

## 8/21 Maine Local Market Report

**Newsorthy:** this [online article from DownEast Magazine](#) cites the Maine Local Market Report. Thank you for making these reports interesting and useful beyond our original aspirations and goals!

**New Organic Price Report:** the first report, gathered in late July, is [now available here](#) on the MOFGA website. (Please consider contributing to the second report [here](#), the results of which will be gathered in late August.)

This market report was compiled by Maine Farmland Trust and MOFGA for the purpose of supporting farmer and buyer communication and creating clarity in a rapidly changing market. Observations are collected biweekly, for this report over the week of 8/17-21, from the same group of wholesale buyers and diversified farmers concentrated in the Portland and Mid-Coast markets. Huge gratitude to those folks for taking the time. This information is solely for informational and observational purposes, and is likely most helpful for small, diversified farms selling to the local wholesale marketplace (such as stores and restaurants), and direct to consumer at farmers' markets and farmstands. We hope the Report's insights from week to week, and over the course of the season, help you assess and gauge your own experience and observations about supply and demand trends. Any questions feel free to directly contact Alex at MFT ([alex@mainefarmlandtrust.org](mailto:alex@mainefarmlandtrust.org)) or Nicolas at MOFGA ([nlindholm@mofga.org](mailto:nlindholm@mofga.org)).

### Key Takeaways:

- Consumer demand remains strong right now. Both farmers and buyers are wondering how it will change as the season transitions. Farmers and some wholesale buyers are expecting demand to decrease after Labor Day, though one buyer voiced hope that folks are visiting later in the season.
- Supply seems to be mostly meeting demand at the moment, although farmers and buyers report different crops being in over or under-supply. There is variation between and among farmers and buyers.
- Farmers anticipate a lull in supply of some specific crops for the next few weeks as folks have faced a particularly challenging year with heat, drought, pest, and weed pressure. Farmers reported impacts on green beans, zucchini, head lettuce, peppers, winter squash, and pumpkins.
- Want to respond to folks' questions? Email us your thoughts - we'll compile and share back.

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## Buyer responses:

Overview: Buyers report consumer demand staying strong. What that will look like in the coming weeks is less certain as the season changes and schools begin, and folks offered differing predictions based on the info they have. Supply is reported to mostly be meeting current demand. There is a reported undersupply of cauliflower. Tomato supply seems to be more or less matched to demand overall, although specific markets are short or oversupplied in specific tomato types.

1. **What trends are you observing right now in current consumer demand?**
  - a. Most folks observed that consumer demand is staying strong for local products, although that's not universal. One wholesale buyer described "rolling hills" and the change isn't hitting all crops equally, making it harder to predict demand. Another reported that demand continues to be significantly above last year.
  - b. Specific markets report that tomatoes (cherry, and unspecified), Tuscan kale, cucumbers, cilantro, and head lettuce are moving well and that bunched greens and chicories are moving slowly.
  - c. One retailer reported selling about 1/5th the volume of local garlic at \$12.49/lb than the weekly volume of imported garlic sold at about \$5/lb.
  
2. **Is your supply meeting demand? Is there unmet demand for certain products? Do you have an oversupply of certain products?**
  - a. Supply seems to be mostly meeting demand. One retailer noted shrinking supply of drought-sensitive crops.
  - b. There is unmet demand for cauliflower. Additionally, specific markets mentioned unmet demand for: salad mix, arugula, broccoli, Caraflex cabbage, dill, red cherry tomatoes, grape tomatoes, large sweet peppers, bagged potatoes, and raspberries.
  - c. Tomatoes are toeing the line between just right and oversupply, with mixed reports from wholesale buyers. Some folks pointed at slicers, and others didn't specify which types.
  - d. Specific markets reported abundance/oversupply of: summer squash, specialty items like shishito peppers, melons, and blueberries.
  
3. **Are you seeing or anticipating any changes that will affect your supply and demand in the coming weeks?**
  - a. Folks are looking towards Labor Day, and two major factors that could affect demand – school starting and changes in residency. Mostly, wholesale buyers are pointing towards the uncertainty, although a couple folks offered thoughts. One buyer doesn't think that going back to school will significantly change shopping patterns, but that maybe institutional demand will look different. And perhaps we'll have some fall visitors, or folks staying longer than usual. Another expects that demand will be lower than usual due to folks heading out of state during fall.

- b. One retailer is looking towards bringing in local supply of storage crops, and noted that if potatoes were packaged in a way distinct from their imported bulk supply, then they would be able to order local product sooner.
4. **Any useful resources, news, or data you want to share?**
- a. One buyer shared “Some of our best farms to work with are those who, when possible, brand their products, either with UPC codes (dreamy), or labels.” They elaborated on the challenges of branding loose produce, and wide price variations between farmers for the same crops.
  - b. Another buyer wonders if this summer’s oversupplies are more often products that aren’t in high market demand due to seasonality or peak production than they are high-demand products seeking new markets due to COVID.

## Farmer responses:

Overview: Overall, demand is steady and strong across all markets, and growing in restaurants. Most farms are experiencing good sales levels, with a few expected seasonal slow-downs reported. Some have seen “customer fatigue” of summer staple crops (zukes, cukes and tomatoes), but not across the board. Most farms have supply to meet their demand, with only a few specific gaps or oversupplies. Where farmers reported unmet demand, they often referenced a specific planting decision (as opposed to increased or unexpected demand). Weather stress and market uncertainties are on all farmers’ minds looking ahead. There will likely be some gaps in supply of certain late summer crops, and many are wondering what changes to expect in customer demand and sales in Sept.

1. **What trends are you observing right now in current consumer demand?**
- a. **Direct to Consumer/Farmers Markets:** Demand remains strong for most crops, including cherry tomatoes, salad mix, head lettuce, melons, blueberries, and any new late-summer items like sweet peppers, celery and eggplant. Two different farms experienced what they call a normal slow-down in early August with customer fatigue for cukes, zukes, summer squash --but then saw a rebound this past week. One farm stated that they were seeing more tourist traffic than earlier in the summer, and another farm reported market sales growth over last year at this time, led by zukes, tomatoes and head lettuce. Onions and garlic were noted by another farm as being popular for them right now.
  - b. **Wholesale to stores:** Most farms report seeing good, steady demand, with only one farm starting to have an expected slow-down for late August. Summer crops like tomatoes, zukes and cukes are moving well in these markets.
  - c. **Restaurants:** An uptick in demand, as restaurants are venturing back into more regular hours of service and ordering more quantity and diversity than earlier this summer.

**2. Is your supply meeting demand? Is there unmet demand for certain products? Do you have an oversupply of certain products?**

- a. Mixed reports this week, with several farms having an oversupply of tomatoes (cherry) and cukes (pickling), and zukes/summer squash, while one farm is not meeting demand for tomatoes and zukes. This farm also has an oversupply of herbs, due to planting more going into this year coupled with the extended closures of restaurants.
- b. Generally, most farms report their supply is meeting demand, but a few farms have unmet demand for specific items, like canning tomatoes (which this farm doesn't prioritize in their crop plans due to low profit margins on their farm), or new potatoes (which a different farm limits in their plantings due to labor costs/hand-digging), or speciality crops for restaurants (which another farm scaled back on their early summer plantings but now feel they could have grown and sold).
- c. Weather related plant stress is a factor for most farms, and some are currently starting to have lulls in their supply, for example in head lettuce plantings.

**3. Are you seeing or anticipating any changes that will affect your supply and demand in the coming weeks?**

- a. There is continued uncertainty and concern for local demand and market resiliency going into the fall. Will consumer buying patterns change? What will be the staple crops most in demand? Will restaurants and stores stay busy? Many farmers voiced their concerns for overabundance due to slow markets or under-abundance due to weather patterns.
- b. Many farms expect a lull in supply in the next few weeks, mostly due to the heat and drought, as succession plantings of green beans, zukes, head lettuce and more have been thrown off, or crops like peppers have lots of aborted flowers. There is a lot of pest and weed pressure being seen in the fields and hoop houses. One farm is seeing their fall crops like winter squash and pumpkins coming in early, which is weird and unusual --but expects as nighttime temperatures cool off, maybe that will slow the ripening?
- c. Many farms also expect a lull in demand as Labor Day approaches, tourists head off, and there aren't any "new" crops to garner excitement until mid-September with standard fall crops like winter squash, leeks and other alliums, cauliflower, fall greens, etc.

**4. Any useful resources, news, or data you want to share?**

- a. Fall crop plans and plantings are still in flux. One farm asks: What are folks thinking about planting now for crop diversity for their CSA's? Spinach, lettuce, arugula, what else? Another farm is waiting to see what happens in September to their wholesale orders before launching their fall/winter CSA. This farm expects a high level of listserv-based asking and offering, buying and selling, this fall as folks may need some crops to fill out their CSA's or other market needs.
- b. One farm reports a higher-than-normal rate of debit/credit card payments this year -- double last year's usage by customers. Another farmer is seeing an increased need

around the issue of food access, and is worried that farmers market SNAP and food voucher programs aren't economically self-sustaining --let's keep this dialogue going!

- c. [Editor's Note: If you want to email your responses to these questions, we'll compile and share back! Hopefully these conversations are also happening out and about in your lives.]
- d. The Field Reports put together by Caleb Goosen of MOFGA have been great to read -- one farmer has found they provide a sense of solidarity with other farms, breaking a sense of isolation and validating that what they were observing and experiencing on their own farms was being observed and experienced by others. [Editor's Note: Thanks Caleb! And folks who send in reports!]