

## **Beginning Farmers selling produce at 40 Massachusetts Farmers' Markets**

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**Farmers of the Flats Mentor Farm were selling at 3 farmers' markets in Massachusetts in 2005 and four years later, in 2009 they increased to 40 farmers' markets:** This was due to the increased capacity of farmers' to grow crops for the markets and the tremendous increase of the number of farmers' markets in Massachusetts. In 2009 there were almost 200 markets offering consumers high quality fresh locally produced vegetables and other agricultural products. The increase in the number of markets and their popularity is an excellent option for all farmers to market a farmers produce. There is an increase on the number of established farmers are using Farmers Markets as their first option to market their produce locally. This type of direct market has many advantages for farmers. The customers come to you, farmers receive payment immediately, and the market can be very forgiving, certain product inconsistencies which do not affect taste or quality are among the many reasons for the popularity of Farmers Market in Massachusetts.

**Challenges:** Flats Mentor Farm didn't have the necessary cultural and language skills necessary to successfully sell their crops at farmers markets. This was revealed as part of constant input given by farmers market managers that although these farmers were a great asset to the consumers and to their market in general that we at the FMF needed to take the lead in providing training to farmers in the marketing component of their farming practices. Some were not comfortable selling at farmers' markets as they thought that they might be and thus that affected their ability to succeed. Self-assessment tools were used to assist these farmers and trainings in this area.



2009 farmers market Central Sq. Cambridge Massachusetts

**Farmers Markets and Beginning Farmers at the FMF:** In 2005 as a result of resources received from USDA cost share AMS grant, the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources, Heifer International, The Society for the Promotion of Agriculture, USDA, RMA, CSREES, to support infrastructure development and to provide training and technical assistance to FMF growers, there was a significant increase in the capacity of growers to produce crops for markets.

Flats Mentor Farm staff embarked in an effort to provide the training and technical assistance necessary on all aspects of marketing to farmers who were now producing more crops than they had the ability to sell. These trainings focused on product quality, product presentation, setting up at each market, customer relations, market etiquette, developing relationships with key partners for their businesses, in this case the farmers' market managers, and assessing and addressing each farmers' language barriers. For example as part of these trainings, FMF staff

organized all farmers to visit other farmers to learn in the field how to set up a farmers market. We held mock customer handling situations where farmers acted like some customers and learned how to handle language barrier situations. Farmers also learned how to describe their produce, (this is ongoing and still a work in progress), they were provided with point of sales materials and signage for their stands. They also received trained on how to contact farmers' market managers and to fill out applications.

### The 40 Farmers Markets that FMF attended in 2009

