



# Rediscovering MICHIGAN'S HISTORIC FARM MARKETS

● By Dianna Stampfler

**I**t's summertime...and that means the return of fresh-grown produce, harvested by local growers and brought to you at dozens of historic farmers markets around the state. Michigan is the second-most agriculturally diverse state in the country, ranking among the top for growing everything from asparagus to cherries to peaches and zucchini. Add to that, locally crafted cheeses, meats, honey, breads and more, and it's no wonder that our farmers markets are among the hottest – and sweetest – summer destinations!

Visiting farm markets isn't a new trend, however. Michigan has a long-standing history of bringing the produce from the rural farms into the thriving urban centers.

Detroit's first farmers market was started in 1841 at Cadillac Square, east of Woodward and was one of three farmers markets operating in this area by the 1850s (the others being Western Market and Chene-Ferry Market).

Fifty years later, operations for the original market moved to the current location (between Gratiot, Mack, St. Aubin and I-75) to the site of an early hay and wood market...and with that, Eastern Market was born! Western Market closed in 1965 and Chene-Ferry Market closed in 1990, making Eastern Market the longest-running market of its kind in Michigan.

This six-block, 43-acre open-air market is open six days a week (closed Sunday), welcoming as many as 45,000 people every Saturday to visit with some 250 independent vendors and merchants as they hawk their finest produce; meats, fish, seafood and cheeses; locally-crafted products; fresh-cut and dried flowers; herbs and spices; nuts and candies; sauces, jams and honey; and so much more. It's estimated as much as 70,000 tons of consumables are sold here each year!

At one time, Eastern Market was home to dozens of breweries and even today has a strong attachment to the region's thriving craft brewing industry. In its heyday, there were more than 40 breweries in the Detroit area and malt silos still stand as a testament to the city's rich brewing community.

As one of the oldest and most historically significant markets of its kind in the country, Eastern Market proudly boasts many of its

original buildings. The market was declared an historic area in 1977 by the State of Michigan Historical Commission.

**Did you know? According to the Eastern Market website, [www.detroiteasternmarket.com](http://www.detroiteasternmarket.com):**

- ♦ Generals Ulysses S. Grant, George Custer and John J. Pershing were headquartered in the area and marched troops up and down the area where the Eastern Market is presently located.
- ♦ Parts of the Underground Railroad went under the Eastern Market through to the Detroit River where escaping slaves were able to make safe haven to Canada. Also, part of an ancient American Indian burial ground was located in the area, and later relocated to a cemetery.
- ♦ Several movies were filmed at Eastern Market including "Presumed Innocent" starring Harrison Ford and Brian Dennehy; "Collision Course" with Jay Leno and Pat Morita; and "Whip It" with Drew Barrymore.

The Fulton Street Farmers Market is the oldest and largest market of its kind in Grand Rapids. First opened in 1922, it was one of three markets operating in the city and was originally known as East Side Market. By 1926, a brick office structure was built and it remains part of the facility to this day (it even operated as a diner for two years, in the 1950s).

Tanis Orchards has been bringing its farm-fresh produce to the market since 1931, making it the longest-supporting business surviving the generations at the market. It's one of more than three dozen farms that make the weekly pilgrimage to this popular market, which is May through December on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays (8am to 3pm) and Saturdays, year-round from 10am to 1pm.

In order to make Fulton Street Farmers Market better than ever, and to preserve it for future generations, a full-scale, \$2.6 million upgrade is in the works. Among the upgrades will be covered open-air sheds, re-grading and re-paving of the parking lot, widening traffic lanes and a 2000-square-foot building for year-round shopping. The project will also include wheelchair-accessible restrooms, a reconstructed plaza with added space for seating, bicycle storage and





Photo Courtesy Fulton Street Farmers Market

vendor overflow. [www.fultonstreetmarket.org](http://www.fultonstreetmarket.org)

Flint's first open-air market dates back to 1905, yet it wasn't until 1940 that the current Flint Farmers Market was built along the banks of the Flint River – thanks to WPA workers under President Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration. Today, some 70 vendors make up the year-round public market, selling everything from local produce, Michigan wine and beer, meat and poultry, cheese, baked goods, arts and crafts, and more. The market is open on E. Boulevard Drive, from 9am to 5pm, Tuesdays and Thursdays, and 8am to 5pm on Saturdays. [www.flintfarmersmarket.com](http://www.flintfarmersmarket.com)

The Lansing City Market is housed in a new \$1.6 million facility along the banks of the Grand River and within sight of the State Capital building (a location it's held since 1939). It is one of the oldest continuously operating farmers markets in the United States, dating back more than 100 years (to 1909). This year-round market is open five days a week (closed Sunday and Monday) and provides everything from specialty items to produce and groceries, from more than 30 vendors. [www.lansingcitymarket.com](http://www.lansingcitymarket.com)

The Royal Oak Farmers Market first opened at the corner of 4th and Troy streets on October 14, 1925. Originally operating as a truck market, this cooperative was a joint venture between the then-new City of Royal Oak and Oakland County. The present enclosed structure in the Civic Center, at the corner of 11 Mile Road and Troy Street was built two years later and dedicated on July 1, 1927. It has been solely owned and operated by the City of Royal Oak since 1997, operating every Friday from May through Christmas and Saturday all year. A "Flea Market" runs every Sunday, with more than 100 vendors selling a variety of antiques, collectibles and other treasures. It's also the site of many special events throughout the year. [www.ci.royal-oak.mi.us](http://www.ci.royal-oak.mi.us)

Muskegon area farmers were known to haul their goods to town as early as the 1860s, and while city officials worked to get a hay market opened near the downtown sawmills in 1886, the first retail farmers market wasn't founded until 1921 at Cedar and Ottawa. The market was moved to its current location, at Yuba and Murphy, in 1961 as Yuba was an access road for the train tracks. Today, the Muskegon Farmers



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