

2016 WSFMA Conference: Farmers Market Boot Camp
Recruiting Farmers and Vendors – Especially Farmers!

First of all, a caveat. The intent is not to “harvest” any farmers from an existing thriving market. Your goal would be to either help a farmer realize more sales in your market – if she has the capacity – and continue at the market where she currently is, or, to establish a really good new market in a community where there is none that is ready and willing to take on new farmers, and take farmers on waiting lists that can’t get in other markets.

Identify Product Needs:

- Where are the gaps in your farmers’ market product mix that is offered to the shoppers? If you are starting from scratch, what are the core items/farmers that you would like to see in your market?
 - *Depends a lot on what the shoppers are looking for in your region – develop personas and/or a rapid market assessment. See more info about this in the Resources page of Farmers Market Coalition or join the Facebook page of Farmers Market Marketers (you have to be approved for joining this closed group).*
- Ask (if you have them) if current vendors can supply the gaps for products that are missing in the market, e.g. value added.
 - *This gives them a chance to increase their revenue as well.*
- Be aware of emerging food trends,
 - *Examples are: an increase in use (and demand!) of paleo products, or more DIY home food artisans who make their own bacon, kimchee, or nut butters – your farmers could supply the main ingredients.*

Finding Farmers:

- More direct channels
 - *Ask current farmers,*
 - *Keep apprised of restaurant chefs using local farmers. They would post on their menus names of farms.*
 - *Find out who food co-ops buy from, as well as other stores that use/buy from local farmers, scout their shelves.*

Research it!

- Indirect – information channels
 - *Check www.localharvest.org; google likely key words, look in Facebook under “Farm” and your city, look at the farm listings of farmers in other farmers’ market websites*
 - *Find a Slow Food chapter and see which farmers they have connected with (like for farm tours or educational workshops)*
 - *The urban gardening programs and clubs in your town can add vendors to your market and a connection to the community gardeners.*
 - *Check the local Greenhorns (young upcoming farmers) chapter, <http://www.washingtonyoungfarmers.org/>, and find if there are any “schools” for beginning farmers, or small farm help centers,*
 - *Get the state’s agriculture department’s list of certified organic farmers (public information). Find their site’s listing of farms that have “you-picks”. Some of these large operations can also attend markets.*
 - *Find Washington Tilth or Buy Fresh Buy Local or regional branding organizations that lists farmers on directories*
 - *Look up members of specialty producer associations (example: hazelnuts, fruits, grass-fed beef).*
 - *Sign on for other markets’ e-newsletters and look at their vendor news.*
- Direct – take yourself to the source!
 - *Go to conferences where the types of farmers you are seeking are most likely to go there, e.g. sustainable ag working group annual conferences, statewide organic/sustainable farmer group conferences and regional meetings.*
 - *Go to local ag extension workshops for farm practices and business improvements.*

- Go to connector meetings like this <http://sustainableconnections.org/events/2016-farm-to-table-trade-meeting>.
- Meet with the Agriculture Extension lead horticulturalist, or the county's lead extensionist in the counties that are in your area— if your potential market would host dozens of farmers then it is worth the extra effort and cost. Work with your local extension office to send out a special mailing (with you paying for the supplies and the postage) to recruit farmers through a particular county. In Central Texas, we sent out 500 surveys and received 130 back!
- Also talk to others who work with farmers in the nearby Farm Service Agency that administers the USDA farm programs. In addition, the Soil and Water Conservation District, the Farmers Home Administration, and the USDA Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) conduct program work with local farmers and may have in mind farmers to recommend to you.
- Investigate local colleges with ag tracts and the land grant universities. Don't overlook community colleges.
- Look into winter-time conferences on farming and farmers' markets (e.g. sustainable agriculture workshops, ag university centers that host workshops, ag extension workshops, agricultural association annual meetings, Food and Nutrition Service trainings for farmers).
- Grassroots marketing - Send press releases to small local rural newspapers, agriculture publications, growers' newsletters, and extension service newsletters. Place signage in farm supply stores.

Recruit! The documents:

- Create a "recruitment packet"
 - Includes 1-to-2 pager of main highlights of the market (or your vision of the future market). Your info sheet on the market should include location/logistics, times, season, expected shoppers or past shopper and sales annual summaries, a pretty good customer "persona" or profile description of the average consumer. List types of programs you have at the market, e.g. accessibility for customers using SNAP/incentives, kid's programs, music, festivals, etc.
 - Also include established rules and regulations, an application (or website links to these things).
 - In the packet, inform the potential farmer about your market. What is it that they need to know to be convinced you will orchestrate a successful market?
 - You would include your marketing strategies.
 - Tell them in brief, what are the main requirements of a vendor (e.g. the "Roots" concept, any insurance, health permits/other permits, and the fees)
 - What is the product mix already, who might be their competition?

Recruit! Make the pitch for your market!

- Direct Contact
 - Once you find farmers, take the time to call them (in evening, after dark, or during lunch hour, when they might be in) and have a short conversation with them about your market, ask if you can send them information by email (or mail if they have no email). Follow up a couple of days later.
 - Hopefully, you can tell them that you have a friend of theirs, Farmer "B" on board, offer to come out to the farm, bring them lunch, and work alongside of them in the fields – whatever it takes!
 - Treat every farmer with your utmost targeted attention and respect, listen to them.

Recruit! Extra steps:

- Hold pre-season vendor meeting; invite those that are on the fence who may be convinced at the meeting.
- Keep in mind socially disadvantaged new beginning farmers. Possibly allow (if within your rules) small micro farmers to pair up and share a booth so they can split the costs of booth fee.