

Census of MI Farmers Markets

Vendors & Products

This document is part of the MI Farmers Market Census series. More available at mifma.org/census



Economic Impact

NUMBER OF BUSINESSES REPRESENTED

The Census asked market managers how many vendors were on their seasonal rosters; that is, the total number who showed up at least once during the market season. This number differs from typical market-day attendance, as some vendors rotate in and out based on seasonal product offerings. In 2019, the median number of vendors on a market's roster was 36, with a range between 1 and 293 total vendors throughout the season.

During the 2019 season, Michigan shoppers chose from:

4,900+
vendor stalls
statewide¹



18
vendors
average per market



¹ This represents the number of business stalls open to customers statewide throughout the season. Businesses can (and do) sell at multiple markets; therefore, this number includes some overlap in vendors across markets and is not a count of total individual vendors in the state.

GEOGRAPHIES REPRESENTED

Michigan Vendors

Markets have economic impact well beyond their own communities, as they attract vendors from many parts of the state. The average market draws vendors from four counties.

Oakland County is the second-most populous in the state, and its markets draw vendors from 33 counties. This is perhaps not surprising, given both the large number of markets (14) and the size of the county's population.

However, markets need not be large or located in densely populated areas to have a wide economic impact. For example, markets in Mackinac County, with the tenth-smallest population in the state, draw vendors from six counties.

Out-of-State Vendors

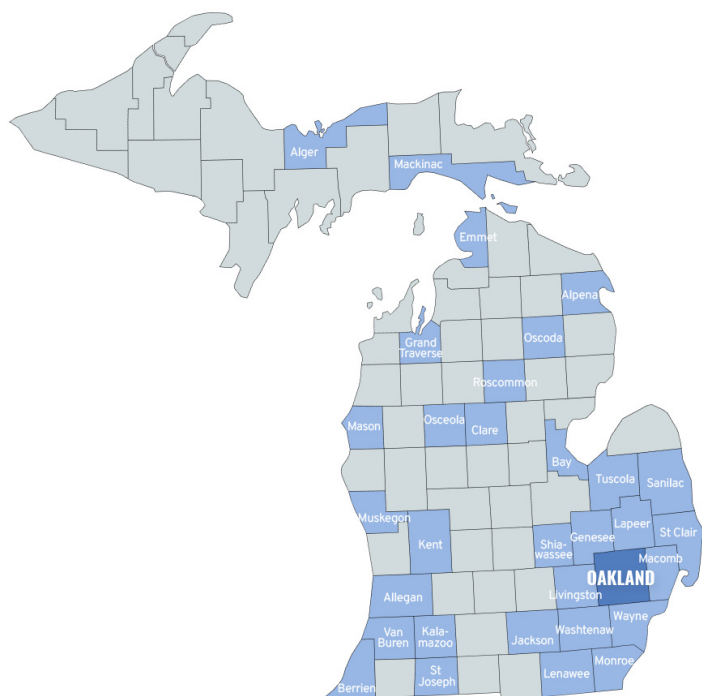
A small number of markets (9%) have out-of-state vendors. The vendors come from four U.S. states (Wisconsin, Indiana, Ohio, and Alaska) and one Canadian province (Ontario).

Geographic Impact of Markets in Two Counties

Oakland County

draws vendors from

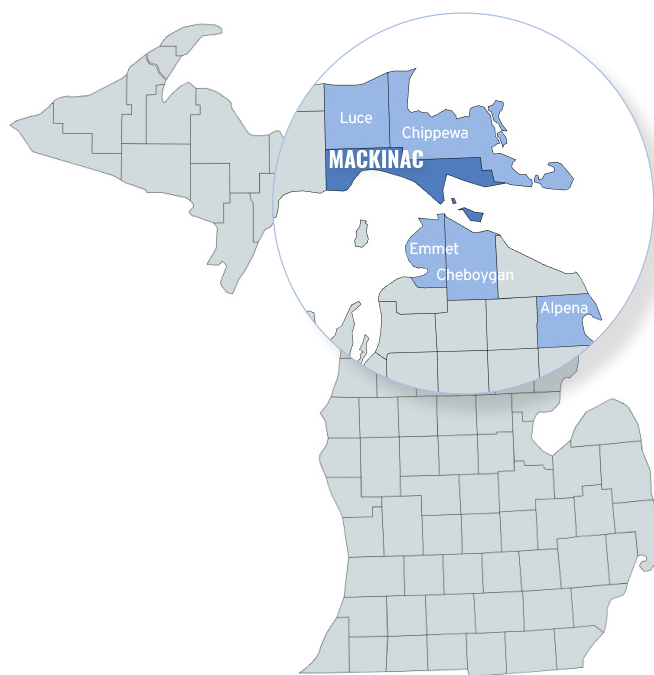
33
counties



Mackinac County

draws vendors from

6
counties



Building a Thriving Marketplace

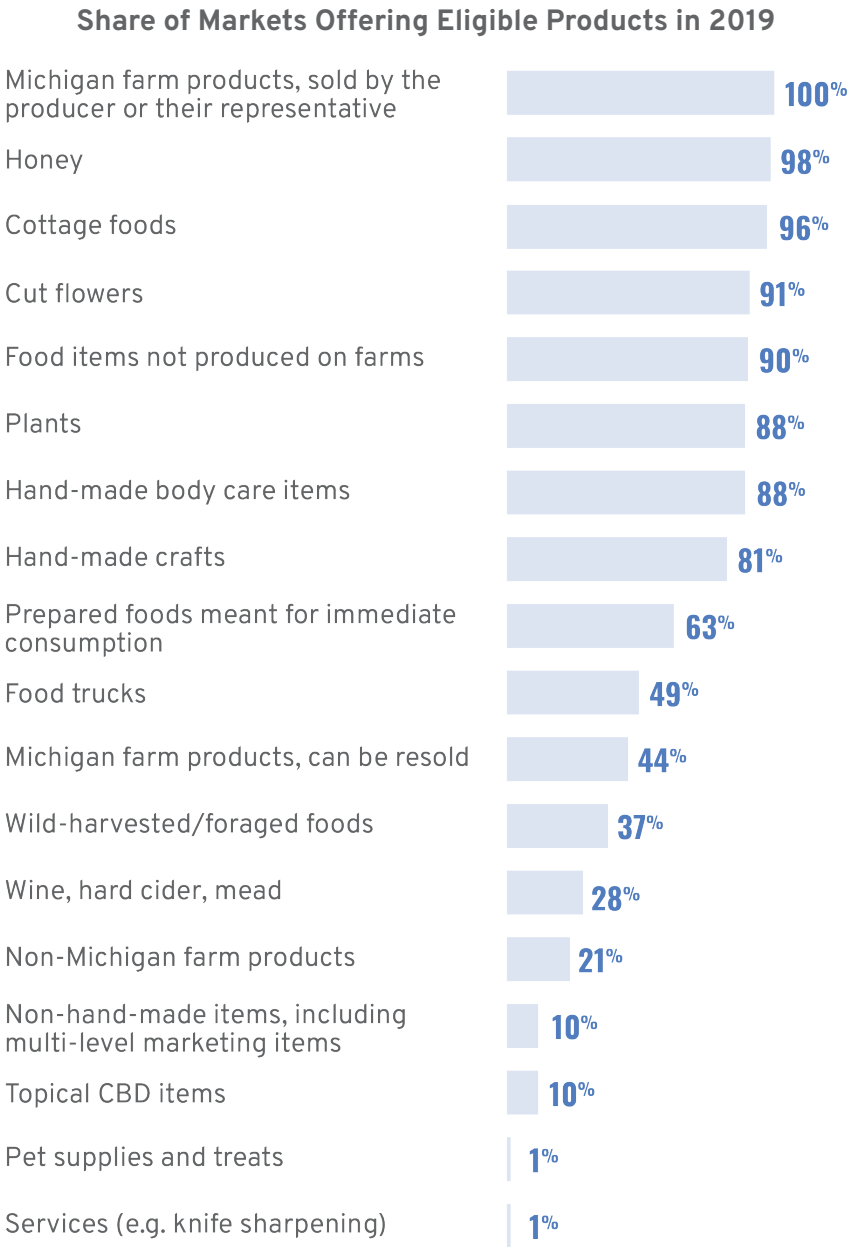
A FOCUS ON AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS

At Michigan markets, on average half of vendors (47%) are farmers, primarily selling the agricultural food products they grow or raise. Many of these farmers also offer other types of products, including crafts (23%), cottage foods (21%), and/or licensed food products (16%). When weathering seasonal changes or unexpected crop issues, farmers can still make their trips to market worthwhile by supplementing with sales of other products to make their income more consistent.

PRODUCT ELIGIBILITY

Each farmers market in the state can choose what items are allowed to be sold at their market. While Michigan farm products are (unsurprisingly) eligible to be sold at all of the state’s markets, honey, cottage foods, cut flowers, plants, handmade body care, and other food items are also allowable at most markets.

About half (46%) of respondents said they explicitly restrict the sale of certain products. Markets were most likely to restrict sales of non-handmade items (including multi-level marketing items), topical CBD products, and farm products from outside the state. A recent state law allows Michigan-produced wine, hard cider, and mead to be sold at markets, but only 28% of markets allow these products.



MAINTAINING PRODUCT RATIOS

Most (81%) said they strive to maintain a ratio of vendors by product type. As one respondent put it, “we try not to have too many of any particular type of vendor so as not to oversaturate the market.” The balance is not only for customer experience, but also for vendor success. One respondent said if there are too many vendors of one type, “they won’t return because they can’t sell enough to make it worth the trip.”

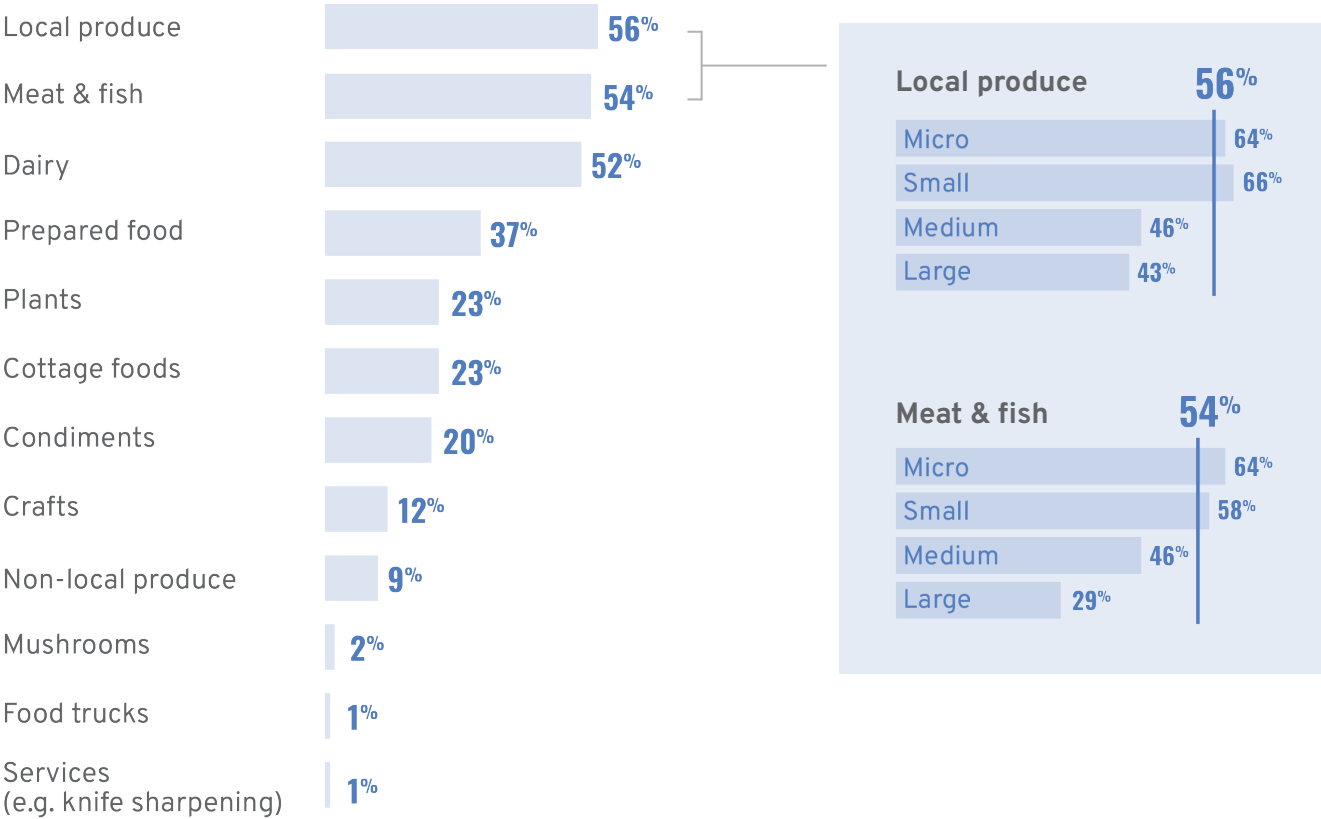
Managers described a hierarchy that prioritized produce vendors, followed by value-added and prepared foods, and finally artisan craft items. In open-ended responses, they said they strive for anywhere from 50 to 80% produce vendors, and then fill in with the remaining categories. One said, “Once our market gets more produce vendors we can accept more of the other vendors.” Managers described this as a “tricky balancing act” that might change over time as the market grows and changes.

VENDOR RECRUITMENT CHALLENGES

The balancing act is made more difficult when specific vendor categories are difficult to recruit. Around half of respondents say they have trouble finding vendors who sell meat and fish; local produce; and/or dairy products.

The chart below shows that micro and small markets have more trouble with recruitment than the average market. These results point to two takeaways. First, that Michigan could benefit from more farmers raising and selling these products at markets. And second, farmers looking for new sales outlets might find opportunities with smaller-sized markets.

Share of Markets Reporting Difficult-to-Recruit Vendor Categories



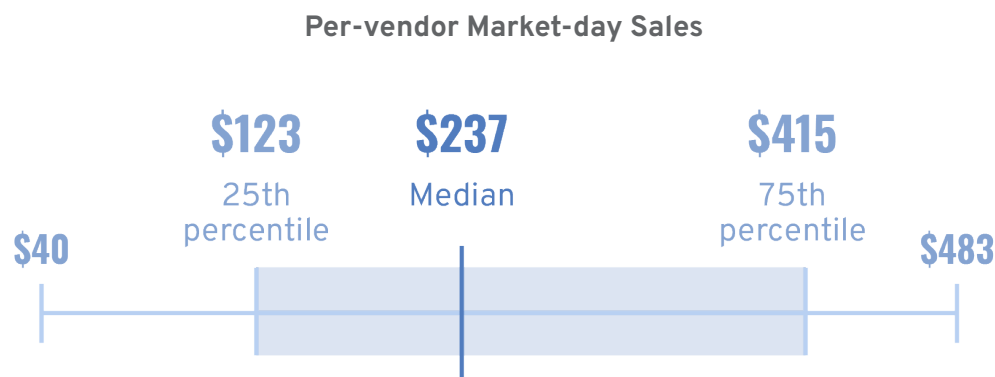
VENDOR SALES

Twenty-four percent (24%) of responding market managers collect vendor sales. Of this group, about a third (30%) do so anonymously, while the remaining two thirds collect this information in a way that's traceable to individual vendors.

We present this information with the following limitations:

- Of the already small group of respondents who collect vendor sales, two thirds provided us with sales numbers. This resulted in a small sample size of 22 markets.
- This group of markets disproportionately represents micro and small markets (with fewer than 30 vendors);

We do not expect these figures to hold true across all Michigan markets, but use them instead as a baseline for tracking future growth.



Difficulty of Collecting Vendor Sales



Historically market managers have not collected vendor sales, and attempts to do so have generally been difficult. Knowing vendor sales is invaluable both to inform markets' management and to report market economic impact. Vendors are understandably private about their business finances. In some cases, market managers have built enough trust with vendors to collect this information.

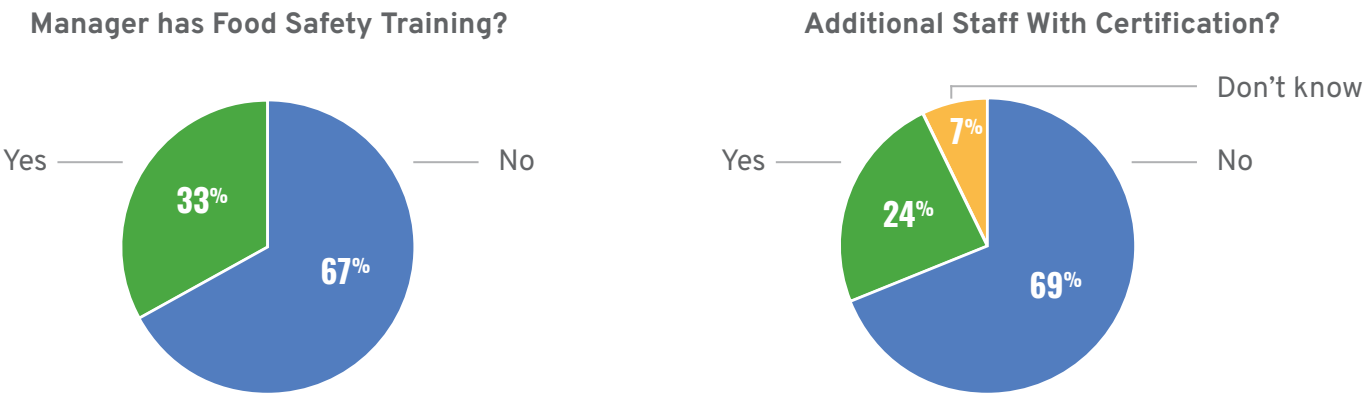
Food Safety Training

BACKGROUND

Farmers markets are not regulated by any one governmental unit; however, different businesses and products are subject to regulations from Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD), county health departments, and others.

Each vendor is responsible for licensure and food safety of their own products. Market managers' roles are nuanced; while they do not enforce laws (federal, state, or county), they have a philosophical interest in protecting the market and its consumers, but not a legal obligation. A well-educated manager can direct vendors to helpful resources about food safety compliance; many pursue certifications or training to equip themselves with the knowledge to support vendors.

Two thirds of Michigan market managers do not have formal food safety training. At those markets that do have some training, the manager is the only staff member with food safety training (69%). The most commonly-held certification is ServSafe (including Basic, Manager, Allergens, and Food Handler).



Licensing & Insurance

When asked what certifications, licenses, or other documentation they require from vendors, market managers largely responded that they require all licenses required for that vendors' products. Managers responded with a wide range of additional answers that included:

- Signed W9
- Proof of insurance (liability and/or business)
- Food safety training
- A copy of anything [vendors] claim to have (organic, for example)
- All that are recommended by MIFMA
- We don't monitor – up to the vendor to acquire whatever license they need for their products