



DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND COMMERCE
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PRESS RELEASE

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Agriculture Commissioner Proclaims National Farmers Market Week

Mississippi Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce, Lester Spell, joined U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, Mike Johanns, in proclaiming August 5-11 "National Farmers Market Week."

"This week is in honor of farmers in Mississippi and across the nation who grow and provide us with one of the safest food and fiber supplies in the world," said Spell. "The vitality of farms across our state is good for local economies, good for consumers, and good for Mississippians."

The number of farmers markets in the United States has grown dramatically in recent years, prompting local, regional, and national advocates of local farming to designate a week each year to take note of their benefits. The U.S. Department of Agriculture reports over 4,500 farmers markets currently operate throughout the nation – a record number, up from 2,800 in the year 2000. Sales generated by farmers markets have been estimated to exceed \$1 billion a year, with most of the money going directly to small family farmers. The number of farmers markets in Mississippi has almost doubled during the same period. Currently there are 40 farmers markets operating in the state, and an additional market is scheduled to open August 7.

"The increasing number of farmers markets in the state demonstrates the high demand for locally grown products," said Spell. "Consumers benefit from the freshness and quality of locally grown products. Purchasing products directly from the farmers who grow them allows consumers to develop a special bond of trust with growers."

The Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce and USDA are working together to increase the development of farmers markets, and in the past decade the Federal-State partnership has emphasized a critical need to help small farmers and to provide consumers access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service works with states to encourage market growth, while its Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services helps needy families gain access to healthy produce. One result is that more than 2,300 farmers markets nationwide now accept coupons from recipients of the Federal Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) assistance program. Currently six farmers markets in Mississippi accept coupons from the WIC program.

Information on farmers markets, including USDA's *National Directory of Farmers Markets*, is available at www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets or by calling 202-690-8103. Information on farmers markets in Mississippi is available at www.msfarmersmarket.com or by calling 601-354-6573.

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