

# Farm marketing success linked to natural, cultural assets

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Direct farm marketing efforts, such as farmers markets and roadside stands, are more successful in communities with more nonprofits, social enterprises and creative industries, according to a team including Cornell

University researchers, who created a nationwide database of assets to help municipalities craft community-specific development plans.

While many municipalities seek to encourage direct-to-consumer (DTC) marketing—an important factor in farmers' livelihoods—the success of their efforts hinges on a wide array of community resources, or capital assets, with natural and cultural assets correlating most strongly with farmers' success, the research found.

To explore differences between communities, Todd Schmit, associate professor in the Charles H. Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management, and colleagues at Colorado State University and the University of Missouri created a database of assets for every county in the United States, breaking down these community resources in six areas: Built, cultural, financial, human, natural and social.

"There's a broad acceptance of the idea that sustainable community development is dependent on this array of capital assets. But when it comes to measuring those capitals, the literature is all over the place," Schmit said. "Some studies will use educational attainment to measure human capital, but others will use food security, or access to medical care. We thought, why not measure all of those things?"

To create their composite database, Schmit and his colleagues gathered data on dozens of factors, such as: The number of manufacturing establishments; the number of owner-occupied housing units without a mortgage; and acreage of farmland. All data came from publicly available sources such as the U.S. Census and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Then they used their new database to evaluate DTC farm marketing against community capital stocks in an article published July 2 in the journal *Food Policy*: "Measuring Stocks of Community Wealth and

Their Association With Food Systems Efforts in Rural and Urban Places."

They found, as expected, that high levels of natural capital, especially farmland, correlated positively with DTC farm marketing. But they also found a positive association with cultural capital: Communities with more nonprofits, social enterprises and [creative industries](#) help farmers prosper in direct marketing.

"Art-centric businesses, museums, theaters, symphonies, architecture firms—there was a very complementary effect," Schmit said. "Maybe [farmers markets](#) are hosting musicians or art vendors and that's making the farmers market a bigger draw for consumers? Or maybe because people are coming to communities to visit an art gallery or go to a museum, they're saying, "Well, let's head over to the farmers market, too, and make a day of it."

Schmit said he hopes the new database will be helpful for community planners and other researchers studying a variety of issues important for regional development.

"With this paper, we wanted to showcase an application of these capital stocks, but our bigger purpose is to provide this data for others to use in whatever application they want: obesity, child nutrition programs, infrastructure investment planning, conservation protection," he said. "We want people to use this data."

Co-author Becca Jablonski, a Cornell alum and an associate professor of agricultural and resource economics at Colorado State University, hopes the database will enable researchers and planners to craft economic development policies that are more successful because they are community-specific.

"Often policymakers set strategies to support community economic development at the federal level without full consideration of the fact that different types of programs and initiatives will have different impacts in different places based on the comparative advantage of a particular place—what they do better than other places," Jablonski said. "We hope that this database of the stocks of community assets can help decision-makers more thoughtfully reflect on their unique strengths and opportunities."

**More information:** Todd M. Schmit et al, Measuring stocks of community wealth and their association with food systems efforts in rural and urban places, *Food Policy* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.foodpol.2021.102119](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodpol.2021.102119)

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