

9/18 Maine Local Market Report

This market report was compiled by Maine Farmland Trust and MOFGA for the purpose of supporting farmer and buyer communication and creating clarity in a rapidly changing market. Observations are collected biweekly, for this report over the week of 9/14-9/18, from the same group of wholesale buyers and diversified farmers concentrated in the Portland and Mid-Coast markets. Huge gratitude to those folks for taking the time. This information is solely for informational and observational purposes, and is likely most helpful for small, diversified farms selling to the local wholesale marketplace (such as stores and restaurants), and direct to consumer at farmers' markets and farmstands. We hope the Report's insights from week to week, and over the course of the season, help you assess and gauge your own experience and observations about supply and demand trends. Any questions feel free to directly contact Alex at MFT (alex@mainefarmlandtrust.org) or Nicolas at MOFGA (nlindholm@mofga.org).

August 2020 Organic Price Report available [here](#).

Key Takeaways:

- Fewer responses this week, but still some observations to share.
- Wholesale buyers and Farmers both report that demand is strong and steady.
- Tomato and fruit supply is dropping off faster than demand in wholesale markets. Other summer crops that are on the way out could do well in wholesale markets, if farmers had supply.
- Farmers anticipate good, steady demand across markets into the fall, and supplies look good to meet it.

Buyer responses:

Overview: Just three buyers reported this week, plus one to say no updates or changes since the last report. These folks report that consumer demand remains strong, steady, and more or less seasonally relevant. Tomato and fruit supply is dropping off faster than consumer demand in wholesale markets.

1. **What trends are you observing right now in current consumer demand?**
 - a. Consumer demand remains strong, for both summer and fall crops, and one buyer consistently reports demand is higher than last year.
2. **Is your supply meeting demand? Is there unmet demand for certain products? Do you have an oversupply of certain products?**
 - a. Buyers overall report that consumers still want tomatoes and fruits, though supply is dropping off.
 - b. Specific buyers report unmet demand (due to low supply) for sweet peppers, fresh beans, broccoli, cauliflower, garlic, pears, peaches, and plums. Buyers also reported that kale and corn were in low supply but seem to be increasing. While basil, heirloom tomatoes, zucchini, summer squash, and cucumbers appear to be 'done for the season'

from the supply perspective, a grower with a late flush could see these items move well at wholesale.

- c. One buyer reports oversupply of winter squash.
3. **Are you seeing or anticipating any changes that will affect your supply and demand in the coming weeks?**
- a. One buyer shares that “September 15-October 15 is typically a period of very stable demand” for them. “Shoppers are turning on their ovens more, which supports more of the types of foods Maine farmers produce.”
 - b. One buyer reflected on the variety and magnitude of challenges that K-12 schools are dealing with: changing funding situations, head counts of students physically at school, and new practices being implemented on site. Whether this will impact local food purchasing remains to be seen.
 - c. Another buyer expects that as the weather cools, consumer interest in fall crops will continue to grow.
 - d. Another buyer reports concerns over early frosts here in Maine, and national impacts of the West Coast fires on produce supply.
4. **Any useful resources, news, or data you want to share?**
- a. “Get out the Vote and Get out the Tote! Remember to support your local orchards this year more than ever...it's a great way to get out of the house in a lower risk environment.” [Editor’s Note: [Maine Pomological Society](#) and [Get Real Maine](#) both have maps to find your local PYO. Check with the farms about COVID procedures.]
 - b. Buyers are beginning their annual outreach and planning to meet new growers and assess supply of crops for winter, and later in the season for next year’s supply. [Editor’s Note: MFT hosted “Sourcing Local Made Easier” for a few years and has compiled input from buyers and farmers about best practices for communications and logistics plans. Contact Alex (alex@mainefarmlandtrust.org) if you’d like a copy of that list.]
 - c. [Editor’s Note: the MEVEG-BERRY listserv is available for buyers and farmers to post their supply needs/inventory. To subscribe, send an email to: meveg-berry-subscribe-request@lists.maine.edu]

Farmer responses:

Overview: Demand has bumped back up post-Labor Day, as seasonal preferences change and fall crops move in to replace summer crops. Farmers markets, direct sales, restaurants and stores all seem to be strong and steady. Supplies of summer crops are dropping off, while fall crops are coming in and meeting demand overall --and most farms expect to have steady supplies to meet demand going through Sept. Weed pressure has been great this summer, so does anyone understand why?

1. **What trends are you observing right now in current consumer demand?**
 - a. Demand across all markets has picked back up after the slight dip in late August. There is strong and steady interest for fall crops as they come in.

- b. Farmers are seeing strong sales of bunched greens (chard and kale), fall brassicas (cauliflower and cabbage), and root crops (carrots and beets). Many farmers also noted heavy demand for winter squash, which is now harvested and curing under cover.
 - c. Several reports were made of summer crop fatigue; customers' preferences have clearly changed over the past few weeks from summer to fall crops. Tomatoes in particular have seen a slump in demand (which most felt is normal for this time of year), and many farms said production has slowed anyway (and several have had frost).
 - d. A couple farmers reported their store and restaurant demand has been particularly good and steady, as well as sales to other farms. One farmer mentioned their restaurant sales are stronger now than at any other time this summer, and wondered if consumers are now more comfortable eating out, or perhaps concerned that restaurants will close up for the winter at any moment --not exactly sure why, but happy to have higher sales at this time. Another farmer noted that their (direct) retail customers seem to have settled into school, things have normalized in the local community, and year-round residents seem very happy to have the farm's online store as a local option.
2. **Is your supply meeting demand? Is there unmet demand for certain products?**
- a. Most farms are meeting demand well.
 - b. There is reported undersupply of cukes, basil, and colored peppers: the few summer crops still seeing robust interest but dwindling supply.
 - c. Several farms said their fall crops aren't ready to bring to market (carrots and beets want a frost to sweeten up, certain winter squash varieties need to cure), so their supply isn't yet meeting demand but will soon.
 - d. There were varying reports about head lettuce: one stating they were experiencing strong demand alongside a gap in supply (due to late planting successions getting thrown off track), while another is seeing a slow-down in demand, so their head lettuce is sitting in the field (at least not bolting as the weather cools).
3. **Are you seeing or anticipating any changes that will affect your supply and demand in the coming weeks?**
- a. There is optimism and a general expectation for steady markets over the next several weeks or more. Typically, farmers expect good demand for all of the root crops, fall greens, cabbage and brassicas, and winter squash through Sept. and Oct., and most farms report good supplies.
 - b. With frosts and high tunnels being turned over to winter plantings, the supply of summer crops will continue to drop.
 - c. More rain is needed.
4. **Any useful resources, news, or data you want to share?**
- a. One farm is preemptively rolling out a fall/winter CSA, even though it might not be strictly necessary for them to add this to their marketing mix right now, but it feels safe to have an overflow valve (even if it ends up limiting the total availability to stores and restaurants, or if summer markets slow down).
 - b. Another farmer is noticing heavy weed populations and that several others are saying it's a bad weed year, and wondering why? Related to all the dryness? Or because our time and attention were taken away at some critical moments doing all the COVID-related packing and prep and precaution? Anyone have insights and observations?