

Abstract: *The number of farmers' markets in the U.S. has increased dramatically over the past two decades. This publication is a resource for those who want to organize a farmers' market or to sell at one.*

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Introduction

Farmers' markets are an ancient method used by farmers worldwide to sell their produce directly to consumers. As U.S. food production became increasingly industrialized and specialized, farmers' markets were replaced by brokers and supermarkets. In the past two decades, however, farmers' markets in the U.S. have rapidly regained popularity.



Farmers find a number of advantages in selling at farmers' markets. By selling directly to their customers without going through middlemen, farmers can charge retail prices for their produce. A farmers' market is a good place for new growers who are perfecting production skills and learning which products customers want most. In addition, many growers enjoy the interaction with customers and other vendors, and say "This is my social life!"

For customers, too, the farmers' market is not

just a place to buy food, but a social affair. A festive atmosphere helps to bring people to markets, where they can talk with farmers about how the produce was grown and how it can be prepared.

Organizing a New Market

A new market is often started by a small group of people who recognize the potential benefits for their community and for local producers. Although markets are sometimes established with as few as three to five regular vendors, a larger number of vendors generally will draw more customers. Your local Cooperative Extension Service may be able to help you compile a list of potential vendors to invite to your first organizational meeting. Use local news media to help publicize your intentions.

Although some markets may be very informally organized, a set of bylaws, rules, and regulations will help to prevent problems down the road. Some of the issues to be addressed are:

- **Leadership.** Who will serve on the board of directors? Some market boards are made up entirely of vendors, while some include other people from the community.
- **Management.** Will the manager be a market member or hired from outside the market? What are the terms of employment? What are the responsibilities?
- **Vendor membership.** Who can be a

member and vendor? Are there geographic restrictions?

- **Location.** Is the market site easily accessible, aesthetically pleasing, and highly visible? Does it have shade from trees or a structure to provide protection from the elements? Does it provide adequate parking and display space for vendors? Are electricity, water, and restrooms available?
- **Hours, days, and months of operation.** When is the market open? At what time on a market day do vendors need to be in their assigned space? When does the space need to be vacated?
- **Fresh products.** Will you have a producers-only market, with vendors selling only produce grown on their own farm? Or will farmers sell what they grow along with produce from other local farms? Or will vendors sell any produce they can purchase, locally or not, acting essentially as brokers?
- **Value-added products.** Will these be made primarily from vendor-grown produce? How do state and federal agencies regulate production and marketing?
- **Arts and crafts.** Will these be allowed? If so, will they be juried or limited in number?
- **Containers, weights, and measures.** Are these regulated in any way by the state?
- **Space assignments.** How will spaces be assigned for the season? Seniority, number of markets attended the previous year, and sales volume are used in some markets.
- **Space and membership fees.** What is fair for both large- and small-volume vendors? What does the market need to operate?
- **Pricing.** How will you ensure competitive pricing? This may take an educational effort to promote quality and presentation over price fixing, and harmony and cooperation between vendors. Most markets insist that vendors post their prices.
- **Process for dealing with infractions of rules.** How can the rules be enforced fairly, firmly, and consistently? How can a member appeal a penalty?
- **Local and state regulations.** How is the

market affected by health and safety standards for food handling?

- **Insurance.** Physical liability insurance in case of injuries or accidents can be purchased by the market or by individual vendors.

The enclosed articles will help you to answer some of these questions. Materials listed under **Further Resources** are also useful, not only for ideas, but for examples of how various markets have written their by-laws, rules, and regulations.

An established farmers' markets can be among the jewels of the community, and for this reason should have strong support from the Chamber of Commerce or economic development council. Cities often provide space for a market free-of-charge. They can also help promote special events and festivals that draw customers both to the market and to shops in the vicinity. The city may be willing to construct shelters to give vendors and customers protection from rain and sun.

Federal Assistance: WIC, FMNP and SFMNP

A federal program that benefits both vendors and low-income customers is the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP), established in 1992. It provides special coupons to WIC participants, which they can use to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables at participating farmers' markets. The program has two goals:

- To provide fresh nutritious unprepared food such as fruits and vegetables to WIC participants who are at nutritional risk; and
- To expand consumer awareness and use of farmers' markets.

During Fiscal Year 2000, 12,897 farmers and 1,622 farmers' markets were authorized to accept FMNP coupons. The most current information on the program can be found at the website <<http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns/>>.

A new Seniors Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) awards grants to states, U. S. territories, and federally recognized tribal gov-

ernments to provide low-income seniors with coupons that can be exchanged at farmers' markets, roadside stands, and community supported agriculture (CSA) programs. Go to the same website, <<http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns/>>, for more details and to learn whether the program is operating in your state.

Additional information on USDA efforts to assist farmers' markets can be found at the website <<http://www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets/>>.

Personal Success at a Farmers' Market

A successful market depends on successful vendors. Lynn Byczynski, editor and publisher of *Growing for Market*, put together a special issue on how to be successful at farmers' markets. In a nutshell, Byczynski advises:

- Offer the highest-quality products.
- Set fair prices.
- Display your produce in a neat, well-organized, and eye-catching manner.
- Provide samples if possible.
- Be friendly, courteous, and respectful to customers. Talk to them!

The farmers' market issue of *Growing for Market* is enclosed, and can also be downloaded from the website <<http://www.growingformarket.com>>.

Enclosure:

Byczynski, Lynn (ed.) 2001. Farmers' market success. *Growing for Market*. January. 16 p.

Further Resources

Books

The New Farmers' Market. 2001. By Eric Gibson, Marcie Rosenzweig, and Vance Corum. New World Publishing, Auburn, CA. 272 p.

Available for \$24.95 plus shipping.

The Legal Guide for Direct Farm Marketing. 1999. By Neil D. Hamilton. Drake University Law School, Des Moines, IA. 235 p.

Available for \$20 plus shipping.

Farmers' Markets: Rules, Regulations and Opportunities. 2002. By Neil D. Hamilton. National Center for Agricultural Law Research and Information Center. 47 p.

<<http://www.NationalAgLawCenter.org>>

Grassroots Marketing: Getting Noticed in a Noisy World. 2000. By Shel Horowitz. 306 p. *A resource for any kind of small business, including horticultural businesses, the book has ideas for low-cost or free publicity. Topics include creating an image; how to write ad copy and press releases; tricks of the printing trade to save money on brochures and ads; direct mail; selling on the Internet; working with the media; and much more. \$22.95 plus shipping.*

Dynamic Farmers' Marketing. 1997. By Jeff Ishee. Bittersweet Farmstead, Middlebrook, VA. 130 p.

Available for \$14.95 plus \$2.50 shipping from:

Bittersweet Farmstead
P.O. Box 52
Middlebrook, VA 24459
540-886-8477

Publications from an organization or agency

Farmers' Markets. 1991. By Charles Marr and Karen Gast. Kansas State University Cooperative Extension Service, Manhattan, KS. MF-1019. 8 p.

Available free of charge from:
Cooperative Extension Service
Kansas State University
Manhattan, KS 66506
785-532-6173

Creating a Farmers' Market Starting from Nowhere. 1990. By Jean P. Feingold. Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences. University of Florida.

Farmer Direct Marketing Bibliography 2001. By Jennifer-Claire V. Klotz. USDA/AMS/TMP/W&AM, Washington, D.C. 52 p. *Includes a section listing farmers'-market-related publications. Updated regularly at the website <<http://www.ams.usda.gov/directmarketing>>, and can be downloaded from this site.*

Periodicals

Growing for Market

P.O. Box 3747
Lawrence, KS 66046
800-307-8949

growing4market.earthlink.net
<http://www.growingformarket.com>

Subscription to the monthly publication of news and ideas for market gardeners is \$30 per year. Check the website for other publications, Farm Tours, and links to many additional resources.

Websites

USDA/Agricultural Marketing Service

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets/>
A number of publications listed on this website can be downloaded or ordered electronically. Or contact:

Velma R. Lakins
Wholesale and Alternative Markets
Program - USDA
Room 2644 - South
1400 Independence Ave. S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250-0269
202-690-0031 Fax
velma.lakins@usda.gov

USDA/AMS Farmer Direct Marketing Funding Assistance

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/directmarketing/funding.htm>

Information about several programs that provide support through technical assistance or funding can be found at this website.

USDA price reports for fruits, vegetables and herbs

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/fv/mncls/terminal.htm>

USDA price reports for cut flowers

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/fv/mncls/ornterm.htm>

Market Farming e-mail discussion group

<http://www.homestead.com/marketfarm/>
To subscribe, send e-mail to
<lyris@franklin.oit.unc.edu> with message or
subject containing "subscribe market-farming".

North American Farmers Direct Marketing Association

<http://www.nafdma.com/>

ATTRA Publications

Direct Marketing. 1999. By Katherine Adam, Radika Balasubrahmanyam, and Holly Born. National Center for Appropriate Technology, Fayetteville, AR. 36 p.

Market Gardening: A Start Up Guide. 2002. By Janet Bachmann. National Center for Appropriate Technology, Fayetteville, AR. 16 p.

Postharvest Handling of Fruits and Vegetables. 2000. By Janet Bachmann and Richard Earles. National Center for Appropriate Technology, Fayetteville, AR. 28 p.

Adding Value to Farm Products: An Overview. 2001. By Janet Bachmann. National Center for Appropriate Technology, Fayetteville, AR. 11 p.

Keys to Success in Value-Added Agriculture. 2001. By Holly Born. National Center for Appropriate Technology, Fayetteville, AR. 20 p.

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