

# Direct-to-Consumer & Consumer Education

---

## 2025 NEW HAMPSHIRE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE STRATEGIC PLAN

---

**Purpose:** To understand the unique opportunities and challenges facing direct-to-consumer markets and consumer education efforts. Direct-to-consumer markets are defined as any market where farmers, fishermen, or food producers sell their products directly to consumers, including at farmers' markets, farm stands, fish markets, and through Community Supported Agriculture/Fishery shares. Consumer education is defined as the efforts made to educate and raise awareness among Granite Staters about the economic, social, and environmental significance of participating in local and regional food systems.

## What's at Stake?

---

New Hampshire's direct-to-consumer markets are crucial to our economy, providing essential income for farms, fisheries, and other food producers. These markets support thousands of jobs, keep dollars in the state, and strengthen our communities. However, direct-to-consumer markets can be less convenient and perceived as more expensive than mainstream markets. Educating consumers about the value of participating in direct-to-consumer markets and local food systems at large is key to increasing purchases and inspiring engagement. With 92,000 people employed in New Hampshire's food system and \$14.2 billion in sales, the stakes are high. An increased presence of supportive and unified local food marketing will boost farmer confidence in their sales potential and increase agricultural growth throughout New Hampshire.

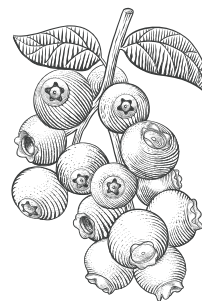
## Current Conditions: Direct-to-Consumer

---

Direct-to-consumer markets, such as farmers' markets, Community Supported Agriculture shares (CSAs), fish markets, and farm stands, are vital to New Hampshire's local food system. While direct-to-consumer sales make up only 0.4% of total food sales, they account for 11.3% of local food sales in New Hampshire, representing the third largest market channel for local food sales, emphasizing a specialized role and potential for growth for direct-to-consumer markets.

While half of New Hampshire residents buy local food at least a few times a month, this varies by county. A majority of the population buys local food in a recreational way, rather than in routine shopping. New England consumers prioritize taste, quality, and affordability when purchasing food, rather than solely focusing on whether the food is local or not. By emphasizing these attributes in marketing and messaging, direct-to-consumer markets can attract a broader range of consumers.

Nutrition incentive programs, like Granite State Market Match and Double Up Food Bucks, play a crucial role in increasing accessibility to these markets, allowing low-income residents to purchase fresh local food, which provides a wider customer-base for local producers. New Hampshire has significant potential to expand its direct-to-consumer markets, transforming farmers' markets, CSAs, fish markets, and farm stands into thriving hubs for local food businesses.



# Challenges and Opportunities: Direct-to-Consumer

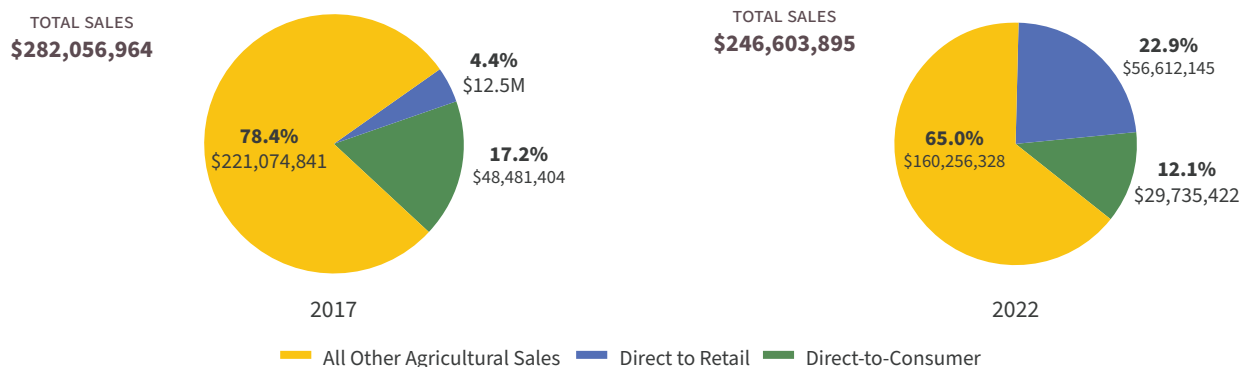
## CHALLENGES

- Accessing local food is often less convenient and perceived as more expensive than mainstream alternatives. Studies indicate that prices at direct-to-consumer outlets can be competitive with, or even lower than, those at grocery stores.
- Many small producers do not have the technology or skills needed to effectively market their products online, limiting their customer reach.
- Many farmers' markets do not have enough funding for professional management and marketing. There is currently no statewide support organization for farmers' markets or CSAs.
- Complex and inconsistent regulatory requirements at the local level creates obstacles for small producers seeking to expand their direct-to-consumer operations. For example, vendor licenses are often not transferable between farmers' markets, adding unnecessary administrative burdens for producers selling across multiple towns. A lack of coordinated, state-level programs to streamline regulations or promote direct-to-consumer operations further hinders growth.
- Choice and variety in many direct-to-consumer markets is limited or not applicable for many low-income households and communities of color.

## OPPORTUNITIES

- NH Eats Local Month is a local food promotion program hosted by a statewide network of organizations focused on local food marketing and coordinated by the NH Food Alliance. NH Eats Local Month leverages strategic partnerships with businesses and organizations in and outside of the food system to support more demand for direct-to-consumer markets and expand consumer education related to local food.
- Despite a lack of statewide support or coordination, there are many thriving farmers' markets, farm stands, and CSAs, as well as regional examples of collaboration and support for all.
- There is demonstrated interest in place-based branding by New Hampshire state agencies, such as the NH Department of Business and Economic Affairs, Division of Travel and Tourism, and other food systems leaders.
- 60% of New Englanders say that local food is important to them.
- There is interest, energy, and research around collaborative marketing initiatives and innovative partnership models among farmers, markets, and regional food networks.

### NEW HAMPSHIRE AGRICULTURAL SALES BY MARKET, 2017 & 2022



SOURCE: USDA Census of Agriculture, Table 2: Market Value. Adjusted for inflation to 2024 dollars.

# Current Conditions: Consumer Education

Consumer education is crucial to sustaining New Hampshire’s local food system, as it raises awareness for the benefits of direct-to-consumer markets and increases the demand for local food. However, many residents are unclear about what qualifies as “local food,” leading to confusion and inconsistent support for local producers.

The perception that local food is more expensive and less convenient than food in the grocery store further influences consumer behavior, particularly among those with limited budgets. Additionally, low-income, immigrant, and racially diverse communities are more likely to face limited access to local food. Effective

consumer education must address structural barriers, such as limited access to markets accepting SNAP/ WIC benefits, while ensuring diverse communities see themselves represented in local food marketing campaigns.

As climate change increasingly affects our food system, the need for effective consumer education is growing. Public campaigns that highlight the role of local food in building resilience against climate-related disruptions are critical. Programs such as farm to school, local food festivals, and awareness-building campaigns have also made progress in this area, but more can be done.

# Challenges and Opportunities: Consumer Education

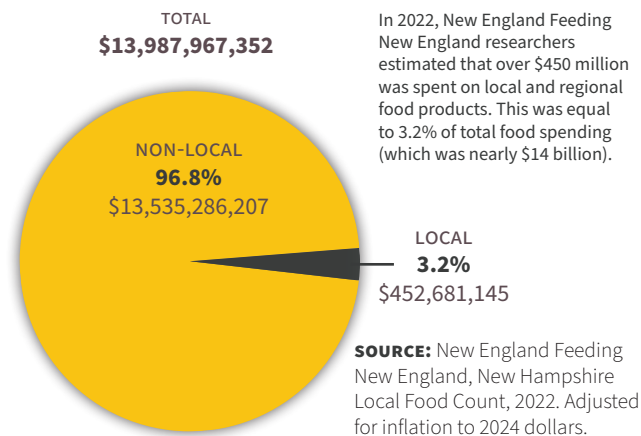
## CHALLENGES

- Misleading marketing by large companies misusing the term “local” creates confusion for consumers, reducing support for truly local food.
- Current educational efforts and programs are limited and often do not have the funding or coordination needed to effectively reach a wide audience.
- Socioeconomic disparities and limited public engagement resources make it difficult for all residents to benefit from local food education.

## OPPORTUNITIES

- Connecticut’s Buy CT Grown campaign, which significantly boosted consumer engagement with local food, is an example of a public awareness building campaign that educates about the benefits of local food to create a more informed and supportive customer base.
- Schools, community centers, and public spaces can be used to share educational materials and host events that promote local food systems and reach a broader audience.
- New Hampshire’s ability to engage diverse audiences is an asset, as educational programs and coalitions are increasingly tailored to meet the needs of various populations, including the Indigenous NH Harvest Calendar, NH Harvest of the Month program, the Cooking Matters program, and NH Hunger Solutions’ Food Access Coalitions.

### ESTIMATED LOCAL FOOD SPENDING IN NH, 2022



# Summary

---

Direct-to-consumer markets and consumer education are key parts of New Hampshire's food system. Direct-to-consumer markets are crucial to the success of small and medium-sized farms, providing economic benefits and fostering community connections that wholesale channels can not offer. However, these markets face serious challenges, including competition from large retailers, economic disparities, and the ongoing impacts of climate change. Consumer education is essential for building a strong local food culture, raising awareness about the benefits of supporting local agriculture, and tackling barriers to accessing local food.

As New Hampshire looks to strengthen its food system towards long-term resilience and sustainability, a coordinated effort to enhance both direct-to-consumer markets and consumer education is required, in addition to an increase of local food availability in the mainstream grocery sector and the employment of collaborative marketing and distribution. By adopting the recommendations outlined, New Hampshire can build a more inclusive, equitable, and resilient food system that supports its farmers and meets the diverse needs of Granite Staters.

# Recommendations

---

- **Establish a coordinated statewide local food promotion program.** Establish a coordinated statewide promotion program through an expansion of the work and infrastructure of NH Eats Local Month. This will include:

  - Developing a New Hampshire grown, raised, and caught labeling system to distinguish genuinely local products and build consumer trust and loyalty. The labeling initiative will leverage research on successful programs like Buy CT Grown and Taste NY to determine best practices and funding needs.
  - Launching a statewide marketing and education campaign to promote the benefits of buying local food, including local seafood. The campaign will focus on increasing consumer awareness, supporting regional organizations, and establishing partnerships with businesses and community organizations outside of the food system. The campaign will include multilingual outreach materials and community-led engagement initiatives to address the diverse needs of New Hampshire's population.
  - Funding for one full-time equivalent (FTE) position to oversee the entire program, including the labeling initiative, marketing and education campaigns, and outreach efforts. The position will ensure coordination and effective use of resources across all components.
  - Securing funding for program implementation based on research into other successful local food initiatives, with an initial funding proposal informed by the needs of the labeling system and marketing campaign.
- **Increase UNH Extension capacity to help producers enhance their marketing strategies.** Increase capacity for direct technical assistance at UNH Extension to help producers enhance their digital presence and adapt to evolving consumer behaviors. This could be modeled after programs like Vital Communities' Climate Farmers Stories program or the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN). UNH Extension could offer a menu of services and match producers with the right technical assistance to support their growth.
- **Launch a student program to provide marketing support for food producers.** Launch a program at the University of New Hampshire that leverages student energy and existing programs (e.g., Voice Z Digital) to provide marketing support for food producers. Match students with local producers to help expand their digital presence and improve marketing strategies, offering students hands-on experience while helping farmers adapt to changing consumer behaviors and strengthening their online reach.

- **Fund two management positions to support farmers' markets and CSAs.** Fund two full-time equivalent (FTE) positions focused on professional management and infrastructure improvements for farmers' markets and CSAs, particularly in underserved areas, to ensure equitable distribution and market stability. Emphasis would be placed on evaluation of current models and development of best practices (e.g., Maine Federation of Farmers' Markets).
- **Expand and integrate local food nutrition incentive programs.** Expand and integrate nutrition incentive programs, such as Granite State Market Match, Double Up Food Bucks, and Vouchers for Veterans, into larger, statewide marketing and promotion efforts by partnering with the NH Food Bank and the regional food access coalitions facilitated by NH Hunger Solutions.

## Authors

---

**Lead Author:** Shawn Menard, Executive Director, Seacoast Eat Local

**Contributing Authors:**

Hanna Flanders, Director of Community Engagement, Kearsarge Food Hub

Analena Bruce, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Food Systems, Department of Agriculture, Nutrition & Food Systems, University of New Hampshire

Colleen Jennings, Communications Coordinator, NH Food Alliance, Sustainability Institute, University of New Hampshire; Market Manager, Salem NH Farmers' Market

David Trumble, Farmer and Production Manager, Local Harvest CSA

---

**New Hampshire**  
*Department of Agriculture,  
Markets, and Food*



This brief was developed through a participatory process led by the NH Food Alliance, a program of the University of New Hampshire. The brief content is comprised of the opinions, perspectives, and information gathered by the authors and participants, and does not necessarily represent those of the NH Department of Agriculture, Markets, and Food or the NH Food Alliance.

For more information, including references and opportunities to get involved, visit the 2025 NH Food and Agriculture Strategic Plan web page on [nhfoodalliance.org](https://nhfoodalliance.org) or scan the QR code on the inside front cover of the print version.