

# 6/12 Maine Local Market Report

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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 were collected over the week of 6/8-12, with crucial and insightful input from wholesale buyers and diversified farmers. Huge gratitude to those folks for taking the time. This information is solely for informational and observational purposes. Any questions feel free to directly contact Alex at MFT ([alex@mainefarmlandtrust.org](mailto:alex@mainefarmlandtrust.org)) or Nicolas at MOFGA ([nlindholm@mofga.org](mailto:nlindholm@mofga.org)).

## Key Takeaways:

- Wholesale buyers report demand is stable, and for the most part, still elevated. Farmers report a more varied picture of demand.
- Expect to sell strawberries, if you have them. Oversupply of head lettuce and salad greens currently.
- Summer tourists and residents having safe options, and confidence in those options, is still a great unknown for wholesale markets. Continued restaurant closures are affecting farmers' sales.
- Farmers are feeling the need to be agile in marketing and crop planning decisions going into the summer and fall.

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## Buyer responses:

**Overview:** Wholesale buyers report that demand is stable, and for the most part, still elevated. Supply is mostly meeting demand, and buyers look forward to more local products coming to maturity. Excitement is high for strawberries! Oversupply of head lettuce in wholesale markets (mostly grocery) continues. The greatest uncertainty in demand comes from the summer population influx – some folks noting that summer residents have arrived, and others reporting not seeing an increase in summer tourism.

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

- a. Demand is fluctuating less or the moment, which one buyer described felt like the “frenzy has dissipated somewhat.” Depending on the market, most folks are reporting that demand is still high, especially for local products. One buyer said demand is 25-45% above last year. However another (different region) noted that sales have dropped off slightly, and thought perhaps that’s because customers now have more choices at their market.
- b. Buyers reported that the greatest uncertainty for them right now is the summer residents and tourists. One buyer said that by now there would be a wave of folks to increase demand, but they haven’t seen it yet.
- c. Buyers report their customers are excited about fruits, particularly berries. There’s still high demand for bagged items. Individual markets reported customers having more

interest in kale, chard, radishes, and rhubarb, over baby greens. Another individual market noted that high egg prices seem to be driving demand down. One buyer heard from a supplier that reseeding seedlings for late June sales is paying off due to late spring frosts.

**2. Is your supply meeting demand?**

- . Buyers report steady supply is meeting their demand for most products.
- a. For unmet demand, one buyer reported local meat, and another spinach, lettuce and salad mix.
- b. Several buyers continue to report an oversupply of head lettuce and greens.

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

- . Strawberries! Excitement is high.
- a. Buyers are looking forward to meeting more of their supply with local product as the harvest season ramps up. Early signs of peas are promising, for one buyer.
- b. Re-opening continues, and one buyer hopes this gives tourists more (safe) options, and they've observed that summer folks are already here.
- c. One buyer reported it's hard to get a clear picture about consumer price sensitivity right now -- while some folks don't seem price sensitive, others are more so.

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

- . Large-scale consumer trends are looking at brands to innovate solutions that address consumer's interest in health and novelty. Shoppers are looking to alleviate the monotony of buying the same things.
- a. Another larger-scale trend is the call to strengthen supply chains and the opportunity presented to local suppliers if they "prove their strong distribution and capacity."

## Farmer responses:

Overview: As with most years, new and early crops that are in small supply are in high demand; right now, that includes fresh carrots, beets, baby zucchini and mini broccoli. Selection and quantities of these items will increase over the next 2 weeks. Strawberries and peas are coming in! Loss of sales to restaurants continues as they remain closed or are having limited seating or take-out. Most farms are experiencing a slow-down in demand for salad greens of all kinds, and some report a similar slow-down in demand for meat. Many farms expressed concern that mid-summer demand will be lower than last year, and are reconsidering their crop plans.

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

**a. Direct to Consumers/Farmers Markets:** There are mixed reports here, which vary from crop to crop and market to market. Reports show there is strong demand at farmers markets for: eggs, fresh carrots, beets, baby zucchini. Individual farms also report strong demand for: cut flowers, salad turnips, radishes, mini broccoli and seedlings (many gardeners & other farmers lost their seedlings to frost last week). Many farms report "greens fatigue" (salad and bunched), and one farm mentioned a drop in demand for over-wintered crops. The increased demand that had been seen for meat over the past 2 months seems to be declining now. One farmer just started their farmers markets and reported that traffic was lower than last year, but transactions per customer was slightly higher.

**b. Wholesale to Stores:** Similarly, there are mixed reports. Some farmers are seeing normal to higher-than-normal sales with their current markets, with additional inquiries from new buyers. Others are seeing a drop from previous years' sales, or a flattening of demand from the past 2 months, particularly for bunched greens, salad greens & spinach.

**c. Restaurants:** These accounts tend to be slow. Sales of salad greens in particular are very slow.

## **2. Is your supply meeting demand? Is there unmet demand for certain products?**

a. **Direct to Consumer/Farmers Markets:** Most farms are reporting some normal seasonal trends, like an unmet demand for early/new crops from the fields including fresh carrots, zucchini, peas, and cut flowers. This undersupply will be alleviated as crops grow with warming weather over the next couple weeks. Most are seeing an oversupply of cut salad greens, lettuce, some bunched greens, and one farmer mentioned herbs.

b. **Wholesale to Stores:** Some farms are not meeting or just meeting their wholesale demand, due to both retail market demand and/or limited supply for early/new field crops. Others have seen a reduction in demand, with an oversupply of salad greens.

c. **Restaurants:** There is an over-abundance of salad greens, as restaurants either remain closed or have reduced their business with a focus on take-out/curbside where the demand for salad is low.

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

a. Many farms are unsure or concerned that this summer's demand will not even be close to 2019 demand. A couple of farms voiced cautious optimism of strong demand into the early summer.

b. Most farms are looking closely at their summer and fall planting plans. There is a feeling that some crops have been over-planted (like salad greens), and more field space will be given to staple crops like onions, carrots and beans.

c. One farm is having some issues sourcing seeds for late-season succession planting, as seed stocks remain low from suppliers.

d. There is a general sense that incoming new crops will see strong demand (as they historically do in their respective early seasons) --coming soon there will be: strawberries, peas, tomatoes!

e.

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

a. Farms are still pre-bagging or packaging most everything, for both farmers markets and wholesale. There is positive feedback from direct-sales customers about contactless pick-ups.

b. By mid-July, farms will be making more focused decisions about their fall crop mix, and may explore a heavier emphasis on storage crops, and thus extend direct sales into deeper fall & winter.

c. One farm is in the early stages of trialing a new online ordering & pick-up system, hoping to bolster summer sales as customers get used to this way of getting local farm products. [Editor's Note: MOFGA is hosting a webinar entitled "Online Sales for Farms: Lessons Learned So Far" this Tuesday, June 16, at 7 p.m. Info and registration [here](#).]

d. One farm reported since restaurant demand continues to be limited, they are not able to pursue their plans for new markets this season.

e. “Black Lives Matter! We are happy to see MFT and other agricultural organizations showing up for racial justice, and we hope that the momentum built by the recent events and protests becomes a long-standing commitment to racial justice in Maine.” Desire expressed for there to be a resource specific to supporting Black, Indigenous, and other farmers of color in Maine in addition to the other resources being shared around.