2023 BC Farmers' Market Economic Impact Study
REGIONAL REPORT

Sunshine Coast

This project was completed by:

BC Association of Farmers' Markets (BCAFM)

in collaboration with:

University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC)

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PROJECT SUPPORTERS:

BC FARMERS' MARKETS

Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership
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SUMMARY

The BC Association of Farmers' Markets (BCAFM), in collaboration with Dr. David Connell of the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC), completed a large, province-wide study in 2023 to measure the economic impacts[1] of farmers markets in BC. The results of this project show that farmers markets in BC have grown over the past decade, despite unprecedented social, political, and economic challenges, including the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Quantifying the economic contributions of farmers markets encourages long-term support for local BC agriculture and food sectors, along with the thousands of farm and food businesses who sell at farmers markets across BC. Furthermore, this study demonstrates the role of farmers markets as integral low-barrier, direct sales channels for local BC producers and shoppers to connect, while showing us their essential role in local food security and food systems.

The ***2023 BC Farmers' Market Economic Impact Study*** builds upon the success of similar projects completed in 2012 and 2006, which were also led by BCAFM and Dr. David Connell. By using comparable methods, we are able to assess changes over time. This study measures market spending and spending at neighbouring local businesses, both of which contribute to the economic impact of farmers markets in BC. In total, 70 farmers market assessments were completed across the province between May and September, 2023.

This report presents a regional analysis for the Sunshine Coast, including both assessed and unassessed BCAFM member farmers markets[2]. Survey results represent participating markets where an assessment was conducted by a research associate.

2023 Study Highlights for Sunshine Coast:

- **Annual economic impact[3] of BCAFM member markets: $5.2 million**
- **Annual direct sales at BCAFM member farmers markets: $3.4 million**
    - **Average shopper spending per market visit: $41.48**
- **Over 116,000 visits and 87,000 shoppers annually**
- **30% of study participants self-identified as tourists or day-trippers**
- **Shopper spending at other local, neighbouring businesses: $3.5 million**
- **79% of study participants said that they would spend $54.94 shopping or eating at other local, neighbouring businesses in the farmers market area**

[1] This study measures the economic benefits of farmers markets. The BC Association of Farmers' Markets chose to use the term "impacts" because of its common use in media communications and its greater recognition by members of the public.

[2] Using data from assessed markets, we are able to estimate the economic impact of unassessed markets by size. This allows a total estimate for the economic impact of all BCAFM member markets.

[3] This is a measure of the "ripple effect" for every dollar spent at farmers markets, including monies vendors spend on inputs for the products sold.

BCAFM Regions

The BC Association of Farmers' Markets divides the province into 10 regions for membership and organizational purposes. The regions are as follows:

- Cariboo Chilcotin Coast
- City of Vancouver
- Fraser Valley
- Kootenay Rockies and Columbia Basin
- Metro Vancouver
- Northern BC
- Sea to Sky
- Sunshine Coast
- Thompson Okanagan
- Vancouver Island and Gulf Islands

This report presents results for the Sunshine Coast region. Study limitations, as discussed on page 5, are particularly relevant for regional reports. BCAFM regions vary widely in the number of markets that comprise each region. Therefore, regions with only a few markets may not be represented well by measures of central tendency (i.e., means or averages). The specific geographies of each region also affect the size of markets and number of tourists and day-trippers.

Sunshine Coast

This project conducted 2 on-site market assessments within the Sunshine Coast region. At the time of writing, there are 5 total BCAFM member markets in the same region. Table 1 showcases assessed and unassessed markets in the region.

Table 1.

List of Farmers Markets in the Sunshine Coast Region

Assessed Markets	Unassessed Markets
Powell River Farmers' Market	Davis Bay Farmers Market
Sechelt Farmers' and Artisans' Market	Gambier Island Farmers Market Society
	Gibsons Farmer's Market

All members of the BC Association of Farmers' Markets were invited to participate in the study and each participating market received a small honorarium for their efforts. A full list of participating markets is included in the provincial final report.

RESEARCH METHOD

The method used to assess individual markets in BC consists of four parts: dot survey; crowd count; shopper survey; and business survey. These are the same methods used for previous BC studies in 2012 and 2006 and are based on the Rapid Market Assessment technique developed by Oregon State University[4].

Dot Survey

The dot survey method engaged consumers in friendly interaction through multiple-choice questions posted in large print on paper pads at eye level. This approach has a high response rate, thereby increasing both validity and accuracy.

The colours of dot survey stickers were random, except for yellow stickers which were reserved for tourists and/or day-trippers to the market. Participants were asked: “Are you a tourist or day-tripper?”. The following definitions were provided to research associates to assist in communicating with participants:

> *A tourist is someone who is doing overnight stays in the area or region. A day-tripper is someone from the area or region who made a special trip into town for the day. Special trip is not something they usually do.*

Picture 1.

Dot Survey Market Set-up

[4] Brewer, L., Lev, L., & Stephenson, G. (2008). *Tools for Rapid Market Assessments.* Oregon State University. https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/sites/catalog/files/project/pdf/sr1088.pdf

There were four questions, developed by the research team, asked at all participating farmers markets. These questions are outlined in Box 1. A fifth question was developed by each participating market to collect data relevant to the local market. Market specific questions are detailed in the relevant market's final report.

Box 1.

Dot Survey Questions

1. How much have you spent, or do you plan to spend, at the market today?
2. How often do you come to this farmers market?
3. If you plan to do additional shopping or eating while in this area of town today, how much do you plan to spend?
4. When did you start shopping at this market?

Crowd Count

During a ten-minute period of each hour a market is open, members of the assessment team and market volunteers stood at each major entry point to the market and counted people entering. The total number of attendees is estimated from these systematic counts using an established formula of multiplying the actual counts by six to determine estimated hourly attendance.

Shopper Surveys

At each market, a small sample of customers was asked to participate in a short interview. People were asked about where they shop, factors they consider when buying food, how long they spend at the market, and how they spend their time when at the market. Customers were also asked if they shop at other local, neighbouring businesses on the same day that they visit the farmers market and if they would visit those businesses regardless of their intention to shop at the farmers market.

Given the small sample size collected at each market, only results aggregated at the provincial level are shown. The information collected from shoppers builds upon the dot survey data, providing additional insights into market customers. Together, the dot survey and the more detailed shopper surveys improve our understanding of what makes farmers markets successful and how they contribute to the local area, in terms of both economic and social impacts.

Local Neighbouring Business Surveys

Neighbouring businesses located near assessed farmers markets were surveyed to assess the influence of the market on neighbouring businesses and to explore the nature of the relationship. Surveys were not completed at farmers markets that did not have other businesses located nearby. The business information helps to understand the relationship between farmers markets and local, neighbouring businesses generally. Given the small sample size collected at each market, only results aggregated at the provincial level are shown. Local neighbouring business survey results can be found in the provincial final report.

Tourist & Day-tripper Analysis

Tourist and day-tripper averages referenced in this report are based on markets, as opposed to shoppers. The regional averages in this report rely on the percentages of locals and tourists/day-trippers for each assessed market and markets are weighed equally. The results would differ if averages were calculated proportionate to the number of shoppers.

Research Associates

A team of six research associates, located in different regions, were hired to conduct on-site market assessments across the province. Research associates, along with Dr. David Connell, Project Lead, the Project Manager, and Project Coordinator met in-person for training and a trial market assessment at the start of the project. Research associates were then responsible for implementing study methods consistently to the best of their ability at 70 market assessments in BC, with ongoing remote support from the study team.

Limitations

The goal of all researchers is to be as accurate and precise as possible. Inevitably, there are trade-offs when these aims compete with other goals. In this study, the project team chose to prioritize engaging as many shoppers as possible in our five-question dot survey. This approach helped to support relations between shoppers and the farmers markets, and with over 11,000 shoppers participating in the dot survey, we gained accuracy. On the other hand, the simple questions reduced our level of precision. The quality of our results was also affected by the diversity among markets, including factors such as: size of the market, physical characteristics of the market (e.g., flow of customers), how busy the market was on the day of the assessment, and weather conditions.

Differences among our research associates also contributed to different outcomes. For example, the question “Are you a tourist or day-tripper?” was not asked consistently with all participants at all market assessments. These and other factors affected levels of participation in the dot survey and one-on-one surveys in different markets

RESULTS

This section reviews regional results of shopper estimates and dot surveys, as well as some provincial averages for comparison purposes.

Market Assessments

Shopper Count

The average number of hourly shoppers during peak season for assessed farmers markets in the Sunshine Coast region is shown in Chart 1.

Chart 1.

Average Number of Shoppers per Hour in Peak Market Season

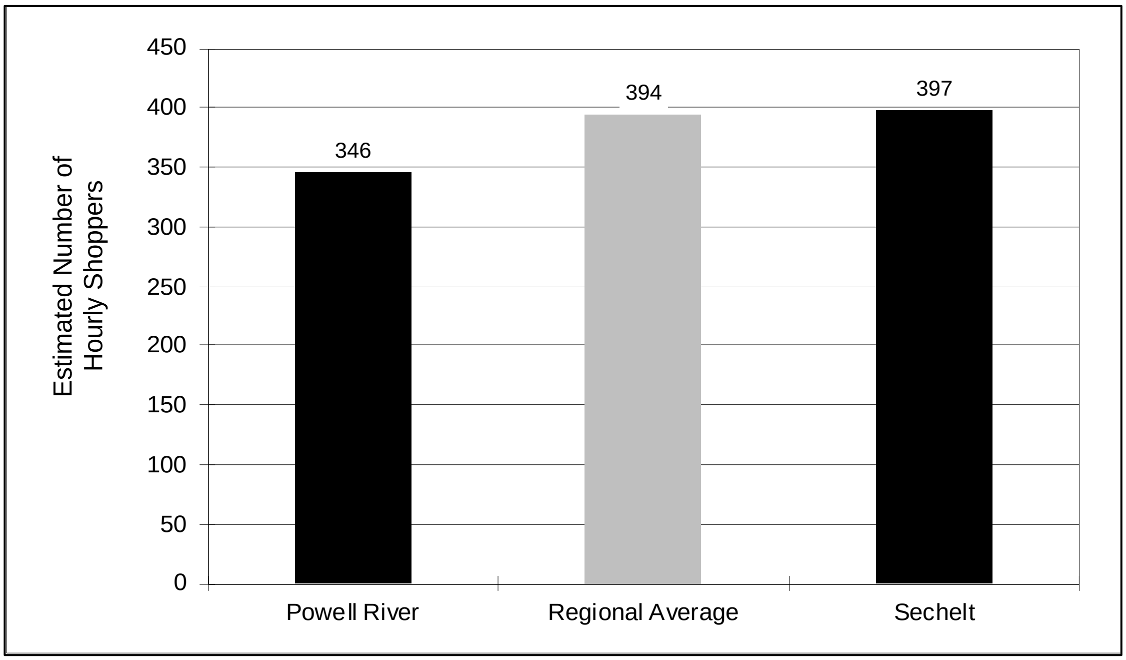


Chart 2 (next page) showcases a comparison between BCAFM regions. Sunshine Coast is comparable to the provincial average number of shoppers per hour. The percentage of survey participants in the region identifying as tourists or day-trippers is nearly double the BC average, as demonstrated in Chart 3 (next page)

Chart 2.

Average Number of Shoppers per Hour in Peak Market Season

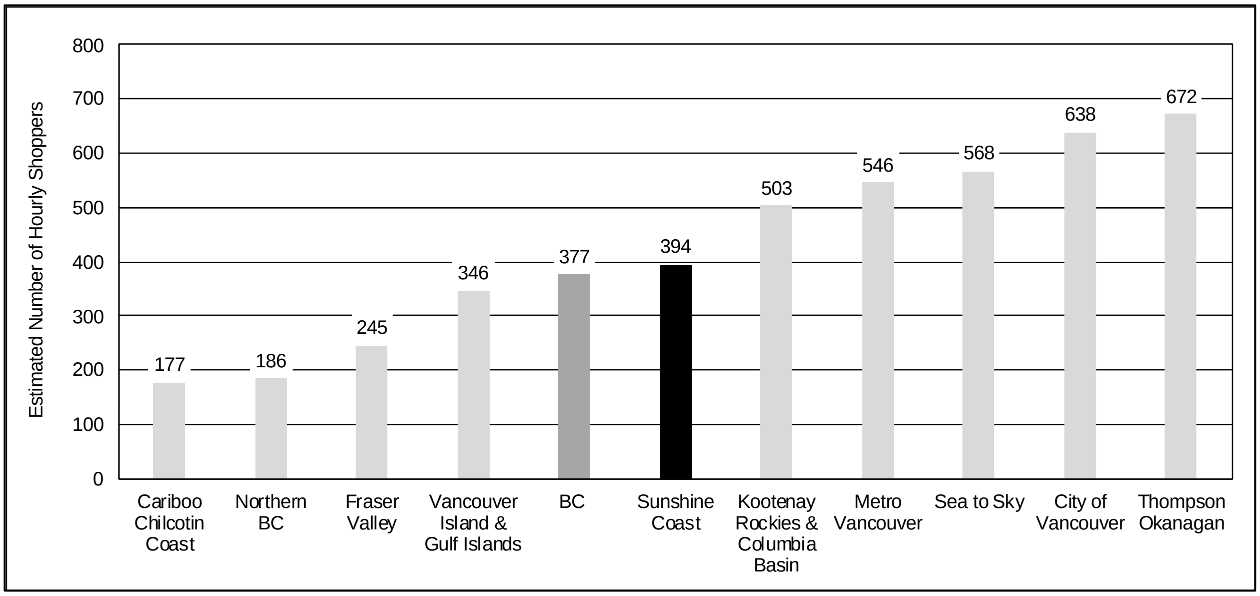
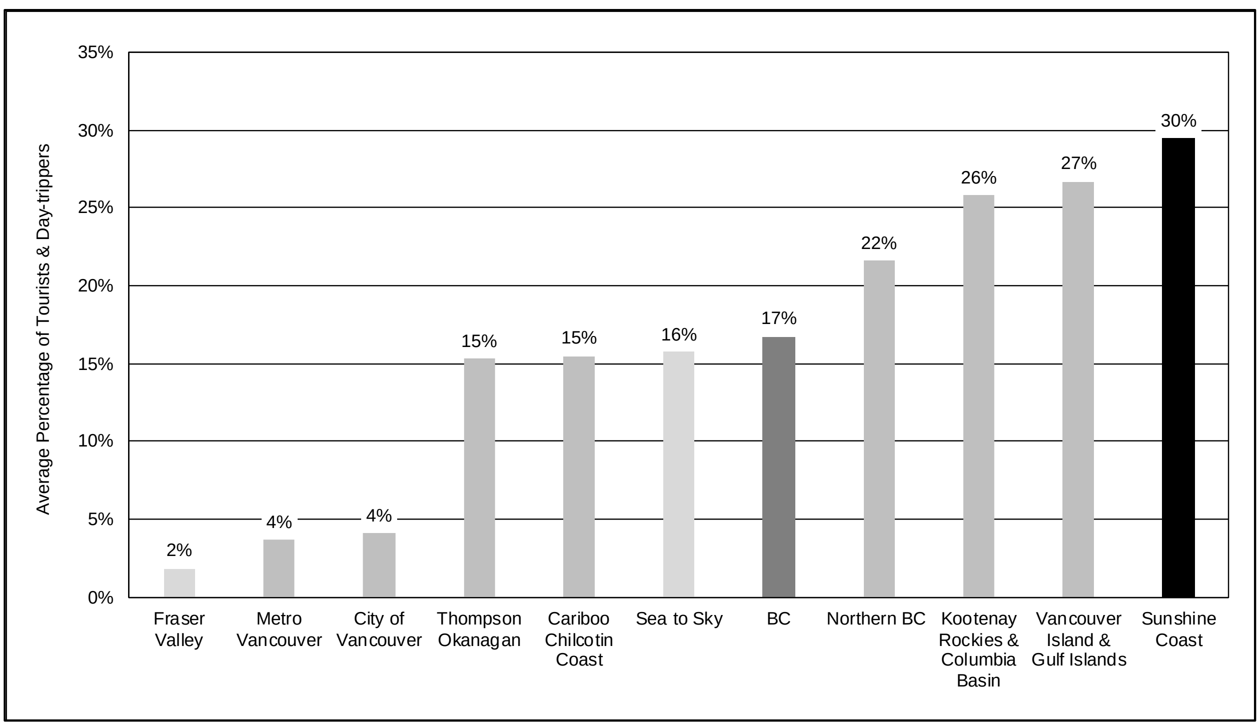


Chart 3.

Average Percentage of Survey Participants Identifying as Tourists & Day-trippers



Dot Survey

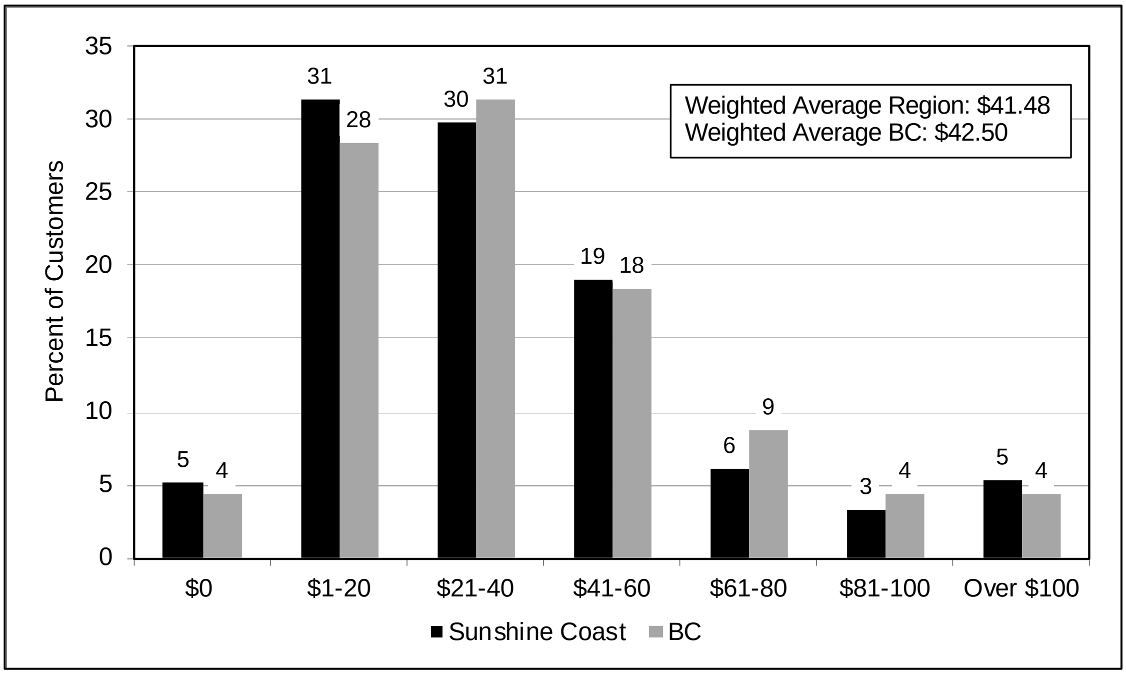
An average of 372 people participated in the dot survey, which is 10% of the estimated total crowd counts for all of the market assessment days. The following five charts show the results for each of the dot survey questions.

Question 1. How much have you spent, or do you plan to spend, at the market today?

Respondents in the Sunshine Coast region spent an average[5] of $41.48 each on the day of assessment[6]. This compares to the BC average of $42.50.

Chart 4.

Average Market Spending per Shopper (Region=373; BC=11,504)



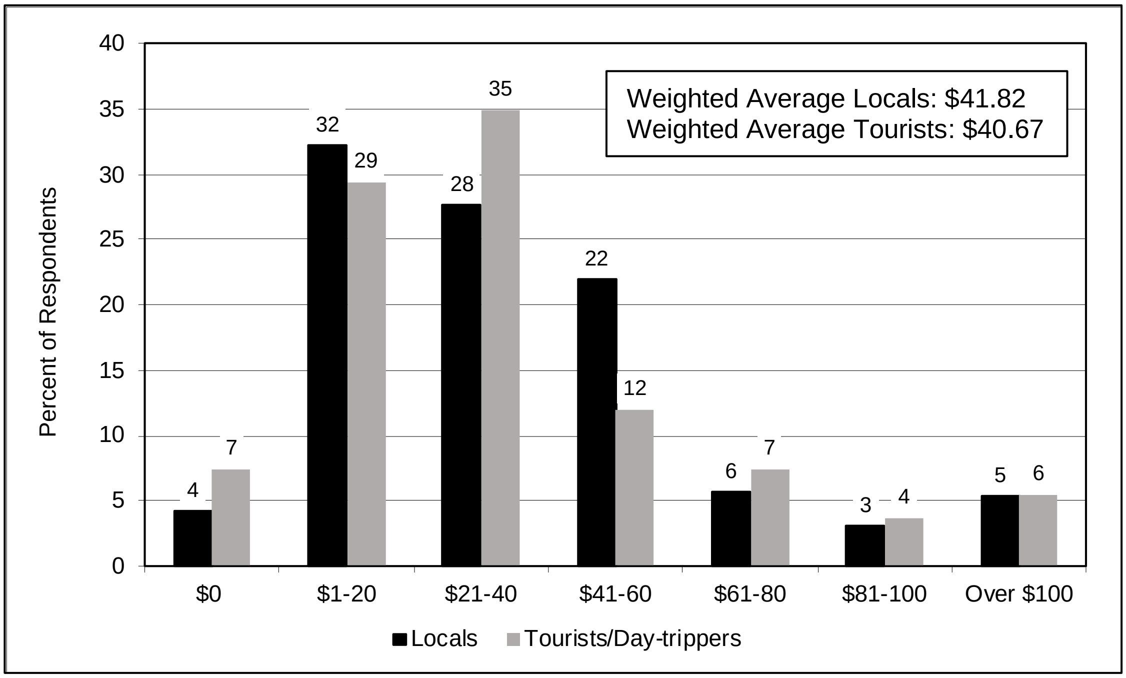
[5] Experience Renewal Solutions, & Connell, D.J. (2009). *National Farmers' Market Impact Study*. Farmers' Markets Canada. https://www2.unbc.ca/sites/default/files/sections/david-connell/farmers-markets/nationalfarmersmarketimpactstudy2009.pdf

[6] The average spent per customer both at markets and adjacent businesses is weighted by category based on results of a national study of farmers markets completed in 2008.

Chart 5 showcases spending differences between locals and those who self-identified as tourists or day-trippers in the region. Approximately 30% of shoppers in the Sunshine Coast self-identified as tourists or day-trippers. Locals spend an average of $41.82, compared to average tourist spending of $40.67. Half of locals (50%) spend between $21-60 and 47% of tourists fall within that range.

Chart 5.

Average Market Spending per Shopper (Locals=264; Tourists/Day-trippers=109)



Question 2. How often do you come to this farmers market?

Chart 6 compares shopper frequency between the Sunshine Coast region and BC. First-time shoppers made up 22% of regional and 21% of provincial respondents. There were more regular visitors across BC than on the Sunshine Coast: 30% of BC respondents visit a market almost weekly compared to 21% of respondents in the Sunshine Coast.

Chart 6.

Shopper Frequency (Region=375; BC=11,659)

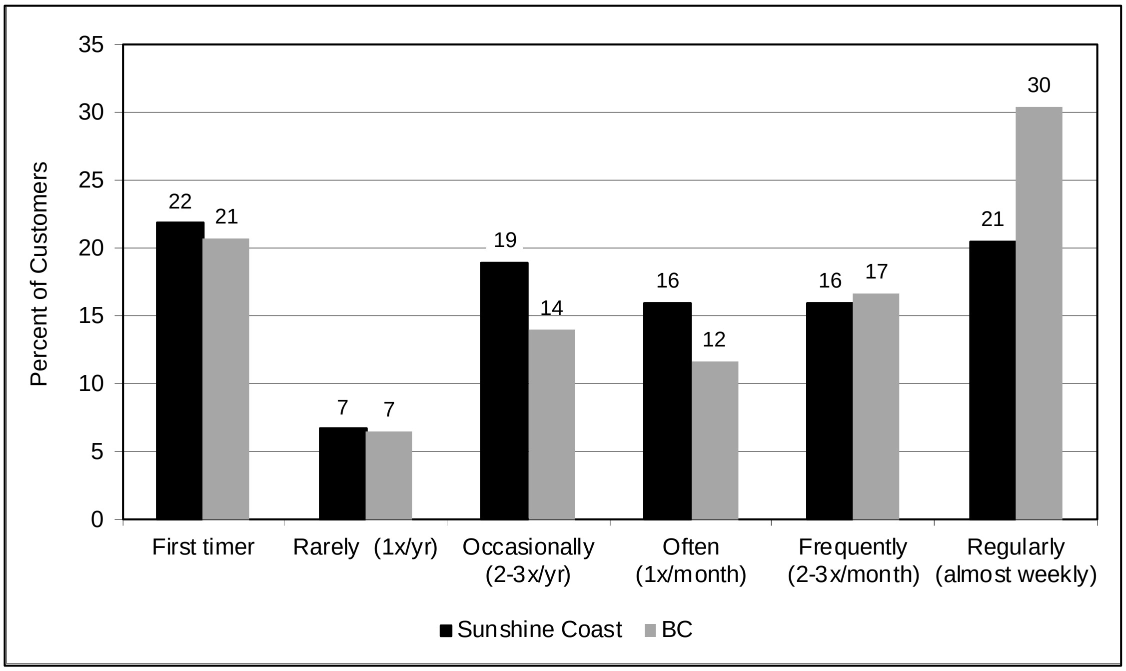
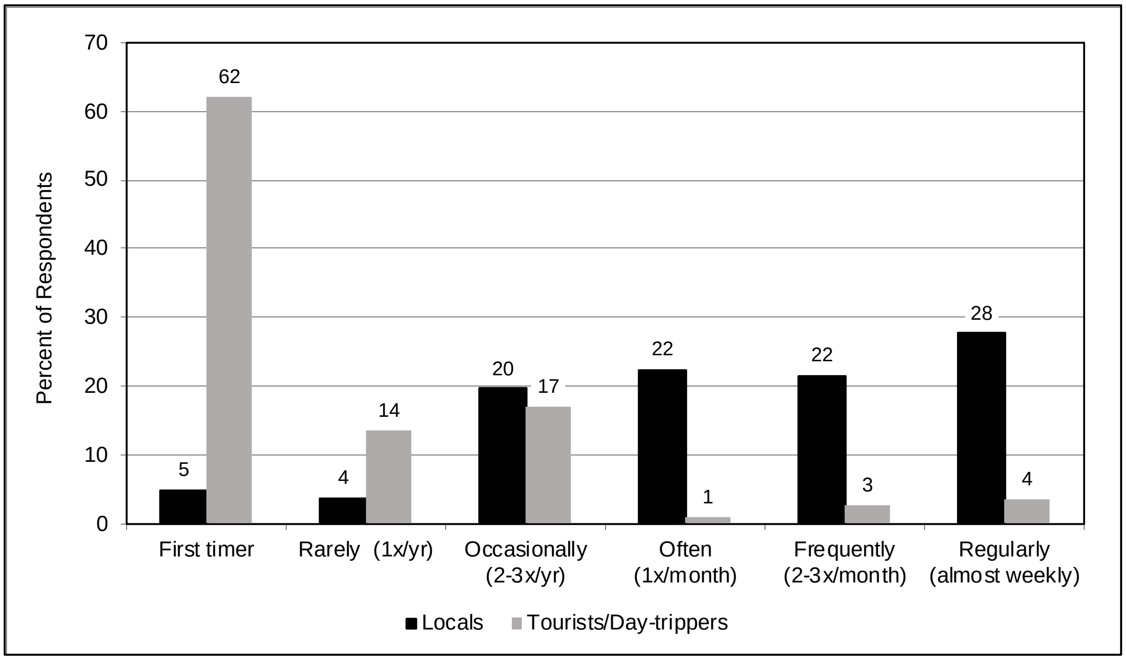


Chart 7 compares shopper frequency between locals and tourists/day-trippers. Sixty-two percent of tourists/day-trippers were first-time visitors and 14% attend a market in the region about once per year. A further 7% of survey participants in the region visit a market at least twice per month.

Chart 7.

Shopper Frequency (Locals=264; Tourists/Day-trippers=111)

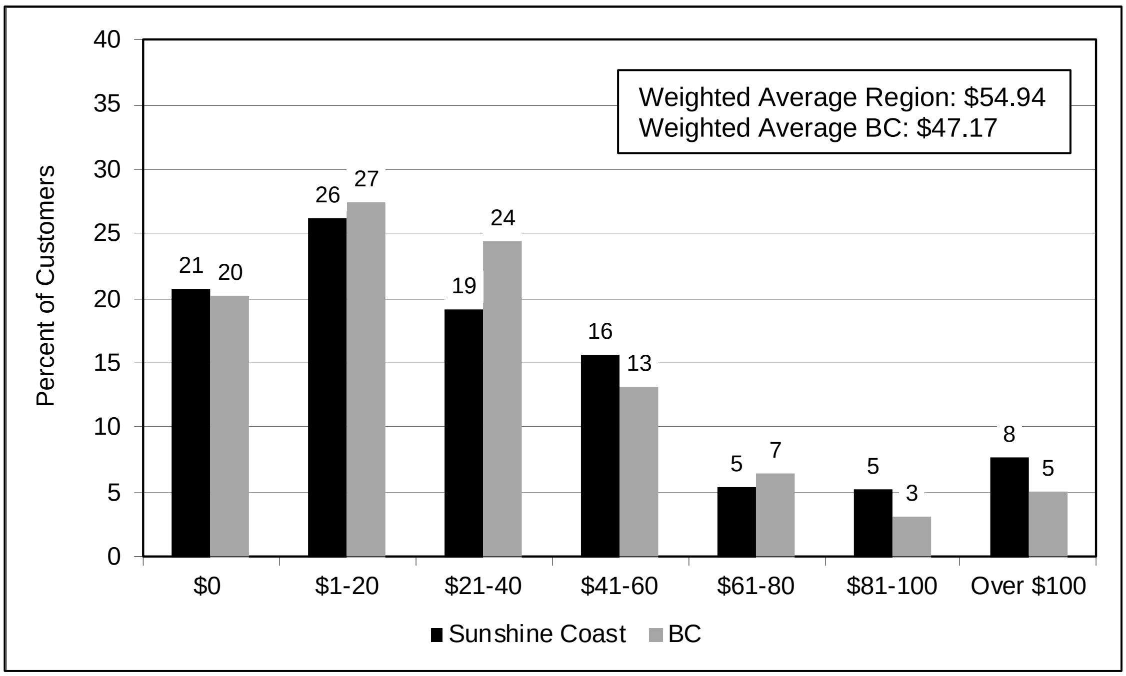


Question 3. If you plan to do additional shopping or eating while in this area of town today, how much do you plan to spend?

Chart 8 shows the range of additional spending by market customers in the region on assessment days, with 79% of respondents indicating that they would shop at neighbouring businesses[7]. The average amount spent by survey respondents at neighbouring businesses in the Sunshine Coast region is $54.94, which is higher than the BC average of $47.17.

Chart 8.

Local Neighbouring Business Spending per Shopper (Region=366; BC=11,244)

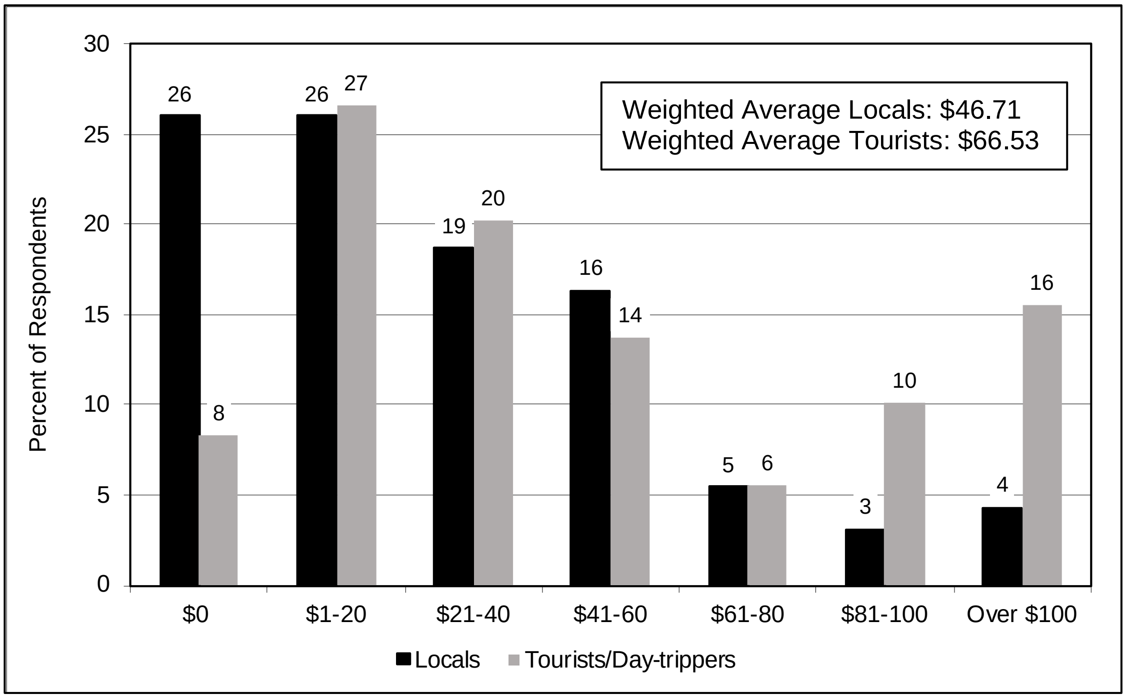


[7] To some degree, study participants perspective influences the understanding of "neighbouring businesses". However, participants were given the additional context of businesses they are stopping at because they were also shopping at the farmers' market.

Chart 9 compares spending between locals and tourists/day-trippers in the region. Tourists spend an average of $66.53 at businesses in the area of farmers markets, while locals spend an average of $46.71.

Chart 9.

Local Neighbouring Business Spending per Shopper (Locals=257; Tourists/Day-trippers=109)



Question 4. When did you start shopping at this farmers market?

Chart 10 shows when market visitors started shopping at the farmers market they were assessed at. Overall, BCAFM member markets have long-time loyal customers with 29% of regional and 24% of provincial participants first attending a farmers market over 10 years ago.

Chart 10.

Market Attendance (Region=372; BC=11,547)

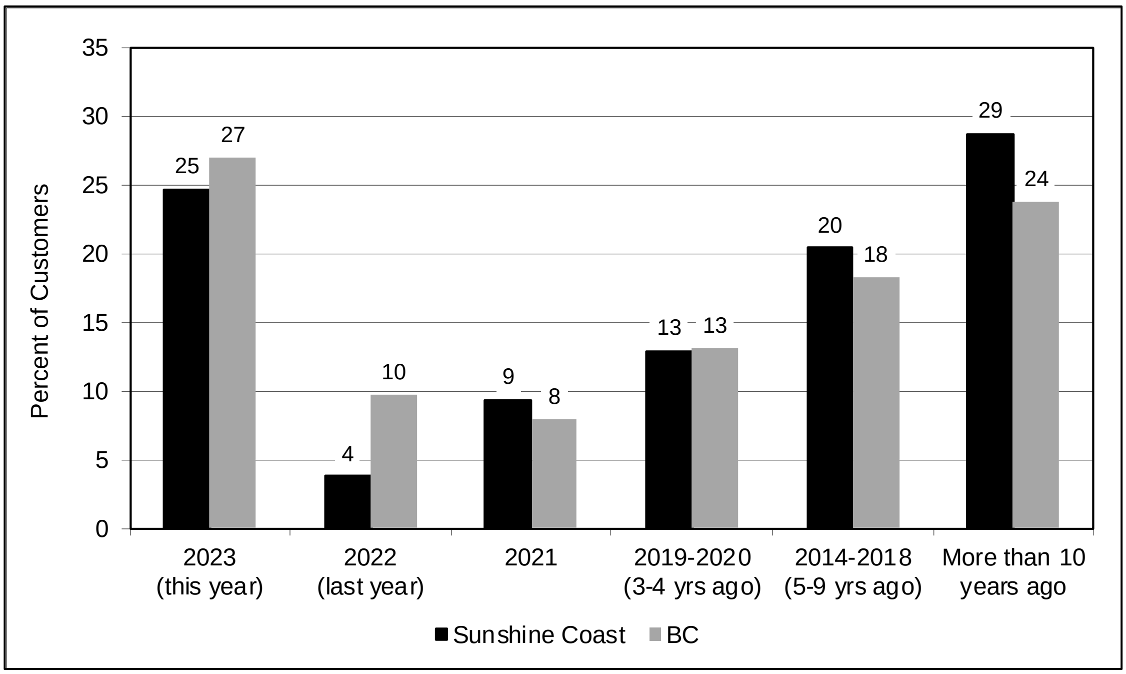
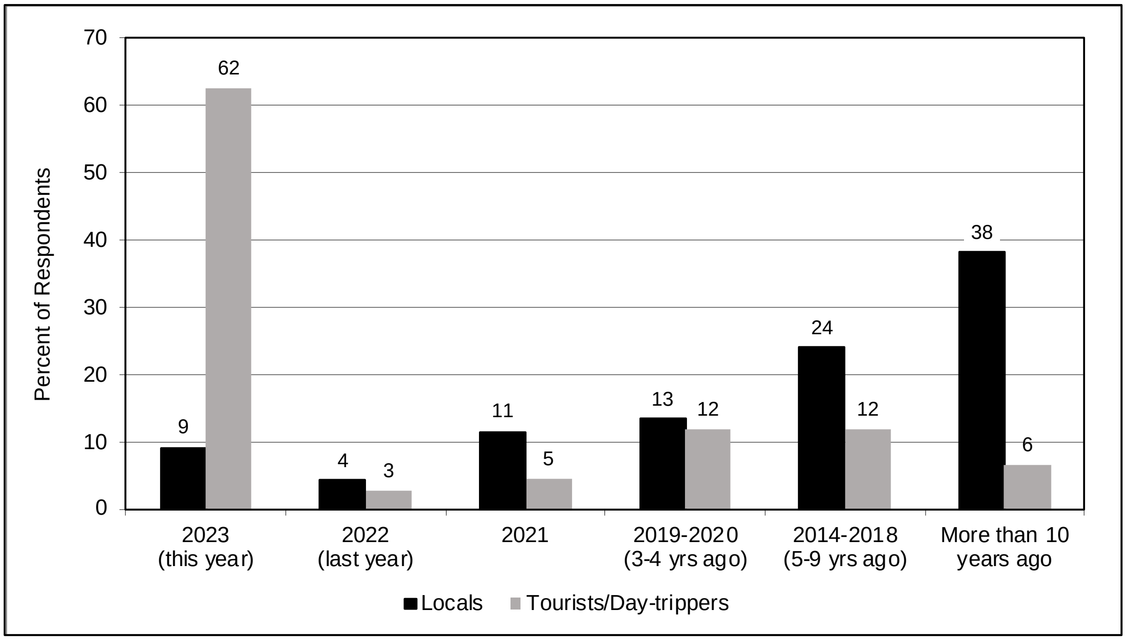


Chart 11 compares market attendance over time between locals and tourists or day-trippers. Although 62% of tourists/day-trippers were new to the assessed market in 2023, a combined 18% have been visiting a market in the region for over 5 years.

Chart 11.

Market Attendance (Locals=263; Tourists/Day-trippers=109)



ECONOMIC IMPACTS ASSESSMENT – SUNSHINE COAST

The information collected at the 70 assessment sites across BC enables us to measure the economic impacts of all BCAFM member farmers markets within the Sunshine Coast region. Using data from assessed markets, we can estimate figures for unassessed markets accounting for the number of vendors and operating days.

Annual Direct Sales

The amount of money spent by market shoppers (referred to as direct sales) is an effective way to measure economic impacts of a farmers market. This impact is the measure of total annual sales of a farmers market.

Annual sales are calculated as follows:

Average Expenditure by Shopper X Number of Spending Shoppers per Market Day[8] X Number of Market Days per Year X Seasonal Factor[9]

For all assessed markets, seasonally adjusted annual direct sales are: **$2.7 million**

For unassessed markets, the estimated annual direct sales are: **$777 thousand**

2023 Annual Direct Sales: $3.4 million

Multiplier Effect

Another measure of economic impacts of farmers markets is to measure the ripple effect of people spending dollars at the market: "If I spend $1 at the market then how does this dollar benefit the local economy?". The ripple effect includes both the profit to the market vendor and the monies the vendor spent on inputs for the products sold at the market, such as: seeds, feed, tools, and ingredients.

In this study we measure revenues and account for the ripple effect using a multiplier of 1.5[10,11] to calculate the economic impact. This multiplier means that for every dollar spent at the market, another $0.50 was spent in the local economy.

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[8] The number of spending customers is 75% of the seasonally adjusted, estimated crowd count for a peak market day.

[9] The seasonal factor accounts for varying sales and crowd levels during a market season and is based on data provided by the market manager and/or long-time vendors.

[10] Hughes, D.W., Brown, C., Miller, S., & McConnell, T. (2008) Evaluating the economic impact of farmers' markets using an opportunity cost framework. *Journal of Agricultural and Applied Economics, 40*(1), 253-265. https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-agricultural-and-applied-economics/article/abs/evaluating-the-economic-impact-of-farmers-markets-using-an-opportunity-cost-framework/E57B46247B82A049139B0FE6804234D8

[11] Otto, D., & Varner, T. (2005). Consumers, vendors, and the economic importance of Iowa farmers' markets: An economic impact survey analysis. Ames, Iowa: Leopold Centre for Sustainable Agriculture. Retrieved from: https://dr.lib.iastate.edu/entities/publication/45ba02a3-1938-464b-81f0-24f7a4bd8d02

Using a multiplier of 1.5, the annual economic impact is approximately:

2023 Annual Economic Impact: $5.2 million

This calculation means that BCAFM member markets in the Sunshine Coast region contribute an estimated $5.2 million to the provincial economy each year. These monies benefit not only market vendors but also the local businesses that supply these vendors.

Community Impact

We can also assess the 'spillover' effect that Sunshine Coast BCAFM member-markets have on their neighbouring businesses. Based on dot survey results for question three, we can estimate the impact of market customers spending additional dollars at local, neighbouring businesses on the day of the market. Using the same formula for estimating sales, as above, the annual spending at neighbouring businesses is approximately:

2023 Annual Spending at Local Neighbouring Businesses: $3.5 million

Acknowledgements

The BC Association of Farmers' Markets and the project team would like to thank all the BCAFM member farmers markets that participated in assessments and for providing a team of volunteers to help gather market assessment data in person. In addition to its own investment in this study, BCAFM gratefully acknowledges the financial assistance of the BC Ministry of Agriculture and Food through the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership.

Furthermore, the work of this project would not have been completed without a great project team. Project planning, resource commitments, and study implementation are parts of a multi-year collaboration between Dr. David Connell, Professor at UNBC, and Heather O'Hara, BCAFM Executive Director. As Project Manager, Chloe Brogan provided exceptional project management and leadership throughout, keeping everyone and everything organized and on track. As project coordinator, Kate Poirier provided invaluable assistance in coordinating market assessments, careful editing, and a brilliant eye for the storied details. In addition, the study recruited a team of Research Associates who were responsible for conducting market assessments throughout the province:

Cait Wills – Southern Interior
Caleigh Smith – Lower Mainland
Christine Bruce – Northern BC
Mandy Drescher – Southern Interior
Morgan Teske – Lower Mainland
Shelly McGunigle – Vancouver Island

Without their commitment, resourcefulness, and curiosity, the project would not have been a success. This project team was intensely passionate and worked diligently to best represent farmers markets in BC.

Finally, with the completion of this study, the BCAFM Membership and Communications team will ensure these important results and findings are shared far and wide with BCAFM members and a range of local, provincial, national, and global stakeholders.