

Seasonal farmers markets continue to grow: *Illinois ranks #3 nationally*

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According to the Illinois Department of Agriculture, Illinois is third in the nation for the number of farmers’ markets. That’s an impressive statistic, given IDOA’s further noting that there are more than 8,000 farmers’ markets across the country offering farm-fresh, affordable, convenient, and healthy products such as fruits, vegetables, cheeses, herbs, fish, flowers, baked goods, meat, and much more to market goers.

Farmers’ markets serve as integral links between urban, suburban, and rural communities, affording farmers and their consumers the opportunity to interact. The popularity of farmers’ markets continues to rise, and more community-based and roadside markets pop up each season.

One of the oldest forms of direct marketing, from the traditional “mercados” in the Peruvian Andes to the unique street markets in Asia, growers all over the world gather weekly to sell their produce directly to the public.

Niki Davis, Southern Illinois University Carbondale’s Hospitality, Tourism and Event Management Program manager and professor of practice, further noted that the farmers markets offer an abundance of opportunity for residents, visitors, and vendors alike, as well as to the regional economy.

“Our farmers markets showcase regional food and culture, and visitors often shop at them just like residents do,” Davis said. “Vibrant agricultural regions boost tourism by attracting visitors to the area. When visiting, people often seek out local flavors and traditions. Travelers will visit local farms for tours and purchase premade local items to take home and share. All of this means money going back into communities through hotel and sales tax, further boosting the local economy.”

Market growth and penetration continue to grow as more consumers seek out the fresh harvests sold directly from the farm by growers in what has become a seasonal ritual for many. With the added ability now at many of the markets for consumers to utilize SNAP benefits for their purchases on-site, the customer base has seen further positive movement.

Often the farmers’ markets also welcome artisans and their handcrafted wares as well – this is widely evident at nearly all the markets throughout the southwestern Illinois region. Here’s an updated list of this region’s published market details:

Alton Farmers’ and Artisans’ Market: In session, rain or shine, through Oct. 21, the Alton Market takes place from 8 a.m. to 12 Noon Saturdays at the corner of Landmarks Blvd. and Henry Street near Argosy Casino and the Alton Riverfront. A Night Market is also hosted every Thursday evening from 7 to 10 p.m. inside Jacoby Arts Center (627 E. Broadway) as well as in Jacoby’s neighboring pocket park through July 27. Visit Alton Main Street online (<https://downtown-alton.com>) or follow them on Facebook for the latest details. (Madison County)

Bethalto Farmers Market: Bethalto’s market is held at the city’s Central Park (213 N. Prairie St.) every Sunday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. through Oct. 15, 2023. Follow the market’s Facebook page for complete information, @Bethalto Farmers Market. (Madison County)

East Alton Farmers Market: Held at Eastgate Plaza, East Alton’s market takes place every Tuesday from 3 to 7 p.m. from April to October. For more details, call (618) 530-1880. (Madison County)

Wood River Farmers Market: Starting July 6, this market is held on Thursday evenings from 4 p.m. to dusk through September. It is located on the parking lot at Madison Avenue/143 and 1st Street. Vendors can visit online at <https://wrparks.org/events/farmers-market/> for information/sign-up. Call Wood River Parks & Recreation at (618) 251-3130 or follow their Facebook page for updates. (Madison County)



Views from a recent Alton Farmers’ and Artisans’ Market. (Photos by Melissa Crockett Meske/ Illinois Business Journal)

The Land of Goshen Community Market, Edwardsville: Located in downtown Edwardsville at North Second Street, this market is held on Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 12 Noon through Oct. 14, 2023. Visit the website at <https://www.goshenmarket.org/> for more information. (Madison County)

Maryville Farmers Market: Maryville’s market is held at Fireman’s Park, 300 N. Donk St., on Thursdays from 5 to 7 p.m. through Sept. 7, 2023. For more information, visit their Facebook page, @MaryvilleILFarmersMarket or call (618) 304-8335. (Madison County)

Melting Pot Farmers and Artisans Market, Granite City: Taking place on the first Saturday of each month from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. June through November (no market in July), Granite City’s market is held at Civic Park in The District, 1301 Niedringhaus Ave. Keep up with their season on Facebook, @MeltingPotMarket. (Madison County)

Highland Farmers Market: Held in the community’s Downtown Square (914 Main St.) from 4 to 8 p.m. on Tuesdays

through Sept. 26 (except for July 4 and 25), visit online at https://www.highlandil.gov/departments/parks_and_recreation/programs_for_all_ages/all_ages/farmer_s_market.php for more information. (Madison County)

Herald Square Farmers Market, Collinsville: A collaborative effort by the Maryville Farmers Market, this location is in the park beside Old Herald Brewery and Distillery restaurant, 115 E. Clay St. Its hours are from 6 to 8 p.m. on Tuesdays through July 25. For more information, call (618) 304-8335 or visit their Facebook page, @Herald-SquareMarket. (Madison/St. Clair counties)

The Vine Street Market at O’Fallon Station: Downtown O’Fallon’s market is open weekly every Saturday from 8 a.m. to 12 Noon through Oct. 21 (212 E. 1st St.). For more information, visit online at <https://ofallonparksandrec.com/vine-street-market/>, follow them on Facebook and Instagram, @vinestreetmarketofallon, or call (618) 624-0139. (St. Clair County)

Belleville Old Town Farmers Market: Downtown Belleville’s market is held from

7:30 a.m. to 12 Noon Saturdays through Nov. 4 at South Charles and East Washington Streets. For more information, visit www.belleville.net or contact the City of Belleville at (618) 233-6810. (St. Clair County)

Millstadt Township Community Farmers Market: Held from 3 to 6 p.m. on Fridays through October at the Millstadt VFW, 200 Veterans Drive, contact Randy Eckert (618) 476-3037 for more information or visit their Facebook page, @MillstadtFarmersMarket. (St. Clair County)

Swansea Farmers Market: Swansea hosts its farmers market on Thursdays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. through October, rain or shine, at the Rural King parking lot (2801 N. Illinois St.). Call (618) 520-5107 for more information or follow their Facebook page, @Swansea-FarmersMarketInc. (St. Clair County)

Monroe County Farmers Market in Columbia and Waterloo: In Columbia every Thursday from 4 to 7 p.m. through October at Turner Hall, 211 E. Cherry St., and in Waterloo every Saturday from 7:30 a.m. to 12 Noon at the Monroe County Annex parking lot, 901 Illinois Ave, readers can find the latest information on their Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/monroecountyfarmersmarket>. (Monroe County)

New Baden Farmers Market: This market runs through Sept. 30, 2023, and is held on the last Saturday of each month from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. It is located at Veterans Memorial Park in New Baden. More information can be found on their website at <https://www.newbadenfm.com/home> or through Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/newbadenfarmersmarket>. (Clinton County)

National firm marks the turf on local athletic fields via GPS-guided robot

By **SCOTT YOFFE**
for the Illinois Business Journal

Edwardsville’s Glen-Ed Soccer Club has poured its faith, and paint, into a unique four-wheeled partner to help it keep its fields painted for the 35 teams and 500-plus kids that comprise the Club’s makeup.

It’s called a Turf Tank, a first-of-its-kind autonomous, GPS-guided robot, built and designed specifically for painting athletic fields.

For Rob Landers and his counterparts on the operations team at Glen-Ed, long gone are the days of having to spend hours on end lining, stringing and painting the Club’s eight fields and its grass parking lot.

“Turf Tank really has been a game changer,” explained Landers. “It’s fast and extremely accurate with its lines and what it really does is frees us up to do other work on the fields while the robot is taking care of the lines.”

The Turf Tank robot is about the size of a mini refrigerator. It weighs in the neighborhood of 135 pounds with a full load of paint and its battery installed.

On its own and controlled by a tablet with Turf Tank’s proprietary software, one robot can paint a full soccer field in roughly 25 minutes. Without one, it would normally take Landers and one to two others anywhere from 2-3 hours to line and paint each individual field.

And Turf Tanks don’t just paint soccer fields. They can also paint fields for football, baseball, softball, lacrosse and others, and the robots even have the ability to paint logos and numbers.

For Glen-Ed, which in recent months hosted its Spring Kickoff and its annual Father’s Day 3v3 Tournament, the robot saved an immense amount of time as its fields were in constant use.

“With all the Club’s recent activity, it’s seemed like we’ve had players

out on the fields just about every day,” said Landers. “We used to have to go out and paint and touch up the fields manually but it’s a much simpler process now that the Turf Tank can do that for us.”

St. Louis’ Major League Soccer Club, St. Louis City, also reached out to Landers to borrow Glen Ed’s Turf Tank when the Club was first getting started.



Shown in this photo is the GPS-guided Turf Tank robot used to mark the field for the Glen-Ed Soccer Club. (Rob Landers/Glen-Ed Soccer Club)

And while much has been made recently about robot technology taking away jobs that’s not the case with the Turf Tank.

“The labor shortage has made it challenging to find employees who are willing to spend hours on end out in the sun painting fields, especially during the warm Illinois summer months,” added Landers.

Turf tanks are both eco- and environmentally-friendly. They are powered by rechargeable batteries and because of their precision and accuracy, the robots use significantly less paint and eliminate the overspray that is common with either painting by hand or using many of the older paint machines and sprayers. Cleaning a Turf Tank is also an easy process, done simply by running water through the paint system, which further reduces the impact on the environment.

Currently, Turf Tank deploys more than 1,400 robots to paint athletic fields across the United States and more than 1,900 globally. And the company was recently named

as one of the Most Innovative Robotics companies of 2023 by a global publication.

Launched in 2015, Turf Tank is based in Svenstrup, Denmark, a small city just outside of the third-largest city in Denmark. The company has U.S. offices in Marietta, Georgia and Omaha, Nebraska and a sales force that covers the entire country.

“Our robot has revolutionized the sports field-painting industry,” said Mikkel Jacobsen, CEO of Turf Tank. “We help turf managers around the world create professional fields, efficiently and cost effectively.”

Guided by GPS, the Turf Tank uses a base station to ensure its accuracy. The base station becomes a fixed point from which the robot knows where to paint every time it is dispatched. The way it works is the base station speaks to satellites via GPS to ensure the accuracy of the field dimensions. Once a user installs a particular field layout, it becomes a simple drag and drop process through the tablet. And from there, it’s as simple as setting one to four points on each particular field to give the robot a starting point and then the robot will paint that field autonomously.

Turf Tank is continuing to innovate with its latest generation of line-marking software, which is enhancing the robot’s usability and boosting the efficiency of the line marking process. It improves the overall user experience and enables them to complete their tasks with greater speed and ease by simply tapping a few buttons, giving turf managers greater flexibility and complete control over every aspect of the line marking process. Turf Tank also has implemented text and logo functionality into its robots.

Besides the Glen-Ed Soccer Club, count Edwardsville High School, Alton Parks and Rec and University City High School among other users of the Turf Tank in the region.

Visit online at <https://turf-tank.com/us/> for more information about Turf Tank.