

City of Bristol Tennessee

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Farmers Markets in the United States Makes Tremendous Strides

State Street Market Keeping Pace

Way back in 1999 the State Street Farmers Market was on the cusp of something great. At that time there were only an approximate 2,200 farmers markets in the United States. The original concept was to create a weekly event for the downtown area. One that would draw people to State Street while supporting local farmers who were finding it difficult to locate places to sell their home grown produce. They had in years past pulled their pick-up trucks in parking lots throughout the downtown area. Problems existed due to lack of promotion. No one knew they were there unless you just happened to pass by. At times they had to move locations for various reasons, which made it difficult for their patrons to find them.

Today the State Street market has become a staple in downtown Bristol for six months of the year, every year for the past eleven years. "It is the social event of the week for many Bristolians and a welcome payday for farmers and artisans" stated Terry Napier, Director of Bristol's Park and Recreation who oversees the city's market. "It's cool morning air, the smell of fresh dirt clinging to garden grown potatoes, the sight of dew still visible on the morning picked tomatoes, fresh flowers, and the low voices breaking the silence of the morning dawn, that is what farmers markets are made of," continued Napier.

Today the USDA reports that over 1,000 additional markets were recorded in the United States during the year 2011. The annual reports show a total of 7,175 farmers markets were operating in 2011, topping the 6,132 markets operating in 2010.

Mike Sparks, Deputy City Manager for the city stated, "These outlets provide economic benefits for producers to grow businesses and provide communities with increased access to fresh fruits and vegetables and other foods. This is seen as a positive addition to those who live downtown and businesses downtown as well."

Only 12 percent of U.S. farmers markets indicated they have the capability of accepting SNAP benefits onsite. Program participants nationwide reports that \$7.5 million dollars were spent in the markets with a national average purchase being \$16.69.

The State Street Farmers Market opened in 1999 and will close-out its eleventh season at the end of October. The market is located at 810 State Street in downtown Bristol.