

Local Food Sales

Local and Regional Food Systems (LRFS) Data Warehouse Project



Overview

This document is one component in the creation of a Local and Regional Food Systems (LRFS) Data Warehouse to support thriving and informed local and regional food sectors. Teams of researchers and community partners reviewed and compiled available data using an equity lens into a single data warehouse to facilitate analysis and visualization.

Our LRFS Data Warehouse contains data related to local food sales that can help researchers, practitioners, and policymakers working to support farm and local food system development. The data can be used to inform proposals for funding, communicate the importance and broader context of their work to shareholders and policy makers, and to evaluate programs.

The set of metrics is about recognizing and specifying the effects that local farms and local markets have in their communities, states, and regions. Some of these are basic headcounts of how many of a given type of market or farm exist. Others seek to count and describe the customers that participate in these markets.

These data include:

- **Producer data** includes information about the number and demographics of producers selling into local markets, both direct and intermediated.
- **Farmers market sector data** includes the number of farmers markets. The USDA maintains the voluntary Local Food Directories which includes farmers markets data with information about location and SNAP acceptance. These data are incomplete (based on the need for farmers markets to self-list on the directory), but it is one of the best centralized sources of data.
- **Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) data** includes the number of operations with CSAs. The USDA maintains the voluntary Local Food Directory which includes data about CSAs including location, operator demographics, number of shares, and share mix data. This data is incomplete (based on the need for CSAs to self-list on the directory), but it is one of the best centralized sources of data.
- **Other sector-level data** include data on the number of aquaculture businesses and agritourism.

Narrative Matters - Working towards equity

The heterogeneity of types of farms, businesses and organizations involved in local food systems means that specific count and other relevant data for each sector or farm type is a challenge to compile.

Local food sales occur primarily in a grassroots sector that has largely not participated in formal data collection efforts and management. For example, data from the farmers market sector is collected at many markets nationwide but often it is focused on measuring the impacts of the organization. The Farmers Market Coalition (FMC) has surveyed market operators on specific topics (such as COVID-19 impacts). However, only a small percentage of markets, and their farmers, are collecting and using data. The data presented are not complete datasets and should not be used to represent the performance of any one sector on a scale larger than what is represented through this data. As the local food sales environment becomes more friendly to collecting and reporting data, we expect the scope and accuracy of the data to improve.

Site users are encouraged to acknowledge the systemic factors that influence community characteristics. When presenting data, we encourage disaggregation by individual race, ethnicity, and cultural group wherever possible. Aggregation of data can mask important differences that might be relevant for understanding needs and crafting adequate program and policy solutions. We also encourage the use of practices that invite community members to help contextualize data, share stories, and amplify community solutions.

The following data are included in the data warehouse. While there are certainly more data on this topic, these data sets are national in scope, complete, and publicly available. We expect that more data will be submitted and added to the warehouse upon its release.

LRFS Data Warehouse Business Development and Infrastructure Measures

Topic Area	Variable	Data Source	Link
Community Supported Agriculture	Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), number of businesses	USDA Local Food Directories, CSA Enterprise Directory	https://www.ams.usda.gov/local-food-directories/csas
Community Supported Agriculture	Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), location	USDA Local Food Directories, CSA Enterprise Directory	https://www.ams.usda.gov/local-food-directories/csas
Farmers Market	Farmers markets, number of businesses	USDA Local Food Directories, Farmers Market Directory	https://www.usdalocalfoodportal.com/fe/fdirectory_farmersmarket/?source=fe&directory=farmersmarket&location=&x=&y=
Farmers Market	Farmers markets, Location	USDA Local Food Directories, Farmers Market Directory	https://www.usdalocalfoodportal.com/fe/fdirectory_farmersmarket/?source=fe&directory=farmersmarket&location=&x=&y=

Additional Measures

Expanded access to data is important for understanding local food sales. Listed here are additional data indicators that are recommended for inclusion at the community-level if, and when they become available. Check out the project website for additional information about how to submit suggestions and additions to the warehouse.

Farmers Market

Few market operators collect or publish farm/vendor level data. Data that measures equity in terms of vendor demographics is being gathered by more operators with the Farmers Market Metrics tool as the primary software offering appropriate metrics for this data. Shopper/visitor data is collected by markets on socioeconomic strata, self-reported by the respondent in a one on one conversation or online survey. The data collected by the farmers market sector is localized by site or by organization but rarely shared across organizations. The local level data of farmers markets should be aggregated and supported with additional resources and funding.

CSA

Community Supported Agriculture is one specific outlet used by producers to get their product directly into the hands of the consumer. Currently there are multiple locations where producers may market their CSA but a centralized, reliable number remains elusive. Galt (2011) showed serious over counting of CSAs in national data sets like the US Agricultural Census. The CSA Innovation Network (CSA-IN) is currently identifying priorities for the collection of CSA metrics.

Other sectors

Local Catch is currently in the process of developing a national survey of fisheries like the USDA's Local Food Marketing Practices Survey. As results from this survey are published, they will be incorporated into the database.

Related sources and referenced databases

Farmers Market Coalition. 2021. Data Collection Comfort Among US Farmers Markets. https://farmersmarketcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/gravity_forms/1-66fc51da018bd946fb1dfb74f4bea1e7/2021/04/Data-Comfort-FMC.pdf

Galt, R. E. 2015. Counting and Mapping Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) in the United States and California: Contributions from Critical Cartography/GIS. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, 10(2), 131–162. Retrieved from <https://acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/article/view/892>

Schupp, J.L. 2016. Just where does local food live? Assessing farmers' markets in the United States. *Agric Hum Values*, 33, 827–841. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-015-9667-y>

Wolnik, D., J. Cheek, and M. Weaver. 2018. Designing an effective, scalable data collection tool to measure farmers market impacts. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 8 (Suppl. 3), 9-25. <https://www.foodsystemsjournal.org/index.php/fsj/article/view/655/641>