

Tips for Selling at: Farmers Markets

NCAT Marketing Tip Sheet Series

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.

Advantages

- You may receive more money per unit, since you sell directly to customers.
- 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.
- Direct contact allows you to find out what your customers want.
- You have the opportunity to build loyal customers.

Considerations

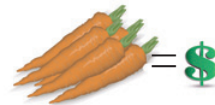
- The volume of sales varies with the popularity of the market.
- Labor costs can be relatively high (time and travel to and from market, time away from the farm).
- If you sell at several farmers markets, schedules can be demanding.
- To sell at popular farmers markets, you must have unique products.
- 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: Rex Dufour, NCAT

For this market you can expect:

- Lower volume
- Higher prices



Tips for Selling at Farmers Markets

- ★ **Have an attractive product mix and clear signs for your market stand.**
 - Ensure that you have a consistent supply of popular products.
 - 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.
 - Sell by unit rather than weight to simplify the math and make transactions faster.
 - Extend your season for popular products before or after the main season. This can increase your sales and attract new customers to your market stand.

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:
<http://apps.ams.usda.gov/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



Photo: Rex Dufour, NCAT

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