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SUMMARY PRESENTATION

Crisis, Opportunity, & Resilience  
in NC's Local Food System:

# A 2020 NC FARMERS MARKET SURVEY & ACTION PROPOSAL

October 2020

# 2020 has been a year of crisis and response - can we leverage this experience as a catalyst for change?

Our food system showed its fragility — **we must learn from the COVID-19 pandemic and build greater resilience and sustainability.** We are also at a moment of energetic and tragic racial awareness — **we must seize this moment to confront what it means to be white, to be Black, and to grow racial equity with humility and compassion.**

## Our Study

In June 2020, Community Food Lab launched a self-funded study of North Carolina farmers markets, to intentionally learn from their recent experiences and grow their impact through shared innovation and evidence-based best practice. This study was designed to analyze experiences across NC and develop actionable recommendations for long-term resilience and racial equity in farmers markets.

## Our Goals

1. **Provide actionable recommendations** to farmers markets
2. **Identify opportunities to grow racial equity** in NC's farmers market community
3. **Provide policy and strategic recommendations** to sponsoring organizations and state level bodies for the resilience, innovation, and success of local food systems
4. **Shine a light on areas** for further research and engagement

# A note on race and accountability:

## on Community Food Lab

We are a white-led organization trying to do our part for a more equitable and just future.

- We know that, being white, we must move forward on issues of race and justice with humility, accountability, and recognition that we will likely still make mistakes. But we can't shy away from hard conversations.
- We know that it will take all of us working together and individually to create change.
- We know that our best work will come through our natural spheres of influence — ours is the food system.

With this in mind, this report was produced with the assistance of Black advisors, and we hope that it can prompt broader conversation, particularly among white communities, about race.

## on Language:

In this report, we are using “**BIPOC**”, or “**Black, Indigenous and People of Color**” — a term that acknowledges that people in Black and Indigenous communities face different, and often more severe, forms of oppression and erasure within our food systems.

For more information, check out <https://www.thebipocproject.org>.

# From June 29 to July 22, 2020, we surveyed NC farmers market managers

about their **COVID experiences and strategies, approaches to racial equity, and initiatives around food access**. We also collected input on whether markets were performing as well as, worse than, or better than the 2019 season, opening the possibility of identifying successful measures.

## With 78 unique responses,

our survey achieved a roughly **45% response rate** among the estimated **175 total farmers markets** in NC. Our conclusions and action recommendations emerged through a combined analysis of our **collected survey data, literature and best practice review, and advisor input on racial equity and policy**.

We're thankful to everyone who completed our survey, to **Stephon Beaufort** for data analysis, and to our advisors for their generous insights on racial equity and food policy:

**LaShauna Austria**

*Kindred Seedlings Farm; Community Food Strategies*

**Ja'Nell Henry**

*Black Farmers Market NC*

**Lisa Misch**

*Rural Advancement Foundation International-USA*

**Morgan Wittman Gramann**

*NC Alliance for Health*

**Hannah Dankbar**

*NC Cooperative Extension*

**Ann Meletzke**

*Healthy Alamance*

**Samantha Winship**

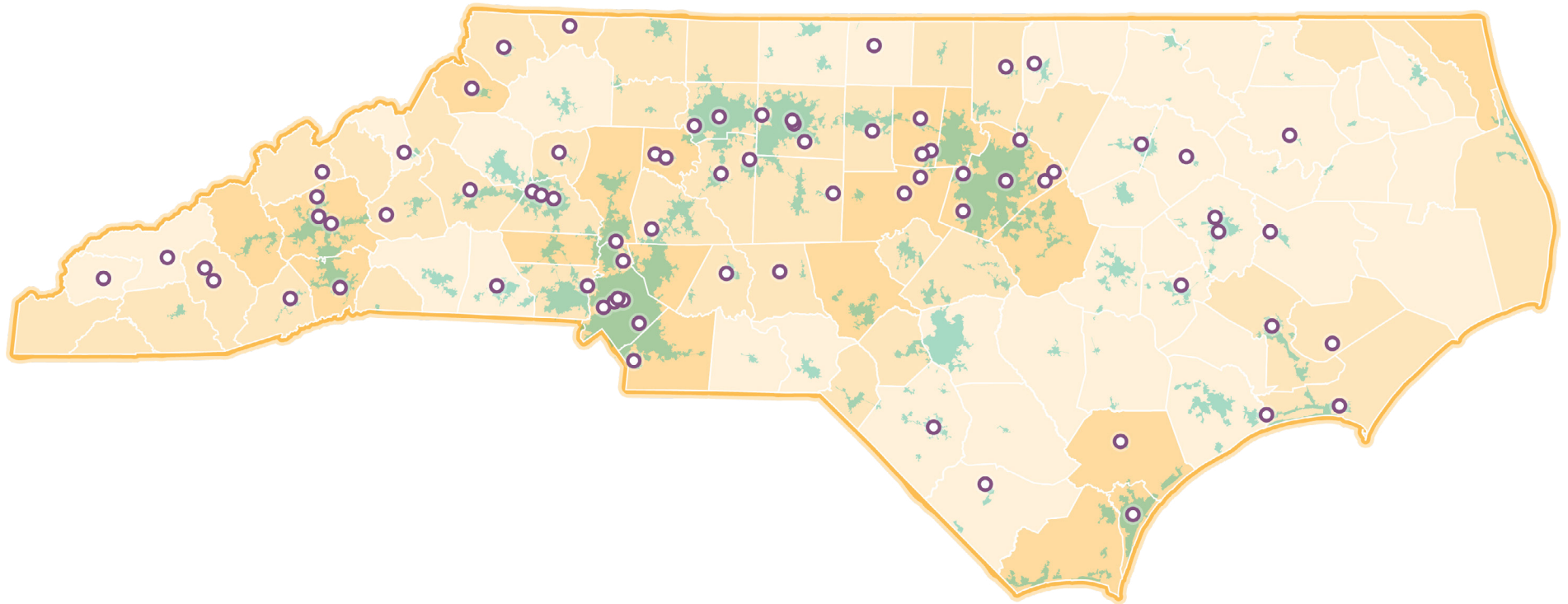
*Mother's Finest Farms*

**2020 NC Farmers Market Study**

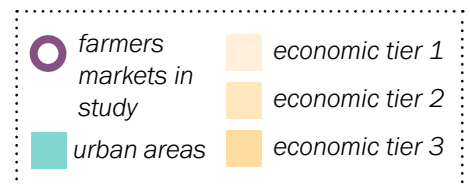
For full report, go to [bit.ly/FMreport2020](https://bit.ly/FMreport2020)

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**We heard from 78 farmers markets,  
representing 47 counties across NC.**



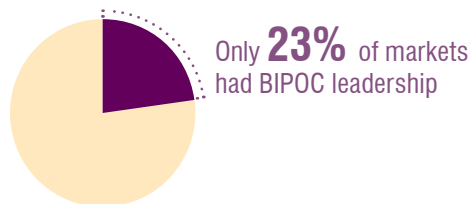
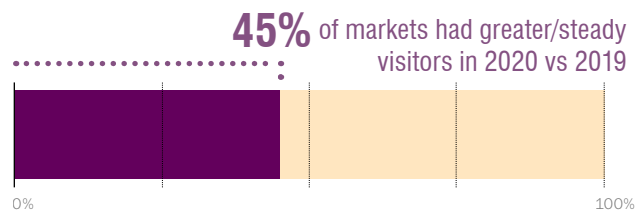
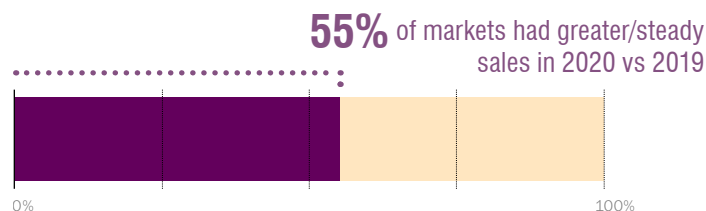
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# These survey responses informed our key findings:



- Despite COVID-19 disruptions, markets in our survey estimated **higher sales in 2020 vs 2019**. They also estimated **fewer visitors in 2020**.
- **Small market size** and **government-sponsored organizational structure** were associated with higher sales in 2020 vs 2019.
- **Curbside pickup/online ordering programs** and **email mailing list communication** were associated with higher sales in 2020 vs 2019.
- No matter the location, markets did best if their **number of vendors aligned with their nearby population**.
- As we explored race in farmers markets, we found that **40% of markets in our survey had no BIPOC vendors** at all. Only **23% of markets had BIPOC in leadership**.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

**2020 NC Farmers Market Study**  
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# We developed recommendations around three themes:

*We are highlighting these as practical and impactful actions that learn from our findings and can be taken on by multiple audiences within the farmers market community.*

*Some target individual markets – to assist with market planning or management – while others offer actions for regional coalitions and networks, the private sector, or local and state government. We ask that you, as the expert on your market and area of work, focus on the actions that are realistic and important for your community and the situation of your market.*

## 1 Learn from COVID-19 for resilient markets

**1.1** Invest in **curbside pickup, online ordering, and email mailing list** initiatives

**1.2** **Right size your market** to your nearby population

**1.3** Support increases in **dedicated farmers market staffing** for vendor retention

## 2 Learn from COVID-19 for a resilient system

**2.1** Grow market partnerships with **local governments, organizations, and networks** to share resources

**2.2** Explore **virtual food hub platforms** where innovative marketing links vendors and customers

**2.3** Develop and fund a **dedicated statewide farmers market database, network, and resource platform**

## 3 Work with BIPOC communities to build racial equity

**3.1** Begin a **conversation about race** in your market

**3.2** Increase **representation of BIPOC** among market leadership and vendors

**3.3** Critically examine your market's **structure and policies**, focusing on equity and inclusion

**3.4** Provide support to markets for **racial equity trainings, education materials, and conversations**

**2020 NC Farmers Market Study**

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# 1 Learn from COVID-19 for resilient markets

Our survey showed that, on average, farmers markets will have greater sales but fewer visitors in 2020 vs 2019.

Despite COVID-19's deep economic disruption and important new safety concerns, positive trends emerged alongside innovations and responses that we believe could support longer-term resilience and impact of farmers markets.

**The three recommendations here offer ideas for investing in the innovations and structures associated with successful markets, prioritizing strategies to help weather this and future challenges.**

## 1.1 Invest in curbside pickup, online ordering, and email mailing list initiatives

Curbside pickup, online ordering, and mailing list marketing programs have boosted market sales and visitors through COVID-19. Moving forward, these are key focus areas for energy and funding to build resilience in farmers markets.

*markets*

## 1.2 Right size your market to your nearby population

Estimate the population within a 10-mile radius of your farmers market. Make sure that you have between 3,000 and 20,000 people for every vendor at your market. Markets outside of this range were much more likely to experience lower sales in 2020.

*markets*

## 1.3 Support increases in dedicated farmers market staffing for vendor retention

While markets have generally increased sales, many also report that it has taken more staff to maintain new market functions and resources to support farmers relying on farmers markets for sales. Recognize and fund these increased costs to help markets maintain these important programs.

*networks & policy*

# 2 Learn from COVID-19 for a resilient system

A successful farmers market is a product of its place: its farm community, its customers, its funding, and its leadership.

Every market is also a product of the entire NC farmers market community. In 2020, the value of that community support has become clear.

**These recommendations seek to support a connected farmers market community from the local to the statewide level.**

**Take them into consideration to support a more resilient and impactful system of farmers markets throughout North Carolina.**

## 2.1 Grow market partnerships with local governments, organizations, and networks to share resources

Partnerships bring support networks that are crucial in uncertainty and crisis. In particular, markets with government sponsorship trended toward increased sales and visitors. Reach out to share ideas, strategies, and resources.

*markets*

## 2.2 Explore virtual food hub platforms where innovative marketing links vendors and customers

As consumers have expanded interest in local food, farmers markets have an opportunity to leverage multiple vendor relationships into additional wholesale and direct-to-consumer markets by acting as aggregators of food. Explore this possibility to support farmers, markets, and customers.

*networks & policy*

## 2.3 Develop and fund a dedicated statewide farmers market database, network, and resource platform

There are few statewide resources, public information, or even consistent counts of markets North Carolina. Building on existing directories, a dedicated statewide resource platform would help support local networks, share costs for programs, and make farmers markets more accessible to communities.

*networks & policy*

# 3 Work with BIPOC communities to build racial equity

Farmers markets have historically had difficulty including and serving communities of color.

For farmers markets to create a more resilient and equitable food system, they must find ways to provide value and community for BIPOC as customers and as vendors.

**These recommendations are not quick fixes, and require dialogue and empowerment of BIPOC as a key part of the process.**

**We hope they can be a starting point for conversations and structural work in your market.**

## 3.1 Begin a conversation about race in your market

It can be difficult to acknowledge and discuss race in farmers markets. From wherever you are, dedicate time for these conversations: among leadership, with vendors, and with your community. *markets*

## 3.2 Increase representation of BIPOC among farmers market leadership and vendors

Representation of BIPOC in leadership and vendors supports marginalized farmers, while creating a more inclusive space for customers of color. Work with leadership and communities to include and empower farmers of color in your market. *markets*

## 3.3 Critically examine your market's structure and policies, focusing on equity and inclusion

Market vendor policies, and the way that they are enforced, can be restrictive to farmers of color. Look critically — with farmers of color— at your market policies: how can they be written and enforced as transparently and equitably as possible? *markets*

## 3.4 Provide support to markets for racial equity training, education materials, and conversations

Markets will need tools, facilitation, and frameworks to effectively move forward into new and difficult topics of race. To meet these needs, invest in funding, gathering, and creating shared racial equity resources for markets. *networks & policy*

# We hope these actions can foster resilience of the NC farmers market community, and that our findings can prompt further research:

- How effective have **SNAP/WIC and nutrition incentive programs** in farmers markets been through the COVID crisis?
- How can **BIPOC be more invited and welcomed** into the NC farmers market community?
- How might we **gather more stories, experiences, and insights from BIPOC** as vendors, leaders, and customers in North Carolina's farmers markets?
- What are the 2020 experiences of the **farmers markets not included in our survey responses**?
- What are the current and potential roles for **farmers markets in city-region food economies**, as part of innovative **direct-to-consumer systems**?



For more detail into our survey method, findings, and recommendations, check out our full report:

[bit.ly/FMreport2020](https://bit.ly/FMreport2020)

[communityfoodlab.org](https://communityfoodlab.org) / [white@communityfoodlab.org](mailto:white@communityfoodlab.org)

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