



wvfarmers.org

WEEK FIVE

Harvesting Sustainability & Community Growth

Information provided with funding provided by USDA Specialty Crop

Week Five Overview

- **Purpose and Goals:** This session explores how supporting local farmers and farmers' markets contributes to environmental sustainability, community development, and stronger local food systems. Participants will learn how purchasing specialty crops from local producers supports both the environment and the local economy.
- **Learning Outcomes:**
 - Understand the role of farmers markets in sustainable food systems
 - Identify environmental benefits of buying locally grown specialty crops
 - Recognize how local food purchases support West Virginia farmers and communities
 - Reflect on ways individuals can support local agriculture and sustainability



What is a Farmers Market?

A farmers' market is a community marketplace where local farmers and producers sell directly to consumers.

Farmers' markets provide:

- Fresh, seasonal fruits and vegetables
- Locally grown specialty crops
- Direct connections between farmers and community members
- Opportunities to learn about food production and agriculture

In West Virginia, many farmers' markets offer specialty crops such as:

- Apples and peaches
- Tomatoes and peppers
- Berries
- Pumpkins and squash
- Herbs and leafy greens



Environmental Benefits of Buying Local



Purchasing food from local farmers can help protect the environment in several ways:

- Reduces transportation distance, lowering carbon emissions
- Supports sustainable farming practices
- Encourages seasonal eating
- Helps preserve farmland and green space

When food travels shorter distances from farm to table, it often requires less packaging, storage, and fuel.

Supporting the Local Economy

Farmers markets strengthen communities by supporting local farmers and small businesses.

Benefits include:

- Keeping food dollars within the local economy
- Supporting family farms and agricultural livelihoods
- Encouraging local job creation
- Strengthening relationships between farmers and consumers

When consumers buy specialty crops locally, they help create a stronger and more resilient local food system.



Building a Stronger Local Food System

Supporting farmers markets helps strengthen communities by improving access to fresh food and supporting local agriculture.



Farmers markets help build a strong local food system by:

- Increasing access to fresh, healthy foods – Locally grown fruits, vegetables, and specialty crops are often harvested close to the time they are sold, providing better flavor and nutritional value.
- Encouraging sustainable food systems – Buying local reduces transportation distance, lowering emissions and supporting environmentally responsible farming.
- Supporting local farmers and businesses – Purchasing directly from farmers keeps money in the local economy and helps small farms remain viable.
- Promoting community connections – Farmers markets bring together farmers and consumers, helping people learn more about local food and agriculture.



WV Specialty Crops and Local Markets

West Virginia farmers grow a diverse range of specialty crops that appear at farmers markets throughout the year. Buying produce in season often means better flavor, freshness, and nutritional value while supporting local farms.

Examples of Seasonal Specialty Crops:

- Leafy Greens (Spring) – spinach, lettuce, and kale are often among the first crops available at farmers markets in early spring and are great for salads, sandwiches, and smoothies.
- Sweet Corn (Summer) – a popular summer crop in West Virginia, sweet corn is commonly enjoyed grilled, boiled, or added to salads and side dishes.
- Green Beans (Summer) – fresh green beans are frequently found at mid-summer markets and can be sautéed, steamed, or preserved through freezing or canning.
- Cucumbers (Summer) – crisp and refreshing, cucumbers are perfect for salads, sandwiches, or pickling during peak summer harvest.





Discussion Prompts: Harvesting Sustainability & Community Growth

- How do farmers' markets help connect community members with the farmers who grow their food? What opportunities do markets create for learning about agriculture and seasonal crops?
- In what ways can purchasing locally grown foods reduce environmental impacts such as transportation emissions, packaging, and food waste?
- What advantages might consumers experience when purchasing specialty crops directly from farmers compared to buying from larger grocery stores?
- How do farmers markets help support small farms, local entrepreneurs, and regional businesses?
- What actions can individuals or communities take to strengthen and support local food systems, such as visiting farmers markets, participating in community gardens, or supporting local agriculture programs?



Activity: Specialty Crop Giveaway

Overview: Participants will receive a selection of locally grown specialty crops sourced from local farmers or farmers' market vendors. This activity introduces participants to seasonal fruits and vegetables grown in West Virginia.

Workshop Focus:

- Local Specialty Crops – Explore fruits and vegetables commonly grown in West Virginia.
- Seasonal Food Awareness – Learn how buying seasonal produce supports local farmers and sustainable food systems.

Workshop Goals:

- Experience the variety of locally grown specialty crops
- Encourage participants to try new fruits and vegetables
- Support local farmers and markets through community partnerships

