

# Farmers Market

## **Starting a Farmers' Market<sup>1</sup>**

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M.E. Swisher, James Sterns, and Jennifer Gove<sup>2</sup>

### **Overview**

There are many details that separate great farmers' markets from struggling or mediocre markets. Below are eight of the most important steps to consider as you start a farmers' market in your community. Also included are Useful Facts about Farmers' Markets, legal information, an example of bylaws and rules for a farmers' market and links to farmers' markets online.

#### **1. Research and solicit available community resources.**

Community support for a farmers' market is invaluable. Getting "buy-in" from residents as well as government and businesses will ensure that the market is seen as contributing to the life of the community. In addition to the intangible factors, a good relationship with the market's neighbors will help in tangible ways. City and county government agencies and local business may be willing and able to help with finding a location, sponsoring and/or doing advertising for the market or other resources.

#### **2. Select a location**

Selecting a location is a tricky issue. Essential components are proximity to your customers or where your customers frequently go, available parking, cover or shade in case of extreme weather, and seating for lingering and socializing, listening to music, or other recreational or educational activities associated with the market. The location you select may also determine your insurance needs.

#### **3. Solicit vendors**

Soliciting vendors may be the toughest job of all. A successful market needs a good mix of products and services to attract a regular clientele. Many county extension offices keep a list of small farmers. Your chamber of commerce or craftpersons guild may be another resource for potential vendors. Once you have identified potential vendors, you may have to sell the idea of a market to them. Farmers, craftspeople and other small business owners must be convinced that spending a few hours a week at the market is worth their time.

#### **4. Market the Market**

It may seem obvious, but farmers' markets need to be advertised to the public, especially when they

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2. M.E. Swisher, Ph.D., associate professor, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, James Sterns, Ph.D., assistant professor, Department of Food and Resource Economics, and Jennifer Gove, Graduate Assistant, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville FL 32611.

first open. Public radio and local newspaper ads are less expensive than commercial radio or TV ads. Of course free publicity is the best of all. Investigate putting an announcement in a neighborhood or school newsletter. The Food Gardening and Weekend sections of newspapers may all be appropriate places to solicit articles about a new farmers' market. The Farmers' Market can serve as a source of entertainment. Live acoustic music adds atmosphere and entertainment to a market. Inviting service groups, churches and educational groups (think about Master Gardeners, Native Plant Society, FFA) and giving them free space at the market will contribute to the variety and sense of liveliness of the market. Clowns, pony rides and other children's entertainment can attract more customers.

Whats next? Perhaps now you have a farmers' market that is up and running. What are the next steps you should be thinking of?

#### **5. Develop by-laws and market rules**

There are some general points to be considered when developing market rules and by-laws. For templates of By-laws and Market Rules, see the examples in the Bylaws and Rules section.

#### **6. Apply for non-profit status**

Contact the Florida Department of Revenue at 1-800-352-3671 (in Florida only) or 1-850-488-6800.

#### **7. Identify a market manager**

The type of market manager you hire will depend on the kind of farmers' market you and the Board of Directors want to create. At first you or another vendor may volunteer as the manager, but successful markets sometimes grow big enough to require full-time management.

#### **8. Get the right market insurance**

The market's insurance needs will depend on a variety of factors. You should consult an insurance specialist to determine what type of insurance your market will need.

The USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) provides credit assistance, food aid and conservation

incentives to help stabilize farm incomes and provide disaster assistance. The USDA has local service centers around the country that help farmers navigate their way through a myriad of federal assistance programs. To find a service center, go to <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/edso>

The USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) provides crop insurance through a variety of approved insurance providers. The agency's website provides an overview of various insurance policies. To speak with an authorized agent, go to the RMA homepage and on the left-hand navigation bar, click on Agent Locator. The regional RMA office in Valdosta, Georgia, covers Florida. From the RMA homepage, click on field offices on the left hand navigation bar.

Florida Farm Bureau Insurance may be an option. Farm Bureau members are eligible for insurance through Florida Farm Bureau Insurance.

### **Useful Facts about Farmers' Markets**

In 2000, about 2800 farmers' markets were operating in the United States. This represents a 63% increase in the number of farmers' markets from 1994. It is estimated that more than 20,000 farmers participate in farmers' markets. The USDAs Farmers' Market webpage includes more statistics and factoids as well as information and resources on farmers' markets and a national directory of farmers' markets, go to <http://www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets/> also see the Farmers' Markets on the Web section for a list of farmers markets on the web.

### **Buy Smart, Buy Local**

Farmers' markets and other direct marketing venues make locally grown produce available to consumers. Buying local has positive impacts on farmers, consumers and their communities. The *Buy Smart! Buy Local!* brochure explains why a vibrant local agriculture economy is important. This brochure is available at <http://smallfarm.ifas.ufl.edu/Farmers%20Market/consumer.pdf>

## Accepting Food Stamps and Other Forms of Public Assistance

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) of the USDA increases food security and reduces hunger by providing children, seniors and low-income people with increased access to food and nutrition education. Farmers and farmers' markets can participate in FNS programs in three ways.

The most widespread of these programs is the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program, which provides supplemental assistance to eligible families with young children. WIC program information can be found by beginning at the FNS homepage and then clicking on WIC/Farmers' Markets and then on Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs. State agencies authorize farmers and farmers' markets to accept WIC coupons. The Florida state contact is Carl Penn (850) 487-4322. A list of all state contacts can be found at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/contacts/farm.HTM>

The Farmers' Market Nutrition Program also includes the relatively new Senior Nutrition Pilot Program. Like the WIC program, the Seniors program is administered through state agencies. For more information contact Holly Greuling (850) 414-2337.

Finally, a few farmers' markets have participated in a pilot program to accept food stamp benefit with the Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) system. Currently, 80% of food stamp benefits are issued via EBT. To get an update on EBT and farmers' markets, begin at the FNS homepage, and click on the EBT heading under Food Stamps and then on EBT & Farmers' Markets.

## Legal Concerns

The most comprehensive and helpful book to date is called *The Legal Guide to Direct Farm Marketing* by Neil Hamilton. It covers all aspects of general legal information for farmers engaged in direct marketing and devotes an entire chapter to legal issues facing farmers' markets.

Copies of this book can be purchased for \$20.00 from Drake University Agricultural Law Center, Des

Moines, Iowa 50311. For more information call (515) 271-2065.

## Health Department Licensure

Many counties and states have health laws pertaining to meat and poultry products as well as processed, value added food items. Check with your local extension office and/or county health department about licensing requirements in your area.

## Bylaws and Rules

### ARTICLE I - Name

The name of this Corporation is the "Downtown Farmers' Market of Big Lake, Inc." and may be referred to in these Bylaws as the "Corporation."

### ARTICLE II - Purpose & Objectives

Section 1. The Downtown Farmers' Market of Big Lake, Inc. has been formed to provide healthy, fresh foods and horticultural products to Alligator County and surrounding areas, and to encourage commerce, entertainment and trade in Downtown Big Lake. (Mission Statement established June 1, 2001)

Section 2. To achieve its mission, the Corporation shall do the following:

a. Establish and operate a farmers' market for the purpose of furnishing a facility for sales of Florida fresh foods and horticultural products.

b. Work with the Alligator County Agricultural Extension Office/University of Florida (Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences) and similar organizations to promote the production of Florida fresh produce and horticultural products in Vegetable County.

c. Organize and/or participate in educational and other activities that promote the use of Florida fresh produce and horticultural products.

d. Organize and/or participate in those activities that, in conjunction with the operation of a farmers' market, will serve to encourage commerce and trade in Downtown Big Lake.

e. Organize and/or participate in those activities that will serve to further the Corporation's mission.

f. Conduct research necessary to further the development of the farmers' market.

g. Solicit and receive funds, gifts, endowments, donations, devises and bequests.

h. Lease and/or purchase property necessary to further the mission of the Corporation.

Section 3. It is hereby provided that the said purposes are not intended to limit or restrict in any manner the powers or purposes of this corporation to any extent permitted by law, nor shall the expression of one thing be deemed to exclude another although it be of like nature.

Section 4. The Corporation is organized exclusively for public purposes as a not-for-profit corporation. Its activities shall be conducted in such a manner that no part of its net earnings will inure to the benefit of any member, director, officer or individual. In addition, the Corporation shall be authorized to exercise the powers permitted not-for-profit corporations under Chapter 617 of the Florida Statutes as now exists or is subsequently amended or superseded provided, however, the furtherance of the exempt purpose for which it has been organized is as described in Section 501 (c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code or any amendments or additions thereto.

Section 5. The Corporation shall be nonsectarian and nonpartisan.

### **ARTICLE III - Membership**

Section 1. Any person interested in and who supports the purpose and objectives of the Corporation shall be eligible for membership.

Section 2. The membership of the Corporation shall be representative of a broad cross section of the community which it serves, including but not limited to representatives from business, citrus, government, horticulture, and education.

Section 3. Criteria for membership may be from time-to-time established by the Corporation Board of Directors.

### **ARTICLE IV - Board of Directors**

Section 1. Except as otherwise provided for by law, by the Articles of Incorporation, or these bylaws, the Board of Directors shall exercise the powers of the Corporation, conduct its business affairs, and control its property. The Board is also expressly authorized to make appropriate delegations of authority through management agreements.

Section 2: The Board of Directors shall assume responsibility for setting goals of the corporation, reviewing and approving the Corporation's operational and strategic plans, and evaluating operational and strategic performance. No acquisitions or divestitures shall occur without prior approval of the Board.

Section 3: The Corporation Board of Directors shall be composed of fifteen (15) members.

Section 4: Five (5) members shall be elected each year to serve a three-year term.

a. By April 30 of each fiscal year, the Board of Directors will appoint a Nominating Committee which will be composed of not fewer than three (3) and not more than five (5) persons. Persons who might be considered to serve in one of the five (5) available Board positions may not be a member of the Nominating Committee.

b. By May 31 of each fiscal year, the Nominating Committee will present a slate of candidates numbering not fewer than five (5) and not more than ten (10) persons who are eligible to serve based on membership requirements found in ARTICLE III and who have expressed their commitment to serve as a member of the Board of Directors. In the preparation of the slate, the Nominating Committee shall consider the future composition of the Board of Directors for the purpose of having representation from a broad cross section of the community which the Corporation serves.

c. By June 30 of each fiscal year, the Board of Directors will elect five (5) persons to fill the five (5) available positions.

d. Those elected will begin their service on the July 1 that immediately follows their election.

e. A Board member may not serve more than two (2) consecutive three-year terms.

Section 5. The Board of Directors shall establish attendance, participation and/or ethical standards, and may from time-to-time amend same, by which Officers and Directors will have to adhere to maintain their membership on the board.

Section 6. The Board of Directors may fill an unexpired term of an Officer or Director by a vote of fifty (50%) percent plus one (1) of the Directors in attendance of a meeting at which a quorum is present.

Section 7. A quorum of the Board of Directors will be constituted with the presence of fifty (50%) percent plus one (1) of the Board positions that are filled at the time of a meeting for which proper notice has been served.

Section 8. Notice of a Board of Directors meeting is to occur by written correspondence or facsimile and is to be received no less than seven (7) days prior to the meeting.

## **ARTICLE V - Executive Committee**

Section 1. The Corporation Executive Committee shall have the full authority to act on behalf of the Corporation Board of Directors if action is required in a time which is insufficient to meet the notice requirement for calling a meeting of the Board of Directors, as found in ARTICLE IV, Section 8 of these bylaws. Otherwise, the Executive Committee shall act as an advisory, recommending body or in other capacities as may be determined by the Board of Directors. Actions taken by the Executive Committee on behalf of the Corporation shall be made known to the Board of Directors within seven (7) days from which the action was taken.

Section 2. The Corporation Executive Committee shall be composed of the following

persons: Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Treasurer, Secretary and one (1) at-large member of the Board of Directors.

Section 3. The Board of Directors shall conduct an election to determine the Executive Committee members for the upcoming fiscal year during the period of time that immediately follows the annual election of Directors and the beginning of the new fiscal year on July 1.

Section 4. Persons eligible to serve on the Executive Committee must meet the membership requirements found in ARTICLE III of these bylaws and serve as a member of the Board of Directors.

Section 5. A quorum of an Executive Committee meeting will be constituted with the presence of fifty (50%) percent plus one (1) of the Executive Committee members of which one (1) must be the Chairperson or Vice-Chairperson.

## **ARTICLE VI - Officers**

Section 1. The Officers of the Corporation shall be the Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Treasurer and Secretary.

Section 2. Officers shall serve one (1) year terms and may not serve more than two (2) consecutive terms in any one position.

Section 3. It shall be the responsibility of the Chairperson to call and conduct all meetings of the Corporation Board of Directors and Executive Committee. The Chairperson will appoint, subject to the approval of the Board of Directors, the chairpersons of all Corporation committees. The Chairperson shall be the principal spokesperson for the Corporation and shall represent it at those programs and activities at which the Corporation is to have representation.

Section 4. The Vice-Chairperson shall preside at meetings upon the absence of the Chairperson and shall assure the duties of the Chairperson upon his/her inability to fulfill the duties of his/her office as determined by the Board of Directors. The Vice-Chairperson shall serve as the Corporation's parliamentarian and shall be responsible to the Corporation to insure that the Corporations' business

is conducted in an orderly fashion. Unless otherwise determined, meetings of the Corporation shall be conducted in accordance with Robert's Rules of Order.

Section 5. The Treasurer shall be responsible for providing a regular accounting of the Corporation moneys and financial transactions. The Treasurer shall be responsible for the prudent management of the Corporation moneys and for making the financial transactions necessary to conduct the business of the Corporation.

Section 6. The Secretary shall be responsible for notifying the members of the Board of Directors and Executive Committee of upcoming meetings. The Secretary shall be responsible for recording the actions taken by the Board of Directors and Executive Committee at their meetings. The Secretary shall be responsible for distributing correspondence and other information/material as may be necessary to conduct the business of the Corporation.

#### **ARTICLE VII - Committees**

Section 1. The Corporation Board of Directors shall from time-to-time form those committees deemed to be necessary to conduct the business of the Corporation.

Section 2. Persons to serve as a Committee Chairperson shall be members of the Board of Directors. Committee Chairperson shall serve as result of an appointment by the Corporation Chairperson and approval of the Board of Directors.

Section 3. Persons interested in serving as a member of a Corporation Committee shall be eligible to serve upon meeting the membership requirements found in ARTICLE III of these bylaws. It is not necessary for such persons to be a member of the Board of Directors.

#### **ARTICLE VIII - Staff Services**

The Board of Directors may from time-to-time engage an individual or organization to provide staff services to the Corporation. The Board will provide those so engaged with a scope of work, reasonable compensation, and periodic (not to be less frequent

than once every twelve (12) months) evaluation of the efforts to accomplish the scope of work.

#### **ARTICLE IX - Finances**

Section 1. The Corporation shall use its funds only to accomplish the purpose and objectives specified in these bylaws, and no part of said funds shall inure to the benefit of nor be distributed to the members of the Corporation.

Section 2. The Corporation shall have a fiscal year beginning July 1 and ending June 30 of each calendar year.

Section 3. All moneys received by the Corporation shall be deposited to the credit of the Corporation in such financial institution or institutions as may be designated by the Board of Directors.

Section 4. The solicitation of funds shall not be authorized without prior approval of the Board of Directors.

Section 5. No obligation of expenses shall be incurred and no money appropriated without prior approval of the Board of Directors.

Section 6. Upon approval of an annual budget, the Treasurer or other persons as authorized by the Board of Directors shall have the authority to make disbursements on accounts and expenses provided for in the budget without additional approval of the Board of Directors.

Section 7. Disbursements shall be made by check signed by the Treasurer and one other Officer.

Section 8. The Board of Directors may from time-to-time cause an audit to be conducted of the Corporation's books and accounts. Such audits are to be conducted by a certified public accountant, and upon its completion, the audit report shall be presented to the Board of Directors.

#### **ARTICLE X - Dissolution**

Upon dissolution of the Corporation, any funds remaining shall be distributed to one or more regularly organized and qualified charitable,

educational, scientific, or philanthropic organization as selected by the Board of Directors.

#### **ARTICLE XI - Indemnification**

Each elected or appointed Director or Officer of the Corporation shall be indemnified by the Corporation against all expenses and liabilities, including counsel fees, reasonably incurred by or imposed upon him/her in connection with any proceeding or the settlement of any proceeding to which he/she may be a party or may be involved by reason of his/her being or having been a Director or Officer of the Corporation, whether or not he/she is a Director or Officer at the time such expenses are incurred, except when the Director or Officer is adjudged guilty of willful misfeasance or malfeasance in the performance of their duties. The foregoing right of indemnification shall be in addition to and exclusive of all other rights and remedies to which such Director or Officer may be entitled.

#### **ARTICLE XII - Waiver of Notice**

Whenever any notice is required to be given under the provision of Florida Statute, Articles of Incorporation or these bylaws, a waiver thereof in writing signed by the person entitled to such notice, whether before or after the same stated therein, shall be deemed equivalent to the giving of such notice where such waiver is permitted by Florida law. All waivers shall be filed with the Corporation records or shall be made a part of the minutes of the relevant meeting.

#### **ARTICLE XIII - Corporate Seal**

The Board of Directors may provide for a Corporate Seal in such a form and with such inscription as it shall determine provided such seal shall always contain the words "Corporation" and "Nor-for-Profit."

#### **ARTICLE XIV - Amendments**

These bylaws may be amended, altered, repealed or adopted by a 2/3rd vote of the Board of Directors at a meeting for which proper notice has been provided.

### **Rules for Downtown Farmers' Market of Big Lake, Inc.**

The Downtown Farmers' Market is intended to provide healthy, fresh produce and other assorted nutritional non-commercial foods to the residents of, and visitors to, the community and surrounding area. Both small and large vendors of produce and non-commercial food items will find a supportive outlet for the sale of their goods. The Market will encourage commerce, entertainment and trade in downtown Big Lake, and help display the city's history, uniqueness, charm and potential.

#### **MARKET RULES**

(IMPORTANT: Please read and sign the Market application. Return it, with your exhibit fee, to the Market Manager. Your signature indicates that you have read, understand and agree with the rules.)

#### **VENDOR EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES**

Each vendor is responsible for providing and removing any and all equipment and supplies he or she requires to do business on the Market site. This includes signs, tables, chairs, products and equipment utilized for clean-up purposes.

#### **SIGNS**

All signs must remain within the allotted vendor's exhibit space and must not block traffic or pedestrian ingress or egress, or interfere with other vendors' display or views.

#### **EXHIBIT SPACE**

Market management has full authority to assign exhibit space. Requests for particular sites will be given consideration but management reserves the right to assign and locate all vendors. Stall space will be assigned by 3:00 pm on the Friday preceding Market day for all vendors whose fees are paid by that time, and may be confirmed by calling 123-456-7899 between 3:00 pm and 5:00 pm on the Friday preceding Market day. (Please note this number has changed from last year.)

#### **HOURS OF OPERATION**

The Market shall operate every Saturday from 8:00 am - 12:00 noon. (\*\*Please note the times have changed from last year.) All vendors must remain at the Market site until the 12:00 noon closing, and must vacate the Market site by 1:00 pm.

### **SET-UP, CLEAN-UP AND BREAKDOWN**

Set-up starts at 7:00 am and must be completed by 8:00 am. Vendors are responsible for removing all garbage from their stall space area. Stall spaces are to be left in the same condition as when rented. Breakdown starts at 12:00 noon and must be completed, and stalls vacated, by 1:00 pm.

### **PERMIT DISPLAY**

All vendors must display their permit pass in order to occupy a stall site. Permits shall remain on display during Market hours.

### **VEHICLES AND PRODUCT DISPLAY**

Vehicles shall not be utilized as a display or dispensing area for Market goods unless it is a refrigerated unit for perishable items. No vehicle may remain running during Market hours other than for purposes of refrigeration of product. The use of canopies, awning and sun-umbrellas are encouraged.

### **PERMITTED MARKET ITEMS**

Fresh produce, plant items, flowers, baked goods, jellies, jams, preserves, and other non-commercial food items may be sold. No cooking will be allowed on-site. The Market Manager will resolve any doubt as to the suitability of an item. No soliciting or political or religious activities shall be permitted within the Market area. Displays of public interest, such as nutritional, health or consumer information, may be displayed with the permission of the Market Manager. All products must be sold, displayed and stored from a surface above the ground. All vendors must utilize tables, shelves, cases or other structures for these purposes.

**FEES** (All fees are utilized for publicity for the Market.)

Ten-foot x ten-foot (10'x10') stall spaces are \$15.98 including tax per Market day or \$319.50

including tax per Market season (October through April). Spaces with electricity are \$21.30 per Market day or \$340.80 per season. Vendors paying on a per Market day basis must pay their fee by 5:00 pm on the Thursday preceding Market day and pick up their display permit Market morning. Payment on a seasonal fee basis must be made prior to the first Market day of the Market season, as announced by the Market Manager. Seasonal fees may be pro-rated for vendors seeking to rent exhibit space after the Market season has commenced at the discretion of the Market Manager. No reimbursement will be made for fees paid if a vendor decides to no longer participate at the Market. The Market Manager shall consider reimbursement in case of illness or death. Vendors may call the Market at 123-456-7899 concerning Market closure due to inclement weather. Vendors shall be credited for fees paid if inclement weather causes cancellation of a Market day. Fees shall be waived for participants of the Community Gardens Program.

### **MISCELLANEOUS**

Vendors are responsible for collecting and remitting their own sales tax. Vendors are responsible for all permits required by Florida or local County to sell their products. The sale or consumption of alcoholic beverages on the market site is prohibited. All rules may be revised by the decision of the Market Board.

### **ENFORCEMENT OF RULES**

The Market Manager is responsible for enforcing the Market rules. Possible violations will be discussed and resolution attempted. Vendors selling prohibited items will be asked to remove those items from sale or leave the Market. Unresolved problems will be referred to the Market Board. Continued violations will result in being banned from the Market with no reimbursement of fees paid. Any vendor challenging another vendor's product's legitimacy or conduct must file a written complaint with the Market Manager, giving the name of the vendor and the product or situation they feel may not be in compliance with Market policies. The complainant must date and sign their name to the complaint and the Market Manager will attempt resolution. If

resolution is not possible, the complaint will be referred to the Market Board.

## INSURANCE

Vendors are encouraged to consider obtaining individual liability insurance for products sold.

## Farmers' Markets on the Web

### USDA Farmers' Markets –

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets/> - This website is designed by the USDA to give you a list of farmers' markets in your state, a Farmers' Market Fact Sheet and information about starting a farmers' market. The site also includes a kids section, and a resource and information section.

### Florida State Farmers' Market –

<http://www.florida-agriculture.com/farmmkt/> - This is the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services website about farmers' markets. It includes links to locations and contacts, a produce availability chart, a cookbook and a nutrition program. The State Farmers' Market mission and overview are also on this site.

### Farmers' Market Online –

[www.farmersmarketonline.com](http://www.farmersmarketonline.com) - This farmers' market is entirely online providing a place for sellers, growers and consumers from around the world to meet, buy and sell. The market sells specialty foods, pet supplies and crafts in addition to traditional farmers' market purchases.

### Pike Place Market –

[www.pikeplacemarket.org](http://www.pikeplacemarket.org) - Pike Place Market, also known as America's Favorite Farmers' Market, is located in Seattle, Washington. The website offers plenty of shopping ideas as well as a list of which foods are in season and which are not. The site includes an online store and information about getting involved in the market.

### The Original Los Angeles Farmers' Market –

[www.farmersmarketla.com](http://www.farmersmarketla.com) - The website for this farmers' market offers links to information about the history of the market, a market directory, market facts, and news and events. The site was awarded a Time Pick by the *Los Angeles Times* in 1996.

### The Olympia Farmers' Market –

[www.farmers-market.org](http://www.farmers-market.org) - The Olympia Farmers' Market, located in Olympia, Washington, offers a place for local residents to sell their produce, foods and crafts. The site includes a calendar, an online Market News section and a list of market vendors with a description of each vendor.

### Dane County Farmers' Market –

[www.madfarmmkt.org](http://www.madfarmmkt.org) - The Dane County Farmers' Market is located in Madison, Wisconsin. The website offers a tour of the market, a kid's corner, a vendor directory, a calendar and recipes. The vendor directory includes a featured vendor and the kid's corner offers a printable page designed to teach kids about agriculture.

### Dallas Farmers' Market –

[www.dallasfarmersmarket.org](http://www.dallasfarmersmarket.org) - The website lists farmers including a featured farmer of the month. There are cooking classes offered at the farmers' market with information about the various chefs and classes listed online. The website also includes a calendar, the history of the market and a list of community partnerships.

### The Ithaca Farmers' Market –

[www.ithacamarket.com](http://www.ithacamarket.com) - This farmers' market is located in upstate New York. The website includes a question and answer section, a vendor and membership application, a calendar and a picture gallery. Information about the history of the market and directions are also provided.

### The Bellingham Farmers' Market –

[www.bellinghamfarmers.org](http://www.bellinghamfarmers.org) - This farmers' market, located in Bellingham, Washington, runs from April to October of every year. The site lists events during the season, a list of vendors and their email addresses, a vendor application and links to other farmers' markets.

### The Beaverton Farmers' Market –

[www.beavertonfarmersmarket.com](http://www.beavertonfarmersmarket.com) - Located in Beaverton, Oregon, this farmers' market has been recognized by the *Sunset* and *Country Gardens* magazines as an outstanding farmers' market. The website lists the markets' vendors as well as contact information, an online newsletter and a vendor application.



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# Selling at a Farmers' Market

Whether you've been selling at a farmers' market for several years or you're in your first season, you want to make sure you have an eye-catching display that will attract customers.

The following tips will help you get organized, sell all your farm products by the end of the market day and make your trip profitable. Following these guidelines will help make your farmers' market trip as enjoyable for you as you make it for your customers.

- Make sure your display is neat, clean, attractive and inviting, providing ease of movement throughout.
- Give customers a sense of bounty, whether you have a diversity of produce or a single niche product.
- Display all produce and farm products at least six inches off the ground, using sturdy equipment such as wooden boards, inverted crates or bushel baskets, tables or other dispensing equipment.
- Display your products neatly and make them easily accessible to all people, including the physically challenged.
- Incline your containers so customers can see the fruits and vegetables and other farm products easily and from a distance, while simultaneously giving prospective buyers an impression of choice and abundance.
- Post product and price signs above every display container or on a blackboard, indicating clearly and legibly the unit price and product variety.
- Make better use of vertical display space by using portable fixtures that allow customers to see the products from elbow to eye level.
- Replenish the containers as they get empty. Bring a range of different-sized containers to the market so you can put your products into smaller containers as quantities diminish.
- Create eye appeal by using contrasting colors, sizes and shapes as you display your vegetables, fruits, and other products.
- Bring only your highest quality products to market, clean and harvested at their optimum maturity and freshness.

## **When preparing for market day, consider bringing the following:**

- Crushed ice or a spray water bottle to keep crops such as lettuce, mesclun and broccoli looking fresh.
- A cooler to ensure safe storage of meat, poultry, eggs and other perishables.
- An appliance thermometer in the cooler to monitor temperature; maintain temperature at 41 degrees Fahrenheit or below.

- Drinking-quality water for misting sensitive vegetables, for drinking and for washing your hands.
- Paper towels and soap.
- Signs.
- Farm business sign.
- Price and products signs.
- Other signs or posters.
- Products price list.
- A white or beige canopy, tent or umbrella to define your sales area and protect farm produce and products from the elements.
- Portable displays such as tables, sawhorses, wooden boards, shelves, etc., on which to display your produce and other products.
- Sandbags or other weights to anchor your table, canopy, fliers, etc. in the event of wind.
- Tablecloths to dress up your table displays and hide the extra inventory and other items.
- Clean and undamaged containers such as wooden or wicker baskets, crates, bushels, etc.
- Fabric or plastic container liners to keep fruits and vegetables free of bruises.
- Plastic or paper bags, new and sturdy.
- Cash box with change and small bills.
- Receipt book and calculator.
- Licensed scale, if you choose to sell by weight.
- Cellophane paper/plastic and rubber bands to cover small fruit containers.
- Florist sleeves, if you are in the cut flower business.
- Bakery cardboard boxes for fruit or poultry pies or dumplings and other value-added products.
- Shopping baskets – a great convenience for customers, allowing them to purchase more products.
- Fliers about your farm: include information about what you sell, recipes, a picture of your farm, contact information.
- Business cards.
- Anti-fatigue mats and a stool for you to rest on if you need some support.
- Blackboard.
- Clipboard, extra paper and pen to write any comments, notes or customers' feedback.
- Heavy paper and marker pens for making new signs if needed.
- Adhesive tape or staple gun (with extra staples).
- First-aid kit.

### **Make sure your sales crew**

- Understands the importance of hygienic practices such as washing their hands after using the bathroom.
- Knows about your farm operation and farm products.
- Is well informed about handling, storing and using each of your products.
- Wears aprons, T-shirts, or caps with your farm name or logo.
- Appears neat and well groomed.
- Is full of enthusiasm, with genuine smiles.

## Other things to consider

### Insurance:

- Product liability insurance is recommended. Also, make sure your liability insurance is adequate for selling at the farmers' market.

### Safety:

- Keep your dog at home. Hopefully your customers will do the same
- If the market chooses to have farm animals on site as an attraction, make sure the animals are there for visual effect only and not for petting. Food safety and people's safety should be your primary concern.

### State and Local Regulations:

- To certify weighing scales: For more information contact the New Hampshire Department of Agriculture, Markets & Food (NHDAMF) <http://www.state.nh.us/agric/aghome.html> Bureau of Weights & Measures: 603-271-3700
- For a General Permit/Restricted Pesticide Permit (required if you use organic or synthetic pesticides on the crops you sell), contact NHDAMF Division of Pesticide Control: 603-271-3550.
- For processed foods such as jams & jellies, cheese and bottled milk, contact the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, Bureau of Food Protection at 603-271-4589 or 1-800-852-3345 Ext. 4589 <http://www.state.nh.us/gencourt/ols/rules/he-P2300.html>

*Written by Nada A. Haddad, Extension Educator, UNH Extension Agricultural Resources Educator*

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# Selling Strategies for Local Food Producers

Division of Applied Social Sciences

For many farmers, marketing and selling their products are the most challenging parts of the farm enterprise, especially when selling directly to consumers. However, direct markets for fresh and unique food products are among the most rapidly growing farm opportunities. People around the country are looking to buy tasty, healthy food directly from farmers — farmers with whom they can talk, ask questions and build relationships. However, these new market opportunities, particularly in farmers' markets, community supported agriculture (CSA), roadside stands, restaurants and cooperatives, require expertise in selling as well as marketing, production and financial management.

In any business, marketing and selling go hand in hand. Marketing describes a range of activities that include deciding what to produce and how to price, distribute and promote a product. Selling, on the other hand, describes the techniques used to entice buyers to exchange their cash for the seller's products. Despite the images that many people hold of pushy "salesmen" who won't take no for an answer, or the "natural-born salesman" who gets people to buy products without much effort, developing strong selling skills is critically important to acquiring and keeping customers in a direct marketing enterprise. And, while many farmers may be intimidated by the idea of selling, it is important to remember that selling skills — just like other skills — can be learned.

The selling techniques described in this guide are customer-friendly and ethical. There is no advice on how to trick or manipulate customers, or how to get customers to buy something they don't really need. Rather, the guide provides practical advice on how to



## ☒ Checklist: Are you ready to sell?

Being prepared to sell is essential. You should have the basics covered before you open for business or make a sales call.

- ☐ **Product quality:** Is your product fresh, clean and ready for sale? Are samples prepared?
- ☐ **Price:** Is your product priced fairly and competitively? Is your price list accurate and up-to-date?
- ☐ **Display:** Is your display neat, accessible and attractive? Are prices clearly marked? Is the name of your farm displayed on boxes, banners or signs?
- ☐ **Supplies:** Do you have plenty of shopping bags. Do you have enough cash to make change? Is your scale in good working order? Are farm pamphlets and recipes available?
- ☐ **Personal appearance:** Are you clean, neat, well dressed and well groomed?
- ☐ **Attitude:** Are you proud of your products and what you do for a living?
- ☐ **Service:** Are you ready to be personable and helpful? Do you have a plan for handling complaints? Do you have a good invoice system?
- ☐ **Gratitude:** Are you thankful for your customers and the opportunity to serve them?

### Authors

**Bill McKelvey**, Department of Rural Sociology, is a program associate with the Community Food Systems and Sustainable Agriculture Program.

**Mary Hendrickson**, Department of Rural Sociology, is director of the Food Circles Networking Project and associate director of the Community Food Systems and Sustainable Agriculture Program.

**Joe Parcell**, Department of Agricultural Economics, is director of the Missouri Value Added Development Center.

## Understanding nonverbal communication

Waving “Hi” to a neighbor; slouching in a chair; looking intently into the eyes of a loved one. These are all ways that we communicate without using words.

Nonverbal communication takes many forms and can convey diverse meanings. However, its significance is often overlooked. Nonverbal communication can actually convey more meaning than verbal communication. Researchers estimate that at least 60 percent of the impact of a conversation or message comes from nonverbal factors such as eye behavior, gestures, posture and voice.

Your relationships with customers can be enhanced by not only having an awareness of the ways messages are conveyed nonverbally, but by taking steps to improve your nonverbal communication. Consider the following suggestions from *Successful Nonverbal Communication*, by Dale G. Leathers (1986):

- Try to sustain eye contact with customers when serving them or having a conversation with them. Avoid shifting your eyes too much, or looking down or away from customers.
- Keep hands and elbows away from your body. When listening to customers, nod your head and smile. Avoid fidgeting, handwringing and touching your face.
- Keep an open and relaxed posture. Lean forward slightly. Avoid crossing your arms and standing rigidly.
- Speak at an appropriate volume and rate. Vary your pitch. Avoid speaking in a monotone, using too many pauses and “ahs,” and repeating words.

increase sales by building a loyal customer base. The guide is organized around a counselor approach to selling outlined in the book *Win-Win Selling* (Wilson Learning Library, 2003) and takes readers through the process of (1) building relationships with customers, (2) discovering customers’ needs and preferences, (3) being an advocate for one’s products, and (4) providing quality service. While much of the information in this guide is focused on selling at farmers’ markets, the tips are appropriate for anyone wishing to sell their products directly to consumers.

## Before you start

Selling is just one part of a successful direct-marketing business. Good production skills and superior postharvest handling techniques can ensure high-quality products that command premium prices. Likewise, a thorough knowledge of your farm’s financial condition can ensure that you employ the right pricing and advertising strategies to gain the most profit.

Being aware that you are competing with supermarkets and other farmers at your market or in your particular region can also help ensure success. At the end of the day, you want customers to spend more of their dollars with you. This means that you have to constantly improve your skills and look for competitive advantages to keep your business profitable.

Although the topics of product quality, farm finan-

cial planning, pricing and merchandizing are beyond the scope of this guide, you can find a host of resources on these topics in the “Resources” section at the end of this publication and through University of Missouri Extension publications and county offices (On the Web: [extension.missouri.edu](http://extension.missouri.edu)).

## Build relationships with your customers

In any business, building relationships with customers is key. This is even more important in the world of direct marketing. However, building relationships with customers takes time and depends on being personable and paying attention to a few basic details. The following suggestions are offered to help you make a good first impression and begin the process of building a loyal base of customers.

### First, pay attention to your personal appearance.

Consciously or unconsciously, customers often base their purchasing decisions on their first impression of you. Be clean, neat, well dressed and well groomed. Dirty clothes and hands, stubbly beards and unconventional tattoos and piercings can all turn off certain customers. This doesn’t mean you have to wear your Sunday best when selling. On the contrary, a clean pair of blue jeans and a fresh shirt are acceptable attire for farmers. Also consider wearing a name tag or having your farm logo inscribed on shirts and hats.

**Second, engage customers as soon as you can** at the market so they don’t have the opportunity to go somewhere else. Always stand rather than sit. Make eye contact with customers and avoid wearing sunglasses if possible. Smile. Say “Hello” and “How are you today?” The idea here is to be inviting and make it easy for customers to visit your stand and get to know you both as a farmer and as a person. When customers do visit your stand, make an effort to learn their names and something about them. This allows you to address them by name and strike up casual conversation when they revisit your stand. When working with chefs, do some homework to learn their names before you make



your first sales call. If the market is slow, keep busy by polishing fruit, straightening the stand, or passing out samples, or consider having a partner in front of the stand to draw people in.

**Third, be reliable.** Show up on time, keep regular hours and have adequate supplies of your product. It is hard for customers to trust you if they don't know when you're going to be at the market, when you're going to arrive with a delivery, how long you'll be open for business or how much product you'll have. If you are trying to sell to a restaurant, reliability is a key factor in gaining and maintaining your customer. For instance, if a hailstorm wipes out your spinach, or deer season closes down your meat processor, make sure to tell the chef as far in advance as possible that you won't be able to deliver their order. With advance warning, chefs may be able to take the lack of product in stride and still continue to order from you. Without it, you may lose the entire account.

**Fourth, share your knowledge** about your products and skills. Customers are often interested in the nutritional value of different foods, how they are grown or processed, or what makes your offerings special. This is especially important if you sell specialty or ethnic products. Customers also appreciate hearing about how your products are used by other satisfied customers.

**Fifth, go the extra mile for customers.** Offer to carry or cart-out purchases. Allow customers to leave purchased items at your stand until they've completed their other shopping. Always try to deliver more than the customer expects. Give away something extra or throw in a sample of a new product to regular customers. These and other services demonstrate your commitment to your customers and show them how much you appreciate their business.

**Finally, be pragmatic and have a sense of humor.** It is guaranteed that you will not satisfy everyone all of the time. Placing reasonable expectations on yourself and others, and being able to laugh at yourself on occasion, will allow you to keep a good attitude and attract customers to your business. Also, if you really don't believe that you are outgoing enough for direct marketing, find someone in your family or hire someone who is. Remember to take the time to educate them about your products and the importance of providing great customer service.

## Discover your customers' needs and preferences

Discovering the needs and preferences of customers takes time, patience and a good ear. It also follows naturally from a commitment to building relationships with customers and getting to know them on a more personal level.

For instance, you might arrive at market with a

truckload of the best yellow-fleshed watermelon in the county, but if the customers at your market are not familiar with this variety, then you are likely to *leave* the market with a truckload of yellow-fleshed watermelon.

Finding out what customers want can be achieved in a couple of different ways. First, when talking to customers, ask questions about their preferences. For instance, ask questions such as, "Are you looking for anything special today?" or "Are you preparing any special meals this week?" If a family is shopping with their children, ask the kids, "What's your favorite vegetable?" You can also relate your products to the season or upcoming holidays by asking, "Are you planning to do any canning this year?" or "Will you be cooking out for the Fourth of July?" Listen carefully to what customers say. If you are taking orders, restate the customer's order to be sure you heard them correctly. Keep a notepad and pen nearby to record orders, comments and special requests.

Second, do some homework. Spend time at the library or on the Internet researching the latest consumer trends, particularly by reading lifestyle magazines (e.g., *Martha Stewart Living*, *Oprah*, *Real Simple*). Look for information about the types of products you

### Building relationships with chefs

When selling to chefs, it may be even more important to invest time in building strong relationships, in part because you stand to gain or lose a higher volume of sales than with an individual customer at the farmers' market. It can also take more time to establish relationships with chefs. You may have to make 10 or more visits or telephone calls to an establishment before the chef starts to take an interest. Being persistent (in a polite way) can pay off.

Once a chef is interested, schedule a meeting well before the start of the season to determine his or her needs. Ask a few questions, such as:

- "What is your favorite meal to prepare?"
- "What are some of your best-selling items?"
- "Are there any products that you would like to source locally?"
- "Are there any hard-to-find or highly perishable products not available from your current distributor?"

Take a seed catalog with you and review it with the chef to determine which products they want. Provide samples of your highest-quality products for the chef to use at home or in the restaurant. Talk about your best-selling products at market and ask the chef if they are interested in the same ones.

When setting up a meeting with a chef, keep in mind that chefs have different schedules than farmers. Chefs are extremely busy during meal times and will not welcome interruptions. If you call on a chef specializing in the lunch business at 11:30 a.m., you will lose the sale. The best time to call or drop by is midmorning, generally before 10 a.m., or in the afternoon, around 2:00 or 3:00 p.m., after the lunchtime rush is over and before the dinner hour starts.

### Top 5 annoyances for farmers' market customers

- 1 Vendor takes or makes cell phone calls while serving customers.
- 2 Vendor chats a long while with other vendors or customers who have been helped while others are waiting.
- 3 Long line has formed at the vendor's stand — most customers won't wait.
- 4 Vendor fails to acknowledge waiting customers.
- 5 Vendor cannot make change.

sell. Stay abreast of the latest developments in direct marketing and farming. This information, along with what you learn directly from your customers, can be used to adjust your product selection to better meet your customers' needs.

## Be an advocate for your products

Once you've developed a relationship with your customers and have a good idea of what they're looking for, it's time to match their needs with your products. Your goal here is to create a partnership with your customers rather than try to sell them something they don't need.

Try to find a balance between sharing information about your products and socializing with customers while at the market. Talking about the nutritional qualities of your products or how to store, preserve, and use your products is a great way to promote them. With chefs, talk about the ease of using your products in the restaurant, or their unique flavors and qualities. For instance, you might talk about the rich flavor of your grass-fed meat, or how well your egg yolks hold up when frying them sunny-side up. Keep in mind that while most people are interested in receiving some information, they don't necessarily have the time to sit through a lecture at the market or in the restaurant. Keep the conversation light and friendly. Passing out informational fliers is an additional way to share information.

Sharing recipes is another great way to promote your products, especially if they are new or unique. People are generally interested in simple, seasonal recipes with only a few ingredients. Recipes can be gathered in the off-season and printed on tear-off note pads with your farm logo and contact information.

Offering samples is a great way to introduce new or in-season products. When sampling at a farmers' market, be sure to consult with your local health department or the market bylaws regarding sampling rules. Generally, samples should be fresh and served in individual cups on a covered tray. Keep a trash can nearby and always use sanitizing water to clean knives and cutting boards between uses. When providing samples to chefs, take small quantities of your product to the restaurant with some information about your farm.

Try to have a brief conversation with the chef if possible. Check back a week later to see if the chef liked your product and is interested in doing business with you.

Make signs or announcements to let customers know about products that will be available in coming weeks. A simple sign can read, "Fresh shiitake mushrooms available next week. Special price: \$3.00/¼ lb. while supplies last." Or, as customers leave with their purchases, you might say, "Next week we'll have our first harvest of oyster mushrooms. Be sure to visit our stand early because we'll only have a few pounds to begin with." Give customers a reason to visit your booth again and the opportunity to become preferred customers. Also, if you sell many different products, consider offering a weekly special at a reduced price. Everyone likes to feel like they are getting a deal. This information can also be conveyed using signs or announcements. A sign might read, "This Week's Special: Winter Squash, 2 for \$5.00." Or, you might say to customers: "We have a special on #2 canning tomatoes this week. They're slightly blemished but will make great sauce or salsa. Here's a copy of our family's salsa recipe."

Don't be afraid to put a little flair into your presentation. Wear a costume or make periodic announcements to passersby about new or special products. Be sure to use discretion though, and be considerate of other vendors and shoppers.

Finally, remember to ask for the sale. Be specific rather than general. Assume the sale by asking questions that will make a sale regardless of the answer. The best questions include two choices with no negative outcome (i.e., no loss of sale). For example, rather than asking, "Would you like to buy some eggs?" say "Would you like just a dozen eggs this week, or would you like to take an extra dozen to have on hand?" Other examples: "Would you like 2 or 5 pounds of tomatoes today?" "How many pounds of beans can I get for you today?" "Would you like the green peppers or the red peppers or both?" When talking with a chef, you might



ask, “What day of the week would be best for me to deliver your order?”

Assuming the sale can be done subtly. If a customer is wavering between two products, say something like “How about getting the fresh spreadable cheese for using on toast, *and* this aged cheese that you can sprinkle over salads?” In this example, there is a greater chance the customer will buy two items from you, rather than one.

If you ask for the sale and it doesn’t happen, then you may need to make another attempt to discover your customers’ wants and needs. Remember though, to increase your sales, you ultimately must ask for the sale — many sales don’t happen without it!

### Creating printed and online materials

Many farmers involved in direct marketing have invested time and energy in communicating with customers through printed and online materials. This is great way for farmers to enhance their relationship with customers and demonstrate the unique qualities of their farm and farm products.

Before starting, consider creating a unique “brand” for your business or product, if you don’t already have one. Combine the name of your farm or a special product name with a unique type style and color scheme to create a logo. Once you’ve created this design and identity, use it consistently on all printed and online materials. Customers are more likely to remember you if you have a strong and consistent identity.

Below are suggestions of different types of materials to consider, many of which can be created using basic word processing or publishing software.

- **Farm pamphlet or brochure:** Include pictures, a farm history, a statement of your farming philosophy, products, and a harvest calendar.
- **Coupons:** Create a double coupon that gives the customer a discount on their next purchase from you, and also includes a discount for one of their friends to purchase from you. Include the coupon with every purchase and vary it from week to week.
- **Weekly or monthly newsletter:** This is a great way to update customers about new products and developments on your farm. Include seasonal recipes, along with food storage and preservation tips.
- **Informational fliers:** Consider creating a ½- to 1-page handout on a range of topics such as nutrition, cooking, storage and preservation tips, classes, events, contests, history and origins of select food crops, relevant news stories and policy issues.
- **Web site:** Take your farm to the Internet and combine all of the options above in one place. However, having a dysfunctional Web site or failing to promptly respond to web requests may be worse than having no Web site at all. If needed, seek help from a professional web designer or web manager.

For assistance with printed materials, marketing, and promotion, contact Lane McConnell, Marketing Specialist, Missouri Department of Agriculture, Telephone: 573-526-4984, or e-mail: Lane.McConnell@mda.mo.gov.

## Provide quality service

You may be familiar with the following adage: a *satisfied* customer will tell fewer than five people about your business, but a *dissatisfied* customer will tell at least 10 people. This demonstrates two important points. First, satisfied customers are an essential part of any business. Second, word-of-mouth publicity can make or break a business. With this in mind, it is important to focus on strengthening relationships with existing customers by providing outstanding service.

Once the market opens, serving customers should be the first priority. All other activities, such as conversations with other vendors or rearranging the display, should wait until the customer is served. Also, be sure to thank customers as they leave and make it clear that all products are guaranteed.

Providing prompt service is also important, especially during busy times. However, try to give each customer the time they deserve. Develop a way to serve customers in order and acknowledge customers who are waiting in line. Make eye contact with waiting customers, tell them that you’ll be with them in a moment, and thank them for their patience. If possible, offer waiting customers a sample or a pamphlet about your farm. When selling to chefs or other direct customers, return phone calls within a minimum of 24 hours to avoid losing the sale. Consider hiring employees, recruiting family members or prepackaging items for extremely busy periods.

Address any post-sale dissatisfaction politely and promptly. And, whatever you do, avoid arguing with customers. Acknowledge all complaints, apologize and take appropriate steps to remedy the complaint. It is sometimes helpful to ask customers how they would like a situation resolved. Once the complaint is resolved, thank the customer for bringing the complaint to your attention and make a note of the complaint for future reference. Keep in mind that it takes more energy and effort to gain new customers than it does to keep existing ones. Even when a customer has a negative experience, they will likely return to purchase from you again if they feel their complaint was resolved in an appropriate and timely way.

Providing good service is particularly essential for restaurant customers. Samples can introduce your product to a chef, but they have to be packaged well and contain enough of your product so that the chef can experiment. Good packaging will allow the product to show visibly if possible, will be consistent from package to package, and will be standardized by weight or count, so a chef can confidently order the necessary amount. (While one chef may appreciate receiving great spinach in a black garbage bag, most chefs won’t even open the bag.)

You will also need to include current, easy-to-read price lists with samples and any printed materials you leave with the chef. Price lists can introduce new prod-

### Can you learn to be a good salesperson?

Anyone can learn to be a good salesperson. Those who naturally excel at selling will enjoy working with a wide variety of personalities, have excellent interpersonal skills and enjoy thinking creatively about positioning or placing their products. They will pay attention to detail and be comfortable when customers don't want their product or don't return their sales calls.

For others, learning to be a good salesperson may take time and attention. Initially, it may require making an extra effort to be outgoing and start conversations with customers. It might also require a commitment to using the resources in this guide to develop the selling skills needed for a successful direct marketing enterprise.

Additionally, it's important to remember that all farm enterprises require broad sets of skills in production, marketing, financial management and selling. Most farmers shine in one or two areas and struggle with the others — only mythical "Super Farmer" can master all of them. Farmers who know all about producing and harvesting high-quality products, and understand exactly how profitable each of their enterprises is, may be completely intimidated by the idea of marketing and selling their products. Or, someone who knows how to market well and produce great products may find it very challenging to determine which of their crop or livestock enterprises make them the most money.

Because developing expertise in all skill areas is generally not easy, direct marketers should honestly evaluate their talents and skills, take strides to develop broad skills in areas that need improvement and seek help from other farmers, workers or family members who possess expertise in particular areas.

ucts to the chefs, especially if you highlight the variety of products you have available. Part of providing good service is making it easy to order your product. Some chefs will place their orders after their dinner service closes, which means you are likely to lose the sale if you can't take e-mail or Internet orders.

Products will need to be delivered on a regular basis, at predetermined times, when it is convenient for the chef. Since chefs have limited storage on-site, delaying your delivery by even a day can disrupt the restaurant's menu and damage your relationship. You will also need to include a separate, legible invoice with any products you deliver. Invoices are usually passed to the bookkeeper, who has to be able to understand the information to process a timely payment.

### Beyond the basics

Although providing outstanding customer service is a proven way to build and strengthen relationships with existing customers, there are additional ways you can improve service.

First, when interacting with customers, find other products to sell them. Take note of what they have in their shopping bags or on their restaurant menus and offer complementary items. Remember their previous

purchases, ask them how they enjoyed those items, and ask if they'd like more. If customers are looking for items you don't carry, recommend other vendors who do carry those items.

If you see a regular customer carrying a competitor's product, offer a sample of your own product with an appropriate promotion to bring them to your stand next week. For instance, "I see you purchased some tomatoes down the way. I've planted this really great variety this year that I think you'll like. Try this one at no charge, and if you like it, come back next week to see me."

Second, consider creative ways to communicate with customers throughout the year. Many farms use newsletters, pamphlets, informational brochures, coupons or handwritten letters to stay in touch with customers. Create a mailing list by collecting customers' contact information from checks or a guest book. Mail printed items or e-mail electronic versions, depending on your customers' preferences.

Third, think about hosting events, classes or contests. An open house or farm tour is a great way to show appreciation for customers. Sponsor free classes on preserving foods. Partner with a local chef to offer tasting parties or cooking classes. Have a drawing or recipe contest.

Finally, make a concerted effort to evaluate and improve your service. Record yourself during busy times with a video or audio recorder. Listen to and watch other vendors. Tour other markets, visit other roadside stands, or go to the supermarket to check their selection, display and prices. Put yourself in the customers' shoes and think about your business from their perspective. Some businesses measure customer satisfaction through customer surveys, meetings with customers, or customer complaints and compliments. The goal is to reflect on both successes and failures and be willing to change.

### Summary

Being successful in direct marketing takes a great deal of time, effort and attention. It requires not only the ability to produce a quality product, but also the commitment to build lasting relationships with customers. It also takes a combination of skills, and ideally a group effort, to create a lasting, profitable enterprise.

However, marketing directly to consumers also has many rewards. As a farmer, you are able to gain greater control over both production and marketing decisions. You have the opportunity take advantage of unique marketing opportunities and earn retail prices for your products. You also become a valued member of the community and gain satisfaction from both your work and the relationships you build with community members.

The authors acknowledge the assistance of John Emery, Lane McConnell and Ann Wilkinson in the preparation of this guide.

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*I'm Right and You're Wrong: Do's and Don'ts in Customer Service.* 2005. Jody Padgham. University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension Publication No. A3811-10. Madison, Wisc.

Web: [learningstore.uwex.edu/index.aspx](http://learningstore.uwex.edu/index.aspx)

Telephone: 877-947-7827

*Marketing on the Edge: A Marketing Guide for Progressive Farmers.* 2002. Canadian Farm Business Management Council. Ottawa, Ontario.

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Telephone: 607-433-2545

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*Zingerman's Guide to Giving Great Service.* 2004. Ari Weinzwieg. Hyperion, New York, N.Y.

## Web sites, publications, contacts

Food Circles Networking Project is a University of Missouri Extension program that connects farmers and consumers around local food. The project offers guides to sourcing local foods and information on creating community food systems.

Web: [foodcircles.missouri.edu](http://foodcircles.missouri.edu)

Growing for Market. A newsletter for produce growers. Contact P.O. Box 3747, Lawrence, Kan. 66046.

Web: [growingformarket.com](http://growingformarket.com)

Telephone: 800-307-8949

The Legal Guide for Direct Farm Marketing. 1999. Neil D. Hamilton. Drake University Law School, 2507 University Ave., Des Moines, Iowa 50311. 235 pp. Available for \$20 plus shipping.

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Telephone: 515-271-2065

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Web: [extension.missouri.edu/explore/agguides/hort/g06221.htm](http://extension.missouri.edu/explore/agguides/hort/g06221.htm)

Missouri Department of Agriculture AgriMissouri program (Web: [www.agrimissouri.com](http://www.agrimissouri.com)) and Farmers' Market Blog (Web: [mofarmersmarket.blogspot.com](http://mofarmersmarket.blogspot.com)).

Missouri Farmers' Market Association. c/o Eileen Nichols, PO Box 1, Webb City, Mo. 64870.

*The New Farm Organic Price Report.* Updated listing of conventional and organic wholesale prices for fruit, vegetables, herbs and grain.

Web: [newfarm.org/opx](http://newfarm.org/opx)

Networking Association for Farm Direct Marketing and Agritourism. Contact 62 White Loaf Road, Southampton, Mass. 01073.

Web: [nafdma.com](http://nafdma.com)

Telephone: 888-884-9270

*Postharvest Handling of Fruits and Vegetables.* 2000. Janet Bachmann and Richard Earles. ATTRA Publication #IP116.

Web: [attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/postharvest.html](http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/postharvest.html)

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