



# Visitor Preferences to the Outeniqua Farmers' Market in George, South Africa

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## Abstract

This paper investigates visitors' preferences to the Outeniqua Farmers' Market (OFM) in George in the Western Cape Province of South Africa. The OFM is a typical farmers' market that takes place every Saturday morning on the outskirts of the town, where stall owners and visitors congregate. Whilst it presents an opportunity for stall holders to sell their goods, it is also a platform where visitors to the event can have a meal and socialise. Using a quantitative research approach, 332 self-completion questions were analysed. The results indicate that about 40 percent of the visitors attended the OFM at least once a month, and the visitors were highly qualified – 41 percent had a post-graduate qualification. As was expected, 64 percent of the visitors were local and 71 percent from the Western Cape Province. As for the visitors' preferences, 59 percent of the visitors were keen to purchase fresh products and 70 percent of the visitors were comfortable paying higher prices, if the products were of superior quality - this may be attributed to a more well-heeled clientele visiting the market. What was notable is that there was not a strong drive for organic products with 40 percent of the visitors being neutral about any preference towards organic products. Overall, there seem to be a preference for locally produced farm products. The variety of products on offer at the market, also seems to be very positive. Based on the outcome of the study, several recommendations are preferred.

**Keywords:** organic products, sustainability, stall holders, farmers' markets, visitors' appeal

## 1. Introduction

Farmers' markets exist all over the world and remain a symbol of identity for many communities (Warsaw, et al., 2021). The core aspect of farmers' markets is centred around producers of foods or other items selling directly to consumers (visitors). Most developed countries have been able to extrapolate various benefits from farmers' markets for communities such as improving hygiene standards of foods and increasing access to fresh and organic foods at affordable prices (Stobbe, 2023; Solanki & Inumula, 2021). Farmers' markets thus have the potential to contribute socially and ecologically to a sustainable food system for countries. Consequently, developing countries have established farmers' markets to bring about much needed change and development to the gastronomy of the region, the

development of small, medium and micro enterprises (SMME's), sales opportunities directly to the consumers, weekly recreational events where locals and visitors will gather.

This paper investigates visitors' preferences to the Outeniqua Farmers' Market (OFM) in George in the Western Cape Province of South Africa. The OFM is a typical farmers' market that takes place every Saturday morning on the outskirts of the town, where stall owners (stallholders) and visitors congregate. Whilst it presents an opportunity for stallholders to sell their goods, it is also a platform where visitors to the event can have a meal and socialize.

It should also be mentioned that this study, was part of a larger and more broader study.

## **1.1 The Study Area**

The Outeniqua Farmers' Market is located on the outskirts of the town of George in South Africa. George is in the southern Cape and approximately midway between Cape Town and Port Elizabeth (Gqeberha). The town has a population of about 294,929 people in 2022 (George Local Municipality) and considered an economic hub of the area.

The Outeniqua Farmers' Market was established in 2011 and is owned by a single person. The market operates every Saturday from 08:00 to 14:00. On average, about 6500 persons visit the market every Saturday (Mocke, 2021), with the vacation period the busiest. The market has a variety of stalls and is home to about 140 stalls - during peak season, the number of stalls can increase to 220, and the stalls are clustered into those offering fresh produce, food prepared on-site, arts and crafts, and entertainment (Mocke, 2021).

## **2. Material**

### **2.1 Research Question**

With the growth and development of farmers' markets in South Africa and elsewhere in the world, it is key to understand what attracts visitors to farmers' markets. This information can be used to plan and market future farmers' markets or just to promote farmers' markets. Hence, the main problem of this study was to ascertain the visitors' preferences to the Outeniqua Farmers' Market (OFM) in George, South Africa. As part of the study, the demographic profile of the visitors could also be established.

### **2.2 The Global Evolution of Farmers' Markets**

The marketplace, or village square has been a central place where goods and products were traded, or sold and has been the cornerstone of economic development in many countries throughout the world (Warsaw et al., 2021; Saili, Rola-Rubzen & Batt, 2017). This public space has over the centuries gained notoriety where the community would gather for a range of activities. With modernisation and the development of shops, the local marketplace became less important, and the local population found themselves buying their goods and products from shops and the like in the sixties.

However, over the last decade or two, farmers' markets have become popularised (Troccoli & De Rosa, 2021). The focus is no longer on goods and produce exchanging ownership between the farmer and the consumer, but more about the total experience, where the visitor is able to immerse himself, or herself in the exercise. This experience has led to consumers spending more time at the farmers' market. As a result, the experience has been diversified to include the offering freshly prepared, ready-to-eat food and other goods. According to Arabska (2018), farmers' markets have become the drivers of alternative food systems, offering culinary experiences for consumers. This view is supported by Robinson and

Śpiewak (2023) who posits that farmers' markets, as part of the Alternative Food Networks (AFN), play a key role in terms of making products accessible to consumers (visitors) and that the cost and quality of products tend to favour the consumers. Consequently, the role of farmers' markets within a society should not be underestimated, more so, since some farmers' markets have elements incorporated elements of corporate social responsibility by catering for the less fortunate.

From a tourism perspective, farmers' markets have encouraged consumers (visitors) to travel to neighbouring towns and cities, where farmers' markets are being hosted. Thus it has become a key attribute for local economic development. The farmers' market as it is known today offers a plethora of activities such as the provision of organic and healthy produce, a meeting place for people, and it encapsulates the cultural identity of the area (Warsaw et al., 2021, Hergesheimer & Kennedy, 2010). As a result, it is not unusual for farmers' markets to be situated in the city centre, or suburban areas, within old re-purposed buildings that are accessible to consumers (visitors). A typical example is Camden Market in London, where a number of older buildings provide decent infrastructure and buildings, which are frequented by locals and tourists. In some instance farmers' markets are located on the periphery of a town or city where there are open spaces. In this instance, there are many such examples from across the globe. The Outeniqua Farmers' Market, where this study was done, is an example of a farmers' market on the outskirts of the town

### **2.3 Farmers' Markets in the Developed World / Countries**

Farmers' markets have gained momentum as new sources of sustainable food production and have become major public gathering places, where visitors and residents congregate on a regular basis to procure food products and other goods (Arabska, 2018). As a consequence, farmers' markets have outperformed traditional food distribution systems by including social interactions, entertainment and miscellaneous goods. The creation of enjoyable spaces where consumers can interact with producers of all kinds of products is a key factor to the growth and success of farmers' markets (Solanki & Inumula, 2021). Hence, during the 2000's the interest in farmers' markets from both consumers and scholars grew considerably (Stobbe, 2023). This interest has led to many studies identifying the demographics, spending habits and motivations of consumers that attend farmers' markets in developed countries. However, the new iteration of farmers' markets as a driver of local economic development is a relatively new phenomenon for South Africa and most developing countries (Biesenbach, 2015). Understanding the nuances of farmers' market consumers is thus paramount in uncovering the growth and success of these markets.

The concept of purchasing directly from producers has always been a prominent feature in society all over the world (Saili, Rola-Rubzen & Batt, 2017). This key feature has seen much change in the last century due to the advent of supermarkets and the globalised nature of the world. Connolly, Bogue and Repar (2022) and Brune, Knollenberg, Stevenson, Barbieri and Moreno (2021) indicate food production in the world as one of the largest sources of environmental degradation. This has propelled much of the developed world to support and embrace more sustainable forms of food production and distribution such as farmers' markets. The localised and community-based nature of farmers' markets remains a key characteristic that motivates the conscious consumer (Ostrom, Goldberger & Smith, 2020). These empowered and mostly educated consumers manifest their preferences through consumption habits. The interest in more sustainable options can be seen as North American farmers' markets experienced remarkable growth in both the United States of America (USA) and Canada (Warsaw et.al., 2021, Dodds & Holmes, 2016). The advancement in farmers' markets have effectively transformed the traditional market from a mere shortcut towards the

producer to a whole experience that consumers can enjoy. The growth in demand and supply for farmers' markets has also accelerated the research in that field.

Another pervasive topic in farmers' market research is the ability to create a Sustainable Food Supply Chain (SFSC). The acceleration of this movement is largely propelled by the devastating negative impacts of the industrial food supply chain (Robinson & Śpiewak, 2023). The global movement of food has led many developed countries to attempt and redefine the supply of food towards a more sustainable chain. Connolly, Bogue and Repar (2022) propose that farmers' markets are the forerunners of the SFSC movement enveloping Europe in the last decade.

Over the decades Europe has always been familiar with farmers' markets and the various iterations thereof, although the popularity of grocery stores and power of the industrial food system has made life for small scale producers increasingly difficult (Connolly et al., 2022). Through economies of scale, the industrialised food system can outproduce small scale producers while also providing lower prices. Nevertheless, traditional farmers' markets that allow interaction with consumers and producers remain essential for many communities and have seen a resurgence throughout Europe (Robinson & Śpiewak, 2023). Farmers' markets essentially adjusted their offerings to focus on organic and local produce, while also creating a space for recreation.

The movement to re-localise food is trending in city spaces due to the prospects of increasing public health and decreasing environmental pressures (Mikulić, et al, 2023). The movement is focused on creating more sustainable and local food systems, which are gathering more public interest in developed economies. The concept of sustainable food systems was further advanced due to external calamities such as, the COVID-19 outbreak and the war in Ukraine. These incidents highlighted the vulnerability of long food supply chains and propelled farmers' markets to the forefront of developmental options for the region (Connolly et al., 2022). The re-localisation of food also brings social benefits to communities with safe and nutritious food that applies environmentally friendly methods of production and are more resilient to price spikes or other disturbances. Thus, farmers' markets or alternative food systems are deliberately attempting to differentiate themselves from the industrialised food system. For example, as opposed to the long food supply chain commonly seen, farmers' markets offer a more direct connection between producer and consumer. The direct interactions caused by farmers' markets allow for social connections, institutional arrangements and collective action that increase food's social value (Robinson & Śpiewak, 2023). Farmers' markets do not eliminate the sale of food, much like the industrialised system. However, the emphasis is given to the philosophical and social ideals of food as a social common and a way to reshape individual relations.

Recently, the European Committee of the Regions has shifted toward a sustainable food policy that will have lasting economic, environmental, and social impacts.

## **2.4 Farmers' Markets in the Developing World / Countries**

In Mexico and Brazil, farmers' markets have also gone through a hiatus in the 1980's as a result of the growth and expansion of supermarkets (Bartis & Oberholzer, 2022). However, this dip in popularity has now been reversed. According to Muñoz, Niederle, de Gennaro & Roselli (2021), this has caused quite a challenge for consumers as they are able to purchase goods at cheaper prices from supermarkets. However, in some Latin American countries, the renewed growth in farmers' markets is attributed to consumers having a more traditional approach to preferring local and organic produce. In Brazil, for instance, consumers have been desirous of rekindling ties with producers. Furthermore, the quality of products

and the process of production, as well as the availability of products, have led to a particular preference for farmers' markets (Schneider, et al., 2016).

The inception of the Federal Agricultural Marketing Authority (FAMA) in Malaysia in 1965 has spurred the growth and development of farmers' markets, despite the establishment of supermarkets in the 1980s (Tey, et al., 2017). The popularity of farmer's markets is thus attributed to FAMA having a specific strategy to support farmers' markets. However, the consumers (visitors) of farmers' markets in Malaysia have a particular preference for fresh, good-quality products, whilst farmers' markets also contribute to their tradition and cultural identity (Saili, 2011; Tey et al., 2017). According to Saili (2011), some of these farmer's markets are in urban areas and thus also contributes to urban tourism. As a result of the unique craft development and gastronomic experiences, urban tourism has become a focal point, also contributing to the exponential growth of farmers' markets across the country (Tey et al., 2017).

In Ghana, farmers' markets are central to urbanisation, as the city dwellers seek more affordable and accessible produce. In this regard, farmers' markets often take the form of street markets (Troccoli & De Rosa, 2021). The development of small, micro and medium enterprises (SMME's) is key to the development of farmers' markets as it creates sustainable economic opportunities, whilst also promoting tourism (Mohammed, 2014). The link between SMME development and tourism is critical in a country with limited economic opportunities.

The central African country of Rwanda is a prime example where the government has focused on sustainable development (Elsner, 2019; Odunga et al., 2019). In addition, as part of the government's core policies and implementation of sustainability, a well-crafted marketing strategy has led to the growth of creating farmers' markets underpinned by pillars of sustainability (Spencer & Rurangwa, 2012). This has tied in well with sustainable tourism opportunities.

In South Africa, which is the focus of the study, farmers' markets are considered the ideal platform to make produce and goods directly available to the consumers (visitors), without an intermediary (Dodds & Holmes, 2016; Naicker & Rogerson, 2017; Arabska, 2018; Pavić, Pažek & Pavlović, 2018). Thus, farmers or stall owners can interact with the consumers (visitors) directly. A very common attribute of all farmers' markets in South Africa is the sale of ready-to-eat food, which can range from a samosa or pie to an elaborate breakfast or even a frozen meal, which can be warmed for consumption at a later stage. Very often, farmers' markets have become gathering places where consumers (visitors) congregate not only to eat and drink, but also to engage and socialise. In some cases, the uniqueness of a farmers' markets is linked to the gastronomic experience it offers, arts and crafts, as well as a range of fresh produce (Dodds & Holmers, 2016; Naiker & Rogerson, 2017).

Over the past 20 years, farmers' markets have mushroomed on the outskirts of towns and cities. More recently, they have also established themselves within cities, in open spaces and old commercial buildings no longer used for their originally intended business. Farmers' markets intend to offer authentic experiences, presumably to first-time visitors.

As is the case in Malaysia, farmers' markets have increased considerably in South Africa, with 225 active farmers' markets recorded in South Africa (Mnguni, 2010; Biesenbach, 2015; Naicker & Rogerson, 2017). Whilst not all towns or cities have farmers' markets, some larger towns and cities may have more than two, both operating on a weekly basis. This means that consumers (visitors) are spoilt for choice, and they do not have to visit the same farmers' markets every Saturday or Sunday.

## **2.5 Farmer's Markets Post-COVID-19**

Recent studies on farmers' market have explored other avenues. These have included the relationship between farmers' markets and healthy lifestyles (Hrubá & Silek, 2023). Healthy styles and good quality food seem to go hand-in-hand and this has resulted in farmers' markets responding to consumers' needs in both the global north and south. Other studies on farmers' markets have investigated the experience of farmers' market vendors (stall owners) on food security and improved diets involving for specific communities (Silva, et al., 2023). In the global south studies of this specific nature, the experiences of stall owners at farmers' markets seem to be rather scant at this stage, and studies have focused on the consumers (visitors) and the growth and development of farmers' markets, in general.

More recent studies on farmer's markets tend to focus on the growing awareness social interaction of visitors to farmers' markets (Lim, et al., 2025). Thus, farmers' markets remain the nexus of engagement opportunities between visitors to the farmers' markets and visitors and stall owners (vendors). The social value of farmers' market should therefore not be underestimated. Consequently, farmers' markets are more than just eating and purchasing products.

According to Török, Kovács, Maró and Maró (2024) it is anticipated that sustainability and environmentally related issues linked to farmers' markets may receive greater attention in the foreseeable future. This is possibly attributed to research initiatives being aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's). Furthermore, future studies on farmers' markets are also likely to continue to be driven by various disciplines underpinned by the 17 SDGs.

The inclusion of local foods have become popular in restaurants and farmers' markets create access to these local products (Roy, 2024). Such initiatives allow for restaurateurs and chefs to build relationships with stall owners (vendors), so that when the farmers' markets are not open, they are able to procure local food directly from the producers. This is major benefits for both parties. According to Roy (2024), the inclusion of local foods on restaurant tables have also been motivated by government, as is the case in Canada. This facilitates the development local economies, whilst at the same time create local pride.

## **3. Methods**

As mentioned previously, this study was part of a larger study which used a quantitative research design. A survey technique was adopted to collect the data. This enabled the researcher to use a self-administered questionnaire, allowing quantifiable data to be collected. Since the fieldwork was done over a 4 week period, a cross-sectional study led to the researchers adopting a cross-sectional study.

The non-probability sampling method was used for this study, with convenience sample being the preferred technique. Since an average of 6500 attended the Outeniqua Farmers Market (Mocke, 2021), more than 390 respondents participated in the study, with 377 usable questionnaires. The inclusion criteria for this study were all participants older than 18 years. Therefore, participants younger than 18 years old were excluded. The reason for excluding participants younger than 18 years old is that they are below the legal age and would require parental consent.

## 4. Results and Discussion

For the purpose of this study, the researchers have presented a perspective on the demographics of the visitors to the Outeniqua Farmers' Market. The preferences of the visitors to this market then follow this.

### 4.1 Demographics of Visitors

An analysis of the visitors indicated that most were almost evenly spread across the different age brackets, barring the 56 to 65 age group representing 23 percent of the visitors. The 46 to 55 age group representing 20 percent of the visitors. The other age groups ranged from 12 percent to 15 percent. It appears that the Outeniqua Farmers' Markets attract a more mature clientele.

Table 1: Respondents and Age Categories

AGE CATEGORIES						
18-25	26-35	35-45	46-55	56-65	66-Older	Total
Count (%)	Count (%)	Count (%)	Count (%)	Count (%)	Count (%)	Count
46 (12.2%)	53 (15.4%)	58 (15.4%)	77 (20%)	88 (23.3%)	55 (14.6%)	377

The Table 2 provides information on the educational levels of the visitors to the Outeniqua Farmers' Markets. The results indicate that the majority of the visitors had attended a Higher Education institution. Almost 41 percent had a Post-Graduate qualification.

Table 2: Education of Respondents

EDUCATION				
Primary	Secondary	Undergraduate	Post-graduate	Total
Count (%)	Count (%)	Count (%)	Count (%)	Count
4 (1.1%)	117 (31%)	103 (27.3%)	153 (40.6%)	377

### 4.2 Preferences of Visitors to the Outeniqua Farmers Market

In this study, almost 61 percent of the respondents had a preference for fresh produce. Thus, the ability to purchase fresh produce seems to be a main consideration when visiting the Outeniqua Farmers' Market. This is in-line with research conducted by Robinson & Śpiewak, (2023). Regarding organic products, almost 38 percent of the respondents indicated that they were neutral about their desire for organic products. It should be noted that at most South African farmers' markets, organic certification is not a requirement. This possibly something that could be explored, if it were to increase the preference for organic products. It should be noted that the respondents reasoning for being neutral is not known.

Forty-four percent of the respondents had a preference to purchase arts and crafts. Again, it is unknown what kind of arts and crafts were more popular than others.

What is particularly interesting is that a large proportion of respondents (almost 68 percent) were comfortable paying higher prices for good quality products. Good quality products, as well as healthy food was found to be a key driver in Poland and the United States,

specifically in Bloomington, Indiana. (Robinson & Śpiekwak, 2023). However, the type of products on sale in this study has not been specified and this could be ready-to-eat food, fresh produce, arts and crafts, and entertainment.

Respondents to the Outeniqua Farmers' Markets preferred to buy from local producers, with 82 percent. The demand to buy local products is, therefore, quite apparent and demonstrates the need for visitors to support local producers (farmers). At the same time, it is worth noting that 79 percent of the respondents were satisfied with the variety of products offered at the market. Thus, the variety or range of products is appealing to the visitors. On the other hand, 42 percent of the respondents were neutral about purchasing novelty products. Novelty products could be toys, collectables, souvenirs, or unusual items.

It is also worth noting that almost 87 percent of the respondents have no problem recommending the farmers' market to other people or visitors. This suggests that visitors to the market were reasonably confident about the products and, or the experience that the market offers. This shows a tremendous vote of confidence in the market and what the market has to offer.

About 86 percent of the respondents were confident about returning to the market.

Table 3. Visitor Preferences

Scales/opinion	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Question	Count (%)	Count (%)	Count (%)
Prefer fresh produce	60,7% (230)	25.1% (95)	14,2% (54)
Mostly purchase organic produce	35,6% (132)	37.5% (139)	27% (100)
Mostly purchase arts and crafts	25,9% (95)	30.1% (110)	44% (161)
Comfortable with higher prices for superior quality	67,9% (256)	20.4% (77)	11,7% (44)
Prefer to buy from local producers	82,1% (307)	15.2% (57)	2,7% (10)
Satisfaction with the variety of products offered	79% (297)	16.2% (61)	4.8% (18)
Prefer to indulge in novelty products	32,1% (118)	42.4% (156)	25,6% (94)
Chance to recommend	86,5% (325)	45 (12%)	1.6% (6)
Confident in returning to the market for a given product	86,2% (324)	45 (12.2%)	1.6% (6)



## **5. Conclusion**

The practical implications of farmers' markets within the context of tourism management is quite pertinent. The more obvious impact of farmers' markets is that it has the propensity to contribute to the local economy where the farmers' market are located (Arabska, 2018, Naicker & Rogerson, 2017). The contribution to the coffers of the local economy comes from tourists visiting the location, and the region where the market is hosted, spending money on purchasing art, craft, food and other products which are on sale at the market. In other words, the transactions of sales extend beyond the regular visitors to the market, which are from the local area. As the transaction of sales grow at the market, it may create further employment opportunities. From a tourism management perspective, the creation of employment opportunities bodes well for any location, or region.

Farmers' markets also have the ability to contribute to community engagement and social interaction on multiple levels. In general, farmers' market provide a platform for social interaction between visitors attending the market. Lim, Kayama, Fisher and Calderon (2025) has concurred with this view. This may happen when they share a table when enjoying a meal and conversation may take place. There may also be engagement between the stall owners (vendors) and the visitors, when they procure goods, or the visitors enquire about product information. On a more advanced level, some farmers' market may even offer opportunities for cooking demonstrations, or the use of an innovative kitchen tool, or device. In this instance, the depth of interaction between those participating in demonstration may become even more intense.

With farmers' markets being located in specific localities, or regions, the origin and development of markets are often attributed to very specific reasons. Consequently, farmers' markets have the inclination to provide authentic experiences, by virtue of their product offerings. The authenticity, or uniqueness of the product offerings can be leveraged for tourism purposes to attract more visitors to a market, or region. In this regard, farmers markets can be marketed as unique tourist attractions that can be a show piece (attraction) for a destination. These show pieces can be used by destination marketers to highlight tourist experiences and unique product offerings to better position destinations. Farmers' markets can therefore contribute to tourism management by stimulating the local economy, provide useful marketing tools to promote destinations and amplify the visitor experience.

This study offered some insight into the visitors to farmers' markets, specifically during the post-COVID-19 period and with reference to South Africa. It would also appear that visitors to farmers' markets have disposable income and may be in need of getting some exposure to the outdoors. Despite South Africa's predominantly Black population, farmers' markets, like the Outeniqua Farmers' Market, are not attracting many Black patrons. The reason/s for this remains unknown, and this may require further research to ascertain if there may be specific barriers that exclude some of the broader demographic groups, other than economic factors.

Future research on farmers' markets may also consider the different management models that farmers' markets are based on and what type of management model is more equitable regarding the different stakeholders, such as the stall owners or vendors and the management structure or team. Further research may also have to look at whether all the vendors are actually responsible for producing their own goods or whether the goods are procured elsewhere at wholesalers and then sold to unsuspecting visitors (consumers). Linked to this may be studies that will explore how farmers' markets deal with overcrowding during peak holiday season, when some of the markets are receive an oversupply of visitors, leading to other challenges, such environmental degradation brought about by the shortage of parking and inadequate ablution facilities for all the visitors.

It would also be worthwhile to ascertain the economic contribution of each of the farmers' markets in South Africa and as a collective. Also, it would be interesting to ascertain the tourism value of farmers' markets in general, and what the maximum distance is that visitors (consumers) would travel to attend, or visit a farmers' market.

Finally, future research could explore any linkages to the SDGs, given the prominence that is accorded to the SDGs currently and the fact that many Universities have prioritized sustainability key research focus area. According to Török, Kovács, Maró and Maró (2024), there is likely to be a special focus on farmers' markets and sustainability, as well as environmental aspects of farmers' markets. Therefore, as a study area, farmers' markets may offer divergent and interesting alternatives to the future researcher.

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