

Farmers Markets

This time of year, Farmers Markets are popping up all over the country. In the document below you will find some tips for setting up your booth or table.

Here are some of the topics discussed in the attached .pdf article:

Tips for Success

Differentiate

Detail Your Display

Organize

Cultivate Consistency

Prioritize Pricing

Be Ready to Commit

Smile !

See article below.

(article on next page)

ORGANIC BROADCASTER

Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service

Experienced market farmers offer tips for success at your first farmers' market

By Lisa Kivirist

Ask any seasoned organic grower, and they probably vividly remember their first day selling at a farmers' market. Maybe it was the ideal stress-free day and resulting combination of cash receipts, happy customers and perfect product. But most likely, that farmer walked away excited about selling at future markets, but with a list of things they will do differently next week.

If you're heading into your first farmers' market season, you're not alone. According to the USDA, there were 8,144 farmers' markets in 2013 in the United States, which is an increase of more than 450% since the USDA started tracking this data in 1994. With continued interest in local and organic foods, shoppers find farmers' markets the best opportunity to "know your farmer" and bring healthy, fresh food to their family's plates.

As with any farm-based venture, selling at a farmers' market should be a thought-out, strategic part of your farm business plan. Here are some tips to get started—advice from farmers seasoned and experienced in the market-selling scene.

Differentiate

As the new kid at the market, how can you stand out from the crowd?

"Our stand looks very different than others around us," explained Pam Walgren, farmer-owner of Perennial Journey LLC, who sells regularly at the Monroe Farmer's Market in Wisconsin. "We aim for a more modern look rather than going along with the 'old country' look of baskets and wooden boxes more common at markets." Walgren found silver restaurant trays used for clearing tables at a salvage yard, and displays her heirloom tomatoes on them.

"Customers remark every week about how beautiful our stand is and how different it is from others," Walgren added. A unique display generates another result: free media exposure, as it is more likely to be photographed and end up on social media like Instagram. Select three key items you have for sale, and showcase these by placing them front and center on your table. If your produce is certified organic, be sure to include that signage on your display.

Detail Your Display

"Eye appeal translates into sales and a little extra effort to plan and pay attention to details goes a long way," advised Lois Federman, co-manager of the Mineral Point Market in Mineral Point, Wis. Federman recommends that immediately after you unload, remove boxes, crates, bags, and other clutter from your display area and only then set up your display. "Many times customers come early to the market, and you never want your booth area less than inviting. If need be, arrive 30 minutes ahead of schedule so you are setup and ready to greet those early bird shoppers."

Joylene Reavis of Sugar Maple Ems Farm in Brodhead, Wis., suggested having a full "dress rehearsal" at home prior to your first market day. "If you have a full table with lots of things for sale, try setting up your table at home and move things around until you get it just right," she recommended. "Don't forget to label everything to save your potential customers time—so they know exactly what they're looking at and how much it costs." Got your table just how you want it? Take a photograph and it will make your market destination set-up much faster.



Pam Walgren's farmers' market stand features fresh produce artfully displayed.

Photo by Perennial Journey LLC

Carefully select the tablecloths you use, aiming for a pop of color that complements your items for sale. Walgren sewed tablecloths that are open in back for access to storage bins underneath, creating a tidy, clean look.

Organize

Keeping your main supplies organized will help you run much more efficiently every week. For the past seven years, Karen Heege has run Victoria's Table, selling artisan small-batch jams and jellies at the Des Moines Farmers' Market in Iowa and has market organization down to a science. "I use large, clear plastic storage bins to haul supplies, and have everything I need in there from bags and tissue for wrapping, tablecloths, signs, cups and spoons for sampling, pens, business cards, and even a market toolkit consisting of scissors, pins, tape, a screwdriver, pliers and extra tent pieces." If the weather gets wet, these bins double as above-ground storage.

Develop your own system for organizing, transporting and setting up your product at market. Keep detailed checklists of all the little things you'll need that easily are forgotten, such as small bills and coins to make change, weights for your tent in case it gets windy.

Likewise, make sure you personally have what you need to get through a busy market day. Pack a cooler with water and high-energy, easy-to-eat snacks like nuts and pre-cut fruit. Bring extra layers of clothing in case the weather changes.

Cultivate Consistency

When you are a new vendor at a market, it is especially important to ask for the same location at every market so your customers don't need to search for you every week. Visit the market site and get a sense of where sunlight falls. Full sun will droop produce quickly. Remember the sun shifts throughout the day, so visit the market ahead of time to scout out your ideal spot, and make that request with the market manager.

If you are not a regular at every market and have a different location each time, direct your customers to your Facebook page or Twitter feed for regular updates on when you'll be at market and where. This gives you opportunity to plug what you'll be bringing and any special deals for regular customers.

Prioritize Pricing

"Pricing at a market can be tricky, especially when competition undercuts, or everybody has a whole lot of the same thing," explained Dela Ends of Scotch Hill Farm in Brodhead, Wis. "We've found that a volume discount of something like 'buy one get one free' helps spur sales and move product. It doesn't have to be a huge price reduction. But, people love

to get a bargain, and it's better to move product and not take it home."

Likewise it's important, particularly in those early market days, to keep a realistic perspective on earnings. It may take a few weeks, perhaps a whole season, for market customers to know you and to start developing a following.

"While the income was inconsistent sometimes week to week, I found farmers' markets the perfect place to experiment when I was starting out farming," recalled Lindsay Morris Carpenter of Grassroots Farm outside Monroe, Wis. "I could bring a bunch of stuff every week, and could readily adapt and try out different pricing and sales strategies and see what works."

If you do end up with extra wares at the end of the day, remember the power of the post-market barter scene. Don't go home with what you already have a lot of. Develop relationships with other vendors who sell what you don't, and make exchanges at the end of the market.

Be Ready to Commit

Fully think through the commitment needed for a weekly farmers' market, especially the larger markets on weekends. Are you ready to commit all your summer weekends to the market scene? This is an important variable to think through, or you'll find yourself resentful halfway through the season. Or if that may be a concern—for example, your family has lots of other obligations on weekends that would make this schedule a challenge—research the growing number of weekday markets as a possibility.

Make sure, too, the market draws the right kind of customers for what you're selling. "Every market has its own culture and vibe," said Leigh Adcock, Executive Director of the Women, Food and Agriculture Network (WFAN). "Some markets cater to busy shoppers who want to quickly buy their week's vegetables, while others create a more social setting with music and kids' activities. Talk to other growers and folks buying at the market to get a sense of what the market is like."

Smile

"Aside from all the merchandising fundamentals, I would reiterate the power of a simple smile and getting to know your customers so you can follow-up on things they mention week to week," summed up Stacy Miller, Program Advisor for the Farmers Market Coalition, a non-profit dedicated to strengthening the farmers' market movement across the country. "Building those relationships and making each transaction personal and not just financial is what cultivates a loyal customer base." Make the shopping experience at your booth personal: share recipes, photos of the farm and invite your super-loyal customers out to the farm for a personal tour.

That personal connection between the food on one's plate and the farmer who grew it is what ultimately keeps both customers and farmers coming back to market and spurs this continued growth of the movement. Celebrate that connection along with a realistic, strategic plan for your market booth and sales and first season success can be yours. For more farmers' market resources, check out the Coalition website: www.farmersmarketcoalition.org.

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