

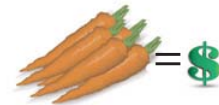
Tips for Selling at: Farmers Markets

Farmers markets are temporary retail establishments typically held outdoors, where farmers come to sell their produce at a specified place and time. Farmers markets are growing in popularity across the country and can be a good entry-level selling place for beginning farmers.

NCAT Marketing Tipsheet Series

For this market you can expect:

- Lower volume of product
- Higher prices per unit



Advantages

- Farmers markets help growers discover local demand for products, and direct contact with customers makes them excellent places to experiment with new and heirloom products.
- You generally have flexibility in the variety and volume of products you take to market.
- No standard pack or grade is required, but your produce should be good quality.
- Farmers markets are a great place to network and see what other farmers are doing, as well as experiment with new and heirloom products.
- You have the opportunity to build a loyal customer base, including local chefs.

Considerations

- Identify market channels on travel routes to and from your market to increase sales and efficiency.
- When setting prices, examine production/administrative costs, profitability goals, market prices, and consumer preferences.
- If you sell at several farmers markets, schedules can be demanding.
- To sell at popular farmers markets, it helps to have unique products.
- Being successful requires positive interactions with the public.
- Most farmers markets have an application process and rules to participate. For example, in California you must register as a “certified grower” with the county agriculture commissioner before selling at a certified farmers market.



Photo: NCAT

Tips for Selling at Farmers Markets

★ key point

- ★ Get creative with your produce display. A good banner and signage with pricing information save time and increase comfort for your customers.
 - Consistency is key, both in terms of the product you take to market as well as being there on every scheduled market day.
 - Consider providing samples of your product if local regulations permit.
 - Set up a service system where customers do not have to wait too long in line.
 - Invest in a scale that not only calculates weight but also gives you the sales price. A calculator that prints on a paper tape is another useful tool.
 - Visit markets seasonally and speak to market managers to figure out what's missing from your market that you could supply.
 - Understand your customer. In addition to keeping sales records, it is beneficial to define your customer base and their trends (daily and throughout the season).

Key Questions to Ask Yourself

- ★ Do I enjoy working with the public? If not, can I hire someone friendly and competent for my booth?
 - Where are the nearest farmers markets? Are they accepting new vendors?
- ★ Do these farmers markets have enough customers to make it profitable for new vendors?
 - What are the other vendors selling? What's my niche?
- ★ How much time will I spend at the market? How early will my day start and end?
 - Am I willing to do this each week?
 - What is the application process for the farmers market? What are the rules? For example, can I sell products I have not grown?

Resources

- ATTRA Publications
Prices vary for individual publications. Many are free. An inexpensive subscription will give you access to all 350+ publications and databases. www.attra.ncat.org
 - **Scheduling Vegetable Plantings for Continuous Harvest** (2008)
 - **Season Extension Techniques for Market Gardeners** (2005)
 - **Postharvest Handling of Fruits and Vegetables** (2000)
- **Find a Farmers Market** by searching the USDA's online directory: www.ams.usda.gov/local-food-directories/farmersmarkets
- **Growing for Market** magazine offers the free issue, "Selling at Farmers Markets:" www.growingformarket.com/categories/SellingAtFarmersMarkets
- **Local Harvest** website is a nationwide directory of small farms, farmers markets, and other local food sources. The site helps consumers buy what they want directly from the farmers and ranchers who produce it. www.localharvest.org
- **Farmers Market Coalition** is an organization geared toward the development of farmers markets, and it has many useful resources. <https://farmersmarketcoalition.org>



Photo: Rex Dufour, NCAT

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