



Evaluating the Sustainability Value of Farmers Markets in Central New York State

Haylee Shapiro

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Lascell (Geography and Environmental Sustainability)

Background:

- Farmers markets support local economies, sustainable agriculture, and access to fresh food (USDA, 2013).
- They create direct connections between farmers and consumers, fostering community engagement (Sustainable Agriculture Network, 2024).
- Success varies based on location, management, vendor diversity, and sustainability initiatives.
- Central New York farmers markets operate in both urban and rural settings, each with unique challenges:
 - Rural markets: Accessibility issues due to limited transportation.
 - Urban markets: Affordability concerns and vendor competition.
- Sustainability efforts vary, including waste reduction programs and organic farming.
- The goal is to provide insights for the Oneonta community and future Environmental Sustainability students.
- Findings will help consumers make informed choices and guide future research on farmers markets.

Introduction:

- Farmers markets are essential for supporting local agriculture and promoting environmental sustainability.
- The effectiveness of these markets varies significantly due to several factors related to management structure.
- This study evaluates farmers markets in Central New York using a 20-point scoring system, assessing four key criteria:
 1. **Accessibility:** Transportation options (bus routes, bike racks) and pedestrian/wheelchair access.
 2. **Product Diversity:** Range of items available, focusing on fresh produce, dairy, meat, baked goods, preserved foods, handmade crafts, and specialty goods, with an emphasis on organic, ethnic, and locally sourced options.
 3. **Sustainability Initiatives:** Vendor practices (organic farming, waste reduction, pesticide-free cultivation), market-wide policies (composting programs, reusable packaging, SNAP acceptance), and other eco-friendly initiatives.
 4. **Number of vendors:** How many vendors are at each market.

Rationale:

This study aligns with the following United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):

- Goal 2: Zero Hunger:** Farmers markets provide affordable, nutritious, and locally sourced produce, improving food security and reducing food waste, supporting healthier communities.
- Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth:** By offering a platform for small-scale farmers and artisans, farmers markets foster job creation and support a sustainable local economy.
- Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities:** Farmers markets reduce food miles, promote local food systems, and improve access to fresh food, contributing to the development of resilient, sustainable communities.

(United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs)



Sustainability efforts around waste management shown at Troy Waterfront Farmers Market.

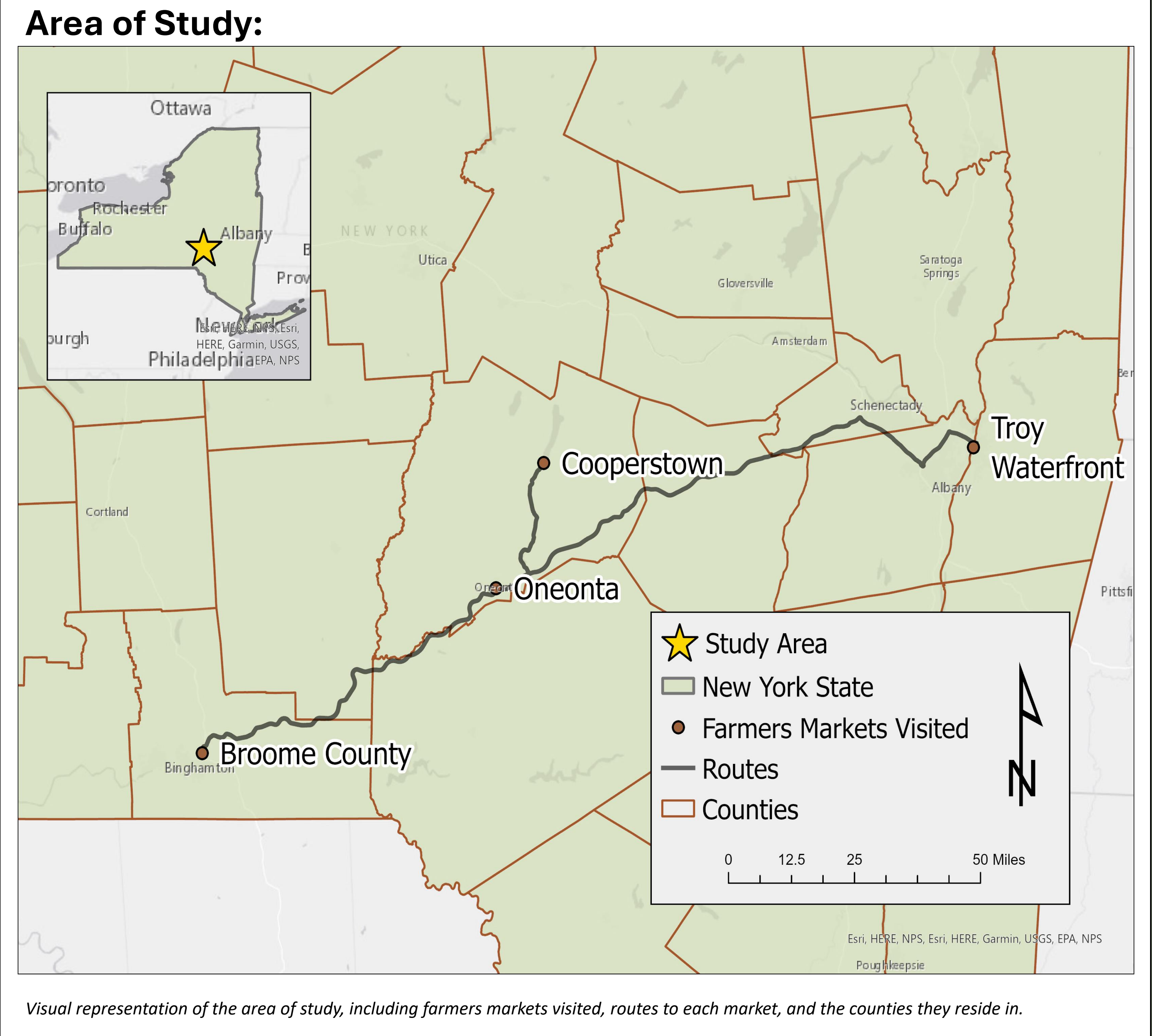
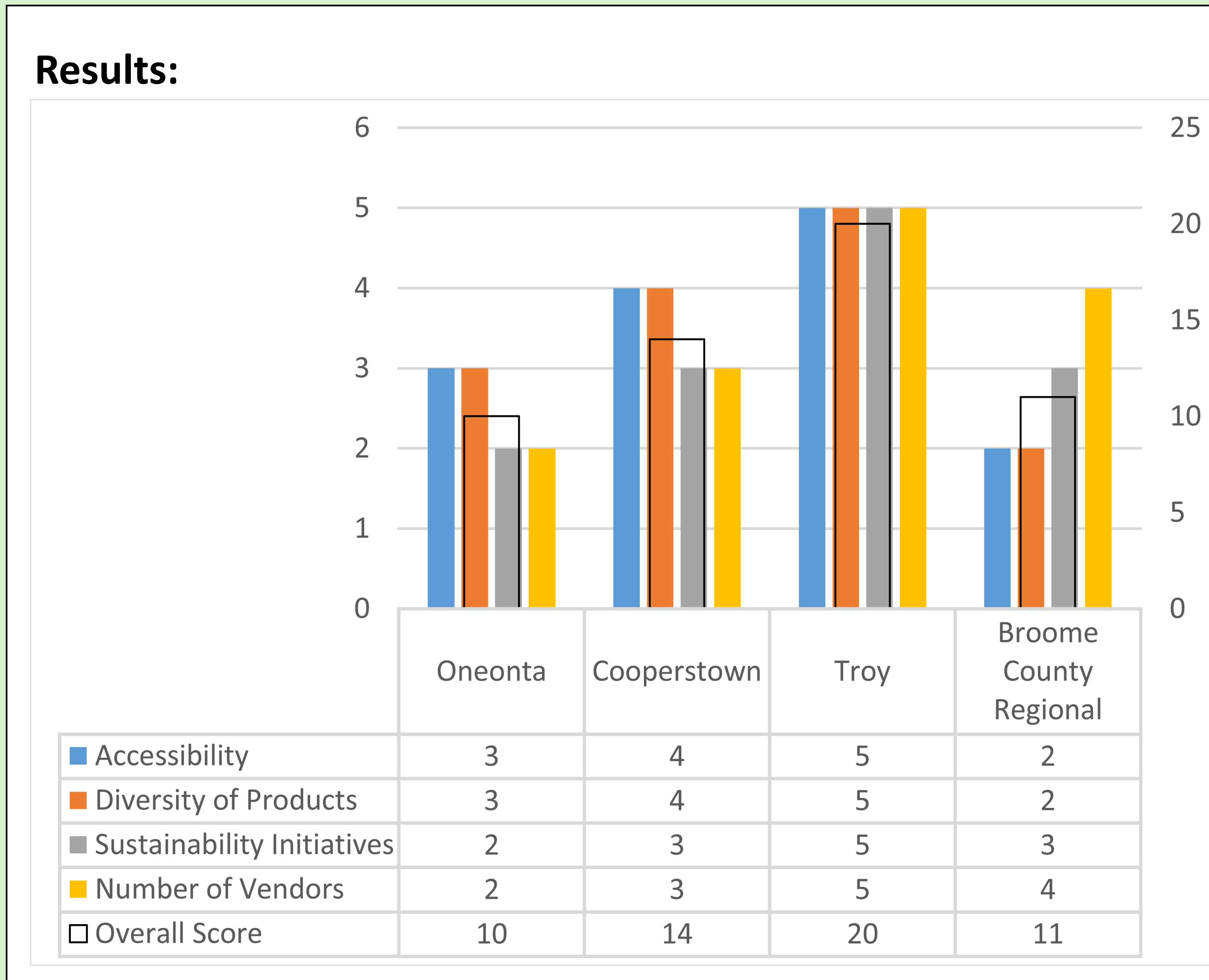


Inside of the Cooperstown Farmers Market depicting a wide variety of produce.

Methods:

Criteria	1 - Poor	2 - Fair	3 - Good	4 - Very Good	5 - Excellent
Accessibility	No public transportation; limited/no parking; difficult access by foot/wheelchair	Limited public transport; minimal parking/bike racks; some pedestrian access but challenging for wheelchairs	Public transport available; parking/bike racks available; pedestrian/wheelchair access okay	Well-connected by transport (bus, bike racks, parking); easy pedestrian/wheelchair access	Fully accessible by public transport, bike, walking; ideal parking, bike racks, wheelchair access
Diversity of Products	Very limited variety (mostly produce/narrow selection)	Some diversity (e.g., produce, meats, baked goods)	Moderate diversity (produce, dairy, meats, baked goods, some specialty items)	Broad variety (ethnic, local, organic, craft items)	Wide range (organic, ethnic, local, specialty items, arts/crafts)
Sustainability Initiatives	No visible sustainability practices; no eco-friendly packaging	Some vendors use eco-friendly practices (e.g., organic farming, limited waste reduction)	Several vendors use sustainable practices, some eco-friendly packaging, basic recycling	Most vendors adopt sustainable practices; market-wide recycling	Strong sustainability efforts (zero waste, food donation programs, eco-education, SNAP)
Number of Vendors	Extremely limited (<10)	Few vendors (11-15)	Moderate number of vendors (16-20)	Healthy number of vendors (21-25)	Plenty of vendors (> 25)

For the evaluation of farmers markets in Central New York, a grading scale was developed to assess key factors, including accessibility, diversity of products, sustainability initiatives, and the number of vendors. Each market was scored from 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) based on specific criteria, ensuring consistency in the analysis. This scale allowed for a fair comparison of markets, highlighting strengths and areas for improvement. By using this structured approach, the assessment considered not only the variety of products and vendor presence, but also the role of sustainability and accessibility in shaping the market experience.



Conclusions:

Summary of Findings:

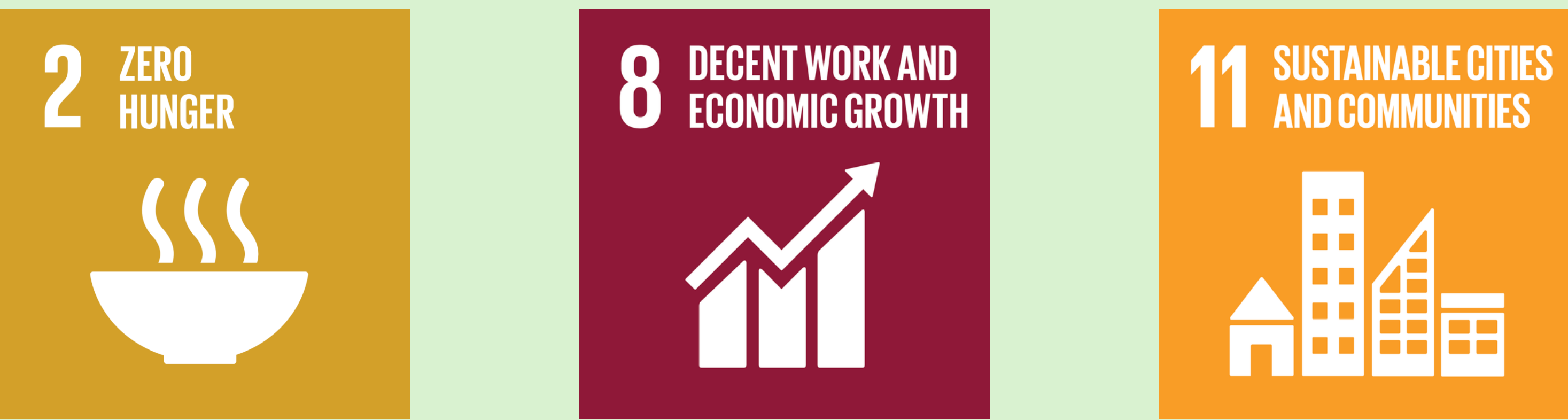
- The markets showed varying strengths:
 - For accessibility, markets with good public transport connections (like Cooperstown and Troy) scored higher than markets with limited access (like Broome County).
 - In product diversity, markets like Troy scored well due to offering a wider range of products, including ethnic and organic items, while Oneonta and Broome County had a more limited selection.
 - Sustainability efforts were strongest in Troy, where composting and renewable energy use were in place, while other markets showed room for improvement in market-wide policies.
 - Number of vendors ranged from smaller markets (like Broome County) to larger ones (like Troy), which offered a greater variety of products.

Key Insights:

- Smaller farmers markets, such as Delhi, Hobart, Norwich, and Clinton were not included in this study due to their limited accessibility. These markets are only open on weekday mornings, which made it difficult to collect data. As a result, these markets were excluded from the analysis to maintain consistency and ensure the study focused on markets that were more accessible to a wider community.

Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank Dr. Jacob Warner, as well as Lindsay Wolfanger and Rachel Kornhauser from the Office of Sustainability, for their assistance and guidance throughout the course of this project. Their support was crucial in shaping the direction of the research and refining my approach to evaluating farmers markets in Central New York.



References:

References available upon request.