People want to know who grows their food, and that has led to the overwhelming popularity of farmers’ markets.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, farmers’ markets are an integral part of connecting consumers with farms, and their popularity stems from growing consumer interest in buying fresh products directly from the farm. Farmers’ markets allow consumers to purchase locally grown, farm-fresh products, and they give farmers the opportunity to develop a personal relationship with their customers.

USDA’s annual farmers’ market directory found that 7,775 farmers’ markets operate throughout the United States, which represents a 17 percent increase over the 6,132 markets operating in 2010.

“The remarkable growth in farmers’ markets is an excellent indicator of the staying power of local and regional foods,” said Agriculture Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan. “These outlets provide economic benefits for producers to grow their businesses and also benefit communities by providing increased access to fresh fruits and vegetables and other foods. In short, they are a critical ingredient in our nation’s food system.”

The 10 states with the most recorded farmers’ markets last year were California with 729 markets; New York, 520; Michigan, 349; Illinois, 305; Ohio, 278; Pennsylvania, 266; Massachusetts, 255; Iowa, 237; Wisconsin, 231; and North Carolina, 217. The directory found 156 markets in Virginia.

“The increase in farmers’ markets is not surprising,” said Tony Banks, a commodity marketing specialist for Virginia Farm Bureau Federation. “For many Virginia consumers, shopping at their local farmers’ markets has become a part of their routine, even if it’s seasonal.”

Direct-marketing farm products “is still a niche in our overall food industry,” Banks noted, “but local foods are here to stay. That’s a great opportunity for farms of all sizes, especially smaller farms, which frequently rely on relationships to build their customer bases.”

Nearly 12 percent of all the U.S. markets indicate they have the capability to accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits, formerly known as food stamps. That represents a 16 percent increase since 2010. The USDA Food and Nutrition Service recently reported that SNAP redemptions in 2010 totaled $7.5 million at certified farmers’ markets and other direct-to-consumer food retail establishments. Program participants made 453,711 purchases, with an average purchase amount of $16.69.
Visit a virtual farmers’ market

When you visit the website myamericanfarm.org and play the Farmer’s Market Challenge game, students can test their math skills while learning about fresh foods. Teachers also will find a “Fun at the Farmers Market” e-comic, an extension activity and a video on the site.

Background Knowledge

When visiting a farmers’ market, consumers can buy locally grown items from community farmers. It is important to know what types of products are sold at farmers’ markets so students can learn about the benefits of shopping within their communities. This lesson teaches students about the many different items they can buy at a farmers’ market and the different jobs they represent. Before teaching students about farmers’ markets, make sure to visit one in your area in order to share personal experiences and/or pictures.

Procedure

1. Pre-cut a grocery bag for each child by making a vertical cut up the center of one side from the open end all the way up to the fold at the bottom. Next, cut holes on each side for the arms and one at the top for the head.
2. Read a book about farmers’ markets, such as “Farmers Market” by Carmen Parks or “A Day at the Market” by Sara Anderson. Share with students personal experiences you’ve had at a farmers’ market in your area.
3. Discuss with students the different types of products found at the market.
4. Describe the jobs people can have at a farmers’ market, such as a produce farmer, bread maker, florist or beekeeper.
5. Assign each student to a product (ex: fruits and vegetables, bread, honey, eggs) and provide the necessary coloring sheet for them to color.
6. After students color the pictures and paste them on the front two panels of their vests, allow them to color a picture illustrating their product or related occupation for the back panel.

Extension

Allow time for dramatic play, and let students pretend to work in a farmers’ market.

States with the most farmers’ markets

1. California ............................ 729
2. New York ................................ 520
3. Michigan ................................ 349
4. Illinois .................................. 305
5. Ohio ...................................... 278
6. Pennsylvania .......................... 266
7. Massachusetts .......................... 255
8. Iowa ....................................... 237
9. Wisconsin ................................ 231
10. North Carolina .......................... 217

In addition to benefitting consumers, farmers’ markets benefit small- and medium-size agricultural producers. The markets are often the first point of entry into the marketplace for smaller farmers.

Farmers’ markets help small- and medium-size producers incubate their businesses, develop and test new product lines and obtain better prices for high-value products.

Farmers’ markets benefit the communities in which they are located, because they create an infrastructure through increased production, processing, distribution and consumption. Farmers’ markets often provide fresh foods in communities where access otherwise might be limited.

A Virginia Cooperative Extension study found that if every household in Virginia spent $10 per week on locally grown food and farm products year-round, it would add $1.65 billion to the state’s economy.

Farmers’ markets benefit the communities in which they are located, because they create an infrastructure through increased production, processing, distribution and consumption. Farmers’ markets often provide fresh foods in communities where access otherwise might be limited.

A Virginia Cooperative Extension study found that if every household in Virginia spent $10 per week on locally grown food and farm products year-round, it would add $1.65 billion to the state’s economy.
Background knowledge
People make economic decisions every day. Scarcity can cause consumers to make choices, and sometimes items have to be given up. Students will be given money, and they have to make decisions about what they can buy. Their funds will be limited, and choices will have to be made.

Procedure
1. Describe what a farmers’ market is and the items that are sold there. Brainstorm the similarities and differences between a farmers’ market and a typical grocery store.
2. Throughout the room, set up produce found at a farmers’ market (real or artificial). Ask students how much they believe each item costs, and then display the actual price. Discuss any large discrepancies between their guesses and the actual cost.
3. Ask students to make a list of what they would like to buy.
4. Pass out the sealed envelopes, and ask the students to decide which items they can buy with their money.
5. Ask them whether they can afford to buy all of their wants. Which items will they buy? Which will they have to forgo? Identify the opportunity cost of each decision.
6. Discuss the choices consumers have to make with the money they have and what that cost can be. Ask the students “either-or” questions: Would you want the strawberries or the blueberries? Would you want the honey or the soap? What are the opportunity costs when you make a choice?
7. Discuss how one way to purchase more of your wants is to save until you can afford them.

Extension
Ask students to complete simple mathematics problems such as: “If I buy a pound of strawberries for $3.75 with a $5 bill, what is my change?”

Have representations of all of the food groups, and ask students to create a meal with their imaginary paychecks.

Provide scissors, glue, construction papers and markers, and give students time to create advertisements for different market vendors.

Bonus Activity
Make a farmers’ market grab bag

Directions: Fill a grocery bag with items that you might find at a farmers’ market (You may use real or artificial items). Have students take turns reaching into the bag and then, without showing the item, describe the item to their classmates. See if the rest of the class can guess the item.
**副总裁 Program Highlights**

**Celebrate Agriculture Literacy Week: Read!**

Join Agriculture in the Classroom in celebrating National Agriculture Week March 4-10. As a part of the celebration, AITC is spearheading Agriculture Literacy Week by encouraging anyone involved in agriculture to read to children in a local school. Celebrate in your classroom by reading an agriculturally themed book, or find suggestions in the “Literature” section of our website, AgInTheClass.org.

**Plan now for staff development**

It’s already time to start planning your summer and fall staff development. AITC provides high-quality professional development workshops for elementary teachers, as well as pre-kindergarten and middle school science teachers. Workshops include fun, hands-on activities and cross-curricular lessons. Contact AITC at aitc@vafb.com for more information and to schedule a workshop for your school or division.

---

**LITERARY CORNER**

**Books focus on importance of farmers’ markets**

- **Farmers Market**, Carmen Parks, Green Light Readers, Harcourt Inc. ISBN: 9780152048419

**Bonus Activity**

**Eat the Rainbow with Farmers’ Market Finds**

Farmers’ markets are excellent places to find many different and nutritious fruits and vegetables. In order to maintain a healthy diet, adults and children are encouraged to “eat the rainbow” by incorporating foods of all colors into their diets. Each color has specific nutritional benefits.

- **Red** helps maintain a healthy heart and memory and lowers the risk of some cancers.
- **White** helps maintain heart health and lowers the risk of some cancers.
- **Green** lowers the risk of some cancers and promotes good vision as well as strong bones and teeth.
- **Orange and yellow** promote a healthy heart, immune system and vision; they also lower the risk of some cancers.
- **Blue and purple** promote memory and healthy aging.

**Directions:** Have students list examples of healthy food items for each color of the rainbow.

---

**Additional Resources**—check out these sites for more resources on farmers’ markets and healthy eating:

- [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov)—information on “My Plate” recommendations as well as coloring pages and posters
- [www.foodchamps.org](http://www.foodchamps.org)—games, recipes, activities, and coloring sheets that encourage students to “eat the rainbow”