European and United States farmers' markets: similarities, differences and potential developments

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Abstract. *Farmers' markets have always been the usual way of buying and selling rural products in the Western world. With the advent of supermarkets, farmers' markets rapidly disappeared in many nations. However, in countries such as France and Italy, which place a high priority on food origin and regional specialisation, some farmers' markets continued to exist, partly due to their mechanisms to identify and promote locally grown foods.*
The consumer's desire to re-establish a bond with local food products, local growers and producers, together with the growing concern for food freshness and healthiness have been key drivers for the renaissance of farmers' markets occurred in the latest years in many European countries and in the United States. Several studies, conducted across Europe and in the U.S., have shown rising consumers' consideration of farmers' markets as important sources of household food shopping and increasing attention of farmers to this sale channel, in a period in which their share of the "food dollar" is continuing to decrease.
The objectives of this paper are to contribute to extend understanding of the main features of the European and United States farmers' markets and raise critical questions about their potential development in the modern food system.

Keywords*:* Farmers' markets; Local foods; Europe; U.S.A.

1. Introduction

Although farmers' markets (FMs) are only one of the activities of the so-called alternative food networks, on which recently researchers are generating a wide range of local and regional case-studies[1], they unquestionably are the most noticeable, as prominent scholars define them as key institutions in the trend towards a less industrialized agriculture [(1)].
The reasons for the reemergence of FMs in many developed countries are varied, but most of the evidence concentrates on farmers' greater revenues [(2)], consumers' satisfaction due to freshness/quality of the products [(3)], FMs ability to connect people to the local community [(4)], and provide opportunity for pleasant social interaction [(5)]. In addition, the emergent consumer's desire to re-establish a bond with local products, widely noticed globally [(6; 7; 8)], seems to be a further important driver for the rapid growth of the FM phenomenon.
Moreover, literature suggests that environmental issues in the United States and food scares in Europe have also been significant issues in FMs growth, since these markets offer a higher amount of information through direct contact with the producers/growers [(9; 10)].
While an abundance of research on FMs can be found in the U.S.A., with even studies dating back to the 1940's [(11)], quite surprisingly a limited economic academic literature is available on European FMs, which is also mostly very new.
Generally speaking, the numerous recent studies on FMs in North America have mainly focused on their economic issues through descriptive consumers' or/and vendors' data, whit clear marketing purposes. These studies have done surveys on: identifying shopper characteristics and purchasing habits [(12; 13; 14; 15)]; exploring the linkage between consumers' motivations for patronage and their beliefs concerning local food [(16)]; analyzing farmers' motivations [(17)]; providing an inventory of FMs growth and development [(11)].
Whereas most of the studies retrieved in the European literature have investigated different topics: revealing the diverse potential benefits of local food systems and short supply chains [(18; 19; 20)], and enlightening the social aspects of FMs [(22; 23; 24; 25)].
The current paper illustrates the results of previous studies that have analyzed this traditional form of commerce and focuses on the purposes that FMs serve in today's global food system.
To further investigate the research topic a qualitative analysis was conducted on two FMs, one in Italy and one in the U.S.A., to explore the core features of the markets, such as management systems, promotion mechanisms, prices and products sold, shoppers and farmers participation, and reveal their main similarities and differences.

[1] Only between 2000 and 2006, over 56 papers exploring new and alternative food chains and networks have been published in major academic journals (Venn *et al.*, 2006).

The work proceeds as follows: first, a brief overview of agricultural direct marketing initiatives is presented; next a review of the current literature on FMs in the U.S.A. and in Europe is analyzed; subsequently the two case studies are exposed; finally, the main implications of the results are discussed and some conclusions are drawn.

2. Agricultural direct marketing

In recent years European and American farmers are looking for more profitable markets as agricultural prices decrease, international competition raises and several regulations (EU CAP, federal and national) impose production limits and stringent safety food standards. On the other side, a number of studies, during the past two decades, have reported that local foods[2] are one of the most dynamic sectors in the U.S.A. and European food consumption. Numerous academics of different disciplines, from rural sociology, geography, anthropology to marketing, have demonstrated that consumers increasingly seek local foods for different reasons (26; 27), ranging from its quality, freshness and taste, to more intangible attributes such as its benefits in contributing to local economy, preservation of cultural heritage and environmental issues, and higher food security. However, despite the acknowledgement of an interest in a number of different advantages of local produce it is also apparent that many do not buy at all, or as frequently as they would like to, because they encounter overwhelming barriers to find them in conventional retail stores.

In this scenario, direct agricultural marketing strategies, that promote and reward non tangible quality characteristics, provide a link between urban consumers and rural food producers, and allow producers to capture a larger share of the consumers' expenditure by eliminating the intermediary in the supply chain, have experienced rising usage by farmers of developed countries[3].

Although it is essential to remark that, as some authors have demonstrated (28), not all these marketing channels always create enough added value to financially reward participating producers/growers. Since they frequently involve changes in production practices and create higher costs (such as packaging, transport, selling and sometimes even processing and transformation), therefore require often political and institutional support on both economic and socio-cultural grounds.

Table 1. Snapshot of direct food selling data in the U.S.A. and Italy

Country	**Data**	**Source**
U.S.A.	– *In 2007 136.817 farms implemented a direct marketing strategy.* – *From 2002 to 2007, the number of farm operators implementing direct marketing as a part of their manage strategy has increased by 17%.* – *Over the same period, farmers saw the value of direct marketing sales increase by 49%.*	USDA, 2009
Italy	– *In 2007 farms engaged in direct sales totalled 57,530 units (6.1% of national total), with an increase of 18% compared to 2005 and by 48% compared to 2001.* – *In 2007 the sales value was estimated at 2.5 billion €, 4.1% higher than the previous year.*	National Observatory on direct sale - Coldiretti, 2008

[2] Important to note is that a major problem in estimating market size and share of local foods is that studies tend to define local in many different ways. However, to have a broad idea of the phenomenon between 2002 and 2007, the U.S. market for local foods reportedly jumped from $4 billion to $5 billion (Packaged Facts, 2007) and a national survey reports that 89 percent of Americans would like to see food stores sell more fruits and vegetables that come from local farms (Deloitte, 2008).

[3] This phenomenon is apparent even if most of the existing researches are related to specific case studies, and do not provide abundant empirical data on the amount of farms and consumers involved (Venn *et al*., 2006; Marsden, 2004).

These non-mainstream initiatives, that create direct producer-consumer relations, are also becoming increasingly included in wider discussions about alternativeness and sustainability of the food sector, quality food production and rural development.
Naturally, direct selling of locally produced/grown food is not new, but its form has changed considerably in recent years. Without being exhaustive, among the many types, the most successful direct marketing systems adopted lately are: pick your own operations (PYO), roadside stands, vegetable box schemes, mail orders, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and buying groups. In particular, CSA, a mechanism in which consumers become shareholders purchasing farm's produce prior to the season, has gained increasing importance in the American food system [(29)], while buying groups (organized consumers that choose to commonly buy directly from selected producers) have flourished in Italy [(30)]. In other European countries (such as Spain), instead, mechanisms of co-operation among farmers have reached successful results overcoming the problems that inhibit small and medium producers from developing direct selling activities.

3. Farmers' markets in the U.S.A.

Allegedly the tradition of direct agricultural markets was brought to North America from Europe and spread across the continent with European settlement [(31)]. The first documented FM in America occurred in the seventeenth century [(32)]. After a period of steady decline, mainly due to urbanization and growth of modern food distribution, FMs revitalization started around the 1970's[4], with a true explosion in the early 1990's [(11)].
Their present popularity can be traced to a number of factors, including producers' renewed search for more profitable alternatives, consumers' rising interest in fresh and local foods, and also the pleasant atmosphere of the FMs [(1)]. Economists related with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) periodically inventory, analyze and report on FMs in the United States. The latest available data show quite impressive numbers: in 2006 the USDA estimated FMs[5] to be a $1 billion industry [(33)] reflecting 13% sales growth since 2000 [(33)]; their number has passed from 2,410 in 1996 to 4,385 in 2006; approximately three million Americans purchase produce every week directly from the farmers at local FMs [(13)]; in California 1% of all produce is sold at FMs [(34)]. Moreover, results for a 2006 FMs survey revealed that average per vendor sales were $7,108 and that the FMs sales were the sole source of farm income for 25% of vendors [(34)].
Since there is a profusion of social scientists studies on FMs in North America[6] the current paper focuses only on the most recent literature and briefly gives an overview of the studies that have assessed consumers' motivations to attend U.S. FMs and of the researches that have investigated FMs role and importance in the country's food system and social sphere.
The work by Govindasamy and colleagues (2002), on FMs patrons in New Jersey, demonstrated that, in general, consumers tended to agree that freshness and direct contact with farmers were the main factors that drove people to FMs, that these facilities helped support local agriculture and that by attracting customers to downtown areas, FMs boosted local economies. Consistently, Andreatta and Wickliffe (2002) found, through a survey on 463 shoppers of a North Carolina FM, that consumers went to the FM to purchase fresh, quality farm products from multiple vendors and to support a local farm economy, rather than to save money.
Henneberry and Agustini (2004) in their research in Oklahoma on consumer, producer, and market manager demographic characteristics and their views on important factors in the success of FMs, state that the most important motivations for consumers to shop at FMs were product quality and freshness, and support local farmers and businesses.
Wolf, Spittler and Ahern (2005) conclude their study, on 336 shoppers of the FM in San Luis Obispo County-California, stating that consumers indicate quality and value as the most important attributes when purchasing at the FM. Similar results were found by Onianwa *et al.* (2006), investigating two markets and over 200 shoppers in Alabama, with the addition of the variety of the products as a valuable reason to shop at the FMs. The results found by Bukenya and colleagues (2007), also in Alabama, highlighted household income, age of household head, household size, and price and quality of produce to be the factors that explain the variations in consumers' attitudes toward shopping at FMs. In Brown *et al.* (2007) survey on West Virginia FMs vendors was found that retired and part-time farmers were significantly different from full-time producers, but in both cases FMs represented an essential outlet for the direct marketing of diverse agricultural products.

[4] Important to remark is the passage of Public Law 94-463, the Farmer-to-Consumer Direct Marketing Act of 1976.
[5] There are a number of different definitions of the FM concept in literature; however the USDA has defined it as "a common facility or area where several farmers/growers gather on a regular, recurring basis to sell a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables and other farm products directly to consumers".
[6] A considerable amount of recent studies has also been retrieved related to Canada, such as Smithers *et al.* (2008); Feagan *et al.* (2007, 2004); Sanderson *et al.* (2005).

In their analysis of the factors that influence customer participation in Indiana FMs Hofmann, Dennis and Marshall (2008) found that the acceptance of WIC vouchers (special supplemental nutrition program for Women, Infants and Children), number of products, presence of a concession stand, and presence of a cooking demonstration all had a positive impact on the number of customers visiting the markets.
Oberholtzer and Grow (2003) define the FM as a place for social activity and promoting a sense of community, in addition to providing fresh food for consumers and positive economic impacts for local businesses. Tiemann (2004), observing sixty-one FMs around the United States, concludes that some of the markets offer the customer an experience along with their produce that can justify higher prices.
Also Hunt (2006) indicates community interactions, like the social atmosphere, friendliness of the markets and the ability for consumers to meet other people that they know, as the main component of the FMs.
Using data from FMs vendors in California, Iowa, and New York State Hinrichs and colleagues (2004) conclude that FMs can serve as mediating social institutions that promote social learning and innovation by vendors. Gillespie, Hilchey, Hinrichs and Feenstra (2007), situating FMs in a larger social context, affirm that these are community and economic institutions that can be keystones for rebuilding local and regional food systems in America. Focusing on their capacity to: give local products and producers public attention, promote farmers' diversification, develop small business, and create an environment where social relations are joined with market dealings.
While Hughes *et al.* (2008) evaluating the net impacts on West Virginia state economy by economic activity generated by FMs concluded that, although still positive and substantial, accounting for the opportunity cost of such spending reduces the impact of these markets.

Table 2. Selection of U.S.A. Farmers' Markets recent studies

Scholar	Year	Research topic	Methodology
Andreatta and Wickliffe	2002	Cultural relationships between farmers and consumers	Interviews with consumers and interviews and focus groups with vendors
Brown	2002	FMs Census	Literature review
Govindasamy *et al.*	2002	Consumers' trends	Consumer survey
Griffin and Frongillo	2003	Importance of FM for vendors	In-depth interviews with farmers
Hinrichs *et al.*	2004	Social learning and innovation of farmers	Mail survey of vendors
Hughes *et al.*	2008	Impact of FMs on state economy	Producer survey
Hunt	2007	Social interactions	Survey on shoppers and farmers
Varner and Otto	2008	Sales performance	Survey of vendors and consumers
Wolf *et al.*	2005	Comparison of FM shoppers with non FM shoppers	Personal interviews with consumers

4. Farmers' Markets in Europe

The term alternative food networks has experienced increasing popularity among academics and has developed into something that applies to an array of emerging food schemes [35]. While some authors consider quality as the main dimension [36; 37; 38] of these networks others lend more towards the local attribute [39; 19].

However, the development of alternative food networks builds on different foundations: mostly on activities of regional quality production and direct selling in Italy, Spain, France, Greece and Portugal [(40)]; on quality definitions such as sustainability or animal welfare, and on innovative forms of marketing in countries such as the UK, the Netherlands, and Germany [(41)]. In addition, the emergent interest for local foods, which consumers perceive as characterized by higher quality standards and as tools for the preservation of tradition and local know how [(19; 21)], has given further strength to the concept of alternative food network.
Many researchers exploring the alternativeness of food networks have often used FMs as practical examples, case studies or an optimal field for experiments. As a consequence, nowadays, the vast majority of academic literature on European FMs indeed originates from sociologists, geographers and rural scholars.
Moreover these studies are mostly centered on the United Kingdom. This could be explained by the great success that FMs have encountered in this country: since the first 'new generation' FM in Bath, England, opened in September 1997 their number has reached in the Kingdom over 450 by 2004 [(23)].
In the UK, FMs are described as food markets where farmers and producers bring their food and sell it direct to the public, and the produce usually has to be from a defined local area and produced by the vendors (National Association of Farmers Markets, 2004).
In their evaluation of FMs, Holloway and Kneafsey (2000) suggest that notions of localness, naturalness, personal trust and a sense of community emphasize the way in which participants value this type of exchange context.
La Trobe (2001) through a survey on consumers in one market in Kent revealed that novelty was the main motivation for shoppers to attend the FM, although some attended specifically to buy healthy fresh foods.
The study by Archer and colleagues (2003) on FMs of North West England showed that consumers' perception of the markets was that they sell fresh, quality, local produce in a pleasant atmosphere, but that the food would not be necessarily cheap. These findings were confirmed by Kirwan's study (2004) in which, through semi-structured telephone interviews with vendors and shoppers' focus groups, consumers demonstrated a belief in the intrinsic quality of the products at the FMs and price was generally not the main consideration, while farmers considered the market as a location where human-level interactions outside commodity exchange.
Youngs (2003) discovered that more than one half of the existing markets in the North West region of England found themselves at a high level of development and prosperity, and loyalty of the consumers being the key factor of their success. Szmigin *et al.* (2003) found that FMs were important both for the community and particularly for older consumers.
Kirwan (2006), in his follow up research examining the social construction and coordination of food quality at UK FMs, reveals that consumers assumed that the produce at FMs was somehow genuine, and in this sense the FM establishes a baseline trust for them. MacLeod (2007) states that FMs have been successful in reinvigorating Scottish farming, and have also provided wider social benefits, such as promoting revival of town centers and an opportunity for urban consumers to reconnect with the rural.
Lyon *et al.* (2009) studying 5 FMs of Scotland conclude that these markets had a useful and important role as a special shopping experience, since respondents were people who did their normal shopping in supermarkets but visited the FMs seeking high quality food products, even if that meant paying premium prices.
Amidst mounting academic interest in the local food systems in Europe the only other specific investigations on FMs[7] are the ones conducted by Sage (2003) and Moore (2006) in Ireland. The first researcher, illustrating the regional good food network of this country, supplies an overview of its FMs and recent developments. While the latter scholar, interviewing consumers' of organic fresh fruits and vegetables, found that they prioritize the trusting relationships built up through repeated personal contact at the FMs over and above organic certification.
Despite a long and consolidated tradition of direct agricultural markets a very limited literature has been found related to Italian[8] FMs. Most of the studies retrieved were completed by historians mainly interested in the cultural and anthropological features of the markets [(42)], or by scholars concerned by its legal aspects [(43; 44)] and often referred to public markets that cannot actually be considered as FMs (for example the Rialto market in Venice, the Porta Palazzo market in Turin and the Central market in Florence). Also for this reason the present study intends to offer some contribute on the subject by describing an Italian case study and suggesting new research avenues.

[7] Non academic information concerning France's different types of farmers' markets, such as the 'Marché paysan', and Germany's 'Bauernmarkt' can be retrieved through several sources.
[8] Although, the possibility of direct selling for farmers was already provided by article number 4 of Legislative Decree of May 18 2001, n. 228 still in force, officially in Italy the establishment of markets for farmers was provided by art. 1, paragraph 1065, of 2007 National balance: "to promote the development of markets with direct sale from farmers, by decree of the Minister of food and agricultural and forest policies..".

5. Case studies

Data contained in this part of the study draws largely on my experiences as a participant-observer at two FMs, Naples in Italy and Washington DC in U.S.A., for an overall period of 10 months between September 2008 and June 2009. During this time, I undertook the role of regular customer and sporadic volunteer in order to observe and interact with FMs managers and customers. To better frame the issues investigated, direct semi-structured interviews with farmers selling at the markets were conducted. The final sample of interviewed was composed by twelve randomly selected food vendors, 6 for each FM, all of them were selling only own products. Further insights were given by several volunteers working regularly in the markets.
The two FMs were chosen, after a qualitative analysis of FMs of central-southern Italy and Eastern U.S.A.; the Naples and Washington DC markets were selected because of their location in the city centre, year-round operation, total sales volumes and relatively high number of vendors. Moreover the two markets well represented a common metropolitan area FM in their respective country. Indeed rural area FMs were not taken into consideration at all since their relevance in the Italian food sector appears, currently, quite weak.
Both markets are very successful and in constant growth, however their positive experiences are based on extremely different characteristics. The following subsections provide a brief overview of the FMs management systems, atmosphere, prices and products sold, in addition farmers' visions of the markets and volunteers/managers' opinions on shoppers participation are briefly presented.

Figure 1. Location of the two cities

5.1 Washington D.C. Dupont Circle Farmers' Market

The FM of Dupont Circle is located in the centre of Washington District of Columbia[9], in the parking lot of PNC Bank, and is one of the eight FMs managed by the non profit organization FreshFarm Markets in the Maryland and Washington DC area. During the year around 40 vendors participate, consistently, at the weekly FM (selling fruit, vegetables, eggs, cheeses, meats, flowers, preserves and jams, bakery goods). Vendors come from Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia. The products sold range from certified organic, low pesticides, free range and conventional foods. Effective and well focused communication campaigns accompany the market during the hole year, supported by promotional activities and local community involvement.
The FM has strict entry rules with stallholders being forced to respect several requirements, the most important ones demands that all produce sold must have been grown in the local area by the stallholder (100 miles range from the market) and that 6% of total vendors' sales at the market has to be transferred to the management organization. Official data, from 2007, reported total FM annual sales of $2.976.118 (+ 30% compared with the previous year), and 124.376 total customers (+11% over 2006).
In general, the market is attended by a large number of visitors (organizers estimate that an average of 4.000 shoppers visit the FM each week) while the amount of actual buyers is considerably lower since over time the FM has consolidated its role as a meeting point for local residents and has also developed as a sort of tourist attraction. While, multiple observations lead to suppose that the Dupont Circle shopper spends a greater amount of what previous studies have defined as the average expense at a FM [(14; 45)]. In fact, Washington's consumers tended to side often vegetable and fruit purchases with cheeses, meats, bakery goods and flowers. According to the data collected by the FM managers, average expenditure per customer was $23.93 in 2007, $20.44 in 2006 and $23.58 in 2005. This high amounts could be explained by the wide variety of foods sold at this specific FM and also by the fact that the products sold were considered by the shoppers as of higher quality of the ones found in surrounding supermarkets. The latter explanation was supported by market managers' idea that the core reasons why consumers attended the FM were freshness and variety of the products.

[9] Washington D.C. population is 591.833 (US Census Bureau, 2009).

The direct collection of prices at the market and their comparison with those of the two nearest located supermarkets, enabled a rough evaluation of the Dupont Circle FM prices' level. Considering a basket of 13 analogous products[10] the average prices of Whole Foods and Safeway were, respectively, 5% and 7% lower than the ones of the FM.
Farmers considered quality and freshness of the products the main motivations of shoppers support, often conjoined with the local attribute of the food sold at the market. Social interaction was also frequently cited by farmers as an important feature of the market. While the environment was not identified as a primary purchasing motivator, it appeared that many shoppers linked implicitly the quality of the food available at the market with certain production methods and practices including organic, free-range and pasture-based methods.
Based on volunteers' opinions and personal observations quality, freshness, and variety, coupled with the social atmosphere of the market, appeared as the major reasons why consumers patronized the Dupont FM.
Moreover, through a dot survey, completed in July 2009, the managers of FreshFarm organization investigated this topic (together with other) and disclosed that 44% of respondents considered supporting local farmers and producers as their primary reason for participating at the FM, followed by food quality (41%).
Direct interviews with vendors revealed that the average percentage of farmers' annual income deriving only from the Dupont Circle FM was over 34% (with huge variability, ranging from 5% to 80%). Vendors were extremely satisfied by their sales volumes at the market (average 4.5 on a 5 point Likert scale), and also stated an overall increase in total transactions over the last year.

5.2 Naples Coldiretti Farmers' Market

The FM of Naples[11] is held bimonthly (every second and fourth Sunday) in the centre of the city in the Villa Comunale Park. It has been established by the local Coldiretti[12], in collaboration with the city's Chamber of Commerce, at the beginning of 2007 and it currently comprises around thirty farmers and growers, coming from the provinces of Naples and Salerno (a south bordering city), that sell fruit, vegetables, extra virgin olive oil, honey, jams, wine, cheeses, cured meats and baked goods.
The FM carries also a discrete amount of traditional regional foods[13] such as Pomodoro del piennolo (tomato), Albicocca del Vesuvio (apricot) and Zucca napoletana (squash).
Most of the vendors that participate at the market are farmers previously involved in other specific promotional activities (such as the official trademark for regional foods and educational farms) and are also equipped to sell directly at the farm.
During multiple visits the Naples FM appeared to have a traditional open market ambiance, with most of the people doing just normal everyday grocery shopping, pretty similar to the atmosphere of other food selling structures that can still be found in some old neighbors of the city centre.
There was a clear majority of shoppers aged over sixty and of women. Consumers bought mainly fruit and vegetables, and had relatively low interest in other foods.
Due to its quite recent institution and lack of staff/volunteers no official data on total annul sales, number of shoppers and average expenditure per visit was available. In addition, market managers were unable to formulate reliable estimations of these information. However, according to a 2007 national survey by Coldiretti, the main reason that pushes people to buy products directly from farmers is the savings for 30% of respondents, the producer-consumer relationship (25%), freshness and genuineness of food (24%), the preservation of cultural and gastronomy traditions (12%), and finally reduced pollution, energy saving, environmental protection (9%).
To broadly assess the economic convenience for consumers that purchased at the market, prices of a basket of 15 food products[14] sold at the FM were recorded and compared with those directly retrieved in modern distribution sales points surrounding the market. FMs' prices were on average 40% lower than the ones of supermarkets, with remarkable savings for shoppers, in particular on fruits and vegetables.
Among managers there was a clear consensus that customers supported the FM mainly motivated by low prices and value for money, also because they assess that the standard shopper has a medium-low annual income.

[10] Specifically the products were: pack of 12 organic large eggs, organic cherry tomatoes, organic strawberries, conventional spinach, conventional potatoes, whole wheat bread, conventional asparagus, conventional sugar snap peas, conventional broccoli, organic lettuce mix, conventional cucumbers, conventional green beans, organic radishes (all prices are per pound, except eggs).
[11] Naples population is of 973.132 citizens (Istat, 2008).
[12] Coldiretti is the largest Italian association of farmers, counting over 568.000 associated farms.
[13] Italy has an official list of four thousand six traditional food products selected by the Department of Agriculture (Decree of 18 July 2000) for their particular link with the territory.
[14] Per kilogram prices of conventional garlic, carrots, cauliflower, yellow onions, snow beans, fennel, lettuce, lemons, long eggplant, potatoes, peppers, pears, tomatoes, plums and zucchini. Other products, due to their specificity, where not taken into account (such as traditional cheeses and cured meats).

Consistently, managers promoted the FM relying heavily on its cheapness organizing regular price surveys and comparisons with city supermarkets. Nevertheless, communication activities were quite sporadic during the observed period and a marked information gap among local residents was noted.
Through the semi structured interviews emerged that farmers considered quality of the products as the principal customer's motivation to attend the market; freshness and low prices were the other factors cited more often. The majority of the interviewed farmers expressed a positive outlook towards the increase of FMs in the region and their growing importance for small producers; while they were much more sceptical on the possibility of the FMs to become an important source for consumers' everyday grocery shopping. Considering the lack of processed foods as a huge weakness of the market. Vendors stated to be quite satisfied of the sales at the FM (average rate was 3.5 on 5) and perceived a growing quantity of shoppers over time. The average amount of farmers' annual income originating from the market was 25%, although it has to be noted that there was a great difference among vendors (fruit and vegetable growers had much higher percentages compared to other farmers, reaching peaks of 70%).
Market's success has recently lead organizers and vendors to duplicate, in different days, the FM in other areas of the city and in neighbouring major towns of the Province (for instance Portici, San Giorgio a Cremano, Torre Annunziata).

Table 3. Main features of the two FMs

Farmers' Market	*Year of establishment*	*Frequency*	*Management*	*Number of vendors*	*Products sold*
Washington DC (Dupont Circle)	*1997*	*Once a week (every Sunday)*	*Non profit organization*	*around 40*	*Fruit, vegetables, fresh meats, cheeses, fish, bread and bakery goods, preserves, honey, soaps, flowers.*
Naples	*2007*	*Twice a month*	*Farmers association*	*around 30*	*Fruit, vegetables, wine, oil, cheeses, cured meats, chocolate, preserves and honey.*

6. Discussion and conclusions

Undoubtedly nowadays, consumers of developed countries, from an almost exclusive focus on product attributes (such as taste, nutritional values, volume) are shifting their attention to the process attributes (such as the links with the territory, the traditional techniques of production, the greening of production processes, the solidarity and amenity of the conditions under which exchanges take place).
Furthermore, in the current socioeconomic context farmers are increasingly powerless compressed between the growing costs of inputs and low market prices [46].
In this framework, FMs have emerged helping producers increase net returns and giving consumers the opportunity to find fresh, local, high quality produce in a friendly setting. However, there is still much to be gained from furthering our understanding of FMs in Europe and in the U.S.A. since their increasing popularity, partnered by a growth of their economic impact on the communities, allows legitimate questions on their potential development in the modern food system.
Nevertheless it currently appears quite unrealistic to forecast in the immediate future, as some have debated [47; 48], a severe separation of the food market place with supermarkets selling mass produced products and FMs (together with other outlets), as a complement to them, providing locally produced and environmentally friendly foods.
The overall ambition of the present research was to better frame the main features of this type of agricultural direct sale, discussing the most recent literature available and presenting two case studies that would contribute to highlight the many similarities and differences among FMs in Europe and in the U.S.A.
In addition, the work was planned to start gathering some empirical and theoretical data on Italian FMs, to contribute to the limited national academic literature.
During the years researchers have described common characteristics for American FMs, such as: identifying the average shopper as female, college educated, and with above-average income [12, 13, 14]; revealing that markets often operate and develop thanks to the management of non-governmental organizations and public funding

coming from individual states or federal agencies [29]; and that generally the products sold in the markets are not covered by specific quality characteristics, as organic products, GMO free, etc. [3].
Whereas standard characteristics of European FMs appear to be much more difficult to define, due to comparatively little academic research and huge differences among single countries; the majority of the studies from U.K. tend to point out to the enjoyable social atmosphere as their main characteristic; which enables consumers to connect with the producers and support the local community [23; 49].
From the qualitative analysis developed in the current paper some broad conclusions can be drawn with the caveat that the two selected FMs cannot, obviously, represent the entire American and European FM phenomenon.
Significant differences were disclosed analyzing the two markets, in terms of customers' support and general motivations to attend the FMs and in terms of market relevance for farmers. For the Washington DC FM the principle factors that attracted consumers included a strong commitment to support local farmers and producers, with an interest in fresh, high quality products and the enjoyment of the social atmosphere; the motivations for farmers' to participate were mainly focused on the interactions with potential customers and higher revenues from direct sale. In the Italian FM consumers supported the market mainly for its lower prices and the availability of fresh seasonal fruits and vegetables, demonstrating also growing interest in the information available from direct contact with the producers. Vendors felt that the Naples FM was useful since it gave them the opportunity to sell a higher amount of production and collect direct consumers feedback on overall quality of their products. Even though some differences between the two FMs could be related to the diverse age of the markets and the specific characteristics of local shoppers, it seems appropriate to roughly describe the Naples FM as a convenience market whereas the Washington FM could be labeled as a community market. Where in the first farmers and consumers are mainly focused on their economic benefits, whilst in the latter the ability for consumers to sustain local community (and interact directly with producers) combined with finding fresh products and meeting other people that they know are the main components of the market.
Linking the review of recent literature with the findings of the examined case studies, a number of issues and complexities emerged associated with the development of FMs.
Future research plans mean to further investigate the motivations that draw farmers to move towards alternative marketing strategies and extend the number of observed markets in Europe and in the U.S.A., as well as side the study with surveys of FMs customers, which should provide a more complete picture of the phenomenon.
Other research avenues must focus on exploring the potential development of European and Unites States FMs in the modern food system, trying to understand whether they will always be more important for a niche of producers of specialty products and specific segments of concerned consumers or they can become an alternative and valid outlet for a higher amount of growers and farmers.
Moreover, during the literature review, scattered references to markets within Europe were found from Germany, Norway, Romania and Sweden, revealing that the role of FMs is significantly different in the diverse countries where the movement is discovered. The understanding of the strong diversities among the European FMs will be an interesting research path for prospective works.

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