



Farmers' Markets Growing In Ky.

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FRANKFORT, Ky. (AP) - Maybe it's high gas prices, or this summer's salmonella produce scare. But Paducah grower Danny Garrett says his produce business selling fresh veggies at a roadside store and a local farmer's market is up this year.

Almost double.

"People are just trying to save some money," Garrett said in a telephone interview.

Farmers' markets are growing in numbers across Kentucky. And, the state has been ramping up its efforts promoting farmers' markets and their locally grown produce.

This summer the state Capitol grounds was host to a large farmers' market with more than 20 growers from Franklin County and nearby locations. Last week was designated to honor farmers' markets throughout Kentucky.

"Farmers' markets are a great source of fresh Kentucky Proud fruits and vegetables. Many also sell canned goods, meat, dairy products, crafts, flowers and other products," Agriculture Commissioner Richie Farmer said in a statement. "Those products are made close to home by your friends and neighbors."

Just four years ago, there were about 85 farmers' markets in Kentucky, according to Bill Clary, a spokesman for the Kentucky Department of Agriculture. This year, there are nearly 120 markets with one in 112 of the state's 120 counties, Clary said.

Garrett, the Paducah farmer, said he grows fruits and vegetables ranging from strawberries and tomatoes to green beans and sweet corn. He said customers are buying more items, including those they can pickle or freeze.

"It's a different year this year, and it's because of the economy," Garrett said.

Early cool weather and late crops, however, have dampened business a little this summer for Aaron Anderson, a 27-year-old farmer in Burlington in northern Kentucky. Nevertheless, Anderson said, business has improved annually and it's also increased in recent weeks.

Higher prices brought on by soaring gas prices also seem to have helped local growers, he said.

"The prices in the stores are a lot higher," Anderson said. "It makes us look cheap."

Clary said the agriculture department has been focusing on boosting farmers' markets because of the potential they provide to small farmers. They account for an estimated \$8 million worth of sales throughout Kentucky last year, Clary said.

"It gives producers an opportunity to sell their goods at fair prices that consumers can afford, but is still better than the wholesale market," Clary said. "It's just a good opportunity."

Jonathan Hostetler, 38, a former contractor who's been growing produce for about three years, said he thought the recent national salmonella scare with peppers and tomatoes has helped local growers. This year some farmers seem to be selling their product at better prices than in the past, Hostetler said.

"More and more people are wanting to know where their product's coming from," Hostetler said. "The consumer can buy tomatoes from me and know ... it's not something that's been shipped."

First Lady Jane Beshear and Farmer teamed up this summer to promote the local markets. Beshear said the Capitol grounds will be an annual host to a farmers' market.

"Farmers' markets are a wonderful way to promote local agricultural communities and support our Kentucky farming families," Jane Beshear said in a statement. "Locally grown produce has many benefits including greater nutritional value, reduced fuel usage - which is more environmentally friendly - and it keeps money within our local communities."

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