

# **Farmers Market Congressional Briefing Statement**

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Thank you for coming today to hear our stories.

In Michigan we have 160 farmers markets from Detroit to Marquette and we get requests for assistance to start new markets weekly. It is estimated that 3,000 farmers sell at our farmers' markets. Most of our markets are seasonal operating from May to October and run by volunteers or part-time staff.

We don't have an accurate figure for the income that farmers obtain from sales at farmers' markets, but I can share a couple of stories. In May through September 2006, the Flint Farmers Market had sales of \$1,000,000 and served 90,000 customers. While this is a year-round market, it is in a community that is struggling because of the decline of the auto industry. A young farmer told me that he used to sell at four farmers markets in northwestern lower Michigan. He made \$50,000 in sales annually and after a few years of building his customer base, he opened an on-farm market where he employs one year-round employee and several seasonal employees that contribute to the local economy.

Another source of revenues for farmers at the markets are Farmers Market Nutrition Program coupons—Project Fresh coupons in Michigan. The rate of redemption is increasing to 74% in 2006 and this puts over \$522,000 into farmers pockets. It also provides limited resource families and seniors with access to fresh produce.

Often farmers markets are the first and only face of agriculture that consumers see. Why is this important? Most Michigan farmers' markets are located near urban centers. At the market families build relationships with farmers and children learn that food does not come from a grocery store. And, the interdependence of urban and rural communities is made clear.

The research tells us that farmers markets contribute to the local economy because when consumers visit the market they also visit other businesses in the community and contribute to the local economy. In addition dollars spent locally circulate in the community 4-7 times so in the case of Flint, the market contributes to \$4-7 million dollars circulating.

Farmers markets need help. In Michigan fewer than 10 markets can accept Electronic Benefits Transfers (EBT) cards. Prior to moving from food stamps to EBT cards, all farmers markets could accept food stamps. The wireless EBT machines are expensive and there are operating and outreach expenses that most farmers markets cannot afford. Michigan Farmers' Market Association (MIFMA) is working on a project with five markets across the state to pilot EBT use and document the process and lessons learned so that other markets can more effectively gain use of the readers. Enhanced support for the Farmers Market Promotion Program and the Community Food Projects program could help bridge that gap in at farmers' market. MIFMA is forming to support farmers markets and farmers with technical assistance, training, publicity and a policy voice.

Thank you for your support and interest.