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## Market structure and vendor performance of Slow Food Earth Markets in Kenya

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### Abstract

Slow Food is an international organisation promoting socially and environmentally sustainable food systems. Its Earth Markets initiative, launched in 2004, aims to connect small-scale producers with consumers through short supply chains while fostering local economies and food culture.

Despite their global expansion, empirical evidence on market structure and vendor outcomes remains limited. This study investigates the operational performance of seven Earth Markets in Kenya (Embu, Gilgil, Kagio, Molo, Murang'a, Nakuru, and Njoro) using a dataset of 150 market observations collected across multiple markets and trading days between 2023 and 2025.

We assessed product diversity, category distribution, presence of indigenous and Ark of Taste-listed heritage foods, vendor income ranges, and self-reported satisfaction.

The analysis shows a concentration in vegetables and fruits, with comparatively lower representation of categories such as dairy, grains and legumes, poultry and meat, root tubers, and honey. A share of the traded vegetables and fruits are indigenous or locally adapted species and heritage varieties recognised by the Ark of Taste, reflecting a meaningful connection to local food traditions.

Most vendors specialise in a single product category, a pattern that may reflect both market efficiency and individual expertise, while also indicating potential for gradual portfolio expansion over time.

Despite this focused product structure, vendor satisfaction levels are consistently high, and an average sell-through rate of 88 % suggests sufficient demand for available products.

Daily revenues are largely concentrated in the 1,000–4,000 KES (approx. 7–30 Euro) range across all markets, indicating relatively modest but stable income levels.

However, the results also reveal a partial alignment between Earth Market principles and on-the-ground realities. Building on this foundation, there is an opportunity to further enhance the visibility and diversity of agroecological products to strengthen contributions to food biodiversity and system transformation.

The study highlights the need for standardised performance indicators and longitudinal monitoring to better evaluate the long-term impact of Earth Markets on smallholder livelihoods, dietary diversity, and agroecological resilience in Kenya.

**Keywords:** Agroecology, Ark of Taste, Earth Markets, farmers' markets, food biodiversity, indigenous foods, Kenya, local markets, slow food, smallholder livelihoods, sustainable food systems, vendor performance