



*City of Reidsville Press Release – Release Date September 26, 2017*

# Market Square Farmers Market Continues To Experience Growth

As the 2017 season wraps up, the Market Square Farmers Market in downtown Reidsville is growing, helped in part by additional sales from the SNAP and WIC programs.

The Farmers Market is up to 18 vendors for the season, plus several who are classified as one-time vendors, according to Farmers Market Assistant Kenya Johnson. In the past, the market had averaged about 12-13 vendors.

With these additional vendors has come more variety in what the market has to offer. It's not just about vegetables and fruits anymore at Market Square. In meat selection, the market has added fresh seafood from the North Carolina coast and Angus no-hormone ground beef. A few vendors provide eggs while others provide baked goods, plants, herbs, jams and jellies. Talented artisans have added to the mix, offering pottery, jewelry, scarfs, bibs, sock monkeys, woodwork and all natural body products such as soaps, lotions, mosquito repellent, bath salts and more. For a small fee, vendors are allowed to bring in "Got to be NC" products, thereby allowing the market selection to expand.

Farmer Paul Sutton, a long-time vendor at the Reidsville market, definitely has seen growth in the market, especially this year.

"More customers, particularly younger people, have contributed to its growth," Sutton said. "The variety of produce, blackberries, strawberries, etc. has helped."

Sutton also attributes the growth to determining what local customers want to see at the market.

"We as farmers have grown in our understanding of what the customer wants and needs," he said.

The SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) and WIC (Women, Infants & Children) programs at the Farmers Market have also helped out tremendously. The Farmers Market started accepting SNAP/EBT, along with credit and debit cards, after receiving a grant from the Reidsville Area Foundation in 2014. SNAP/EBT recipients can use their card to receive tokens at the market from Johnson. The customer then uses the tokens at the various vendors.



**Paul Sutton, right,** helps customers at the Market Square Farmers Market in downtown Reidsville. Sutton has been a long-time vendor at the market.

Johnson said the numbers show the SNAP/EBT program has increased sales by at least 30% month for month for last year and this year.

Johnson explained that the market started accepting the WIC FMNP vouchers last year, but this is the first year they have been able to double their WIC benefits.

“This is a win-win situation,” she said. “Fresh fruits and vegetables are available to so many more people.”

Sutton agrees.

“The value to the customer is obvious,” he said. “It encourages people to eat healthy.”

Sutton said he has already exceeded his token sales for all of last year by the end of August with only two months left in the season. Overall his total sales have been up 31%. He credits SNAP as a significant part of this increase. SNAP customers can double their benefits up to \$20 per day.

The Farmers Market has also seen an increase in younger customers, who want to eat healthy. Johnson said one young couple came to buy produce to make baby food for their child. She has also seen families and different generations coming together to shop at the market.

Kirby Wilkins has volunteered his time many Saturday mornings to provide a pleasant listening experience for market goers and vendors. “We have had a lot of positive feedback to the music,” Johnson said.

The Farmers Market has also geared special events around holidays like Mother’s Day or Father’s Day. A Kids Day was held in July and a Grandparents Day in September. Two “Junk-In-Your Trunk” sales were held in June and October to coincide with the market.

If you want to check it out, the market officially ends October 31<sup>st</sup>. The market operates Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays from 7 a.m. to 1 p.m.