

THE HIDDEN VALUE OF FARMERS MARKETS: A CASE STUDY OF THE  
ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND CULTURAL ASPECTS OF THE ATHENS FARMERS  
MARKET IN ATHENS, OHIO

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree Master of Arts in the

Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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The Ohio State University  
2004

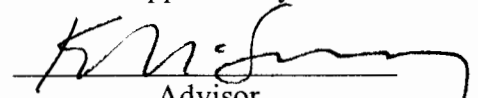
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## ABSTRACT

Farmers' markets are one form of direct marketing that has existed for generations, but studies lack conclusive information regarding the advantages, disadvantages, and quality of life implications for farmers. This thesis provides a literature review of farmers' market research in the US and traces the rise and decline of farmers' markets since their appearance on the American landscape. Next, this thesis presents an ethnographic study of various rural farmers' markets in Southeast Ohio, with special focus on the Athens Farmers' Market in Athens, Ohio. Qualitative and quantitative research methods used in this study indicate three inter-related dimensions of farmers' markets: economic, social, and cultural. Specifically, the Athens Farmers' Market provides economic benefits to market vendors and the local economy by increasing farm income, increasing sales tax revenue and local spending, facilitating bartering, providing employment opportunities, promoting diversification of agriculture and diversification of income, and serving as a business incubator. There are also social networks present at the Athens Farmers' Market that serve multiple purposes. The market is a forum for farmers to interact with each other and the social networks of the market serve as an information resource for farmers to collaborate and problem-solve. Older or experienced vendors also provide assistance to new or young farmers by serving as mentors. Vendors provide a nurturing social-support system which encourages the entrepreneurial endeavors of vendors, as well. The market allows farmers to learn

business skills such as leadership and negotiation through sales experience and by observing other vendors. The social atmosphere of the market also facilitates friendships among vendors and customers and builds a sense of community. The Athens Farmers' Market itself is an expression of the cultural values of the region, including its appreciation for farming, entrepreneurialism, rural lifestyle, and community pride. By studying the Athens Farmers' Market and other rural markets we can better understand rural livelihood strategies, formal and informal economies, and small-scale agriculture.

The implications of this study include evidence that an ethnographic approach to the study of farmers' markets is highly advantageous compared to traditional survey methods. Also, as this study strongly suggests that these markets are economically beneficial to the local economy, it challenges local governments, non-profit organizations, or community groups to consider supporting existing farmers' markets, or creating new markets if none exist, as a means to alleviate rural poverty and stimulate the local economy.

Dedicated to my parents, Tom and Jan, my sister Angie, and to Aaron.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank my advisor, Kendra McSweeney for her intellectual support, guidance, and advice which made this thesis possible. I am grateful for the time and patience she spent on this project and her presence on a site visit.

I thank Linda Lobao for her encouragement and the helpful feedback she provided on papers leading up to this thesis. I appreciate the motivation she provided by reminding me of the importance of this research, as well as the knowledge of rural sociology she imparted.

I also wish to thank Becky Mansfield for her support. Her knowledge of food systems was an inspiration for this research, and her advice on qualitative research methods helped create this thesis.

Finally, I wish to thank the farmers and vendors at the Athens Farmers' Market for their active and willing participation in this research, and for welcoming me into their community.

This research was supported by grants from the Critical Difference for Women group and The Ohio State University Department of Geography. I am grateful for these awards, without which this study would not have been possible.

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## CHAPTER 1

### FARMERS MARKETS

#### 1.1 Introduction to Research

Since the advent of the global food market in the 1960s, and particularly after the Farm Crisis of the 1980s, rural America has been in a state of crisis. Agricultural restructuring, including corporate farm ownership and the industrialization of agriculture, has led to the demise of family farms. The loss of these farms threatened the very essence of rural life, and it appeared the demise of rural America was at hand. Indeed, some of these predictions were accurate: rural poverty increased, rural to urban migration was substantial, agricultural lands were abandoned, and many farms were sold or foreclosed.

At the same time, however, rural America has proven to be remarkable resilient. Migration out of rural areas was never complete and many farmers supplemented their agricultural income with off-farm work in order to maintain ownership of the family farm. Rural communities sustained themselves by inviting unconventional businesses into the area, including landfills or nuclear waste storage facilities, to bring money into the community.

Nevertheless, life remains difficult for the 13.4% of the US rural population living below the poverty line (US Census Bureau 2000). The challenge, now, is to build on the

rural resilience to improve rural well-being. USDA agricultural programs have spent billions of dollars seeking to alleviate rural poverty through food stamps, job training, and economic development (Campbell 2000). Emblematic of such efforts is the USDA's and other groups' renewed interest in the economic promise of rural farmers' markets. A farmers' market, as defined by the USDA, is "a common facility or area where multiple farmers/growers gather on a regular basis to sell a variety of fresh fruits, vegetables, and other farm products to customers" (2002 p. 1). Farmers' markets once defined rural economic life, but experienced a decline from the 1940s. Now a resurgence in farmers' markets has overtaken the US and these markets are being targeted as the economic salvation of rural farming. And so, the question becomes: How important are farmers' markets? What economic benefits do they provide for farmers? For rural communities? Are there social dimensions to farmers' markets? Do farmers' markets play a role in local culture?

These questions frame this thesis. In the first chapter of this thesis I will provide a literature review of the economic, social, and cultural attributes of farmers' markets. Next, in chapter two I will present a brief history of the decline and rise of farmers' markets, followed by the research questions and objectives of this study and its conceptual approach. Chapter three will examine the study site and methods for this research. The results of this study regarding the economic benefits of farmers' markets will be presented in chapter four, and the cultural and social benefits identified in chapter five. Finally, chapter six provides a discussion of the study results, including the theoretical and practical implications of the finding, and suggestions for future market research.

## 1.2 Introduction to Farmers' Markets

Recent interest in farmers' markets has arisen among rural sociologists, geographers, agriculturalists, horticulturalists, nutritionists, and anthropologists. Most of this interest is in exploring the role of farmers' markets within local food systems, as a place for social learning, and as a business incubator. To date, research in the dynamics of farmers' markets have focused on three key areas, the economic, cultural, and social attributes of the markets. While these three aspects of farmers' markets are deeply intertwined, to illuminate the topic I artificially separate them into three unique categories. I review each of the economic, cultural, and social issues of farmers' markets below and highlight questions that require further attention to complete the understanding of these markets. In particular, I note that current literature relies heavily on surveys to gather information on the markets, and researchers often survey market officials and customers more than the vendors themselves. The overview of key areas of farmers' markets is followed by specific research questions that are addressed in this study and that seek to fill in the information gap of farmers' market dynamics. These questions are unique to rural markets because of the rural nature of the study site and the lack of research on rural farmers' markets.

## 1.3 Attributes and Benefits of Farmers' Markets

Research shows that farmers' markets typically attract small-scale vendors who hope for economic gain through increased income and better profit margins from direct sales (Griffin et al. 2003; Brown 2002b). Farmers' markets are attractive primarily to

those farmers who are unable to compete on the global agricultural system or in mainstream food markets. They are attractive to farmers who lack the production volume to sell wholesale. Farmers who vend at farmers' markets often do so because they believe it is their best or only marketing channel (Lyson et al. 1995; Sharp et al. 2002). This means that many vendors at farmers' markets are typically small-scale farmers, part-time farmers, or hobby farmers. It is also common for retired persons to sell agricultural products to supplement their income; new farmers find the farmers' market a good venue for sales when they are just beginning their agricultural careers. There is low risk in participating in a farmers' market because the cost to join is minimal, and thus attractive to these farmers. The organizational flexibility of the market is also desirable. That is, it is easy to enter and leave the farmers' market and is thereby conducive to the unpredictable nature of farming. Many farmers, especially those who are full-time growers, sell at more than one farmers' market. Again, this is possible due to the low financial investment and flexibility of the markets (Lyson et al. 1995).

Studies show that while the structure of the farmers' market "pulls" farmers to sell, they are also "pushed" to participate in the market as a source of income. Farmers' markets sales may be the sole source of income for a small farmer, or a supplementary income source to other agricultural or business ventures. The cash income from the market also has an insurance function (Brown 2002b). For example, hobby or part-time farmers might vend at a farmers' market to increase their household income when the economy is poor. Regardless of whether or not a farmer earns all or part of his/her income at the farmers' market, a small farmer may rely on market sales for his/her livelihood. According to many researchers, income from farmers' markets can mean the

difference between a farmer being able to farm or not being able to farm (Brown 2002b; Hinrichs et al. 2004). Further, profits from farmers' markets enable farmers to maintain control over their farms (Hinrichs 2000). It is estimated that the retail nature of the market allows farmers to increase their earnings 40-80% compared to wholesale or other sales methods (Andreatta et al. 2002). Through direct marketing farmers do not have the added expense of a middleman and are able to make a better return on their sales.

Research indicates that farmers' markets are most valuable to farmers who cannot compete in mainstream markets as they are able to find an income source in market sales (Burns et al. 1996; Feenstra et al. 2003). This income can make farming profitable, while the low cost and flexibility of the farmers' market is fitting with the farming lifestyle. This increased profitability also preserves farmland and retards the loss of open space by keeping more farmers farming (Brown 2002b)

#### i.) Economic Motivation for Market Participation

It is clear from farmers' market research who is vending at farmers' markets and that their motivation is income generation, but current studies indicate there are other economic reasons for participating in a farmers' market. Bartering is one such non-cash, economic benefit to vending at a farmers' market (Pyle 1971). Bartering, or the trading of goods or services between vendors, has the potential to make participation in farmers' markets profitable even when there is little cash flow. While it is acknowledged among academics that bartering exists at farmers' markets, there is no current research exploring the extent and importance of this component. In particular, how widespread is this phenomenon? What does bartering imply about the vendor-to-vendor relationships

within a market? To date, researchers have only focused on vendor-to-customer interaction in terms of economic exchange, but bartering among vendors brings to light another dimension to market dynamics.

In addition to the economic advantages farmers' markets provide for farmers, the cash exchanges at a farmers' market appear to contribute to the economy of local communities in a concrete way. For example, farmers' markets provide economic stimulation to local areas, including contributing to local tax revenues, driving tourism, providing employment opportunities, diversifying agriculture, diversifying income, and facilitating entrepreneurial endeavors (Lyson et al. 1995; Andreatta et al. 2002; Brown 2002b; Feenstra et al. 2003; Griffin et al. 2003; Hinrichs 2000; Hinrichs et al. 2004). The economic and social impact of farmers' markets, according to Brown, appear to be far-reaching. These insights—and the questions they leave unanswered—are examined in greater detail below.

First, farmers' markets strengthen the local economy by contributing to the local tax base. Many purchases at farmers' markets are taxable, and therefore, the farmers' market benefits the local economy by generating sales tax revenue (Brown 2002b). Furthermore, customers who patronize the farmers' market tend to conduct their daily errands at stores nearby the market. In her inventory research on farmers' markets, Brown was able to document a clear association between farmers' markets and increased local spending, which was found to stimulate the local economy. In short, farmers' markets can draw money into a local economy and into the hands of farmers. It remains unclear, however, where the money that is earned by vendors at farmers' markets is spent. To what extent do vendors take their market sales income and recirculate it in the

local economy by spending it at locally owned stores for supplies, or do they make their purchases at the local Wal-Mart and therefore effectively send the bulk of their revenues outside the community? Does money spent at the farmers' market support the local economy better than money spent at national chain grocery stores? In effect, what path are farmers' market dollars likely to follow?

Next, studies show that farmers' markets increase the money circulating in the local economy by capturing a large portion of tourist dollars (Hinrichs 2000; Feenstra et al. 2003). Farmers' markets are popular tourist attractions, especially for urban people, providing food and agricultural products in a rural, culture-rich atmosphere (Pyle 1971; Lyson et al. 1995; Brown 2002b). But the extent to which market vendors rely on tourist dollars or market themselves to attract tourists is unclear. What share do tourists comprise of farmers' market shoppers?

Another economic characteristic of farmers' markets identified by researchers is that income generated from farmers markets, whether through local sales or tourism, can make farming profitable enough for small farmers to hire on-farm workers. Thus, the presence of a farmers' market can lead to increasing employment opportunities in the local community (Andreatta et al. 2002). However, research has not been able to determine to what extent a farmers' market can generate such job spin-offs, how many job opportunities a market can open, nor who fills these openings.

Diversifying regional agriculture is identified by academics as another potential benefit of farmers' markets (Brown 2002b). Farmers' markets expose farmers to new products, information, and ideas, and thereby facilitate their adoption of more diverse crops, the sale of processed foods, or creative marketing strategies (Andreatta et al. 2002;

Hinrichs et al. 2004). Through this so-called “social learning” and the development of new agricultural products, farmers decrease risk by relying less on a few products to account for their income and so can ultimately increase sales and profits as well (Feenstra et al. 2003). How exactly this process plays out—or does not play out—in specific ways remains open to investigation.

Next, while some farmers make their entire living from selling at farmers’ markets, others find it to be a good supplementary income source (Andreatta et al. 2002; Brown 2002b). For those who choose to diversify their agricultural income, the farmers’ market *complements* other direct marketing forms, such as “u-pick” or roadside stands. Further, a market stall is an ideal place from which to publicize these additional income sources (Lyson et al. 1995; Feenstra et al. 2003). Through farmers’ markets, vendors are also able to meet representatives from other businesses who may be interested in farm buying products in a more sustained way; farmers can opt to sell privately to restaurants or other businesses (Baber et al. 2003). Such alternative markets for their products are especially important to farmers because they offer income-generation and so can increase a farm family’s economic stability, decrease their economic risk, and can compensate for low sales weeks at the farmers’ market. But questions about income diversification still remain unanswered in farmers’ market literature, including: What are the main forms of income diversification that the farmers’ market facilitates through interaction with private buyers? Are some sales outlets preferred over others? Which ones?

Finally, farmers’ markets are said to facilitate entrepreneurship and serve as incubators for small business development (Hinrichs 2000). Farmers’ markets allow a vendor to maintain his/her income source while investigating new business opportunities.

Research suggests that this occurs because these markets provide a nurturing social atmosphere that encourages experimentation and serves as a niche market for testing new products or service ideas (Brown 2002b). Most small-scale farmers lack the capital required to begin a new business venture outright; the low cost and low risk environment of the farmers' market, in contrast, make it an ideal forum to introduce a new business (Lyson et al. 1995, Feenstra et al. 2003). Participating in local community markets also helps with the development of new businesses by helping vendors develop business skills. Researchers have claimed, for example, that selling at a farmers' market teaches management, marketing, communication, and leadership skills to vendors (Brown 2002b; Hinrichs et al. 2004). These are valuable tools that help vendors promote new businesses and can aid in the transition to larger economic ventures. Farmers' markets stimulate the local economy by creating new businesses, and in this way also bridge the informal economy of the farmers' market with the formal economy (Baber et al. 2003; Griffin et al. 2003). While identifying farmers' markets as business incubators is an important research finding, it remains unclear to what extent farmers' markets promote entrepreneurship, and researchers have urged closer scrutiny of businesses developed through farmers' markets, particularly their success or failure rates (Feenstra et al. 2003; Hinrichs et al. 2004).

In summary, current research suggest that the economic aspects of farmers' markets include the following: Farmers' markets increase the profitability of small-scale farming, stimulate the local economy, and lead to diverse agricultural products and income. It is also worth noting that the growth in influence and spread of farmers' markets in rural America suggests that these attributes are economically efficient for

producers and consumers, and research indicates markets are also economically beneficial to the communities in which they are located. However, the precise function and importance of these multiple economic roles is not fully understood; further, researchers themselves state that overall, farmers' markets have been inadequately studied as contributors to local rural economies (Lyson et al. 1995; Andreatta et al. 2002; Feenstra et al. 2003).

## ii.) Cultural Aspects of Farmers' Market Vending

A second category of farmers' market attributes is that of the cultural elements of farmers' markets; and by culture I am referring to the unique values, norms, attitudes, and/or beliefs of the vendors and the Southeast Ohio region. Nearly all research on farmers' markets has acknowledged that these markets have cultural significance to vendors, patrons, and the local community; however, no study has comprehensively evaluated the cultural value and meaning of a market (Griffin et al. 2003).

Researchers have stated that, in addition to being a place of business, farmers' markets are also expressions of local culture (Hinrichs 2000). Farmers' markets have their own cultural norms, values, and meanings. The markets thrive on the human connection between food production, sales, and purchasing, contrary to the faceless markets of mainstream grocery stores or wholesaling. At a farmers' market, vendors and consumers are reconnected with each other in the regional landscape (Andreatta et al. 2002). The atmosphere of the farmers' market, set within the natural landscape, capitalizes on the rural character and uniqueness of the land (Feenstra et al. 2003). Customers typically perceive, and come to experience, that the culture of farming values

a connection to the land and the market preserves that land and the farming lifestyle.

Customers often feel as if they are participating in a social movement by purchasing local foods from local people. It is especially important that farmers' markets allow the farmer and consumer to participate in the culture of farming while at a farmers' market (Pyle 1971; Lyson et al. 1995).

Researchers have found that farmers typically view farming as a lifestyle as much as a business, and farmers' markets highlight both these aspects of farming. In effect, farmers' markets are places for building a sense of community between producers and consumers because the rules, regulations, and policies of farmers' markets are cultural expressions of the values held by the local people (Andreatta et al. 2002). For example, rules such as producer-only sales demonstrate that a local community values primary producers over resellers, and so reflects a concern for the well being of small producers. Other expressions of the local cultural dynamic include special event days at the farmers' market such as children's days, pumpkin festivals, "Heritage Days", or other events showcasing aspects of the region and/or cultural and religious events. In the process, farmers' markets revive appreciation and sympathy for farmers and their lifestyle (Feenstra et al. 2003).

Clearly, much of the non-economic value of the farmers' market lies in its expressions of local culture, and the farmers themselves take pride in this culture because they are part of the local community and have an investment in the area. Furthermore, vendors have a vested interest in the well being of other vendors (and, to some degree, their customers) because many of them are neighbors. Due to their concern for local people, vendors use their time at the market to educate and provide civic values to

customers. Studies report that farmers' teach people about nutrition, wholesome eating habits, and better food preparation (Baber et al. 2003; USDA 2003). The presence of farmers' markets has been shown to increase local health by increasing fruit and vegetable consumption (Andreatta et al. 2002; Feenstra et al. 2003). Vendors also use the farmers' market as an arena to educate people about local food systems and the socio-economic value of eating local foods.

### iii.) Social Attributes of Farmers' Markets

The final component of farmers' markets identified by researchers is the social element. The term social, as it is used here, refers to the interpersonal interactions, networks, and ties between and among vendors and customers. In addition to being economic and cultural centers, farmers' markets are also social institutions. They occupy social spaces in a community and the interactions between vendors, and among vendors and customers, create social ties of friendship (Hinrichs et al. 2004). Many of the exchanges at farmers' markets are driven by the familiarity and social ties created by one-on-one interaction (Andreatta et al. 2002). Research indicates that vendors and customers foster relationships of loyalty, trust, and reliability at farmers' markets. Customers patronize vendors they consider friends, and there is a social context to market purchases because of the personal interactions that are involved in the transactions. Through their relationships, vendors and customers participate in the local community's social life while participating in the farmers' market. These social ties do not, however, negate the importance of price, or dictate selling practices. Hinrichs (2000) states, for example, that the economic function of the farmers' market is always pre-eminent; economic

transactions exist but are socially embedded because of the ties between vendor and customer. Yet some researchers suggest that the economic motivation to sell at a farmers' market often comes second to the desire for social interaction (Lyson et al. 1995). In fact, for many farmers, selling at the farmers' market comprises an important part of their recreation. Farmers especially value the social interaction of the market because of the isolated nature of their occupation; without the farmers' market, many farmers would not have the opportunity to build relationships with members of their community (Feenstra et al. 2003).

Through interactions at the farmers' market, vendors also develop social networks. Studies indicate that these networks generate and circulate new information, such as information regarding new agricultural products and marketing techniques (Hinrichs et al. 2004). Social networks also support entrepreneurial ideas, promote small business development, and encourage expanding the sale of products to markets beyond farmers' markets (Feenstra et al. 2003). By selling at the farmers' market, vendors learn business skills that can aid in business ventures beyond the farmers' market. Therefore, farmers' markets help vendors build human capital, and the support of other market vendors can persuade a farmer to use these skills to expand his/her sales or explore new products to sell.

And so, research suggests that vendors at farmers' markets make valuable social ties through vendor and customer interactions. The friendships made and information exchanged at the market proves invaluable as they stimulate new ideas and entrepreneurial endeavors, as well as creating a sense of community. The value of social interaction at farmers' markets for fostering friendships, sales, and developing new

products or business skills is apparent. The extent and influence of these networks has not been fully explored through research, especially with regard to the role of social networks as an information resource for farming techniques (Brown 2002b). But, several questions require further attention, for example: Who is most integrated into social networks? Is it possible to be excluded from these networks? Additionally, because the economic interactions at farmers' markets are so closely tied to the social nature of the market, one must ask: To what degree participation or non-participation within social networks impact the economic benefits of vending at farmers' markets?

## CHAPTER 2

### THE DECLINE AND RISE OF FARMERS MARKETS

Farmers' markets are a form of direct marketing that has existed on the American landscape for centuries. These markets are a link to understanding the rural landscape as they indicate the type of farming in a region and the health of the agricultural economy. Changes in farming mechanization, national or regional economies, or rural cultural values are mirrored in farmers' markets.

In order to understand the changing role agriculture in rural areas, it is helpful to examine the history of farmers' market numbers and distribution. If farmers' markets are expressions of rural lifestyle and culture, as well as indicators of farming practices and rural economics, then the growth or decline of farmers' markets throughout history will offer insight into farming innovations, new agricultural economics, or changing rural values. By exploring the history of farmers' markets, including their locations, rules and regulations, and roles in the agricultural economy, the impacts of agricultural change on rural areas becomes apparent. Therefore, to understand the economic and cultural roles of farmers' market today it is necessary to explore past market trends, and their causes, and the implications of these trends to rural communities.

## 2.1 History of Farmers' Markets

Farmers' markets date back to ancient Greece and Rome. The first farmers' market in the United States was set up by Europeans in New England in 1634; by 1700 there were nine active markets in the colonies. Markets soon began to appear all over the nation. The distribution of farmers' markets has varied over time and space, and markets have experienced periods of boom and bust. The number of active markets often indicate changing consumer demands, farming trends, regional development, agricultural economics, technology, and/or regional development (Pyle 1971; Brown 2002a).

Determining the exact number of US farmers' markets present throughout history is challenging due to a lack of consistent data and lost, incomplete, and fragmented data. Additionally, the definition of farmers' markets evolved over time, leading to discrepancies in census data. Regardless of these data shortcomings, general trends in the number and distribution of farmers' markets are identifiable (Pyle 1971). The following are summaries of US census data from 1880, 1918, and 1946 based on research and analysis by Jane Pyle in 1971. Since her research many records on farmers' markets have been destroyed, and current researchers rely on her study as one of the best records of farmers' market numbers, trends, and locations.

### Census 1880

By 1801 farmers' markets reached the Northwest Territories with the establishment of a market in Cincinnati, Ohio, and again in Cleveland in 1837. In 1880 the United States Census surveyed some of the nation's cities regarding the existence and importance of their market facilities. The results of this census showed a growth in

number of farmers' markets in the South, Northeast, and parts of the Midwest, usually following the establishments of new cities. New markets in the Midwest were created in new cities as older markets in established cities deteriorated. The decline in farmers' markets was most prominent in New England, where markets were closing and no new markets were being constructed. Markets in the West were scarce, as there was little urbanization in the area to facilitate the establishment of the markets. Therefore, it appears that markets in highly urbanized areas were floundering and dying, but in less developed regions the markets were still a significant part of the American lifestyle (Pyle 1971).

#### Census 1918

In 1918 the US Census Bureau conducted a study of markets in cities with populations over 30,000. The study, which overlooked small cities, cities with private markets, and permanent open-air markets, was more comprehensive than the 1880 survey (Brown 2002a). This census also differentiated between wholesale and retail markets for the first time, but classified both as municipal markets. Nearly half of the 240 cities in the survey reported having markets. Two-thirds of large cities had one or more markets on average, but those numbers were even greater in the Midwest, South, and the West. The descriptive nature of the data leads to the conclusion that two out of 118 cities with farmers' markets had expressly wholesale markets, and the remainder were primarily retail. It is also unclear if these retail market vendors were producers or middlemen.

The number of New England markets continued to decline, although records show a rise in open-air markets during wartime in 1916 and 1917. These wartime markets

usually disappeared by 1920, but illustrate that even where market numbers were declining, the market was useful in difficult times as a means to supplement income and acquire fresh produce. Overall, the distribution of markets in 1918 was similar to that of 1880, and the trend of market decline perpetuated (Pyle 1971).

#### Census 1946

The 1946 study by the Department of Agriculture was significantly different from previous surveys, establishing four market classifications and analyzing their occurrences in four geographic areas. The classification “retail market” most closely resembles the farmers’ market of today’s standard. The results of this survey show a total of 291 retail markets in 1946, a growth since 1918. Markets in the Midwest were struggling and small or new markets opened and closed quickly. A few older, established markets were still flourishing in the region, and many outdoor, seasonal markets were identified, giving the Midwest a total of 129 retail markets. The Northeast had 156 retail and wholesale markets, 71 retail markets existed in the South, 21 retail markets were located in the Far West, and only 4 retail markets were identified in New England—keeping with the trend of decreased retail markets in the former colonies. These numbers are difficult to interpret as they are not comparable to data from other surveys because of the changing classification of markets and geographical divisions. It can be concluded, however, that the number of retail farmers’ markets remained approximately the same between 1918 and 1946 (Pyle 1971).

While market numbers increased slightly between 1918 and 1946, the importance of the farmers’ market in food distribution drastically declined. In 1920 the advent of the

modern supermarket and improvements in transportation and refrigeration technologies decreased the need for local fresh food markets in cities (Pyle 1971; Lyson et al. 1995). The number of markets remained consistent, but the prominence of the farmers' market in urbanized areas lessened as the connection between food consumption and food production declined.

#### 1976: Farmer-to-Consumer Direct Marketing Act

There are no national data regarding the number and distribution of markets between 1946 and the 1960s. Anecdotal evidence does exist to indicate a decline in the number of markets from the 1950s to 1960; and many researchers appear to concur (Pyle 1971; Lyson et al. 1995; Brown 2002a). What is certain is that by the 1970s, the farmers' market, with its present definition, was deeply in decline and numbered approximately 340 nationwide. Changes in technology, infrastructure, and urbanization were blamed for the decline—many of the same reasons that were used to describe previous declines in earlier studies. However, in 1976 came the passage of the Farmer-to-Consumer Direct Marketing Act and with it, funding for community development projects, including direct marketing. This resulted in a resurgence in farmers' markets. Between 1977 and 1980 farmers' markets increased rapidly, totaling 1,225 by 1980 and 1,890 in 1989 (Brown 2002a). This is attributed to both the Direct Marketing Act and an increased demand for fresh produce due to growing awareness of nutritional benefits and dieting or weight loss trends (Friedland 1994). The retail farmers' market, whose presence almost disappeared, was once again a growing and active part of the American landscape.

## Today's Farmers' Market

The number of farmers' markets in the US continues to grow today, even though funding for the Direct Marketing Act ended in the mid-1980s. The changing economics of agriculture have led to the success of farmers' markets. World War Two provided many technological advancements to farming, including machinery and pesticides, which increased productivity and led a complete restructuring of the farm sector (Halweil 2000). Increased productivity led farmers to market their products globally beginning in the 1960s and increasingly into the 1970s (Lobao et al. 1995). However, the increased supply of agricultural products led to a decline in the value of these crops. To combat this issue, more technology was implemented to increase farming output yet again (Halweil 2000). Large amounts of money were invested in more land, machinery, and chemical inputs. This cycle came to an end in the 1980s when the low demand for US products, increasing interest rates, and other economic factors led to the financial decline of the farming industry. This decline, the Farm Crisis, brought the worst financial circumstances to the agriculture since the Depression (Lobao et al. 1995). The value of farmland fell, debts from the purchase equipment and other technology rose and many farms were either foreclosed or sold.

After the Farm Crisis it was apparent that a bi-modal system existed within American agriculture, meaning farms where either very large or very small. The large farms had vast quantities of land, hired labor, and expensive equipment and other technology (Lobao et al. 2001). Such farms were financially successful due to the economy of scale, and were able to market agricultural products globally. On the other end, the small farms that remained in the US were unable to compete with the

agribusinesses that now monopolized the farming industry. Small-scale farmers became more dependent on local markets to sell their limited production volume. The farmers' market presented itself as a local market that appealed to the needs of local farmers, and catered to the growing consumer demand for fresh, local foods (Andreatta et al. 2002; Brown 2002a; Brown 2002b).

And so, one way in which small scale farmers have been able to persist has been by producing for farmers' markets and marketing their food products to local consumers. During her research on farmers' markets, the US comptroller general told the researcher Allison Brown that, "the surviving smaller farms have been able to exist, for the most part, on the outskirts of urban areas. These farmers have not been forced to sell out partly because they have been able to change their production systems and marketing strategies to take advantage of local conditions" (2002a, pg. 669). Farmers' markets fulfill the need for an outlet for small farmers to sell their products, while simultaneously satisfying consumer demand for fresh local farm products, organic foods, and specialty items. The number and growth of farmers' markets indicates economic efficiency and consumer support for this marketing system (Andreatta et al. 2002). It is the demand for these products and the advantages of this marketing system to small farmers that drives the expansion of farmers' markets throughout the country (USDA 2003).

As of 1995 the USDA reported 2,410 active farmers' markets (including daily, periodic, and seasonal markets), an increase of 655 from just two years earlier. As of 2002 there were over 3,100 farmers' markets in the US—a growth of 79% since 1994 (Payne 2002). The exact revenue earned through direct marketing is unknown, but was estimated at \$404 million in 1997; however, this number is likely to be far below the

actual value of direct marketing sales (Brown 2002b). The number of farmers' markets and the income generated through this form of direct marketing is substantial and shows no signs of stopping.

The geographic distribution of farmers' markets has changed since the passage of the Direct Marketing Act. Farmers' markets are now growing in number in the New England area, a region where markets have been in decline since the 1880s.

Massachusetts had 87 markets alone in 2003, a dramatic increase from the four retail markets the entire territory had in 1946 (USDA 2003). The South has maintained its tradition of many farmers' markets, claiming 173 in the Southwest (Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas) and 354 in the Southeast (see Appendix Table 1 for regional descriptions). The region most heavily populated with farmers' markets is the North Central United States with 921 markets. This number is slightly misleading because the North Central region is comprised of more states than other regions. However, the predominance of farmers' markets in this area is likely due to the many small and medium sized farms of the area (Hart 1972). It is these farms that tend to reap the most benefits from farmers' markets. Small and medium sized farms often lack the volume and resources necessary to sell their products to mainstream markets (Lyson et al. 1995; Burns et al. 1996; Hinrichs 2000; Andreatta et al. 2002; Brown 2002b; Feenstra et al. 2003; Griffin et al. 2003). The local farmers' market is a small, local venue with an existing clientele that can dramatically increase profits from agricultural sales. This is also the case with the Mid-Atlantic region. There are a large number of markets, 385 in 2003, in the Mid-Atlantic region that cater to the needs of the small scale farming common in the area.

The Great Plains and Rocky Mountain states have an increasing number of farmers' markets, though the corn and grain crops in the Plains and the later development of the Rockies have not permitted as rapid growth in market numbers as in other regions. Finally, in the Far West farmers' markets are commonplace, with 591 in the region in 2003, and 365 of them in California alone. Urbanization used to be a constraint on the development of farmers' markets, but now heavily urbanized states like California, New York, and Texas boast the greatest number of farmers' markets. This is likely due to the high concentration of people in these states, creating a large demand for fresh, healthy foods that are available at farmers' markets. Consumer demand and large populations near cities make farmers' markets profitable, and as a result, more markets are located in urban areas. The geographic distribution and trend toward a declining number of markets in the 1940s was reversed in the late 1970s, today there is an overall national growth trend in farmers' markets. Regional development histories and populations still factor into the location and number of markets, but growth is indisputable.

## 2.2 Farmers' Markets in Contemporary America

In addition to the quantity and distribution changes of farmers' markets there have also been changes in market ownership. Historically, market establishment followed closely after the construction of a city. Markets were located in public sites, usually on land set aside for such a marketplace by the city's founder or a land donor (Pyle 1971). The market was created and operated by city officials who passed ordinances to regulate market competition and maintain equal benefit to all vendors. For example, some cities had ordinances forbidding the sale of produce outside of the farmers' market during

regular market hours. Today a majority of farmers' markets are independent of local or non-local governments, being entirely self-sufficient or relying on corporate or non-profit sponsorship (Pyle 1971; Payne 2002). The Mid-Atlantic region has the highest number of subsidized markets at 25%; these markets are subsidized by local governments, non-local governments, business groups, or non-profit organizations. All the other regions of the US have only 13-21% non-self-sustaining markets (Payne 2002). Most markets are under the direction of a market manager or director, and/or a market board that makes major market decisions and regulates vending within the market. There is competition between farmers' markets and local businesses today, as ordinances such as those forbidding sales outside of the market, do not exist anymore and would likely be illegal.

### Market Operation

In addition to a shift in market ownership and control, there have also been changes in the structure and operation of markets. Today markets are geared more toward the interest of producers, rather than resellers or consumers, as in the past (Pyle 1971). Traditionally, markets have been open six days a week if the market is large, or three days if the market is smaller. The hours of operation were dawn to noon, or sometimes mid-morning. The number of vendors varied dramatically, from less than 25 to more than 100, although such larger operations were rare. By 1946 some of this market structure had altered, as markets were more often held outdoors in streets or vacant lots and became more seasonal.

Seasonal markets remain the most common form of farmers' markets today. Most seasonal markets are open for 15-20 weeks in the spring, summer, and autumn.

However, some regions still have large numbers of year-round markets, including the Southeast, Mid-Atlantic, and Far West, with 33%, 25 %, and 28%, respectively (Payne 2002). Today farmers' markets are open between one and three days a week. While there is not much data available on national average hours of operation, early morning vending for a few hours appears to be most typical (USDA 2003). Again, the number of days and hours of operation of markets tend to benefit the producer, as it allows for a large profit in a short amount of time and enables the farmer to spend more time on his/her farm. One consistency over time is the number of stalls, or vending places, at the market. In 2000, the average number of stalls per region ranged from 17-61, with the Southwest and Northeast having the smallest numbers and the Far West with the largest.

This information demonstrates that there is variety among farmers' market structure within states and across regions, but the size range of markets has been fairly consistent over time. Thus, farmers' market size, time, and number of days can be tailored to the needs of a specific community or region.

### Producer-Only Rule

It is obvious that US farmers' markets have changed throughout history and are more diverse today than ever before. Due to this fact, there is much competition between markets and among vendors at the same market. In response to such competition, market directors and boards of many farmers' markets have established themselves as "producer-only" markets. This means that farmers are only permitted to sell products they make or grow themselves. This restriction is the norm across the US: 67-82% of farmers markets are producer only, with 46-66% of markets imposing additional restrictions (Payne

2002). Such additional restrictions may include the number of vendors, organic certification requirements, or restrictions on the sale of arts and crafts.

The producer-only market eliminates some of the problems seen in markets since their establishment in the US. Farmers' markets were valued because of their fresh, quality produce at reasonable prices direct from the farms. Over time, however, market vendors became resellers—that is, individuals who bought farmers' produce to sell at the farmers' market themselves, and the market lost its farm-direct quality and pricing advantages (Pyle 1971; Brown 2002a). The advent of the middleman in the marketplace can be traced to declines in the number of markets, and the producer-only rule prevents such conflicts in the farmers' market today. There are still many markets that allow resellers to vend, and many are a combination of farmer and flea markets and are located in cities. The producer-only market, however, is the truest way to obtain produce directly from the producer (Pyle 1971).

Markets evolve according to the needs of local producers (Pyle 1971). Restrictions on outside selling during market times in the 1880s have given way to restrictions on the type of produce one can vend at a market today. These stipulations are both different means to the same end: limiting competition and serving the interests of the market vendors. Market regulations are changed or modified to accommodate the needs of local producers. Farmers' markets are now producer-interest driven, in contrast to the consumer-gear market of the past. Farmers' markets, though traditional institutions, are structured and well-regulated organizations. In this way the flexibility of the market enables it to cater to local farmer needs, consumer demand, and take on the unique culture of the community.

## 2.3 Research Questions and Objectives

The foregoing review of the existing literature regarding farmers' markets makes it clear that farmers' markets can serve multiple economic, cultural, and social functions. At the same time, it is also apparent that there are significant gaps in the understanding of farmers' markets in academia. This thesis seeks to fill some of the voids in farmers' market literature by answering a number of key questions about farmers' market roles and dynamics.

First, this study seeks to answer specific questions with regard to the economics of farmers' markets. In particular, there has been little published research on farmers' markets in rural areas. Past research has focused on markets in are around cities, or in highly urbanized states such as California and New York, but no studies have exclusively targeted rural areas disconnected from major urban centers. And so, this study asks: What is the role of farmers' markets in the local economic development of rural, impoverished areas? This research will also explore the role of non-cash economic activity in the farmers' market by asking: How prevalent and important is bartering at a farmers' market? In order to determine the role of tourism in the farmers' market, the following questions also shape my research: How much do vendors rely on tourist dollars at the farmers' market? Do vendors actively market to tourists? Next, I will trace the money spent at the farmers' market to answer the question: Does money spent at the farmers' market stay within the local economy? And finally, I will investigate past and present business ventures at the market asking: What is the level of success or failure of businesses that emerged from farmers' markets?

Second, this research will also focus on the social and cultural aspects of farmers' markets. In particular, what social networks exist at the market? What is their function? What is the importance these social networks at the farmers' market? In order to examine the culture of the marketplace, I will also determine: What expressions of culture are apparent at the farmers' markets? What are the cultural roles of farmers' markets in rural areas? Who values the culture of the market (customers, vendors, or both) and why? Finally, this research will ask: Do farmers' markets contribute to an increased quality of life for participating vendors?

By answering the aforementioned questions, this study will contribute to a better understanding of farmers' markets. It is my intent that this research not only results in a thesis, but that the conclusions made from this study are used to improve, support, or create farmers' markets. Ultimately, data from this study can be used to explore the extent to which farmers' markets benefit rural economies. If farmers' markets do stimulate the local economy, I hope this study will then be used by government officials, citizens, or non-profit organizations to justify the creation and support of farmers' markets. If farmers' markets are found to help develop successful new businesses, perhaps this research will lead to state or local funding for farmers' markets, or funding for vendors who wish to market a new product or business at the market. Investors or money lending agencies might also find, based on this research, that investment in small farmers or new businesses at the farmers' market is a good investment.

Another aspect of this research will be an increased understanding of local food systems and their place at the farmers' market. By tracing the path of goods and money into and out of the market, greater light can be shed on the existing food systems in a

community, and in turn can be used to identify, strengthen, or duplicate food systems in other rural areas. The results of this research will contribute to a more solid understanding of the mechanics of farmers' markets. By identifying aspects of the market vendors find positive and negative, and capitalizing on or improving these issues, more vendors and customers might be attracted to farmers' markets. This could lead to a strengthening of local food systems and make farmers more competitive in mainstream markets (Andreatta et al. 2002).

Answering the research questions for this study could lead to an increased and widespread understanding of the multiple roles of farmers' markets to academics, government, and laypersons. The implications of this research could be an increased quality of life for vendors, customers, and the local community. The primary function of this study is to contribute to the understanding of farmers' markets and use this new information to benefit the market, its vendors and customers, and promote local economic development. This research will also contribute to geography as a discipline by contributing to theories of rural development, rural livelihood strategies, issues of place, regional economics, and acapitalistic economics.

## 2.4 Conceptual Approach

The foundation for this research is informed by theories of innovation diffusion, and the concepts of industrialization of agriculture, globalization of food systems, and rural development. Each of these issues helps to understand the circumstances in which farmers' market growth has occurred, and they provide explanations as to how and why farming, farmers' markets, and rural areas exist in their current form.

Theories of innovation diffusion provide insight as to how farmers' markets, an innovation, diffused across the American landscape. Innovations diffuse if they are useful to adopters, and farmers' markets were of economic value to those cities and farmers who participated in the markets when they were introduced in the US. The fact that there has been a resurgence in farmers' markets suggests that they are once again useful to adopters. Theories of innovation diffusion suggest that farmers have always been leaders in innovations, usually in the context of technology, and this appears to be the case with the adoption of farmers' markets (Harper et al. 2002). Diffusion research indicates that innovations which are consistent with existing social norms and values diffuse most readily (Rogers 1995). Farmers' markets are consistent with the lifestyle and cultural values of farmers, and so diffusion theories can explain the rapid adoption of farmers' markets by vendors. Rogers' research on diffusion states that adoption of an innovation relies on opinion leaders adopting the innovation, social networks to promote the innovation, and a need for the innovation. Small farmers needed a market for their products, strong social networks exist among farmers that likely facilitated increased market participation, and many farmers' markets have wealthy, powerful vendors who are influential, informal leaders. Brown's (1981) work on diffusion suggests that agency promotion is necessary for diffusion and pricing can be a constraint to adoption. Extension agencies have been involved with the creation or promotion of many farmers' markets, including several markets in this study. The low cost of farmers' markets has encouraged vendors to participate, so pricing has been a factor in the adoption of farmers' markets. Therefore, theories of diffusion, particularly research by Rogers and Brown,

provide insight as to who vends at farmers' markets, why they vend, and the motivation behind their decisions.

Another issue crucial to understanding farmers' markets is an awareness of changing agricultural practices, specifically the industrialization of agriculture. The present agricultural economy in the US is one of large scale, corporate-owned agriculture (Halweil 2000). The cost of farming is high and profits from crops are low, and industrial agriculture is the most profitable due to the economics of scale (Schaeffer 1997). As the industrialization of agriculture enhanced the global exchange of food products, local food systems gave way to global food systems in some commodities (Friedland 1994). The shift in farming from small-scale, family farms to large-scale, industrial farming has led to significant consequences to rural communities. Many small farms were sold, foreclosed, or abandoned since the 1940s (Lobao et al. 1995). This caused the collapse of many businesses in rural communities that relied on agriculture. Farmers, who had relied on off-farm work to supplement their incomes, were unable to find jobs as businesses continued to close (Schaeffer 1997). Employment rates increased while wages plummeted, increasing poverty in some rural communities. The impacts of agricultural change are still apparent in rural communities, and the farmers' market could be a way to counteract the effects of industrial agriculture by making small scale farming profitable again. Research regarding the restructuring of agriculture and its impacts to farmers and rural communities sheds light on the structural reasons behind the resurgence in farmers' markets. By identifying the impacts of agricultural change on rural areas, researchers are better able to look at the impacts of farmers' markets. For example, to determine if farmers' markets are beneficial to a rural community, a researcher can see if

the market has led to decreased poverty, increased employment, and families maintaining ownership and control over their farms.

## CHAPTER 3

### STUDY SITE AND METHODS

Drawing on theories of innovation diffusion and concepts in agricultural and rural development, coupled with an understanding of farmers' market research and its shortcomings, I chose to research farmers' markets in the Southeast region of Ohio. The Athens Farmers' Market in Athens, Ohio was also selected as a case study. To understand the nature of farming in Athens, Ohio, and consequently the nature of the Athens Farmers' Market, it is imperative to look at the history of Athens County and the farmers' market's place in it. Exploring the history of Athens also provides insight into the economic history of the area, which explains the rurality and poverty that characterizes Athens County. In order to conduct an appropriate study and draw valid conclusions about farming and the rural economy, it is necessary to investigate the history of industry, agriculture, and the cultural heritage of Athens County. This chapter provides a brief history of Athens County, a history of the Athens Farmers' Market, and an explanation of the methods and data analysis used for this research.

### 3.1 A History of Athens County

The Athens area was settled in 1797 and Athens County was formally established in 1805. The county is located in Southeast Ohio and extends west from the Ohio River (see Figures 3.1 and 3.2 below). This part of the state is a hilly region that lies within the Appalachian mountain range, the only unglaciated part of Ohio.

*The Appalachian Region*



**Figure 3.1 The Appalachian Region**



**Figure 3.2 Appalachian Ohio Counties**

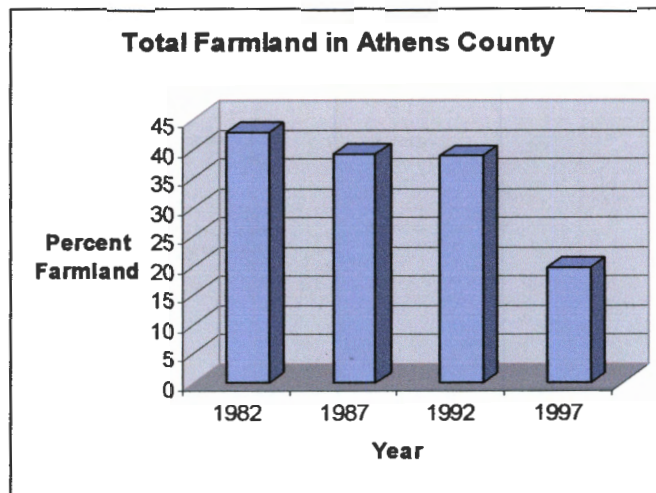
The map to the left illustrates "Appalachia" as defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission. The map on the right is a closer view of the Appalachian counties in Southeast Ohio. The source for both maps is the Appalachian Regional Commission (2002).

Athens County is rich in natural resources and the region's history reflects the boom-and-bust demand cycles for its products (Wikipedia 2004). From 1820-1870 the exportation of salt was a major industry in the county. After the Civil War more locations began

exporting salt and the Athens market suffered in the competitive market. The salt exportation industry in Athens eventually disappeared and with it many of the small towns that survived on the jobs and revenue of the salt industry (Athens County Ohio Genealogy and History 2004). Iron was the next major extractive industry in Athens County, followed shortly after by coal mining. During the height of these industrial periods, advancements in transportation were made to move goods into and out of Athens County. In 1873 the Hocking Canal was extended to Athens County. The waterway was used to ship salt, coal, wool, and lumber out of Athens, and bring finished goods, such as furniture, into the region. However, floods, frozen waters, and the expansion of the railroad brought an end to the use of the canal system by 1890. The Cincinnati and Marietta Railroad reached Athens in 1857 and became the primary transportation mode for coal, metal, iron ore, and agricultural items. The railroad was also a method of transportation for Athens County residents. Presently the only active railroad in the county is a scenic train system in Nelsonville that is primarily a tourist attraction (Wikipedia 2004). Athens County was a leader in the salt, iron, and coal industries, but each of these industries left the area when the resources were exhausted or market price fell. With a decline in these industries came a decline in the prosperity of the county, including economic decline and increased poverty, characteristic of Appalachian areas impacted by resource extraction (Nesbitt et al. 2001). Today only the extraction of coal continues in Athens, but it is mined on a small, limited scale compared to the levels of mining decades earlier (Athens County Ohio Genealogy and History 2004; Wikipedia 2004).

Embedded within the history of boom and bust extraction is a long-standing tradition of small-scale agriculture. Family farms have always been an integral part of the Southeast Ohio landscape. Sometimes, during boom periods of resource extraction, farmers would leave their farms to earn money in the mining or timber industries, but they always returned to farming when the extraction period ended (Effland 2002). Since this region of Ohio remained unglaciated, it fails to have the rich soils of the Northern or Central areas of the state. The hilly terrain, coupled with poor clay soils, has prevented large-scale agriculture from developing, but that does not mean the industrialization of agriculture did not impact Athens County (Athens Farmers' Market Directory 2003). With the restructuring of the farm economy and the global food trade, Athens was shut out of most mainstream agricultural markets and farming in the area decreased. As illustrated in Figure 3.3 below, between 1982 and 1992 the total percent of Athens County in farmland decreased steadily from 42.8% in 1982, to 38.7% in 1992, and then a large decline by 1997 to only 19.6% (OSU Extension Data Center 2000b).

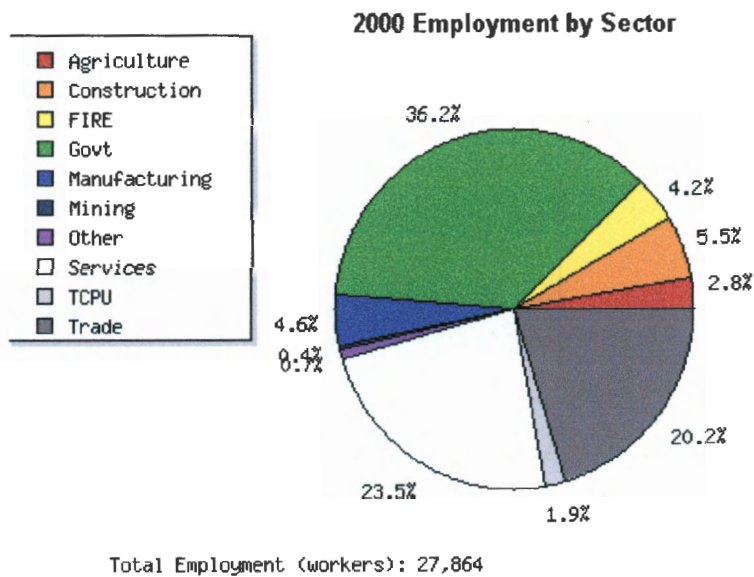
Despite this, the inexpensive cost of land and natural beauty of the area attract small-scale or family farmers and specialty producers. The production of organic produce in Athens is a growing business and Athens is known for its food economy. Such of these specialty items are only available at local stores, restaurants, or at the Athens Farmers' Market (Wikipedia 2004).



**Figure 3.3**

This graph illustrates the change in percent of land used as farmland in Athens County from 1982-1997. Source: National Resource Inventory.

Aside from its history of resource extraction and tradition of agriculture, Athens County is also a leader in education. Ohio University was the first university in the Northwest Territories, established in 1804, in the city of Athens. Athens, located near a bend in the Hocking River, is still home to Ohio University. According to the 2000 Census, the population of the City of Athens is 21,342, but most of these are students; Athens has only about 6,100 permanent residents. Most of the 62,223 who live in Athens County reside in the city of Athens, which is the site of the Athens Farmers' Market (US Census Bureau 2000). Of the two-thirds of the county that is rural, most earn at least some of their income from farming. As seen in Figure 3.4 below, about 2.8% of the county earns their income from agriculture (OSU Extension Data Center 2000b).



**Figure 3.4**

This pie chart shows the percent of the work force employed in various industries. The acronym FIRE stands for Finance, Insurance, Real Estate, TCPU represents Transportation, Communications, Public Utilities, Trade includes wholesale and retail trade. Source: Ohio State University Data Extension Center (2000a).

In most of these cases, however, farmers list their off-farm jobs as their primary source of income, so the data on the percent of the population farming is under-represented (Effland 2000). Of particular significance is the rurality of Athens' immediate environment. Insights of this study, therefore, hold the promise of shedding light on the dynamics of a rurally-located market—a distinction from previous urban-area studies.

Ohio University is one of the major employers in the area, and offers economic stability to the region by employing many people. In selecting the Athens Farmers' Market as a case study, I was concerned that a farmers' market in a college town might not be representative of a typical rural market. While Ohio University provides an

educated customer base of professors and administrators, students generally do not patronize the market. Furthermore, the longevity and reputation of the Athens Farmers' Market is what draws customers locally and from great distances. As a result, I feel that for all intents and purposes, this market is typical of a small-town rural market.

Despite the presence of Ohio University and its employment opportunities, the boom and bust of various extractive industries in Athens County has left the region depleted of its natural resources and economically depressed. As a result, Athens and its surrounding Southeast Ohio counties comprise some of the poorest counties in Ohio. In 2000, Athens was ranked as the 87<sup>th</sup> poorest county out of the 88 counties in Ohio, with an average income of \$28,735, compared to the state average of \$42,054 (OSU Extension Data Center 2000a). However, through the rise and fall of industry and poverty, farming in Athens and the Southeast Ohio region has persisted and is one of the last remaining economic activities in the area. Therefore, the Athens Farmers' Market, being located in a rural, impoverished county, is ideal for the purposes of this study.

### 3.2 A History of the Athens Farmers' Market

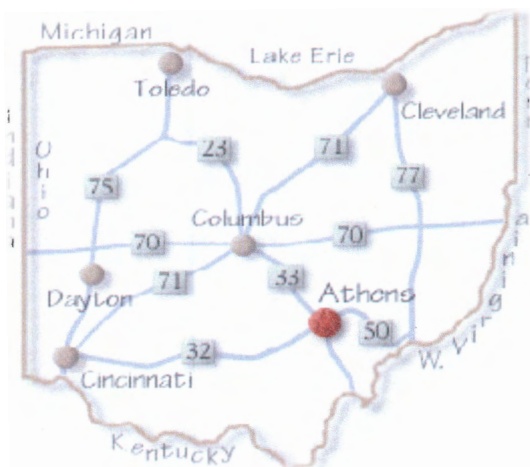
Historical landmarks suggest that farmers' markets were an integral part of the landscape in Southeast Ohio in the 1800s, but no mention of them exists again until 1970. In this year the Athens Farmers' Market was established, the same decade that witnessed the rebirth of farmers' markets across rural America. The Athens Farmers' Markets' origin was typical of independent markets, that is, there was local government support of the market, but no financial contributions or sponsorship. The following is a brief history of the Athens Farmers' Market that illustrates the creation and operation of the market.

This history reveals what the Athens community and farmers hoped to gain from the farmers' market. Changes in the market are identified, which offers insight into the changing needs of producers, consumers, or other interests. Also, studying the history of the market provides a better understanding of how and why the market exists as it does today.

In the early 1970s two Athens residents, Harold Dodd and John Millar, employees at the Soil and Water Conservation District Office, suggested that Athens (see Figure 3.5, a map of Ohio) needed a farmers' market. Two years later a few farmers began selling their produce from metered parking spaces in downtown Athens.

This created conflicts with licensed street vendors, so the farmers moved to a park and

recreation area on East State Street. The first market was held in the summer of 1972 on Saturday at 10 am. Three producers were present at the first market, five the next week, and twelve at the peak of the season (Athens Farmers Market Directory 2003).



**Figure 3.5 Ohio Map**

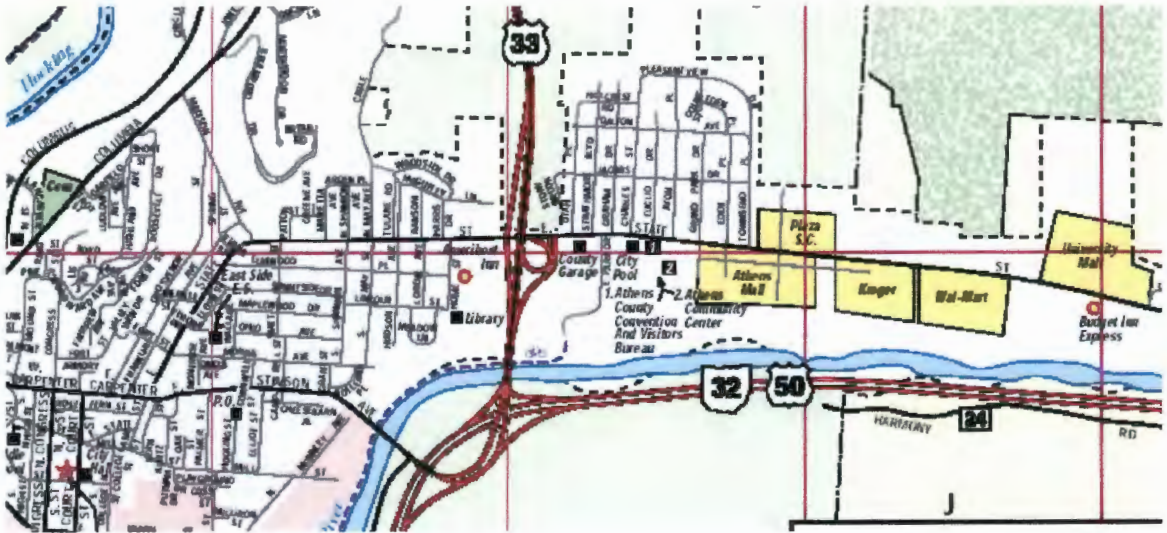
Map Source: Athens Ohio Chamber of Commerce (2003)

Mayor Donald Barrett and the market vendors wanted certain regulations on the market, specifically that it not be used for crafts and that only vending by producers be allowed. These principles were drafted into bylaws and remain the basis for market regulations today. Ed Rannow, a teacher and honey vendor, was chosen to be the first market manager. The market manager, an unpaid position, was responsible for collecting the vending fee of \$3 a day. In order to increase participation in the market that first year, the Agricultural Extension Office in Athens sent letters to local growers announcing the new market. In 1973 the market increased its days of operation to Wednesday and Saturday morning, April to Thanksgiving. The following year the price to vend increased to \$25 a season or \$5 a day, up to a \$25 maximum.

The Athens Farmers' Market grew in popularity over the years as it became more well-known in the community and more popular among farmers. The construction of the Athens Mall, Kroger, and a highway bypass increased traffic along East State Street and brought new customers. The variety of products available at the market expanded to include baked goods, eggs, and cut flowers. Some vendors drove over two hours to sell their products at the farmers' market, as there were no restrictions on who could vend at the market, as long as they produced their own food products. In 1982 the market moved 100 feet to a paved parking lot and used 32 parking spaces as vending stalls. By the mid-1990s these 32 spaces had expanded to accommodate 50 vendors during July to August. Poultry, smoked meats, and prepared foods appeared at the market in addition to existing items and were drawing hundreds of customers. Attempts were made to include Monday and Tuesday sales, but these efforts were without success. The media coverage of the

Wednesday and Saturday markets aided in the growth and success of the market, as did word-of-mouth advertising.

In 1995, the City of Athens proposed a long-term plan to build a shelter for the farmers' market, but the plans were never finalized. This did not slow the expansion of the market, however, and during that year the market began accepting Women, Infant, and Children Coupons, and expanded to year-round sales. The construction of a city park forced the Athens Farmers' Market to relocate in 1998 to the parking lot of the University Mall (see Figure 3.6). The new location, provided at no cost to the market, was a higher traffic location with room for the 80 stalls presently in use. There is currently a three-year waiting list for a permanent stall at the market; those without a permanent stall can vend at the market, but their location is rotated and not guaranteed from season to season. In 2002, the Saturday Market Café opened, preparing food such as sausage, omelets, and hamburgers, all made from ingredients available from vendors present at the market. Local community organizations, such as ACEnet and Rural Action, sponsored the café in order to promote the local food economy (Athens Farmers Market Directory 2003).



**Figure 3.6 Athens City Map**

This is a partial map of Athens County. Downtown Athens is denoted by a star in the lower left corner of the map. East State Street is located in the center of the map running horizontally. The Athens Mall is highlighted in yellow, the first site of the Athens Farmers' Market, and to the far right is the University Mall, present home of the Athens Farmers' Market. Source: Athens County Chamber of Commerce.

Over the past two or three decades, new market managers and market presidents were elected to operate the facility. The market manager is still responsible for collecting vending fees, directing traffic, answering questions, and ringing the 10 am bell to indicate the start of the market. In 1993, the market manager became a compensated position at \$25 per week, and in 1995 this was raised to \$50 per week. The cost of a vending stall at the market has also increased. In 1995 the daily fee was \$10, or \$50 annually, and in 2000 the price rose to \$60 per year, bringing in a total revenue of \$6,000 per year. In 2001 the price rose again to the present cost of \$80 for 1 stall, \$130 for 1.5 stalls, or \$200 for 2 stalls. These fees are very low when compared to the cost of stalls at other area markets.

The responsibilities of the market president include running the annual spring meeting and the fall potluck dinner, and tending to the business aspects of the market. Such business activities include formally establishing the Athens Farmers' Market as a not-for-profit organization covered by Workers Compensation and liability insurance. In 2002, the market filed for trade status 501(c)6 with the Internal Revenue Service, thereby removing all tax obligations for the market to pay taxes on the stall fees collected or market director income. Later that year the market opened a savings account reserved for future property purchases, the construction of a shelter, or other purchases to be decided by the market members (Athens Farmers Market Directory 2003).

The Athens Farmers' Market is in its fourth decade and shows no signs of slowing down. Each year approximately 100 producers from the Southeast Ohio region vend at the market over the course of eight months. The market attracts tourists from urban and surrounding areas and continues to expand. Beginning in April 2004 the market will expand its sales to a Sunday "Taste of the Market" on Court Street in downtown Athens. The market, which will operate until November, is aimed at encouraging students and downtown residents to attend the Saturday and Wednesday market. The number of vendors, customers, new marketing days, and increasing attractions at the market indicate that the Athens Farmers' Market is a successful and important part of the Athens landscape. The purpose of the market, which attempts to remain faithful to the needs of local producers and consumers, is as follows:

The Athens Farmers' Market shall operate on a not-for-profit basis. It shall serve its members and the public through education on the benefits to the community that result from supporting a locally based food economy and by providing a public market allowing direct connections between producers and consumers of local food and agriculturally products (Athens Farmers Market Directory 2003).

### 3.3 Methods

In order to answer this study's research questions and meet the objectives, I conducted an ethnographic study of the Athens Farmers' Market and, for comparison, other farmers' markets in the region. An ethnographic study, which employs participant observation and focuses on intensive study of a population within a natural setting, was the best-suited method of research (Limb et al. 2001; Johnston et al. 2000). This method allowed for in-depth qualitative research exploring the culture of the market and observing interactions among the economic, cultural, and social dimensions of the market. The ethnographic method allowed for this research at an individual level, and this small-scale approach was necessary to answer many research questions, particularly tracing the money spent at farmers' markets and witnessing social interactions. Also, there are no existing ethnographic studies of rural farmers' markets. Most studies have relied on data collected from surveys and questionnaires. A more in-depth research method is required to answer the remaining questions regarding farmers' markets, and the ethnographic method was the most appropriate for this study.

Throughout the course of my research I visited eight farmers' markets in the Southeast Ohio region. By visiting multiple markets I was able to get general sense of what a rural farmers' market in Southeast Ohio were like, and determine if the Athens

Farmers' Market was typical or an anomaly. The markets I visited varied in type and structure and included Lancaster Farmers' Market, Hocking Hills Farmers' and Flea Market, Zanesville Farmers' and Flea Market, Logan Farmers' Market, Morgan County Farmers' Market at McConnelsville, Ross County Farmers' Market in Chillicothe, Riverside Farmers' Market in Marietta, and Athens Farmers' Market. A few of the markets were producer-only, but many were also flea markets where books, toys, and miscellaneous items were available for purchase. The farmers' markets varied in number of vendors, ranging from 2 to 66. The locations of the markets were distinct, some indoors, outdoors, at fairgrounds, in parking lots, or in grass fields. Each market had its own unique style; for example, some markets were formal with vendors never leaving their stands and selling only after a signal was given by the market director to indicate the start of the market, others were casual with vendors sitting in their cars, smoking, or talking among each other. Of the producer only markets, the Athens Farmers' Market is the oldest and most renowned in the area. I chose the Athens Farmers' Market as a case study for my research, visiting the market eight times over four months between June and September 2003 and once in December. The following methods were employed during these visits.

#### Formal and Informal Interviews

During my visits to the market I conducted 46 informal, semi-structured interviews with vendors. These key informants enhanced my understanding of the dynamics of the Farmers' Market and I used the insight gained from these conversations to design interview questions. Between November and December 2003 I used these

questions to formally interview 13 Athens Farmers' Market vendors and tape-recorded our conversations. I asked all the people I spoke with about their motivation for participating in the market, relationships with tourists, and places they shopped for goods or services (see Appendix Table 2). Their responses helped answer the research questions I set forth in this study.

### Participant Observation

Other research of the market was conducted as a participant observer, and the interactions and relationships I developed with the vendors through this method helped obtain considerable information through informal chats. By walking through the market and making purchases vendors were more likely to talk to me, were less suspicious of my note taking, and conducted business transactions in my presence. In this way I was able to observe bartering activity and social interactions among vendors first-hand. I also spoke to small business owners at the market to gather information on the successes and failures of small businesses started at the market.

In addition to the information I was able to obtain through participatory research, the ethnographic approach to this study also provided a great deal of information. By immersing myself in the activities of the market I learned general market information. Each visit took about two or three hours, and I spent this time walking around, taking notes on product types, unique or new products, and the addresses of the farms owned by the vendors. During the months of my research I observed between 51 and 66 vendors at the market on any given week, and was told that number lowers to around 10 in the winter months (see Appendix Figure 1). Through this ethnographic research I also

observed the social and cultural dynamic of the Athens Farmers' Market, aiding in answering my research questions. During three market visits the Saturday Market Café was open and serving vendors and customers with foods from farmers at the market. There was often live music by a fiddler or banjo player and a picnic table with coloring books for children. Free flowers were handed out to young children and samples of pastries and produce were available upon request. Through participating in and observing the Athens Farmers' Market I was able to understand the social networks and culture of the region that cannot be obtained through structured interviews.

#### Non-Market Site Visits

Finally, to complete my research I toured the farms of two vendors, an organic produce farmer and a buffalo farmer. I also visited an owner-operated restaurant that vends at the market. In each case, the farmer took between two and five hours to show me their operation, ask questions, and take pictures.

### 3.4 Data Analysis, Interpretation, and Dissemination of Research

In order to interpret the data collected over the four months of fieldwork in 2003, I had to categorize and analyze the information I gathered. First, I transcribed the tape-recorded interviews with the market vendors. I typed and organized my field notes for all the visits to the Athens Farmers' Market as well as the other seven markets, and typed my notes from the informal conversations I had with the vendors.

After transcribing my field notes I proceeded to search these documents for themes, using standard qualitative research techniques. I identified three primary themes:

economic activities, cultural activities/expressions, and social interactions/networks. Using latent content analysis—that is, determining underlying meanings for what was said—I coded each site observation or interview question response as economic, social, or cultural (Hay 2000; Limb et al. 2001). After placing each piece of data into its appropriate category, I revisited the farmers’ market literature. I identified and constructed lists of every economic finding by past researchers, every social finding, and every cultural finding. I then compared my three findings lists with those I made from previous researchers’ findings. Through this data analysis I created subcategories for each of the three main research categories based on similar findings between my research and previous market studies, and findings unique to my research. At this time I also turned to the 1997 Census of Agriculture to gather and interpret information regarding area poverty rates, income from direct marketing, average income, and general farming statistics for Athens County, various Southeast Ohio counties, and the state of Ohio to be used in conjunction with the farmers’ market literature for data interpretation.

In November of 2003 I was asked by the Athens Agricultural Extension Agent to present my preliminary research findings before the market members at the annual Fall Potluck Dinner. I agreed and in a 30 minute presentation offered a brief literature review of farmers’ market research and then compared and contrasted the Athens Farmers’ Market to the conclusions academics have drawn about farmers’ markets. The market members’ response was overwhelmingly positive. For one hour after the presentation, the vendors verified many of my findings, identified oversights in my research, offered additional information, and encouraged me to continue my research. Through this

presentation my research gained focus, I obtained valuable feedback, and many of my preliminary conclusions were validated by my research subjects.

Similar to my presentation at the Athens Farmers' Market annual meeting, I presented my research findings in March 2004 at the American Association of Geographers Annual Conference in the Rural Geography Specialty Group section. Here I met Dr. Bruce Scholten of the University of Durham in England, a researcher of farmers' markets in Washington State. We discussed the conclusions of my research and Dr. Scholten agreed that many of the farmers' markets in Washington exhibited similar economic, cultural, and social characteristics as in the Athens Farmers' Market (personal communication). Again, the results of my research were validated, this time by an academic.

### 3.5 Problems and Limitations of the Study

As previously mentioned, Athens is the home of Ohio University, a dominant employer and source of economic stability for the county. In addition to this, Ohio University provides an educated population of professors and students to patronize the market. In fact, many of the vendors at the Athens Farmers' Market are former Ohio University professors. For these reasons the Athens Farmers' Market might not be exemplary of a typical rural farmers' market. However, the early morning hours of the market tend to discourage student customers. International students are attracted to the market, but many do not have the means to travel there. Also, if the market were drawing heavily on student and faculty clientele, there would not have been the need to establish a Sunday market in downtown Athens to attract campus-dwelling students. Athens is a

larger city than most in the area, and the presence of Ohio University does provide economic benefits to the city; however, much of Athens County is removed from the City of Athens by distance and economic independence. Athens County is very rural, and although Athens is a developed city, the rural economy and culture remains like that of the entire Southeast Ohio region. I believe that much of the information gathered about the Athens Farmers' Market is applicable to many rural areas throughout Appalachia and across the nation.

Secondly, there is a possibility that this study is biased toward the opinions and activities of the more educated market vendor. Many vendors, usually those who appeared to be of lower income and had less education, were suspicious of me and my research, often asking me if I was with the Federal Bureau of Investigation. These vendors grew to trust me over time, however, talking to me and answering my questions, but the information I gathered from them was limited and not very detailed. For instance, some vendors refused to tell me their income, other jobs they had, or family information. Other farmers, many who had bachelors or had graduate degrees, were more forthcoming with information. These farmers also tended to be those with larger farms, organic certification or chemical-free farms, and were full-time growers. While I was able to gather at least some data from all types of farmers, most of my information comes from the farmers who were more willing to talk with me. I estimate only five to seven vendors refused to provide me with information, a small percent relative to the number of vendors present at the market over the four month research period. This is a small number, but it must be acknowledged that this population of farmers is not completely represented in this research.

There are also several potential limitations to this study. One objective of this research was to examine the role of farmers' markets in rural economies, and consequently this study only addresses rural area farmers' markets. The Athens Farmers' Market, while rural, is also well established in the community. Many of the findings in this market might not be applicable to young, newly created markets, though it must be remembered that the Athens Market was at one time a new market. This study is an illustration of how one rural market has developed and how this market impacts the area. Additionally, this research addresses producer-only farmers' markets. While several farmer and flea markets were visited, the Athens Farmers' Market was the primary case study and is a producer-only market. The sale of crafts changes the form and dynamic of a market and it would not be appropriate to compare a producer-only market to a market of another kind. Despite these limitations, this study provides valuable insight to rural, producer-only farmers' markets.

### 3.6 Results

The data gathered throughout this study are presented in chapters four and five of the thesis. Chapter four outlines economic data regarding the Athens Farmers' Markets, including farmers' income, participation in farmers' markets, and the impacts of the Athens Farmers' Market on the local economy. Chapter five consists of data regarding the cultural of farmers' markets, social networks and their function, and issues of politics and conflict at the market. Finally, chapter six summarizes the data and outlines the conclusions of this research. The chapter also addresses the implications of the results of this study to farmers, rural communities, and the future of farmers' markets.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS I: ECONOMIC DYNAMICS AT FARMERS MARKETS

The data from this study show that there are primarily seven ways in which the Athens Farmers' Market provides economic benefits to Athens and its surrounding communities. These economic aspects of the market benefit the farmers participating at the market, consumers, and the local economy. The economic benefits are inter-related, but described separately in the results. The economic benefits of farmers' markets in Southeast Ohio include a) increased farm income, b) increased sales tax revenue and local spending, c) bartering, d) employment opportunities, e) diversifying agriculture, f) diversifying income, and g) business incubator.

#### 4.1 Income

Interviews with vendors and secondary data were helpful in determining the income range of farmers who sell their products at the Athens Farmers' Market. In general, the market represented a primary or supplementary income source for vendors. At the Athens Farmers' Markets most farmers either relied on the market as a sole source of income, or as a fifty percent contributor to the household income. Most of the seven vendors reporting their income from the Athens Farmers' Market placed their earnings

between \$20,000 and \$28,000 per year. For example, a meat and fruit vendor stated her annual income was approximately \$22,000 a year, about half of which was earned through her participation in the Athens Farmers' Market and Morgan County Farmers' Market at McConnelsville. Another vendor stated that her income fluctuates from year to year:

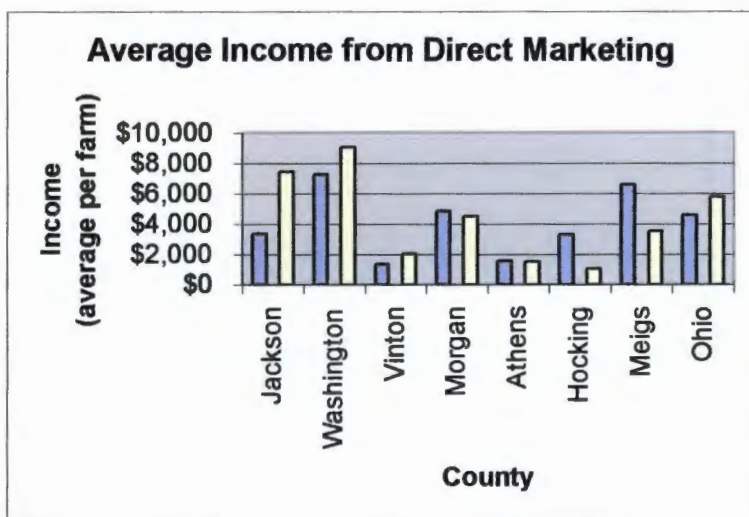
Some years it is so bad my income is about \$12,000, and other years when everything goes right and everyone participates and everything goes as it should, then I can make \$20-24,000. So it just all depends—on Mother Nature mostly (Vendor E, December 18, 2003, Phone Interview).

Meat vendors tend to earn a slightly higher income than produce farmers. A buffalo farmer at the market earns \$1,200 per buffalo. Each year he slaughters about 24 buffalo, for an average income of \$27,600, half of which is earned through sales at farmers' markets. The very small vendors with limited products and the very large, certified organic vendors either refused to divulge their income or were not interviewed, so these income descriptions apply to the middle-sized vendor.

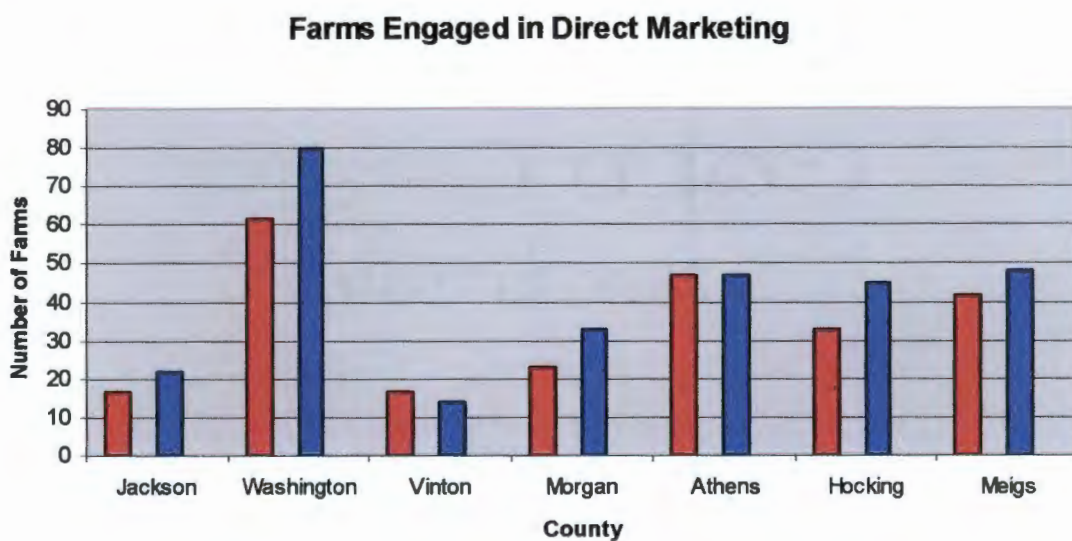
To determine how Athens Farmers' Market vendors compare to vendors in other counties and statewide, it is necessary to refer to the 1997 Census of Agriculture. These data indicate that there are a growing number of farms engaging in direct marketing, which in some counties accounts for a growing share of total income. Beginning in 1992, the Census of Agriculture asked farmers about their participation and income generation from direct marketing, including farmers' market sales, roadside stands, or other producer-to-customer sales. Between 1992 and 1997, Athens County reported 47 farmers participating in direct marketing, earning \$1,563 per farm in 1992 and \$1,534 in 1997

(see Figures 4.1, 4.2). Neighboring Hocking County had an increase in the number of farms engaging in direct marketing, from 33 in 1992 to 45 in 1997; however, the average revenue per farm in Hocking County declined from 1992 to 1997. This increase in the number of farms participating in direct marketing, but decrease in profits, was also found in nearby Meigs County and Morgan County (refer to Figure 3.2 for county locations). The decrease in income could be the result of poor growing conditions in 1997, poor weather affecting customer purchases, or an under-reporting of earnings. However, the increase in the number of farms marketing directly to customers suggests there were economic benefits to the farmers.

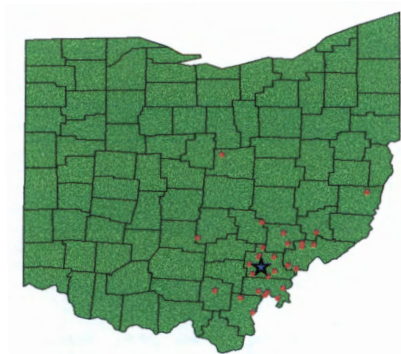
Some counties saw an increase in farmer participation in direct marketing and an increase in per farm sales earnings. Jackson County had 17 farms directly marketing in 1992, earning an average of \$3,353 per farm, and in 1997, 22 farms earned an average of \$7,453. Washington County average sales increased from \$7,259 to \$9,042 in 1997 while the number of farms participating rose from 62 to 80. Vinton County had 3 fewer farms engaging in direct marketing in 1997 than in 1992, but in 1997 the average earnings per farm rose to \$2,066 from \$1,334 (USDA 1997). It must be said, also, that all of these counties are in the Southeast Ohio region, and farmers in one county might be vendors in any number of farmers markets or other direct marketing venues; therefore, farmers in Vinton County might be vendors at the Athens Farmers' Market. In fact, this is highly likely because Vinton County, and other Southeast Ohio counties, do not even have farmers markets and are in an extremely rural area where roadside stands or other direct marketing outlets would probably be unsuccessful.



**Figure 4.1**



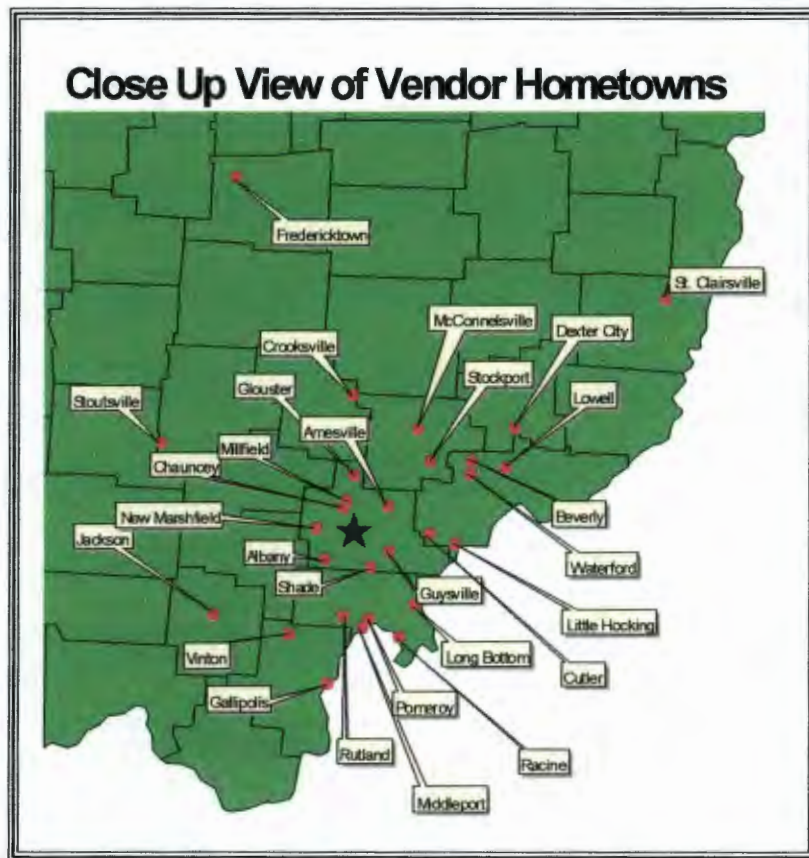
**Figure 4.2**



**Figure 4.3: Athens Farmers' Market Vendor Map**

This map shows the general area from which the Athens Farmers' Market draws vendors. Figure 4.4 is a more detailed map of this data.

The Athens Farmers' Market attracts vendors from all over Southeast Ohio. Many vendors say the reputation of the market as a busy and fun place to sell is what entices them to vend in Athens. Most Athens Farmers' Market vendors are from Athens County or surrounding counties, particularly Albany, Amesville, Crooksville and Millfield; however, some people travel from as far as Fredericktown and St. Clairsville. As seen in Figure 4.4, a map identifying the cities where many Athens vendors come from, the Athens Farmers' Market has a large radius of influence.



**Figure 4.4**

This map identifies the hometowns of Athens Farmers' Market vendors. The blue star denotes Athens, Ohio, home to many vendors and the market itself. Note: The cities of Beaumont and Pratts Fork are not illustrated on this map and are hometowns of several vendors.

When comparing the amount of income generated from the Athens Farmers' Market with the data presented in the 1997 Census of Agriculture data, vendors at the Athens Farmers' Market appear to earn a great deal more money than most direct marketers. The vendors in the Athens Farmers' Market are reporting incomes in the

\$20,000s, with all or half from farmers' markets. This means that Athens Farmers' Market vendors are earning between \$10,000 and \$20,000 from direct marketing. Therefore, this market is a very successful direct marketing venue where vendors can earn more than the county averages for direct marketing. In fact, the average per farm income from direct marketing in the state of Ohio is \$5,787, and vendors at the Athens Farmers' Market appear to exceed those sales. Therefore, the per farm income generated by the Athens Farmers' Market is greater than the state average per farm direct marketing revenue. It is apparent that the Athens Farmers' Market is increasing the household income of these vendors through agricultural sales, and is increasing it beyond the average range of direct marketing earnings for Ohio.

#### 4.2 Sales Tax and Local Spending

A significant way in which the Athens Farmers' Market contributes to the local economy is through sales tax. Many vendors charge sales tax on their non-food items, thereby contributing to the local tax base. Approximately 30% of produce vendors at the Athens Farmers' Market also accept Women, Infants, and Children food stamp coupons, called WICs, which brings federal dollars into the local economy while providing lower income families with fresh, healthy food products. Once at the farmers' market, many people choose to complete their errands at shops nearby the Athens Farmers' Market. Initially, the University Mall, who allowed the market to use their parking lot at no charge, was concerned that the placement of the farmers' market might impede business (Athens Farmers Market Directory 2003). Now, after six years in this location, the University Mall is a strong supporter of the market. Many employees of the mall shop at

the market, traffic near the mall increases on Saturday mornings during market hours, and the mall now provides the farmers' market with a custodian to help with the cleanup after-hours.

Data also provide evidence that money spent at the market remains in the community. An informal study conducted by the Athens Farmers' Market Director determined that during peak seasons (June to August) customers spent an average of \$60,000 per month at the market. Regardless of the exactness of this number, a large sum of money flows through the farmers' market, witnessed by the fact that a majority of the farmers' I spoke to said they make a week's worth of income during the two-hour Saturday market. Much of the money earned by these vendors is spent locally: at the Athens Farmers' Market itself, in local businesses, or used to buy supplies from neighbors. For example, many vendors do at least some of their grocery shopping at the market, turning over the money they just earned to other local producers. A majority of vendors buy their daily farming supplies locally, often from neighboring farmers. For example, a buffalo farmer, whose buffalo meat sales at the farmers' market constitute 50% of his total agricultural income, buys all the corn and hay feed for his livestock locally from neighboring farmers. A beef and lamb farmer purchases hay for her livestock from a neighbor as well. A chemical-free farmer, who also earns 25% of his income at Athens Farmers' Market and 25% at the nearby Logan Farmers' Market, buys his organic fertilizer and plants from a fellow market vendor. A flower vendor buys new plants from local greenhouses, friends, and neighbors. Almost all the produce or meat farmers at the market told me that they purchase a large portion of their daily supplies at White's Mill, a locally owned store, while others go to nearby Lancaster for their needs.

There are some exceptions to buying local, the most widespread being the purchasing of seed. Every produce farmer interviewed stated they purchase at least some of their seeds from mail-order catalogs in order to have a diverse and more unique selection of food items, particularly lettuce varieties. Farmers agree that variety is one of the best ways to attract and maintain customers, so every effort is made to increase their produce selection. Despite seed orders, vendors at the market do a majority of their shopping locally, keeping money spent by local citizens or tourists at the farmers' market circulating and strengthening the local economy.

#### 4.3 Bartering

Aside from cash income, bartering is a major, under-recognized, component of the Athens Farmers' Market. Bartering is conducted informally, usually at the end of the market, when vendors gather excess produce, eggs, or similar items and approach other vendors for exchange. Some vendors have pre-existing weekly barter arrangements with each other, but most exchange is impulsive and based on what goods are available for trade. One vendor sells free-range, organic chickens and eggs, and has a standing exchange with another vendor for orchard fruits, lamb, and beef. Outside of this trading, the same man approaches other vendors with his eggs and barter for the food items he desires that week, often greens, salsa, bread, or fruits. Another vendor says she trades soap for canned goods, such as jellies and preserves, or greens "quite a bit." There appears to be a greater volume of exchange among produce and egg vendors than meat (pork, beef, buffalo, duck, rabbit, and lamb) vendors. This is likely attributed to the higher cost of meat products. Vendors tend to trade items that are close in value to the

products they are offering. For example, a head of lettuce is similar in value to a loaf of bread, so this trade is fairly common, but trading lettuce for a pound of meat requires a greater volume of produce for an equal exchange, and vendors tend to avoid such transactions. Though these exchanges are rare, they do occur occasionally, for example, a buffalo farmer traded his meat for eggs when approached by another vendor.

Vendors at the Athens Farmers' Market may also engage in secondary barter, that is, trading for items they do not need, but know are in demand and can be traded for other products they want. The egg vendor states he will trade his eggs for fruits if he believes he can further trade those fruits for lettuce or other vegetables, or any other produce he wants. A plant vendor stated she trades perennials with vendors from several other farmers' markets and greenhouses in order to have a large, diverse selection for her customers. Overall, the same few people, primarily the organic egg and chicken farmer, initiate most of the bartering at the Athens Farmers' Market, although most vendors state they are happy to trade when approached. One produce farmer, when asked if he traded at the market, stated he trades a little, but rarely initiates the exchanges. His answer exemplifies the often highly informal nature of barter dynamics. The farmer explained:

Well, I guess I'd have to say that almost all the trades we do are initiated by other people. We do very little initiating of trade. Maybe I need to think about that. It usually happens at the end of the market. For example, Crumbs Bakery often will come around with some loaves of bread. They'll say, "Do you want some bread?" and we'll say, "Sure help yourself," and they'll take a bunch of stuff. But, yeah, it's mostly initiated by other people. We're very happy to do it, I don't know, I just don't...I need to think about it, why I don't initiate more (Vendor F, December 22, 2003, Phone Interview).

Vendors barter for more than just personal food items at the market. Some vendors agree to labor trade during a particularly busy harvest or planting time. One vendor, an orchard owner who earns her entire gross income of \$22,000 from two farmers' markets and on-farm sales, trades farm equipment with her neighbor. Neither vendor could afford to purchase or repair the machines they needed, but by sharing each others' equipment the farmers have all the technology they need. A vendor at the Lancaster Farmers' Market trades produce orders for used construction supplies to build greenhouses. He has traded vegetables for plywood and plastic, and has built two greenhouses for himself almost completely out of recycled materials.

The bartering economy of the farmers' market also extends beyond the vendors' circle, facilitating trade outside the market. Customers who enjoy a particular farmer's produce might approach a vendor to trade services for food items. For example, a chemical-free produce farmer was able to exchange produce for anniversary portraits of himself and his wife taken by a client. The same farmer was approached by his alternative medicine doctor who also expressed interest in exchanging his services for produce. This farmer stated he believed the amount of bartering at the market was growing and he wished to become more involved in this aspect of market exchange.

The role of bartering at the Athens Farmers' Market is extensive, and bartering is present at many of the other markets throughout Southeast Ohio. Farmers rely on their ability to trade for more than food products, including labor and supplies. The farmers' market puts vendors in contact with individuals who have an interest in product or service exchange, individuals the vendor may not have had access to through means other than direct marketing. Bartering is a benefit farmers' receive through their involvement in the

market that is not captured in monetary sales figures, but can be substantial in terms of helping people get by. The prevalence of this aspect of the “informal economy” in Southeast Ohio markets suggests that one of the key values of farmers’ markets.

#### 4.4 Tourism

The Athens Farmers’ Market is a tourist attraction, regularly drawing customers from Columbus, Ohio and Parkersburg, West Virginia, two hours and one hour away, respectively. In any given week I estimate between 25% and 50% of market customers are from outside the Athens area. The Athens Farmers’ Market is attractive to tourists because of the many events taking place, including the café, children’s activities, free flowers for children, food samples, a banjo player, and a fiddler. Market vendors advertise and market toward tourists, trying to increase their sales and attempting to attract tourists to their farms. On-farm sales and other outdoor activities are a major potential source of income, and vendors believe once tourists visit their farm, they will develop a regular clientele for on-farm and produce sales. For example, one vendor offers fishing and primitive camping at her farm, and passes out fliers at the market advertising these activities to local people and tourists from cities. “We are selling the down-on-the-farm experience” she states. Sales from farmers’ markets, fishing, and camping are the sole source of her family’s income, which ranges from a gross of \$12,000 to \$24,000 a year, depending on her produce harvest and the number tourists visiting her farm. She places ads in visitor’s guides and county brochures trying to attract customers to her greenhouse and outdoor activities. This vendors’ farm was also the site of a reenactment of the Civil War battle known as Morgan’s Raid. She explained that the

market offered a great way to get people to her farm and to advertise her camping and fishing. She passed out free fishing passes and hopes some of the 2,000 people that attended the reenactment will visit her farm this summer.

Another example of the benefits of tourism is a local worker-owned restaurant that vends at the farmers' market; tourism at the market increases their vending sales, but also draws customers to the restaurant downtown. The ability of the farmers' market to attract tourists benefits the vendors with increased sales, promotes other recreational activities on vendors' farms, and increases spending at local shops and restaurants. The market is also used by vendors to attract tourists to local events and activities. Signs advertising high school benefit auctions, prom fundraising, or local festivals are commonplace at the market. While this study did not count the number of tourists or interview tourists themselves, it is apparent that vendors believe tourists provide a large source of their income and specifically target this group of customers.

#### 4.5 Employment

Farmers' markets keep farms working and can enhance their profitability, enabling farmers to hire laborers, market vendors, or employees to run the on-farm store. An orchard owner who sells at the Athens Farmers' Market pays several employees to vend at Riverside Farmers' Market in Marietta and the Zanesville Farmers' Market, which are open during the same Saturday hours as Athens Farmers' Market. A plant and produce vendor employs her brother-in-law, sister-in-law, and niece to sell for her at other farmers' markets and help her with the harvest. The free-range, organic egg producer, who earns an estimated 50% of his annual income at the market, hires up to ten

employees during the year, depending on how much labor trade he can obtain. That is, this vendor will offer to help other vendors with their farm chores, such as pruning, harvesting, or planting, in exchange for them helping him with his farm work; however, if no other vendors are willing to participate in this labor trade, the egg vendor will hire workers. Several other vendors hire family or friends to help harvest or sell products, though orchard owners tend to hire the most help. Most produce vendors have one or two people selling at their stalls, but orchard owners often have up to five people working one booth in order to serve the number of customers at the market. Farmers in Athens and the surrounding areas tend to be family owned operations, but it is fairly common practice to hire additional family members, friends, or other workers during busy farm seasons. By keeping farming profitable the Athens Farmers' Market keeps farm owners employed in agriculture and helps to provide jobs to other community members. The number of job opportunities often depends on the harvest; a large harvest requires more labor and will lead to greater profits to pay for hired help. Additional employees might be needed during particularly busy days at the farmers' market. Most vendor stalls have one or two workers, with fruit vendors having an average of four or five people selling to customers. An estimate of the number of employment opportunities created by vendors at the Athens Farmers' Market, either to sell at other markets, on the farm, or for labor, ranges from 30-50 individuals, again depending on the size of the harvest, time of year, and other farming variables.

## 4.6 Diversifying Agriculture

Interactions among vendors at the farmers' market facilitate an increase in the variety of agricultural products present at the Athens Farmers' Market. Farmers diversify their agricultural products to increase their sales profits and to compete with other farmers for new items that will attract the most customers. For example, an orchard owner has decided to plant a pumpkin patch for the next season after seeing the premium price pumpkins fetched this past autumn at the market. Organic dog biscuits, a non-traditional agricultural product, were introduced for sale at the Athens Farmers' Market two years ago, and now five vendors at the market sell the same product. A flower vendor trades or buys the most unique perennials she can find, plants them in her garden, and sells cuttings of the plants at the market. She claims her water lilies draw in customers because they are one-of-a-kind items at the market. While at the Athens Farmers' Market I counted over 200 different items for sale (for a complete list see Appendix Table 3). Competition for customers at the Athens Farmers' Market leads to the appearance of new agricultural products at the market and on the farms in the Southeast Ohio region.

Some vendors develop ideas for new agricultural products unlike any other products at the farmers' market. In 2003 a flower vendor decided to use the pond on her farm to raise shrimp for sale at the market. Seafood at a Southeast Ohio Farmers' Market was a unique idea and became very successful. Upon witnessing the success of this flower and shrimp vendor, another vendor is looking into selling fish from her ponds at the market in 2005.

Requests for specific produce items can also increase agricultural diversity in Athens area farms. If a customer asks a vendor if they have a certain food item, and the vendor does not, it is commonplace for the vendor to purchase seeds and grow the item the following year. Occasionally, international students from Ohio University will give vendors seeds for produce items native to their homelands, such as China or Korea, and the farmer will grow the product for them. For example, one vendor grew loofah in 2003 upon the request of a customer. Pepper and melon varieties from overseas have also been introduced to Southeast Ohio farmers and now appear at the market, a clear example of innovation diffusion. In this way farmers gain a new, interesting product to sell and customers can purchase a food item unavailable in mainstream grocery stores.

Finally, participating in the Athens Farmers' Market exposes farmers to new ways of marketing or adding value to their products. At the beginning of June, for example, two farmers sold pre-packaged bags of mixed salad greens. This item sold well and by the end of August at least six vendors were selling packaged salad mixes. Similarly, when certified organic farmers posted signs announcing their organic status and the benefits of eating organic foods, many other vendors placed signs stating their foods were pesticide or chemical free. While the presence of certified organic farmers did not cause other farmers to stop using chemicals on their produce—most were already chemical free—the chemical free farmers learned how to market their food in order to compete with organic producers. The competition for customers and sales leads to value-adding and competitive marketing at the farmers market, in addition to the development of new agricultural products.

#### 4.7 Diversifying Income

In addition to diversifying agricultural production, vending at the Athens Farmers' Market leads to more diverse income sources for farmers. Many vendors at the Athens Farmers' Market are hobby or part-time farmers who use their market sales as a supplementary income source. For example, a retired art teacher sells flowers at the market to supplement her fixed income; a young couple started vending in the summer of 2003 to increase their income after the birth of their daughter; and a woman who is on disability sells dog biscuits to increase her income until she can work again. One flower vendor said that since the economy has been poor there have been more vendors than usual at the market as people are trying to earn extra money.

The Athens Farmers' Market is a good cash source for those who wish to supplement their off-farm income, but it is also useful for full-time farmers as a supplement to their agricultural income. Full-time farmers often diversify their agricultural income sources through vending at multiple farmers' markets, roadside stands, u-pick sales, or wholesaling. While farmers' markets are a common outlet for farmers who do not grow enough volume to make wholesaling profitable, most Athens Farmers' Market vendors grow enough produce to market to this outlet. Nearly half the Athens Farmers' Market vendors earn some portion of their income from wholesaling. A large number of market vendors earn fifty percent of their income from farmers' markets and fifty percent from wholesaling. Even though volume and opportunity do not inhibit wholesaling, farmers' market vendors in Athens prefer direct marketing their products to eliminate the costly middleman and retain more profits. A produce vendor estimates he makes 10 to 15 times more money selling retail than he would if he sold wholesale.

Another vendor who just started vending at farmers' markets said, "I'd like to get more into wholesaling, but we're selling good at these farmers' markets. If I can get rid of my stuff without paying for a middle-man, I'd rather do that" (Vendor G, December 22, 2003, Beverly, Ohio). For those that do diversify their income by mixing farmers' market and wholesaling, they often do so to decrease risk and increase profitability. A farmer does not run the risk of losing his/her farm because of a slow sales week at the farmers' market, he/she can turn to wholesaling profits to pay the bills. If all sales venues are earning money on a particular week, the farmer enjoys increased profits for that week.

The Athens Farmers' Market also puts producers in contact with private businesses that wish to purchase local food items. At the market, for example, vendors are approached by chefs who wish to buy produce for a restaurant or country club. A few vendors at the farmers' market do sell privately to restaurants or country clubs; however, many vendors have attempted this and now chose not to sell privately. One farmer sold organic lettuce to a hotel restaurant, but had to wait four months for his payment to be issued by the hotel's corporate office. "Four months not getting paid can kill a small farmer," he said. A beef and pork vendor said her experience selling to restaurants and country clubs was that they buy only the choice cuts of meat and leave her with the less valuable hamburger to sell herself. She no longer sells her meats privately, and has instead expanded her vending to a second farmers' market. The two farmers' markets and any on-farm sales comprise her entire household income. A few vendors sell their products to locally owned health food stores, but overall Athens Farmers' Market vendors prefer to sell their products directly to the customers.

A final way in which the Athens' Farmers Market facilitates diversity of income is by serving as an effective advertising medium for vendors to promote other sales venues or services that contribute to their income. For example, a flower vendor advertises her wedding and special event floral services. A buffalo vendor tells customers about a Dairyetta where he and his mother sell fast-food lunch items including buffalo-burgers. Several vendors have started taking internet mail orders for their produce, flowers, and plants, and they publicize their websites at the market. Vendors advertise both on-farm and off-farm business activities at the market and use the market itself to diversify their income. By creating multiple income sources farmers provide themselves with income security, knowing they will earn money from at least one income source each week. Expanding sales to other farmers' markets, selling wholesale, internet sales, or selling to local health food stores are the most popular forms of diversification of income for Athens Farmers' Market vendors.

#### 4.8 Business Incubator

Many vendors at the Athens Farmers' Market use the market to try to start new businesses or introduce new products. An example of one such successful business venture is the organic egg and chicken farmer. This vendor began selling his products at the Athens Farmers' Market in 1996; he has since expanded his production and now sells his eggs to mainstream grocery stores throughout the Eastern United States. He still vends at the market, earning 50% of his income from Athens Farmers' Market sales and 50% from grocery store sales, and is trying to expand his farm to include an on-site processing plant. Other business endeavors are not as successful as this one; for instance,

a young woman began vending menu items at the Athens Farmers' Market in 2003 to advertise her new restaurant and test market some food items. The restaurant failed but the woman has since started a catering business, learning from her market experience that Athens had a greater demand for a catering service than another restaurant. Ultimately, this seemingly failed business attempt was actually successful and the catering service has a growing number of clients. Even successful businesses with customers nationwide find it economical to vend at the farmers' market. For example, a salsa producer, who used to sell her product out of her home and now is sold by major grocery chains across the United States, has a stall at the Athens Farmers' Market.

There are many businesses just getting started at the farmers' market. One vendor noticed a demand for organic dog biscuits in 2002, and she now sells her product to drive-thru stores, pet stores, and a few local shops. A bonsai and mini-jade plant vendor is trying to generate a customer base for his product with the hope of creating an internet business for people to purchase his plants. A flower vendor is advertising her services for weddings and special event arrangements, hoping to begin a side business as a florist. This is the same vendor who started a shrimp farming business on her farm. Many of these new business enterprises begin as attempts to expand and diversify farm products for sale at the market. Those who do develop new businesses are not doing so in hopes of abandoning their other agricultural interests; rather, they are trying to test market new ideas and increase their income. Most vendors have modest goals for their new enterprises, they wish to sell their products locally, earn more money, and remain part of the Athens community by continuing to vend at the Athens Farmers' Market; that is a "successful" business for these vendors.

In addition to fostering new businesses, the Athens Farmers' Market teaches businesses skills to vendors. For example, one produce farmer confessed that he is not comfortable in social situations, but said the farmers' market is teaching him how to talk to customers and how to negotiate. Another vendor, who claims the market taught her the importance of communicating with her customers, stated "... you can't just sit there, you have to talk. And Scott [her son] says he doesn't like to hard sell, well I try not to hard sell, but I do try to inform people...And I don't think you can just sit on your laurels, I don't care if it's flowers or what, you have to have a personality" (Vendor A, November 5, 2003, Phone Interview). Several other vendors mentioned that by participating in the farmers' market they learned how to market their products to the customers with pretty baskets and colorful tablecloths, as well as the importance of posting signs with prices and information about the farm. The Athens Farmers' Market is a breeding ground for new business ventures. It is an ideal venue for farmers to test market their products, learn business skills, and start new businesses.

#### 4.9 Summary of Economic Results

Many of the economic benefits I observed at the Athens Farmers' Market were mentioned in the farmers' market literature. For example, increased income was a positive result of vending at a farmers' market according to many researchers, and this held true of the rural markets in Southeast Ohio; however, the increased income of Athens Farmers' Market vendors was significantly higher than in other counties and the State of Ohio. An increase in local spending occurred as the farmers' market customers shopped at local stores. Most interesting was evidence that money spent at the farmers'

market remains in the local economy. Further, I uncovered the significant and expanding role of bartering. Neither practice had been explored in past research.

Vendors rely on tourist dollars for market sales, as described by previous studies, but evidence from farmers in Southeast Ohio suggests that the market is important not only as a destination, but as a “hook” to entice tourists to engage further with local activities and cultures. Farmers’ markets provide employment opportunities, in this case about 30-50, for every 60 vendors. An increase in agricultural products and income sources was found to be a consequence of vendor interaction at the farmers’ markets. While diversification of farming and income is not unique to these farmers’ markets, the type of products and income sources do appear to be unique. Athens Farmers’ Market vendors have raised shrimp, grown loofah and Asian vegetables, baked ethnic pastries and sold other one-of-a-kind items. Athens farmers’ also sell or have sold their products to local grocers, private buyers, such as country clubs and restaurants, and wholesalers. This is atypical for farmers’ market vendors, as past research indicates farmers who vend at farmers’ markets do so because they cannot compete with the volume needed for wholesaling or do not have access to mainstream markets or private buyers.

Finally, the results of this study indicate that the Athens Farmers’ Market is a breeding ground for new businesses. Studies by other researchers have been unable to determine the rate of success or failure of business at farmers’ markets. It is apparent that the Athens Farmers’ Market has generated both successful and failed business attempts, but that failed entrepreneurs learn from their mistakes and develop valuable business skills in the process. Also, the definition of a successful business in this region is one that provides for the needs of the household. Success cannot be misconstrued as

founding a business with a regional or national consumer base. While this has happened at the Athens Farmers' Market, there are many more "successful" businesses that operate only at the market and a few other local stores.

The results of this research are in many ways typical of urban markets described by other researchers, but there are also unique aspects of rural farmers' markets are apparent in this study.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESULTS II: SOCIAL NETWORKS AND THE CULTURE OF FARMERS MARKETS

There are strong social networks in place at farmers' markets that serve many purposes, including information exchange and support systems. The interaction among vendors is valuable to foster friendships, a sense of community, and to problem-solve, but it can also lead to differences of opinion and power struggles. Further, within the social and cultural ties of the market, and despite the conflicts, farmers' markets provide civic values to their communities.

#### 5.1 Social Networks

Vendors at the Athens Farmers' Market are motivated to participate in the market for more than economic reasons; there are social networks that exist at the market that the farmers rely on. One of the functions served by the social networks at the farmers' market is that of an information resource. Farmers exchange knowledge about farming techniques, crops, pest control, and many other agricultural issues. As one produce farmer said:

I don't know if there is a day at the market that I don't have some kind of a conversation with another farmer in which either they are asking me a question or I am asking them a question about what would be the best way to deal with this on a farm. We're sharing answers to problems all the time. That happens every day at the market (Vendor F, December 22, 2003, Phone Interview).

This same farmer further explained why the farmers at the market are such a valuable resource, saying:

They collectively know a lot more than our extension agent. In no way do I criticize him, he's the best agent we've ever had, but collectively the farmers at the market know more than he does, and I'm sure he'd agree to that. Yeah, that's our most important resource, we're just trading information all the time.

A farmer at the Ross County Farmers' Market in Chillicothe told me this information exchange happens so often because it is the nature of farmers to help each other. She says farming is dependant on help and sharing and so when farmers gather there is a large volume of free information being exchanged. The farmers' markets appear to be a forum that facilitates this information exchange because it is one of the few times, if not the only, that so many farmers congregate in one location.

Farmers at the Athens Farmers' Market provide assistance to each other through more than just information exchange. Vendors help each other set up and take down their stalls or pick up a tent that has blown over in the wind, but moreover, they provide a social network of encouragement and mentoring. A chemical-free produce farmer explained that he has only been farming for two years and looks to the other producers as role models. This farmer said, "Mentoring is a big thing at the market, you don't often think of that when you think of farmers' markets, but it is. Ed Perkins [another vendor]

has been more help to me starting out the farm than anything” (Vendor B, November 19, 2003, Glouster, Ohio). This new farmer said his mentor, whom he described as “selfless”, visited his farm and gave advice on how to revive wilted crops and protect against pests. New farmers, or farmers converting to organic or chemical-free production, rely on the knowledge and encouragement of the more experienced farmers. Several farmers stated they would not have continued farming or made it through the first few years of farming if it had not been for the support of certain vendors at the farmers market.

The mentoring and support systems at the farmers’ market also foster the entrepreneurial spirit of the region. Vendors encourage each other to try growing new crops or to start a new business. At the market vendors will direct customers to vendors who have new, unique products. For example, when the buffalo farmer began selling his meat at the market, many vendors told their customers about him saying, “Did you see that new vendor? He sells buffalo. You might want to check that out.” When a vendor was out of kale, I was told to try “that new, young guy over there. He’s just starting out and he has good produce.” The vendors at the Athens Farmers’ Market encourage each other and promote the businesses and products of their friends. In this way the social networks of the farmers’ market can help vendors try new ideas in a nurturing and supportive environment.

The social networks at the Athens Farmers’ Market are valuable for providing information, mentoring, and entrepreneurial support, and through this they have also fostered friendships. The social interactions at the market are expressions of the local values and culture of the Athens community. The opportunity to make friends, see

friends, and visit with neighbors is a significant force drawing vendors and clients to the farmers' market. When asked why they participate in the Athens Farmers' Market, most vendors stated they were as much motivated by the opportunity to socialize with friends as they were to increase their income. One produce vendor said, "Direct marketing is so much better than going through a middle-man, I could go on and on about that. It's an outreach to the community, one of the ways that we connect with a broad spectrum of people from the area." Produce farmers, more than meat or flower vendors, stated their primary reason for attending the market is to leave their farms and see friends, neighbors, and to meet new people. One producer farmer explained, "It's part of my recreation, it is the thing I do each week that I enjoy the most. I go to the farmers' market to have fun, to get some income, to connect with friends, to connect with other farmers." In fact, some vendors come to the Athens Farmers' Market even though they do not turn a profit. A potted plant vendor told me he makes only enough from his sales at the farmers market to cover the price of his stall and the expense of driving to Athens from his home, but he comes every Saturday because it is fun and he gets to visit with customers and vendors.

Customers are attracted to the Athens Farmers' Market for the opportunity to socialize with friends and neighbors as well as vendors, according to a produce farmer. He says "...what happens at that market everyday is so important for the health of the Athens community, the connections, the networking, the relationships that are being built. There are people that come to that market that don't buy anything, they come to visit and see their friends. That is so incredibly important" (Vendor E, December 22, 2003, Phone Interview).

## 5.2 Politics at the Market

The Athens Farmers' Market is also a political forum for the community, though opinions as to whether politics have a place in the market differ. In 2003 a stall at the farmers' market was purchased for the "Kucinich for President" campaign, and vendors passed out literature and collected donations. Books on religion, civil rights, and working for peace and social justice are sold or handed out by vendors at the farmers' market. The Saturday after the United States began its war with Iraq, protesters gathered at the Athens Farmers' Market carrying signs and chanting anti-war rhetoric. The culture of the Athens Farmers' Market includes strong political opinions, but many vendors do not feel the market is the appropriate arena for politics. One vendor, a former military officer, was offended by the anti-war protests that took place after the bombing of Iraq. She felt the protests had no place at the market, but if people were going to protest, they should at least include a message about supporting the US troops. Another vendor is angered at the involvement of politics in the market at all, saying:

But I do think politics, religion, and all this stuff should be left out of it. And I know that it has been a venue for it and it bothers me. I think it has kept people away because there have been some rallies and some people really taking a stand. And they have marched and they've had signs and they've talked about this stuff, you know, and I think that's fine and its America and everybody has the right to an opinion, but here? I don't think it should be used as a soapbox. I really don't. And I think it's a real, real, touchy issue (Vendor A, November 5, 2003, Phone Interview).

This same vendor said she is also upset when farmers' write editorials in the newspaper regarding politics, religion, or other controversial issues, and associate the Athens Farmers' Market with their opinions. She explained:

...when they sign 'Athens Farmers' Market' with their name as an endorsement, it isn't fair to use the farmers' market as who you are. I don't think it should ever be mentioned. I think you should state your opinion and put your name on it, but I don't think you have to put 'Athens Farmers' Market' under it. And that's like speaking for me, and they're not speaking for me—and shouldn't be.

Despite the fact the many vendors have expressed similar opinions about politics at the farmers' market, other vendors feel the political demonstrations and discussions are important expressions of people's beliefs and belong at the market where they can foster dialogue. One vendor, who conducts peace and social justice work, says part of the reason he attends the market is to talk with people about these issues. "I am going there to witness. I'm discussing peace and justice with people all the time. Every time we go to the market, people are coming to me asking what is going on over in Palestine or Iraq right now. And we're talking about that." At the time of the interview, this farmer's wife was in Palestine and he was leaving for Iraq, both working with Christian Peace-Makers. And so, for many vendors political activism is part of their lives, and they bring this to the farmers' market. "There is a large hippie population here in Athens," one farmer commented, and political involvement and protesting is part of their nature. Whether or not people agree on political issues and their place within the Athens Farmers' Market politics, religion, and occasionally protests are part of the culture of the market.

### 5.3 Local Market Politics

There are also political issues and power struggles of a more local nature at the farmers' market. Some farmers believe the larger producers at the farmers' market have more power and influence than the smaller vendors. As one produce vendor said, "There

are different levels to the farmers' market." The large, organic, college-educated farmers tend to make more money at the market, in the opinion of many smaller vendors. They have a louder voice and their opinions regarding issues of how to spend the market budget, whether to increase market hours, and other managerial issues tend to carry more weight. Some vendors have pointed out that the Athens area farmers have a "clique" and work together to change the market for their benefit. There is clearly a perceived hierarchy within the market and power struggles between vendors or groups of vendors.

There are also conflicts at the market regarding the pricing of products. Through market regulations and peer pressure from other vendors, vendors at the Athens Farmers' Market must price their goods close to the prices set by other vendors. For example, if lettuce is commonly sold between \$1.00 and \$2.00, a farmer must price his lettuce within that range, or close to it. One produce vendor said he has two friends who disagree with this policy and do not vend at farmers' markets because they are forced to compromise their prices, but that fact has never bothered him personally. A flower and produce vendor, however, is very upset about these rules because she feels many vendors at the market are over-pricing their products. She explained:

And I've seen customers, you know, I've seen a lot of customers not come anymore because they've over-priced everything. Why do people want to come and pay \$3 for a dozen carrots when they can go to Kroger's and get a dozen carrots for a buck fifty? But I have a lot of regular customers because I don't, I won't, overprice myself. I look at Kroger and find out what they are pricing their vegetables for and I pretty much price mine almost the same as the market are. I do not overprice my vegetables and for that I have a lot of regular customers who will seek me out. When the rest of the vendors complain I just say "oh, my product is inferior." They can gripe at you if you are selling stuff cheaper than they are. And so I just say my tomatoes are not as big as yours are...but that is one of the things I won't do is overprice my produce. And so for that I keep a lot of regular customers every year (Vendor E, December 18, 2003, Phone Interview).

Many of the larger, organic vendors will pressure smaller vendors who price their produce comparatively low. Again, the issue of inequality of vendors is raised, as smaller vendors feel they are being bullied by larger vendors and forced to conform to their prices. The nature of the farmers' market gives power to the vendor by allowing him/her to sell directly to customers and control the variety and volume of agricultural products, but there is still inequality at the market and a sense of powerlessness for some of the vendors.

#### 5.4 Civic Value

The Athens Farmers' Market provides many civic values to vendors, customers, and the Athens community. The market is a family oriented, child-friendly environment. There is diversity of religion, gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic class, and the market facilitates the interaction of these groups. One vendor also sees the Athens Farmers' Market as a place of spiritual guidance. He explains his roles at the market saying:

I also serve, I think in some way, as a pastor there. I do a lot of counseling at the market. I am trained in pastoral counseling, my degree is a seminary degree, a degree to be a pastor, a theological degree. Almost every market people are coming to me sharing the struggles they are having in their lives or their family or whatever. On Saturday I was in some pretty heavy conversation about a family that is having an awful lot of difficulty that I'm involved with that family. So I am doing counseling at every market (Vendor F, December 22, 2003, Phone Interview).

This vendor is providing an important, if informal, service to the Athens community. His presence at the farmers' market allows him to interact with the community and provide assistance to friends and neighbors.

Another value of local culture that the Athens Farmers' Market imparts is the importance of healthy food and local food systems. The farmers' market reconnects growers and consumers, and people become acquainted with those who grow the food they eat. The farmers educate the community about health, nutrition, and good eating habits. One beef vendor said she spends a lot of her time at the market educating consumers. She tells her customers the breed of cow she raises produces beef that is "lower in cholesterol, fat, and calories than major USDA numbers." A woman at the Ross County Farmers' Market at Chillicothe says she sells her produce at lower prices than other vendors because "it's not about making money, it's about getting the people of Ross County to eat right!" And both the Athens and Ross County Farmers' Markets have vendors who accept WICs as payment for their produce. In this way these markets provide a service to their communities by enabling those of lower economic status to eat local, healthy food products. Vendors are helpful when accepting WICs, explaining to

the customers “I can give you one more peach or two more plums with this amount. What would you like, dear?”

A produce and flower vendor also gives back to the Athens community by donating the produce she does not sell to Casa Nueva, a worker-owned restaurant in downtown Athens. If the restaurant cannot use the produce, she gives it to local homeless shelters in Athens or Meigs County. Donations to a local soup kitchen from Athens Farmers’ Market vendors are common, and one such organization sent a thank you letter to the farmers that was read at the Fall Potluck Dinner.

The greatest civic value the Athens Farmers’ Market provides is a sense of pride to the entire market and Athens community. The farmers are proud of their occupation and the market provides a forum in which farming is recognized and often praised. The farmers’ market celebrates the farming culture of the area and reconnects the community to local people and a traditional lifestyle. One vendor said he loved to farm because it was a wonderful way to live, he was a free spirit and farming allowed him to be his own boss. Another vendor agreed, and also commented on the farmers’ market helping her farm become more self-sufficient, saying:

Well, I think I’ve got 120 acres here and if I don’t make it pay for myself I’m not doing something right! And I don’t really like working for other people. If I can’t be the boss, I don’t want to play. And so, like I said, I’ve got 120 acres and a lot of it’s farmland, some of its woods, and I think every year, year by year, the farm is becoming more self-sufficient and I have to take out less and less loans from the bank to get me through the year (Vendor E, December 18, 2003, Phone Interview).

The farmers’ market fosters pride by allowing people to live the farming lifestyle they want, and helping them make enough money to maintain control over their farms and not

increase their debt. One vendor, who lived and raised her children in Columbus, moved to the Athens area and began farming 25 years ago. She loves the farming lifestyle and takes great pride in the fact that she has learned how to manage the farm. She was part of a research study on women in non-traditional roles, and she describes her farming lifestyle saying:

Every morning I get up and it is a hoot to me that I have learned what to do...And so I went out and fed this morning and it was sprinkly, and it was like, this is the best! I worked behind a desk for many, many, many, many years, being dressed, wearing heels, makeup, the whole nine yards, and oh, I love this! (Vendor A, November 5, 2003, Phone Interview)

And so the ability to live the farming lifestyle, making a living off doing what one loves, and being part of a community at the Athens Farmers' Market provides vendors with a sense of pride and dignity that they value and that is part of the culture at the Athens Farmers' Market.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Farmers' markets throughout the United States are marketing institutions that embody the social and cultural values of a region. They serve economic functions to vendors and local communities, provide social networks, and are representative of cultural norms. However, farmers' markets in rural, impoverished areas also play innovative roles in the economic, social, and cultural dynamic of the area. This study has shed light on several unexpected or under-appreciated elements of rural farmers' markets. Several of these points are worth review here.

#### 6.1 Results Revisited

To begin, there has been little research to date that investigates the role of barter in urban farmers' market; this study indicates that bartering plays a substantial role in rural farmers' markets. In Southeast Ohio's farmers' markets, many farmers engage in bartering for goods, services, or labor. The same few vendors tend to instigate trades, and most vendors are happy to participate. There is an increasing amount of bartering at the Athens Farmers' Market, and some bartering is occurring outside the market, such as with photographers or physicians. The goods and service bartered at farmers' markets

are valuable to the vendors but the expansion of bartering indicates this is an important, if under-appreciated, aspect of the farmers' market. The significant role of bartering identified by this study suggests that further investigation into the bartering practices of vendors of other farmers' market is warranted.

Brown (2002b) stated in her research that farmers' markets help retain money within the local community that might otherwise be spent elsewhere. Certainly, customers who forego purchasing produce or other food items at a chain grocery store in favor of farmers' market are contributing money to the local community. But to date, no researchers appear to have traced the money earned at the farmers' market to determine how and where it is spent. This study, in contrast, did just that. My findings indicate that in the case of the Athens Farmers' Market vendors are likely to purchase their supplies and food at the farmers' market, from neighbors, or at locally owned stores. Tracking the money circulating through a farmers' market was a new dimension to farmers' market research, and the results of this finding suggest that increased spending at farmers' markets could strengthen local economies in ways not previously identified.

Some researchers have stated that farmers who vend at farmers' markets do so because it is the only outlet for their product, or the best outlet available (Lyson et al. 1995; Brown 2002b). Other researchers have stated that farmers' markets are useful to small-scale farmers who cannot produce enough volume for wholesaling or other marketing methods (Sharp et al. 2002; Griffin et al. 2003). In contrast to these claims, most Athens Farmers' Market vendors earn at least some portion of their income from wholesaling, selling to restaurants or country clubs, or selling to national grocery stores. Many of the market vendors who do not sell to these mainstream markets do so out of

choice. These farmers produce the volume and quality necessary for mainstream sales, but prefer to vend at the farmers' market to earn a better price, or because they have had negative experiences selling to restaurants or country clubs in the past. Therefore, based on the results of this study, it cannot be assumed that farmers vend at a farmers' market because they are so disadvantaged that they have no other options. Many market vendors have chosen to vend at the market for a combination of economic and personal reasons and other vendors diversify their income between mainstream markets and the farmers' market.

Andreatta et al. (2002) showed through their interviews with farmers' market vendors in North Carolina that there is inequality within the market, with some vendors receiving preferential treatment by market administrators. This statement likely underrepresents the power struggles present between vendors at the markets. In the case of Athens Farmers' Market, certain vendors, usually certified organic producers, earn more money at the market than do other vendors. They are also more educated, and carry more influence on smaller vendors and market officials. These vendors are able to use their positions to manipulate market rules and regulations, influence pricing issues, and turn budget concerns to their advantage. Such power struggles probably occur at all farmers' markets, but have not been extensively explored. Clearly, though, markets are not jolly, conflict-free spaces. In Athens, conflicts between vendors extend beyond issues of preferential treatment and include disputes as to the appropriateness of the marketplace as a political or religious forum. Given the controversies described by Andreatta et al. (2002) combined with the results of this study, it would appear that inequality and politics present within farmers' markets deserve future research, especially for how they

might influence the ability of the most underprivileged vendors to benefit from the market, economically or otherwise.

This study differs from previous research because it examines a number of significant dimensions of farmers' markets, including their inter-related economic, cultural, and social dynamics. Most farmers' market researchers have mentioned the strong cultural elements in farmers' markets, and the need for more research on the topic (Lyson et al. 1995; Andreatta et al. 2002; Feenstra et al. 2003; Griffin et al. 2003). For example, Hinrichs et al. (2004) revealed the social nature of farmers' markets and its effects on economics and social learning, but again culture is overlooked. This is an important oversight, because ultimately the cultural norms of a group of vendors dictates how the market will operate, and thus must be accounted for when conducting a study of a particular farmers' market or markets within a region. By investigating the cultural values of the area and the entrepreneurial spirit of some people in Appalachia, I was able to understand the motivations of vendors, the community's relationship with the market, how vendors use local culture to promote the market, and I could relate better to the vendors and obtain more information from them. Where other researchers studied the market and only noted that there was a distinct culture, I tapped into the culture of the area, participated in the market, and completed the research with a better understanding of the culture and how it impacts the social networks and economic exchanges at the market. Arguably, this approach lent my study a more holistic and comprehensive angle than more questionnaire-based studies.

Finally, to my knowledge, no previous published research on US farmers' markets has taken an ethnographic approach to farmers' markets. Two studies, Feenstra

et al. (2003) and Lyson et al. (1995), conducted research to determine the role of farmers' markets on facilitating new, successful businesses. Lyson et al. surveyed vendors in New York about their motivations for selling at the market and how important the market was as a source of income. Feenstra et al. interviewed market managers in New York, California, and Iowa to learn of the types and success of enterprises started at the farmers' market. But without speaking directly to farmers, neither informally nor through structured interviews, it is debatable just how accurate their findings were. By talking directly to farmers, in contrast, I was able to learn about failed business attempts, successful businesses, and vendor's future plans for businesses. Also, during site visits I was able to witness the creation of a restaurant, its failure, and a new catering service opened in its place. Farmers' market researchers, in my opinion are not spending enough time conversing with vendors, but relying on surveys, market managers, or customers for information. Farmers' markets are producer-driven, meaning that the market is created and operated in the best interest of the producer, not the consumer. Most markets are unsubsidized and run by vendors, yet researchers are not conducting in-depth studies of these vendors, their opinions, ideas, spending habits, or economic transactions. In order to learn more about farmers' markets, especially the entrepreneurial and cultural aspects, it is imperative that researchers complement their existing approaches with an ethnographic approach. Many of the surprising and new conclusions that resulted from this research came about by allowing market vendors to speak about their concerns, motivations, and opinions.

## 6.2 Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings of this study have several theoretical and practical implications. For one, these results suggest that there is a need to rethink the methodological approach to farmers' market research specifically, and rural economic development more generally. This is especially important if the results of this study are to be compared with the dynamics of other markets, particularly in urban areas. The value of small-scale studies with direct interaction between vendors and researchers cannot be overstated.

In terms of policy towards farmers' markets, this study strongly suggests that these markets are economically beneficial to the local economy. Since farmers' markets provide such profound benefits to the local economy, as well as to vendors and customers, investing in a farmers' market is an investment in the health of a community and its citizens. Local governments and non-profit organizations should consider supporting existing farmers' markets or creating new markets if none exist. These markets could increase the income of farmers, stimulate the rural economy, increase human capital, lead to new business ventures, enhance the culture and social ties of the region, and increase the quality of life for vendors and customers. Also, lending agencies or investors might consider investing in new businesses started at farmers' markets, now that research has proved many new companies enjoy local, regional, or national success. Specifically in Appalachia, a portion of federal funds allocated to the alleviation of poverty could be used in the creation of new farmers' markets.

### 6.3 Future Research

There is a clear need for future research on farmers' markets, especially markets in rural, impoverished areas. Rural farmers' markets are understudied in their economic value and under-appreciated for their social and cultural importance. Research on the economics of farmers' markets, particularly the spending habits of vendors, would strengthen and broaden the findings of this study, namely that farmers' markets stimulate the local economy. More research is needed on the role of bartering in rural and urban markets, and inequality and power struggles among vendors. Studies on the culture of farmers' markets are still sparse, and research outside Appalachia would provide an interesting comparison for this study. Finally, an exploration of the gender roles at the market and on the farm would be an informative and noteworthy study. There are many women in non-traditional roles at farmers' markets and issues of gender at the market are only just beginning to be explored.

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## APPENDIX

<b>Far West:</b>	<b>591</b>
Alaska	8
California	365
Hawaii	67
Nevada	16
Oregon	58
Washington	77

<b>Rocky Mountains:</b>	<b>170</b>
Arizona	31
Colorado	47
Idaho	19
New Mexico	36
Montana	17
Utah	13
Wyoming	7

<b>Southwest:</b>	<b>173</b>
Arkansas	28
Louisiana	21
Oklahoma	25
Texas	99

<b>North Central:</b>	<b>921</b>
Illinois	130
Indiana	67
Iowa	141
Kansas	67
North Dakota	22
Ohio	73
South Dakota	9
Wisconsin	149
Missouri	102
Nebraska	39
Minnesota	55
Michigan	67

<b>Southeast:</b>	<b>354</b>
Alabama	13
Florida	64
Georgia	9
Kentucky	86
Mississippi	18
North Carolina	84
South Carolina	35
Tennessee	45

<b>Mid-Atlantic:</b>	<b>385</b>
Delaware	2
District of Columbia	25
Maryland	59
New Jersey	47
Pennsylvania	152
Virginia	76
West Virginia	24

<b>Northeast:</b>	<b>569</b>
Connecticut	65
Maine	57
Massachusetts	87
New Hampshire	30
New York	269
Rhode Island	16
Vermont	45

Table 1: Farmers' Market Counts by State and Region

Source: USDA National Directory of Farmers' Markets, "US Farmers' Markets—2000: A Study of Emerging Trends," 2002.

### ***General Farm and Family Information***

How many people are in your family?

What is the size of your farm?

Do you have family in the area? How long has your family been in this area? (i.e. Are you a first generation farmer?) Where were you born?

How far were you able to get in school? Your children?

Are there other jobs or careers you or your family held or hold that contribute to your income?

What income range best describes your household? (provide ranges)

What percent of that income is from the farmers' market?

How would you estimate your profit margin from farming, or the difference between your gross and net pay?

How does the lack of taxation of farmers' markets affect your sales or income generation plan?

Is there government involvement in growing or selling your good? Should the government's role increase, decrease, or stay the same?

Do you consider yourself a typical or atypical farmer? Why?

### ***Aspects of Farm Life***

#### **(Farmers' challenges)**

Is farming your family's primary source of income?

What share would you estimate of your family's income comes from farming?

What do you remember as the biggest challenges you or your family faced as a farmer(s) in the past year? Past 5 years? (i.e. droughts, illness)

How did you address it?

What are your future plans for your farm?

### ***Web of Interconnectedness: Network Approach***

#### **(How many farmers does 1 farmer rely on?)**

What goods or services do you exchange? How many do you pay for?

Who do you buy from? Who buys from you?

Who do you trade with? What do you trade with/for?

Who else do you rely on to maintain your farm or family?

### ***The Role of the Farmers Market***

What are your top three reasons for participating in the market?

Do you participate in any other markets?

How many years have you participated in the market?

How has the market changed over the years?

How did you get involved with selling at the market?

Is selling at the market a status symbol? (i.e. Indication of success or failure)

What do you feel are the advantages and disadvantages of participating in the market?

What are your favorite aspects of going to the market?

What percent of your annual income do you earn at the market?

Do you consider yourself experimental or a risk-taker?  
What are some reasons other farmers do or do not participate in the market?  
How does market participation change your income status relative to your neighbors?  
How many of your neighbors engage in the market?  
What are your future plans in relation to farming? The farmers' market?  
What do you consider to be the recipe for market success?

Table 2: Interview Questions Administered to Athens Farmers' Market  
Vendors in 2003

## Number of Vendors at the Athens Farmers' Market

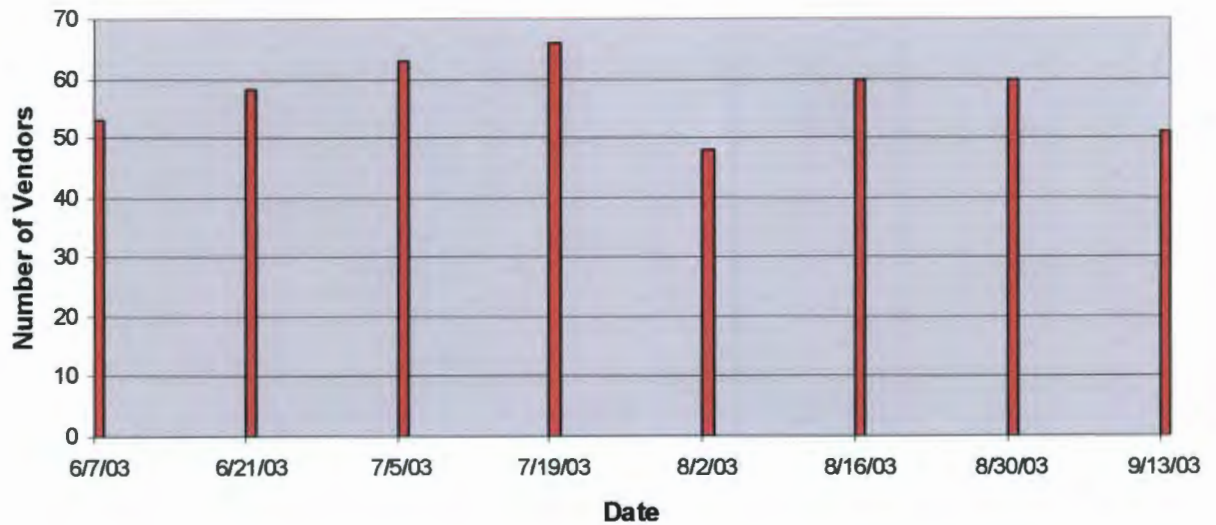


Figure 1: Athens Farmers' Market Vendor Counts June-September

Note: On August 2, 2003 the number of vendors present at the Athens Farmers' Market is comparatively low. This is likely due to the fact that there had been a large amount of rainfall the two days prior to the market, and rain during market hours. The weather makes it difficult for many vendors to harvest their produce, and the outdoor nature of the market makes vending in rain unpleasant.

Produce	
anchos peppers	mizuma
Anise	mushrooms (shuntrel, shiitake, truffles, oyster)
Arugula	mustard greens
asparagus	nettles
banana peppers (hot, mild)	okra
Basil	onions (yellow, white, red)
batavian (red, green)	oregano
beets	pachoi
bell peppers (red, green, orange, yellow, purple)	parsley
bitter melon	paw paws
boc choi	peppermint
boc choy	potatoes (red, yellow, baking)
broccoli	pumpkins
buckwheat greens	purslane
cabbage (red, green, Napa, Chinese)	raab
cantaloupe	radish sprouts
carrots (yellow, orange)	radishes
catnip	rhubarb
cauliflower	rosemary
cayenne peppers	sage
chilis (red, green)	scallions
chives	shallots
cilantro	snow peas
collard greens	soybeans
corn (yellow, silver, bi-color)	spearmint
cucumbers (lemon, English, traditional)	spinach
dill	squash (many varieties)
edible flowers	stir fry greens
eggplant	string beans (many varieties)
fennel	sugar babies
garlic	sugar snap peas
garlic whips	sunflower sprouts
gourds	Swiss chard
jalapenos	tarragon
kale (red, green)	tat soy
kohlrabi	tomatillos
leeks	tomatoes (regular, cherry, many varieties)

Table 3: List of Products Available at the Athens Farmers' Market As Recorded During Site Visits (continued)

Table 3 (Continued)

lettuce (at least 20 varieties)	Turnips
lima beans	watermelon
Lovage	zucchini
mesculum salad mix	
<b>Fruit</b>	<b>Bakery</b>
apples (many varieties)	baklava
Apricots	biscotti
black raspberries	breads
Blackberries	brioche
Blueberries	brownies
cherries (sour, sweet)	buckeyes (candy)
grapes (red, green, concord)	carrot cake
nectarines (regular, white)	cinnamon rolls
peaches (regular, white)	cookie bars
pears (white, Bartlett)	cookies
plums (red, purple, green)	crackers
raspberries (red, gold)	cranberry pumpkin bread
Strawberries	danish
Wineberries	fruit pizza
	graham crackers
	granola pecan rolls
<b>Meat and Dairy</b>	moon pies
beef (organic)	muffins
Bratwurst	oat-peanut clusters
Buffalo	Oreo bars
cheese (organic and other varieties)	pastry and pecan rolls
chicken (live, organic meat, marinated breasts)	zucchini bread
chicken eggs (organic and conventional)	pies (many varieties)
duck (live, meat)	pita bread
duck eggs	pizza
lamb (organic)	pretzel twists
lunch meats	pretzels
organic cottage cheese	rolls
organic milk	scones
Piedmontese beef	sesame cakes
pimento peppers	shortbread
Pork	tarts
Sausage	tea rings
Shrimp	toffee
turkey eggs	veggie puffs

(Continued)

Table 3 (Continued)

Pre-Made Food Items	Plants	Miscellaneous Items
apple cider vinegar	annuals (many varieties)	apple cider
Applebutter	bonsai plants	cat toys
Applesauce	bushes and shrubs (many varieties)	CDs "Back Porch Swing Band"
Asian pasta salad	dried floral wreaths, baskets, etc	Coffee
BBQ sauce	flower bulbs	Cookbooks
cheese spread	fresh flower arrangements	dog biscuits (organic, regular)
chutneys	fresh flowers	gift boxes of assorted honey items
corn chips	herb plants	Hebron Journal (book on non-violent protests)
cous cous salad	mini-jade plants	Honey
falafel sandwiches (made on grill)	mini-maple tree plants	honey candles
flavored dips	perennials (many varieties)	honey candy
fruit ice pops	pine trees	iced tea
ganoush	potpourri	kittens (free)
granola	potted house plants	Lemon-Shake up drinks
honey mustard	vegetable plants	maple syrup
hummus	water plants	marigold necklaces
jams and jellies		mixed fruit baskets
molasses		non-alcoholic daiquiris, pina coladas
mustard		organic teas and accessories
nori rolls		pecans
pickled asparagus		pink lemonade
salad dressing		popcorn
salsa		puppy (free)
sorbet		raspberry iced tea
spring rolls		soap
sushi		wool yarn
tabouli salata		worm composte
tofu marinade		
tofu pasta		
tomato sauce		
trail mix		
veggie wraps		