adoption of digital payments, and the strong geographical proximity between producers and consumers reveal that farmers markets operate as structured and increasingly professional economic systems.

At the same time, these markets strengthen territorial resilience by creating direct relationships between urban consumers and nearby agricultural producers. The prevalence of short-distance supply chains highlights the strategic importance of protecting peri-urban agricultural land and supporting local food economies capable of reducing logistical pressures and environmental impacts. This has proven to be more crucial than ever in current times characterised by global disruption of supply chains due to diverse geopolitical and health shocks (wars, pandemic, etc.), where short food supply chains and local food systems have emerged as more resilient and enduring entities.

The strong participation of women and young farmers further confirms the role of farmers markets as inclusive platforms that can contribute to generational renewal, entrepreneurship, and social inclusion within rural areas.

4.3. RECONNECTING CONSUMERS WITH FOOD

The consumer analysis highlights how FMs are increasingly functioning as spaces of trust, education, and community interaction.

High levels of customer loyalty, frequent attendance, and consumer interest in quality, local origin, and organic production indicate that shoppers perceive farmers markets as environments capable of delivering value beyond price alone.

The fact that a large proportion of consumers reported discovering new ingredients at the market further reinforces the educational dimension of direct sales systems. Through direct interaction with producers, consumers gain access not only to food products, but also to knowledge regarding seasonality, production methods, local and diverse varieties, and culinary traditions.

In this sense, FMs contribute to rebuilding cultural connections between people, food, and territories, while simultaneously fostering more informed and conscious consumption practices.

4.4. FUTURE PERSPECTIVES AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Although the study presents certain methodological limitations, including uneven geographical participation and the operational challenges associated with data collection in open market environments, the campaign represents an important first step toward building a shared international framework for evaluating the impacts of FMs.

The findings underline the need for greater institutional recognition of FMs within public health, food, agricultural, environmental, and urban development policies. Strengthening local food infrastructures, supporting evaluation capacity, investing in peri-urban agriculture, and facilitating market access for small-scale producers represent key areas for future policy action.

As global food systems face increasing ecological, economic, geopolitical and social pressures, farmers markets emerge as locally embedded and adaptable infrastructures capable of contributing to more resilient, diversified, and community-oriented food systems.

Ultimately, the evidence presented in this report suggests that FM's should not be viewed as marginal or alternative spaces within the economy, but as strategic components of sustainable territorial development and future food system transitions.





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