

GOVERNOR PROCLAIMS NATIONAL FARMERS MARKET WEEK

August 01, 2006

Don Wambles
(334) 242-2618

MONTGOMERY, Ala. -- Gov. Bob Riley and Alabama Farmers Market Authority Director Don Wambles have joined U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns in proclaiming Aug. 6-12 "National Farmers Market Week."

Gov. Riley issued a state proclamation "to call special and deserved attention to the many farmers markets in Alabama and their many benefits to local farmers and consumers."

The number of farmers markets in the United States has grown dramatically in recent years, prompting state and national advocates of local farming to designate a week each year to take note of their benefits. The U.S. Department of Agriculture reports over 3,800 farmers markets currently operate throughout the nation – a record number, up from the initial count in 1994 of 1,755. Sales generated by farmers markets have been estimated to exceed \$1 billion a year, with most of the money going directly to small family farmers.

Alabama has seen increases in the number of farmers markets during the same period, from 17 to 93. "The vitality of small- and medium-sized farms across Alabama is good for local economics, good for consumers and good for our state's citizens," said Gov. Riley. "Many communities find it rewarding to invest in local markets as a component of economic development and are realizing benefits from the resulting tourism."

Wambles said, "Consumers benefit from the freshness, quality and wide selection of locally grown products. Meeting and interacting with the farmer who grows the food also develops in consumers a special bond of trust in the integrity and accountability of our growers."

Chambers County farmer Prather Slay, who chairs the Alabama Farmers Federation's State Horticulture Committee, praised state and national leaders for recognizing the importance of farmers markets.

"As farmers, one of our biggest challenges is marketing our produce to consumers," Slay said. "Programs like National Farmers Market Week and the 'Buy Fresh, Buy Local' campaign help us remind shoppers that they get the freshest, best-tasting produce when they buy it directly from local farmers."

USDA is developing numerous initiatives to increase farmer and consumer awareness of the convenience and value of farmers markets.



The governor said Alabama's Farmers Market Authority and USDA are working together to increase the development of the farmers markets, and in the last decade the federal-state partnership has emphasized a critical need to help small farmers and provide consumers access to fresh fruit and vegetables.

Secretary Johanns observed that about one in four farmers markets in the country contribute their surplus to gleaning programs that distribute food to local homeless shelters, community pantries and other charitable organizations that feed the hungry.

USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service works with states to encourage market growth, while its Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services helps needy families gain access to healthy produce. One result is that more than 2,300 farmers markets nationwide now accept coupons from recipients of the federal Women, Infants and Children assistance program. More than 32,000 women infants and children and 62,000 seniors are benefiting from Farmers Market Nutrition Programs in Alabama.

Information on farmers markets, including USDA's National Directory of Farmers Markets, is available at www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets or by calling 800-384-8704. Information on farmers markets in Alabama is available at www.fma.alabama.gov or www.BuyLocalAlabama.com, or by calling toll free (877) 774-9519.