

# Census of MI Farmers Markets

## Market Manager Compensation

This document is part of the MI Farmers Market Census series. More available at [mifma.org/census](https://mifma.org/census)

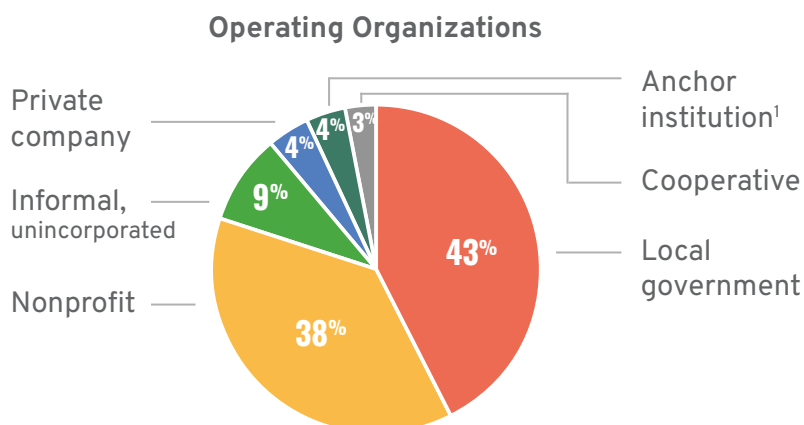


## Michigan Market Managers:

### MOST OFTEN WORK FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS OR NONPROFITS

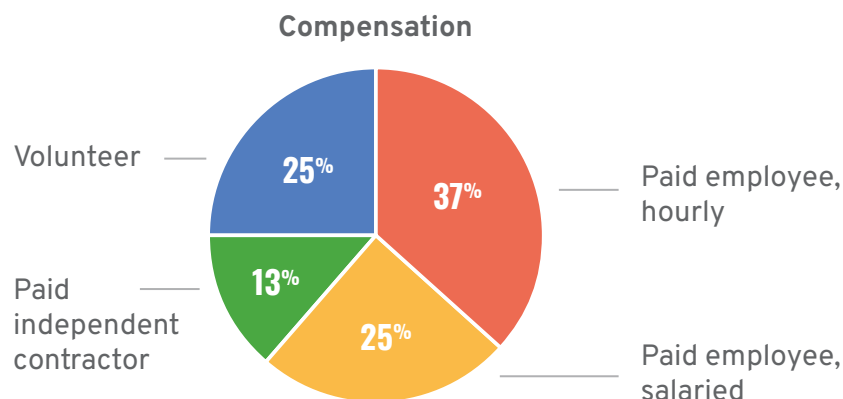
Local governments and nonprofits operate most of the markets in Michigan, and thus employ most managers. A smaller number of managers work for unincorporated or informal markets, private companies, anchor institutions<sup>1</sup>, and cooperative organizations.

<sup>1</sup> Hospitals and universities are examples of anchor institutions. While they may be nonprofits, in the farmers market sector they are often separated into their own category.



### TYPICALLY WORK IN LOW-PAID OR VOLUNTEER POSITIONS

Most (62%) managers are employees of the organization that operates their market. However, some (13%) are independent contractors, and a significant portion (25%) volunteer in their roles.



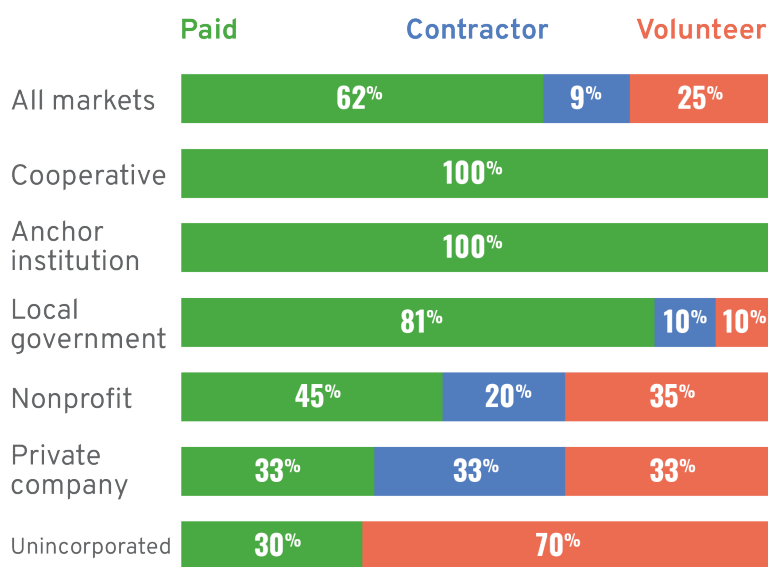
Nonprofits, private companies, and unincorporated markets are least likely to pay their managers. Together, these organizations make up half (51%) of the markets in the state and 20% of volunteer manager positions, making them the biggest contributors of volunteer labor.

By contrast, cooperatives, anchor institutions, and government-run markets are most likely to pay their managers. Together, these organizations make up half (49%) of markets while providing 59% of paid manager positions.

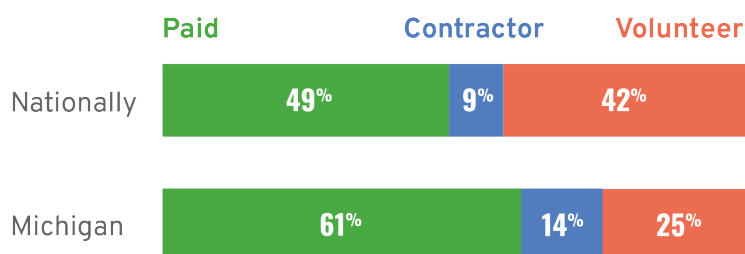
Michigan managers are more likely than their national counterparts to be paid for their work.<sup>2</sup> Still, for those who are paid, market management is unlikely to be a full-time job; median annual compensation for the job is just \$8,250, and 71% seek additional employment outside the market.

Because market managers' positions and pay are structured in many different ways, the Census gave the option to report compensation hourly, daily, weekly, monthly, or annually. Most managers reported annual or hourly earnings to the Census; the table below shows how many organizations reported, as well as the range in compensation for each method.

### Compensation Method by Organization Type



### Compensation Method



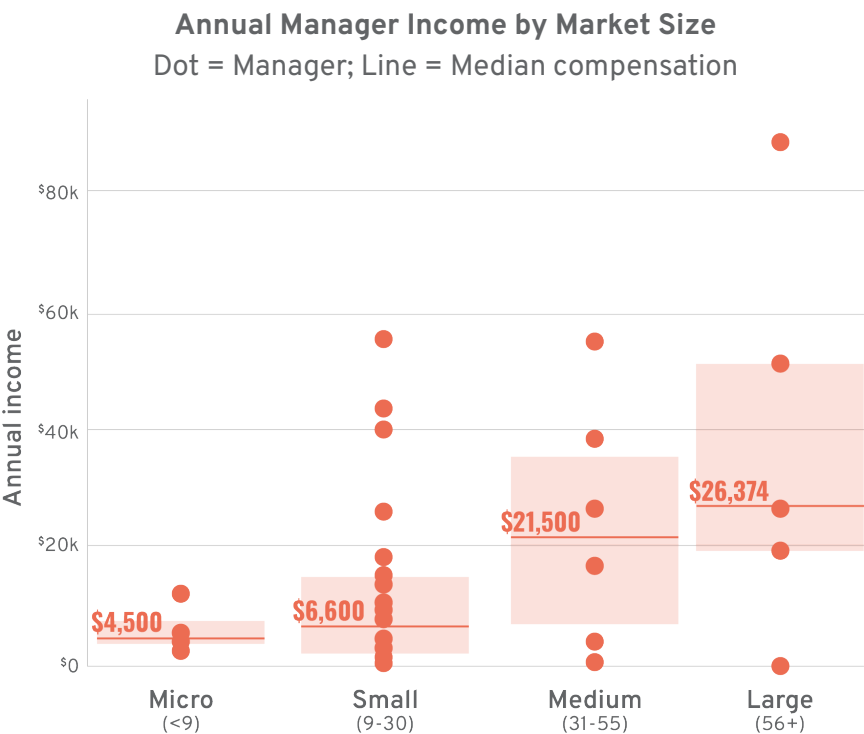
Compensation method	Organizations reporting	Low end	High end	Median
Hourly	20	\$10	\$34	\$17
Daily	1	\$125	\$125	\$125
Weekly	5	\$100	\$5,000	\$269
Monthly	6	\$30	\$2,411	\$825
Annually	50	\$35*	\$87,000	\$8,250

\*In the form of a vendor stall fee reimbursement

<sup>2</sup> National Agricultural Statistics Service, National Farmers Market Managers 2019 Summary (2020). Retrieved from [https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/Todays\\_Reports/reports/nfar0820.pdf](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/Todays_Reports/reports/nfar0820.pdf)

Compensation & Market Size

Fifty respondents reported annual earnings, and they revealed differences in income among differently sized markets. As market size increased, so did the median market manager salary, ranging from just \$4,500 for micro markets (with fewer than 9 vendors) all the way up to \$26,000 for large markets (with more than 56 vendors).

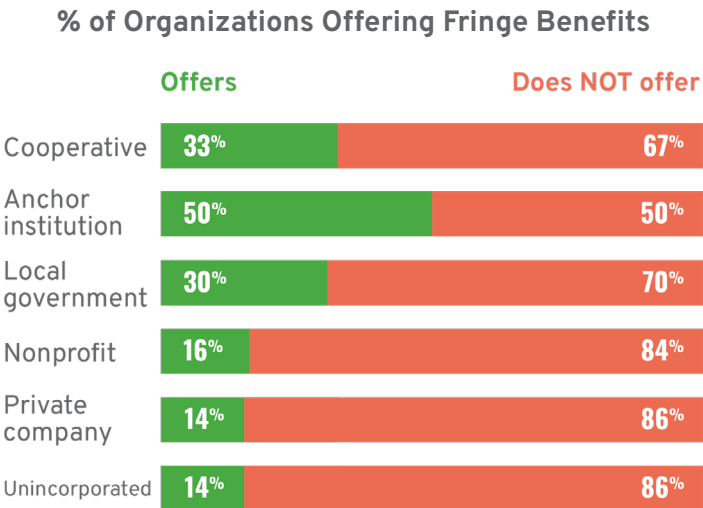
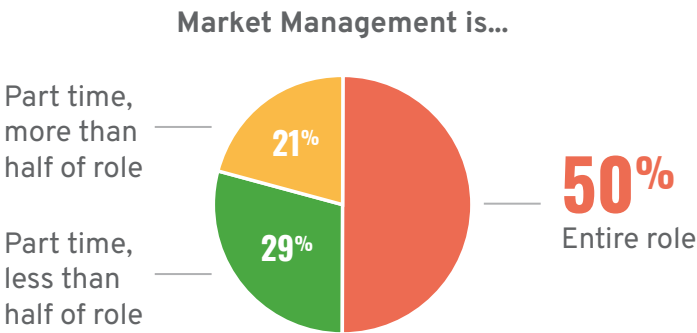


Benefits

About three quarters (77%) of managers do not receive benefits beyond their wages; this reflects the part-time nature of most market management positions. While half of respondents say market management comprises their entire role at the organization, this group has some characteristics that make them unlikely to be eligible for benefits:

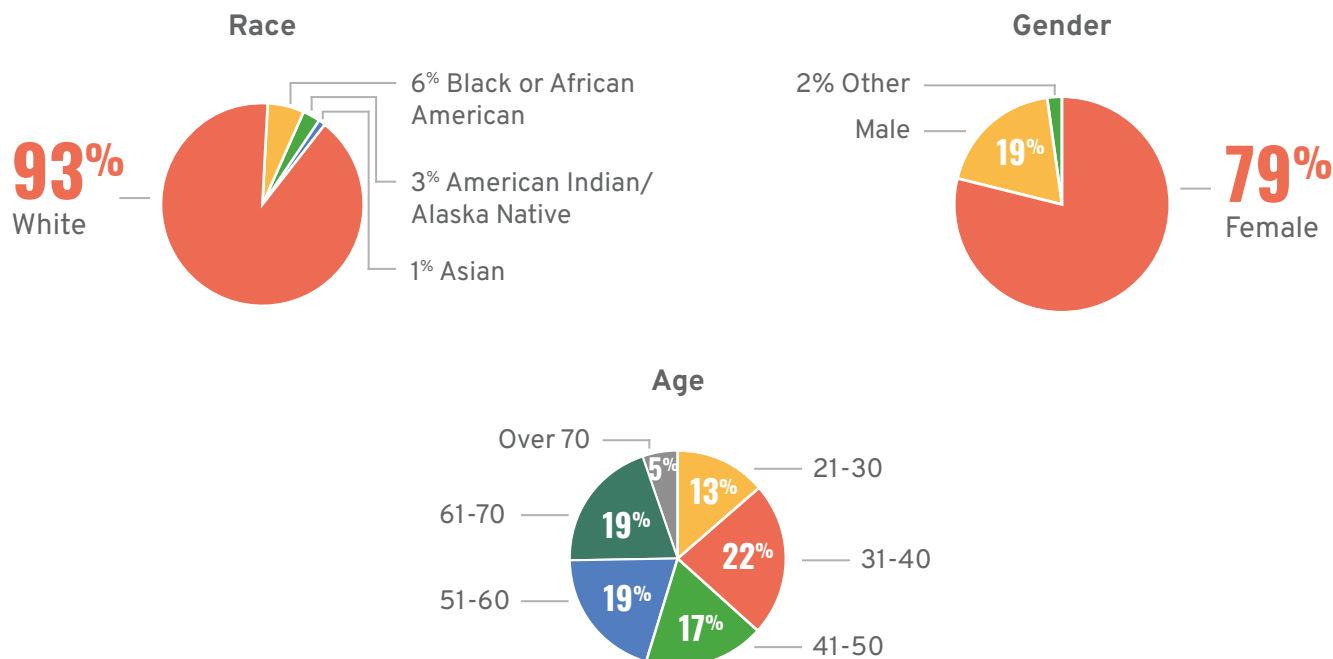
- 84% work fewer than 30 hours per week during peak season
- A quarter (25%) are volunteers
- 13% are independent contractors

In the minority (23%) of cases where benefits are offered, health insurance, paid vacation, and retirement contributions are most common. Anchor institutions (hospitals and universities) and cooperative organizations are most likely to offer benefits.



## OVERWHELMINGLY IDENTIFY AS:

White (93%) and Female (79%). However, managers are diverse in terms of age.



## HAVE SHIFTING ROLES AND PRIORITIES THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

The typical manager works between 10 and 18 hours weekly, depending on the season. There is variation by market size, however: large markets have higher workloads during all seasons. This is, in part, because about half remain open in the winter months.

### Seasonal Fluctuations



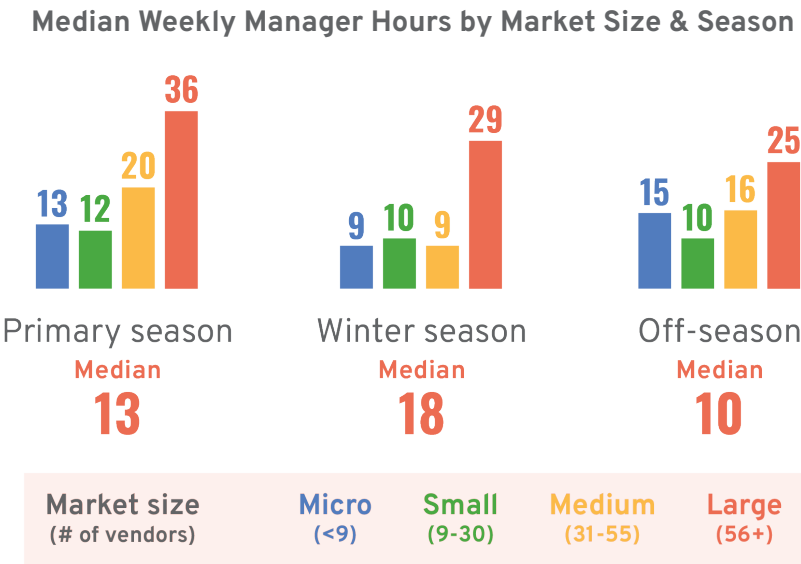
Farmers markets operate in a cyclical fashion. In Michigan, most are seasonal and operate from spring through fall; we refer to this period as “Primary Season.” An increasing number of Michigan markets operate winter markets (Winter Season). These markets tend to be smaller than Primary Season markets; sometimes, they operate less frequently and/or at different (indoor) location. During the months markets are not actively open, there is still much work to wrap up from Primary Season or prepare for the season ahead. We call this Off-Season work.

Fortunately, the majority of managers believe they can fulfill their job duties with the amount of time allotted throughout the year. There is some variation from season to season and based on market size. Specifically, micro-sized market managers are more likely to report a lack of time in the off-season to complete their jobs. By contrast, managers at large markets are more likely to report a lack of time in primary season, but 100% of them say they have ample time in the off-season to complete tasks.

Both the number of hours and form of compensation vary widely across markets. Recall (from the pie chart on page 3) that half of managers oversee markets as part of their larger roles at organizations. One executive director at a Main Street organization says “many hours worked [at market] go unpaid.”

Whether a market is open in winter or not, managers’ pace and tasks shift. One respondent said even when the market is closed for the season, “I am actively reviewing policies with my board, talking with vendors, and seeking new vendors and other ways to grow our market and the market-related programming.” Some managers are paid for this work; others are not.

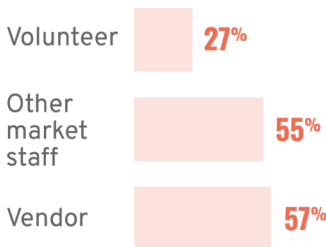
It is common for manager staffing to shift throughout the year. One said their compensation is based on “an average of 24 hours for the whole year...so I can bulk out hours in the summer and slim down in the winter/off season to make my yearly average.” Some organizations have the capacity to hire seasonal help; one respondent said the market manager position is a function of a full time salaried position, while the assistant manager works seasonally.



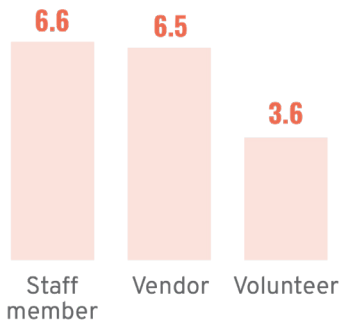
## DRAW ON DIVERSE SKILL SETS AND WEAR MANY HATS

The Census showed there are many pathways to becoming a manager: one third (32%) of managers had previous market experience before assuming their roles. Of this group, most had experience as vendors or market staff, while others had experience volunteering. On average, those with previous experience spent between 3 and 7 years in these roles prior to becoming managers. This shows depth of experience and commitment to the field before entering management roles.

**% with Market Experience Prior to Managing**



**Average Years Before Managing**



Despite being volunteers or earning meager salaries, market managers wear many hats and use diverse skillsets in many areas.

External Relations

Market managers are the face of their markets in the community. Many are responsible for advertising their markets; developing partnerships and fundraising structures that add value to their markets; and supervising volunteers who help make the market function smoothly.

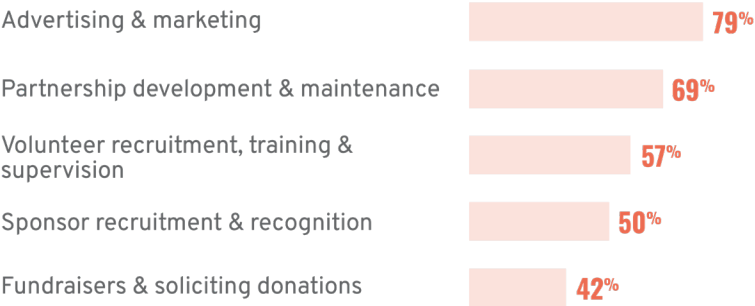
Internal Relations

Managers respond to many groups’ needs; they recruit and communicate with vendors who offer a range of products to attract customers and create a thriving marketplace; this is essential for a good shopping experience. Most also report to a market governing body or board that has some say in budget and decision-making. Some managers also hire, train, and supervise market staff.

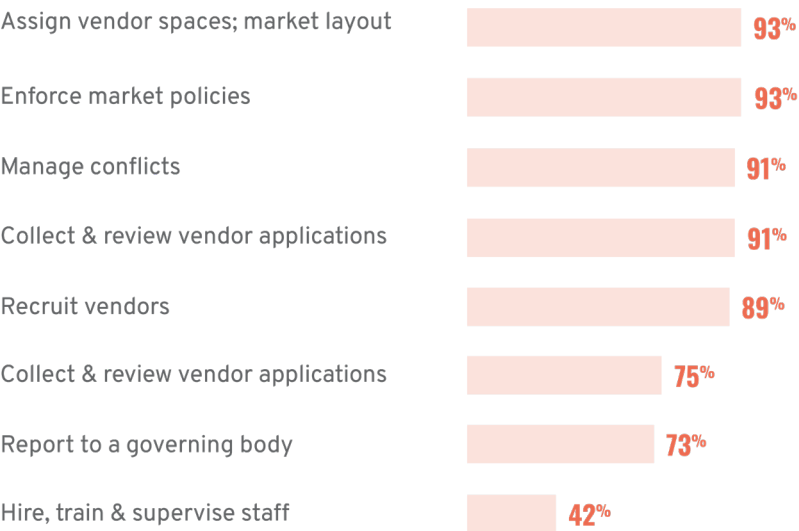
Market Operations

Managers are responsible for financial records, market budgets, and food assistance programming. They ensure all legal requirements are met for hosting public events in their spaces, and they are responsible for emergency plans. They develop market policies and maintain organizational records over time. This list is extensive but by no means comprehensive. It makes one thing clear—market management is a professional role that requires a diverse set of skills.

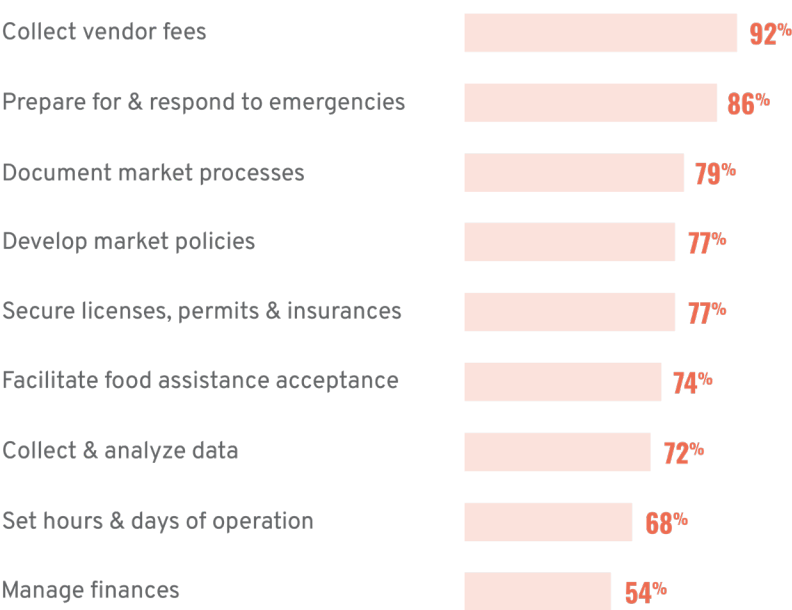
External Relations Responsibilities



Internal Relations Responsibilities



Market Operations Responsibilities



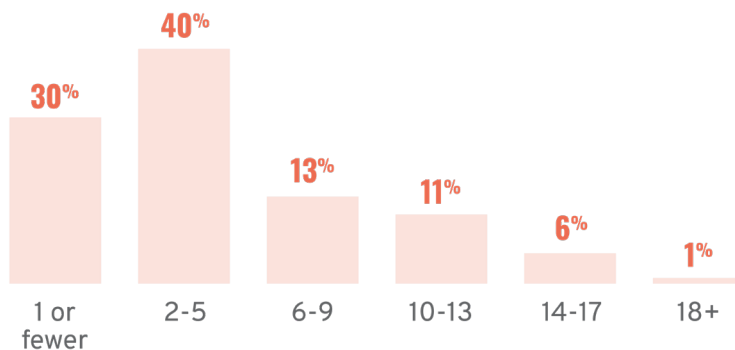
## DON'T STAY IN THEIR ROLES FOR LONG

Unfortunately, meager compensation, combined with the high demands of the job, means manager retention is difficult. Seventy percent of markets had managers who had been in their roles for five or fewer years.

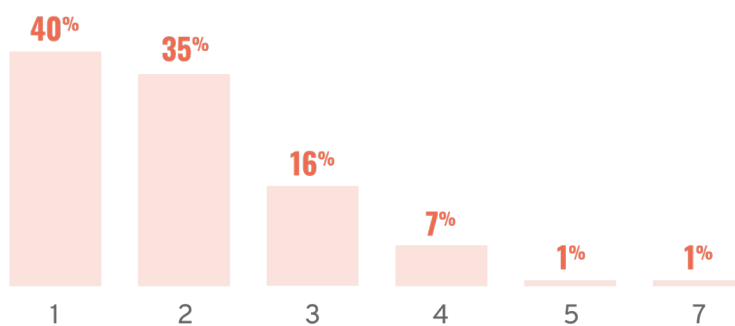
We investigated manager retention another way, by asking how many managers each market had in the past five years, and discovered that more than half (60%) had two or more in that time period. We defined this as “high turnover” and investigated those who fit this definition. Organizations with the highest turnover rates are medium-sized markets (31 to 55 vendors), as well as those run by local governments and nonprofits. By contrast, the organizations with less turnover are large-sized markets (56+ vendor), as well as those run by co-operatives or private companies.

High manager turnover is an unsurprising outcome of a work environment that is often part-time and low-paid (if at all). However, the sector benefits from dedicated managers too: the top chart to the right shows that 18% of markets are led by managers that have been in the role a decade or more; half of those managers are volunteers. This suggests longevity in the sector is not driven by attractive working conditions, but rather by dedicated individuals with the bandwidth for volunteer service.

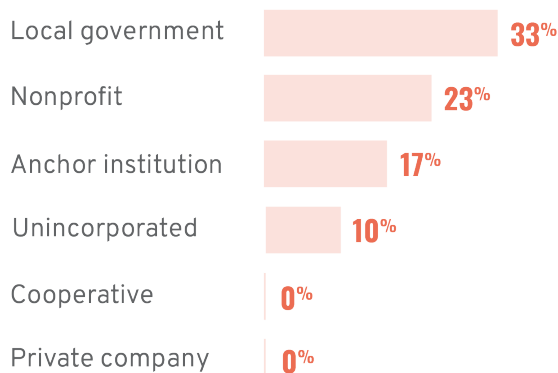
Years Managing This Market



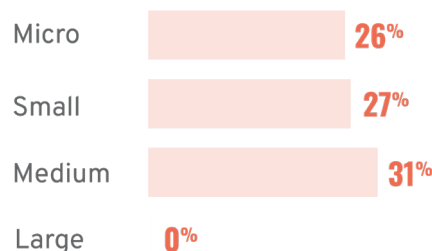
Number of Managers in the Past Five Years



Markets with 2+ Managers in Last Five Years, by Org Type



Markets with 2+ Managers in Last Five Years, by Market Size





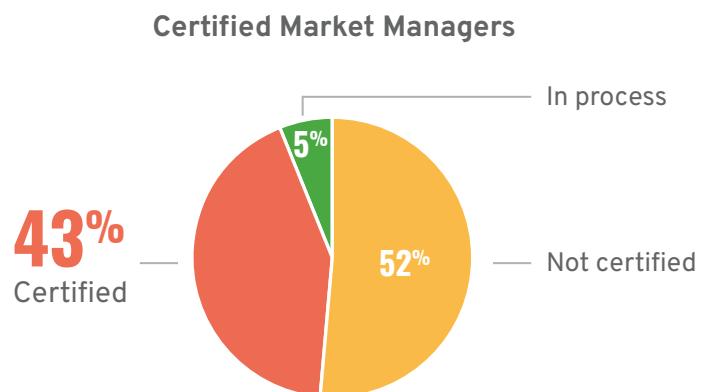
These findings support MIFMA's observations from the field: frequent market manager turnover is detrimental not just to the people in these positions, but also to markets' ability to thrive. New managers often do not have access to strong onboarding support; documented institutional knowledge; or documented policies. A lack of institutional memory contributes to a loss of vendors, sponsors, partners, operating locations, and more. Newcomers spend more time getting acclimated and preventing markets from collapsing, rather than helping them grow or thrive.

## BENEFIT GREATLY FROM MIFMA'S LEADERSHIP

At the time of the Census, the COVID-19 pandemic was fresh in managers' minds, as they were between the 2020 and 2021 seasons and still faced uncertainty about market operations for the upcoming season. They ranked "COVID-19 guidance and support" as the most important service MIFMA offered. After this, other top-ranked services that MIFMA provided markets were:

- Advocacy for state and federal policies related to farmers markets
- Support for accepting food assistance benefits
- Market Manager Certificate Program

Half (49%) of Census markets are led by managers who have been through (or are in the process of completing) MIFMA's Market Manager Certificate Program. This demonstrates the power of the program to galvanize a group of professionals who are dedicated to learning and networking. MIFMA's support and services are invaluable to managers, one of whom said the organization "keeps us informed, provides education, guidance and support, breaks down complicated issues, looks to the future, and generally helps us be the best we can be."



## MIFMA's Market Manager Certificate Program



In 2011, MIFMA launched the Market Manager Certificate Program with the goal of professionalizing the role of farmers market managers. The 32-hour certification course equips individuals with the skills, abilities, and networks necessary to provide leadership for thriving farmers markets. MIFMA also offers continuing education for those who have completed certification. Over 350 market managers in 6 states have sought certification since the program's inception.



## NEED MORE FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO FULFILL THEIR ROLES & GROW THEIR MARKETS

When asked what support managers needed, most said **funding and capital**. The second-most popular response was **support for food assistance programs**. For more information about market capacity required for these programs, see Census Brief 2: Food Assistance.

These needs confirm that MIFMA's continued advocacy and support are crucial to a robust farmers market sector in Michigan.

### Key Takeaways

#### Markets Need Stable Management

Managers' time invested during peak season, as well as the legwork done during the off season, is crucial to the smooth functioning of community markets. Manager responsibilities are diverse and numerous, and their jobs sit at the nexus of many stakeholders' interests. They are responsible for creating thriving marketplaces for vendors and customers.

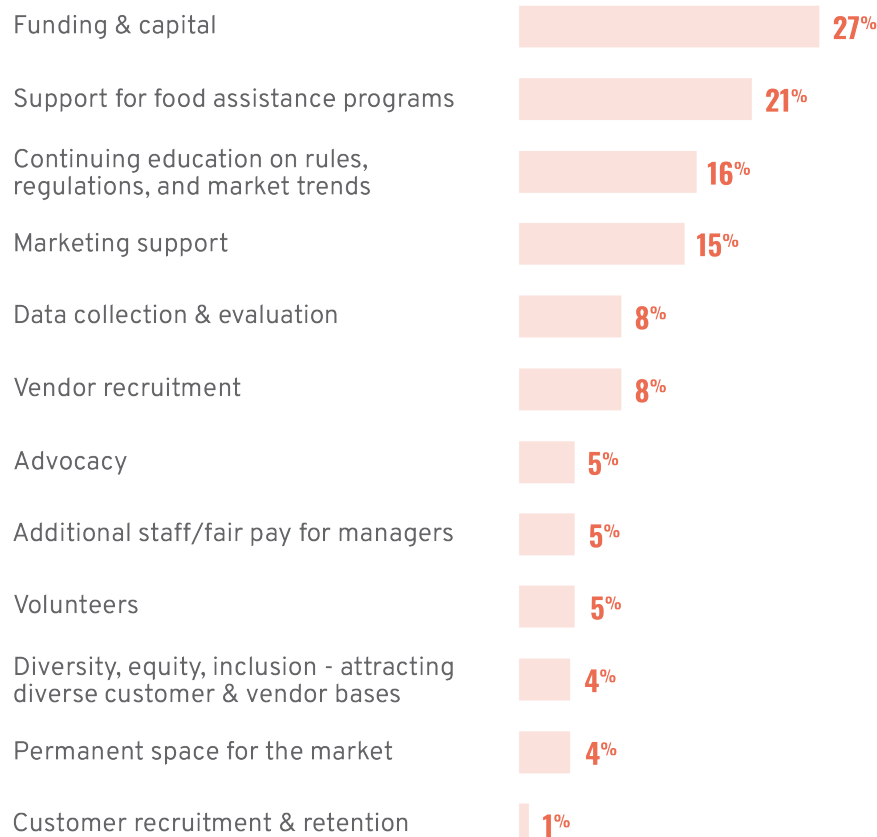
#### Managers Need Stable Jobs

Unfortunately, managers' compensation is not commensurate with the key roles they play. Manager turnover is high. While most feel they can accomplish basic tasks with the time and budget allotted, managers (mostly women) commonly volunteer time beyond that because, as one put it, "I want to see the market succeed." Managers should be fairly compensated for their labor.

#### Thriving Markets Rely on Community Support

It is essential for markets to have ongoing community investment to attract and retain the skilled professionals they need to thrive. For more on this topic, see Census Brief on Market Operations.

### Support Needed to Continue Operating or Be More Successful



### MIFMA'S Response

MIFMA envisions a farmers market sector that thrives under the leadership of well-resourced managers. Thanks to a USDA grant, [<https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/FY2021FMPPDescriptionofFundedProjects.pdf>] MIFMA is developing a Market Manager Cost Share program. Modeled after a similar program in Kentucky [<https://cfaky.org/fmsp/>], the program will offer funds and support to markets as they seek to increase compensation and decrease leadership turnover. MIFMA holds a vision of fair compensation for market managers, resulting in stable leadership and more thriving marketplaces in the state.