

Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau Ask Laura Newsletter Column
September 2013 (printed in October 2013 newsletter)

Q: What can you tell me about farmers markets?

A: National Farmers Market Week was just celebrated in August! As part of the festivities, USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack proclaimed the value and importance of farmers markets to agriculture and our communities by stating that, among other things, they “provide increased marketing opportunities for agricultural producers, offer consumers fresh, affordable, convenient and healthful products direct from the farm, and play a key role in developing local and regional food systems that support the sustainability of family farms”. Indeed, an interesting graphic, *The Food Chain Reaction from a Farmers Market*, illustrates how markets positively contribute to the expansion of local and regional food sales, support area businesses, increase access to fresh healthful products, and provide important links between rural and urban communities. It is worth noting here, too, that a report written by the USDA Economic Research Service maps and discusses the competitive nature of operating farmers markets, which can be especially intense in some metropolitan and surrounding areas.

During the week of recognition a few additional notes were shared and statistics highlighted. In a USDA blog post, the first known farmers market in the US was identified as Pennsylvania’s Lancaster Central Market, which began its life in 1730 and is still in operation today. Nationwide growth in farmers markets has been remarkable, increasing in number from 2,863 in 2000 to 8,144 in 2013. Not surprisingly, California has the largest number of farmers markets in the US, at 759, or roughly 9 percent of the national total for 2013. The San Francisco Bay Area, the South Bay, and the Central Coast all have many seasonal and year-round farmers markets in operation.

If you are interested in learning more about a particular farmers market in this area, in California, or the US, there is a searchable directory available, which is maintained at the USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service web site: <http://search.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets/>. Once there you may search by market name, state, zip code, and distance. Information for each market can then be displayed including the address, contact information, schedule, number of vendors, and if credit cards and other benefits payments are accepted. A listing of the various products offered at each market is also provided. Finally, there is a mapping feature, which is very helpful in determining market locations. The information is voluntarily supplied by managers and other representatives of farmers markets and market associations.

Here are two additional USDA web site links to reports and information mentioned above:

<http://blogs.usda.gov/2013/08/05/farmers-markets-as-community-centerpieces/>

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/farmersmarkets>

Please feel free to contact us at (831) 763-8040 if we can assist with other questions.