



FARMERS MARKETS & REGIONAL GRASS-FED BEEF DISTRIBUTION

One out of five Chicago consumers self-report that they prioritize purchasing grass-fed beef, and 34% of residents in larger communities self-reported as first-time buyers at farmers markets (Sept 2020).

Consumers view grass-fed beef as a healthier, higher quality, and more humane meat option, according to our user research.

The total annual sales volume of retailers that are likely to sell grass-fed beef products in the Chicago Metro Statistical Area is \$421.6M, an average profit of \$7.1M per retailer. Chicago MSA annual household expenditures average about \$1,079 on meats, poultry, and eggs.

What is Grass-fed Beef?

There's a lot of misconceptions about what "grass-fed beef" means — for both the kitchen table and the farm. Grass-fed beef usually is defined as cattle that is raised on grass and forage (as the primary food source) for the lifetime of the ruminant animal post-weaning.

Grass-fed cattle spend the majority of their lives outdoors, and usually are contained in paddocked enclosures that are rotated for optimum grazing. This differs from *grain-fed* or

conventional beef, which requires highly concentrated feeding operations.

Because of their diet and living conditions, **grass-fed beef has less fat, produces less greenhouse gases and requires less hormone and antibiotic treatments.**

Cattle eating grass improves soil health, water quality, pollinator and bird habitats, and requires less costly inputs in comparison to crops like corn or soybeans. This is called regenerative grazing. Beyond these many nutritional and environmental benefits, research suggests that the Chicago region has the greatest opportunity for expanding regenerative grazing and grass-fed beef markets in Illinois.

An unmet opportunity: Grass-fed beef sales and producer variety at Chicago MSA Farmers Markets

There remains untapped opportunity to



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make direct consumer sales of grass-fed regional beef at farmers markets. Our research identified 156 active farmers markets in the Chicago MSA (Metropolitan Statistical Area): 6 in Wisconsin, 21 in Indiana and 129 in Illinois. Of these, 52 markets are in the City of Chicago.

Customers spend, on average, between \$28 and \$35 per visit at Chicago's farmers markets. In 2020, between 26 – 34% of survey respondents in small and large-sized communities, respectively, self-reported as first-time buyers at farmers markets.

Despite these market signals, the variety of grass-fed beef vendors are lacking at Chicago MSA markets. Though most markets have at least one grass-fed beef vendor, only two markets have two vendors and only a single farmers market has three vendors. In other words, for reasons that we uncovered (electrical infrastructure, cost prohibitive, not enough vendors) farmers markets don't offer a lot of variety of beef vendors.

Compounding the lack of grass-fed beef diversity (and related lack of direct-to-consumer outlets for producers), **none of the grass-fed beef vendors at Chicago farmers markets are located within the Chicago MSA.** Vendors may travel up to 300 miles to farmers markets in the Chicago MSA with some traveling from Michigan or Wisconsin. As a direct result of transportation logistics, producers sell primarily pre-packaged, frozen cuts at farmers' markets.

For Consideration: Market Barriers

Lack of Online Marketplaces: Few farmers markets in the Chicago MSA offer online shopping. Via our outreach and engagement, market managers noted they do not have capacity to implement fully developed e-commerce solutions.

Product Transportation: Grass-fed beef vendors travel long distances to attend Chicago farmers markets – an expensive barrier.

Infrastructure: Some farmers markets do not have the electrical infrastructure to support enough deep freezers required to safely store grass-fed beef from several vendors.

Solutions to provide more direct, nutritional meat to your consumer base, while investing in regional producers.

Consumer spending habits in the U.S. are slowly shifting toward market channels that favor locally sourced food. **Farmers markets are uniquely positioned to fill this need via:**

Chill Out: Offering grass-fed beef products to your market attendees could be as simple as electrical access for producers to bring on-site deep freezers—offering local, healthy food while increasing your sales.

Scheduling and Subscriptions: Farmers markets may offer scheduling flexibility for grass-fed beef vendors by offering drive-thru pick up, delivery or pre-packed box programs while reducing booth rental pricing to off-set travel costs and incentivize more vendors to attend markets.

Consumers see grass-fed beef as a healthier, higher quality, and a more humane meat option for people and the planet.

Have questions about selling grass-fed beef to your consumer base? Learn more here: delta-institute.org/project/grass-fed-beef-market/

Learn more here about selling grass-fed beef to your consumer base:
<https://bit.ly/3RMYpfU>

