

7/10 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 7/6-10, 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).

Key Takeaways:

- Demand across all markets (except restaurants and institutions) remains elevated and strong for local products, particularly for in-season summer crops
 - Any undersupply of summer crops (zukes, cukes, tomatoes) should be resolved in the coming weeks as these crops come into full production
 - There remains an oversupply of head lettuce
 - What's going on with pricing? It's on a lot of folks' minds, so please [share your thoughts in this quick 4-question survey](#) for the next report.
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Buyer responses:

Overview: Only 3 buyers responded this week. Everyone agreed that demand is still elevated over this time last year, and that demand is "appropriately seasonal" with crops like berries and peas being in too short supply to meet demand. Some questions about who are the consumers driving demand for local products right now - folks visiting Maine, or folks living here?

1. What trends are you observing right now in current consumer demand?

- a. "Appropriately seasonal"
- b. Everyone wants berries, and supply has been short due to weather
- c. Still elevated demand and strong demand for local produce

2. Is your supply meeting demand? Is there unmet demand for certain products? Oversupply of certain products?

- a. One buyer reports that although the local tomato supply is rapidly growing, they are currently undersupplied. Another reports they are undersupplied on peas, berries, hakurei turnips, slicing cucumbers.
- b. One buyer reported high prices and inconsistent national supply of corn, broccoli, and melons.
- c. Buyers report being oversupplied on lettuce heads of all types and sizes. Specific buyers also mentioned oversupply of asparagus and rhubarb.

3. Are you seeing or anticipating any changes that will affect your supply and demand in the coming weeks?

- a. Questions for discussion! One buyer was wondering... (email the editors with your thoughts and observations and we'll compile and send back around)
 - i. Retailers and Farmers' Markets: are you seeing tourists and out-of-towners at your markets? Seems like the demand is there, but it's not clear who the consumer is.
 - ii. Pre-packed items: Are consumers still avid for pre-packed items or are they returning to bulk options?
- b. Rain helped some crops and took a toll on others. Anticipating mildew and fungal issues.
- c. One buyer hoping to see chanterelles

Farmer responses:

Overview: Retail markets are strong, while reports of wholesale markets are mixed, with restaurants and institutions being well below normal. Standard summer crops (zukes, cukes, summer squash, new potatoes, etc.) are seeing high demand across all markets, and supply will likely meet this demand as these crops come into full production over the next few weeks. Demand for head lettuce, salad greens and bunched greens continues to be slow, with some resulting oversupply. Farms acknowledge there are so many uncertainties in the markets for the upcoming month, yet planning and planting for their fall season continues. Several requests for marketing help and resource sharing came in this week, as well as several plugs for Maine farms to continue to collaborate with marketing support, information exchange, and social justice work.

1. What trends are you observing right now in current consumer demand?

- a. **Direct to Consumers/Farmers Markets:** Demand is high for summer crops including cukes, zukes, summer squash, peas, new potatoes, carrots and the first tomatoes. Individual farms also listed high demand for some specific items like herbs, fennel, local eggs, and cheese. One farm noted sustained interest in strawberries, but that crop has slowed down. Demand continues to be slow for head lettuce and cut salad greens.
- b. **Wholesale to Stores:** Mixed reports: a few farms stating that demand is good from their retail grocery accounts, especially for the new summer crops, while a couple farms report their store demand is slower than expected. One grower noted that stores this summer are not selling their cut salad greens out of a bulk box (due to COVID-19 concerns), but only pre-bagged in small sizes, and that's reduced their overall volume.

- c. **Restaurants:** Most farms are seeing some business with these accounts, but report small orders, no regular pattern of demand, and that restaurants are still figuring out operations while getting back into service.
- d. **Institutions:** Most institutions are closed or operating with limited capacity, which has been hard on farms who have built markets with these businesses.

2. Is your supply meeting demand?

- a. **Is there unmet demand for certain products?** In both Direct to Consumer and Wholesale markets, there is unmet demand for zukes, summer squash, cukes, and tomatoes. Individual farms also noted unmet demand for their peas, beans, spinach, bunched beets, and broccolini. Some of this undersupply is weather related. Some will be alleviated soon as production comes into full swing.
- b. **Do you have an oversupply of certain products?** There is an oversupply of head lettuce and bunched greens like kale. A few farms mentioned that the balance of supply and demand for items like kale and chard usually gets this way at this time of year. One farm said they have an oversupply of scallions and cut flowers.
- c. One farm noted that they've had good demand and acceptance of new COVID-19 product packaging like mesclun mix in a clamshell or baby zucchini in a quart container, priced per container.

3. Are you seeing or anticipating any changes that will affect your supply and demand in the coming weeks?

- a. Supply of the main summer staple crops (zukes, cukes, tomatoes, etc) will be coming on strong.
- b. Several farms anticipate a near normal pattern of steady demand for the next month, then a dropping off in mid-to-late August. Yet most farms acknowledge that there is great uncertainty ahead, in tourism, in restaurant trade, in schools' reopening, in the consistency of online sales of local farm produce, and more, which leads to an uncertainty in demand in the coming month.
- c. A few farms report they will be working to keep their planting schedule on course, and ensure a supply for fall --but it's hard to know what the markets will be like then. One farmer stated that their crop plans continue to change (even from the tractor seat as cover crops are turned in) as their marketing plans for the fall continue to change.
- d. Many farms this week voiced acceptance of new procedures and circumstances that they've experienced or taken on over the past few months of the pandemic, including things like the added labor and packaging for pre-bagged items, the increased time and infrastructure needed for the increase in farmstand traffic or CSA membership or online orders, and that some markets (like restaurants and institutions) will not recover this summer to normal levels.

4. Any useful resources, news, or data you want to share?

- a. One farm requested marketing support from Maine's ag service organizations, to highlight the variety of products Maine farmers are bringing to market and the ways farmers are collaborating and pivoting in their marketing efforts during the pandemic. This farmer suggested there needs to be positive reminders to consumers about all the ways farmers have brought them high-quality, well-priced products, and that they will continue to do so when society starts to relax from pandemic safety precautions. The pandemic has revealed how

much food is available in our state and how producers have collaborated with each other to get it to markets and consumers.

- b. Along a similar line, another farmer wondered if consumers will go back to buying large quantities instead of small pre-bagged units after this is all over. Can farmers expect to sell as much as in the past?
- c. There was a request for a resource list for packaging and other farm supplies, particularly plastic bags, from vendors that support MOFGA's mission (socially, environmentally, etc). Farmers are trying to be conscientious about their packaging choices, but feel there are limited options, and find it's difficult to source items from companies with shared social, political or environmental affinity to their own.
- d. One farmer asked, regarding this Market Report, can we all be collectively transparent and collaborative with sharing more information without shooting ourselves in the foot?
- e. All farms are encouraged to access and utilize the [National Young Farmers Coalition Racial Equity Toolkit](#).