

Area farmers markets heat up in winter

By [Jane Black](#) Washington Post Staff Writer
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The temperature was stalled in the mid-20s on Saturday morning. But the Falls Church Farmers Market still lured a crowd of shivering shoppers swaddled against the bitter chill and wind. It also brought out vendor Leland Atkinson, who had come to sell ice cream.

"I'm insane," Atkinson said, only half-kidding. Seven cartons of his [Simplicity Ice Cream](#) were nestled in a bed of ice that seemed superfluous. Also on offer, and far more popular, were \$3 cups of hot chocolate made with Atkinson's bottled hot fudge sauce, also for sale.

"We do very well here in the summer," Atkinson said. "So we wanted to try the winter market."

A growing number of farmers and producers are braving the weather to sell at the Washington area's year-round markets. True, the selection of produce is limited, and certain items, such as the ice cream, can be less of a draw. This winter has been especially difficult, thanks to a historic blizzard and brittle temperatures. But in the face of adversity, vendors are giving market fans many good reasons to shop outdoors.

Last week and over the weekend, we scouted 10 farmers markets and, in addition to small quantities of greens and root vegetables (all selling briskly), found locally roasted coffee, homemade pickles, bee pollen, jams, dried heirloom beans, charcuterie and plenty of ready-to-eat foods including soups, fresh pastas, salsas, dips, boiled peanuts and pastries.

Pastries like the made-to-order Belgian waffles (\$4) at the Palisades market on Sundays. Caterer Joelle Paelinck, who began selling at the market only this season, mixes a heavy dough studded with imported pearl sugar designed to melt into the waffles as they cook. The result is a dense, palm-size treat with crisp, caramelized edges. The smell alone is worth the trip.

Many vendors at the winter markets were new to the scene. When Thomas Venable lost his job as a graphic designer last year, he launched [TommyV's](#), a line of salsas (eight ounces, \$5) at the Oakton Smart Market on Saturdays. Also at Oakton was Kathy Huff, who shut down her bricks-and-mortar coffeehouse last fall and began roasting her beans, called [Sommo](#), in Reston (11 ounces, \$9.95); and Dilek Kaygusuz, who hawks Turkish prepared foods such as tahini and yogurt dip (eight ounces, \$3) and baklava (\$1 per piece) under the brand Sofra. "My kids were always asking me why I don't sell my food," Kaygusuz said. "And I said: 'Who will buy it?'"

An hour before the Oakton market closed, all she had left were two boxes of baklava.

For some veteran vendors, business at the winter markets is booming. Customers were snapping up fresh chestnuts (one pound, \$4.29) from Twin Springs Fruit Farm at the Concord St. Andrews Church in Bethesda on Wednesday. Kathleen Jorgensen, who works for hydroponic lettuce grower Endless Summer Harvest at the Sunday FreshFarm Market at Dupont Circle, says that sales peak in January and July, when other farms don't have fresh lettuce. On Sunday, demand for lettuce (\$5 per head) was so great that she sold out in 70 minutes. Kalorama resident Patricia Cepeda called Jorgensen before leaving her home to make sure there was still lettuce available.

Brisk sales match the weather. At the Del Ray market on Saturdays, which is open year-round for the second consecutive year, Elise Scott of [Pearl Fine Teas](#) brings a kerosene heater and pours cup after cup of whatever tea she is offering that day. (In addition to tea leaves, she sells hot cups for \$2.) [Dressed Up Nut](#) proprietor Aimee Steel, who sells spiced nuts (eight ounces, \$7.95 to \$9.95) and delicious pistachio, pecan and pecan-cornmeal biscotti (\$1.50 each), had to grab at her tent between customers to prevent it from blowing away. She says she never sets up shop in the winter without bringing hand and toe warmers.

"In spite of the awful weather and the wind, there's a lot of foot traffic," Steel said. "No matter how bad it is, people are showing up to buy."