



Organizing a Cooking Demonstration at Your Farmers Market

Cooking demonstrations are a great way to add excitement to your market, highlight seasonal produce and inspire shoppers to try something new. Successful cooking demonstrations can engage customers and increase sales, but they require careful planning, dedicated staff (or volunteer) time and a modest amount of space and equipment. Here are some tips to help you get the most out of this great way to enhance your market day.

Step 1: Understand your local health department requirements and secure any necessary permits

If you intend to distribute samples of the products demonstrated at your market, you will need to make sure that you secure the necessary permits in advance, and have a complete understanding of the equipment and process required. If you plan on using a gas-fired grill or range, you may also need to secure permits from your local fire authority. Navigating the permitting process can take time, so start early in your market planning season.

It is also helpful to have someone with your market organization have their food handler's permit so that they can step in and lend a hand during demonstrations if necessary.

Step 2: Identify goals for your demonstration(s)

Defining one or two clear objectives at the beginning of your planning will guide your planning and help you communicate more clearly with staff, partners and customers.

Thinking about your market organization, community, customers and vendors, what types of demonstrations would they benefit from the most? Do you want to highlight specialty items from your vendors? Would your customers benefit from learning basic cooking techniques? Do you want to focus on meals under \$10? Kid-friendly recipes? Brainstorm a list of possible ideas and then focus on one or two.

Step 3: Establish a budget

When calculating the cost of your cooking demonstration you will need to factor in one-time expenses for things like equipment or permits as well as ingredients and disposable items like napkins or sampling cups. Don't forget to factor in printing costs to have the recipe available for customers to take with them! Work with your demonstration facilitator to select recipes that will fit within your budget for ingredients.

Step 4: Select a demonstration facilitator

Local chefs are a natural choice for conducting cooking demonstrations, but they are not the only option. Other culinary professionals such as cooking class instructors, caterers, hospital chefs or dietitians may be a good resource. You may also want to be creative in your recruiting - anyone with solid cooking experience and an engaging presentation style can do it. Do any of your farmers or vendors have a fun personality and a favorite recipe? Are there other organizations such as the local food bank, extension office or social service agency that have a similar educational mission?

Once you have identified your demonstration facilitator, work with them on the recipe selection to make sure that it utilizes ingredients that can be found at your market and meets any other goals that you have identified for your program.

In addition to the demonstration facilitator, it is also a good idea to provide them with an assistant – either member of your market staff or volunteer – who can help with set up, clean up, distribution of samples, etc.

Make sure that everyone involved understands all the necessary health department requirements for cooking demonstrations and sampling (i.e. having food handlers permit, doing prep work in an approved facility, etc.) as the regulations for farmers markets may be different than what they are familiar with.

Step 5: Promote your event

Include information about your cooking demonstration in all of your market promotional tools such as your website, newsletter or social media outlets. If you are featuring a local chef, or representative of another organization, this is a great opportunity to cross-post information on their social media channels to expand your audience.

Many local newspapers and magazines also publish weekly activity calendars both in their print and online versions. Sending out a media advisory, or, if possible, entering your information directly into their system will help you be included in these free listings.

If you are planning a series of events, or have an especially interesting person conducting the demonstration you can also send a media advisory to your local newspaper or magazines. Make sure to include all the “who, what, when, where and why” of your event.

Make sure you have signage promoting the cooking demonstration the day of your market. Letting customers know who will be presenting and what the recipe or featured product is may encourage them to extend their market stay and be more engaged in the demonstration. A few minutes before, recruit a few shoppers to be in the audience since a crowd will naturally draw others in.

You may also want to let any of your farmers who carry products featured in the recipe know about the demonstration ahead of time. Give them copies of the recipe so they can use it to help promote their sales.

Step 6: Create an event plan

To make sure everything goes smoothly the day of your demonstration, plan out each step of the process in advance. Make a list of all the supplies you will need and know where they will be stored. Identify what ingredients you can shop for in advance and what you plan on getting at the market. Will your vendors be donating product? If so, how will you recognize them during the demonstration? If you are borrowing any equipment, when will you receive it and how will it be returned?

Thinking through your demonstration step by step, writing it down and sharing with everyone involved will help avoid mistakes and promote a better experience for everyone involved.

Step 7: Deliver the cooking demonstration

Make sure to announce the demonstration a few minutes before it begins to draw an audience in. You may choose to pass the recipe out to everyone in advance, or have it available to those who are interested afterwards depending on customer preference and quantities available.

At the scheduled time, introduce the person giving the demonstration and thank them for sharing their time and talents. This is also a good time to promote any other messages related to your goals for the demonstration, or provide information about which vendors have recipe ingredients available.

The demonstration itself should be fun for everyone. Encourage the audience to ask questions, or share their reactions to the samples.

Make sure to thank your audience at the end for their participation and support of the market.

Step 8: Evaluate and improve

Evaluating the demonstration is an essential part of learning and improving for the future. Check in with your audience after the demonstration to see what they found inspiring and what was not useful to them. You can do this via a short written survey, or simply by being present, observing reactions and asking individuals for feedback.

Make sure to take notes about the process as you go so that you can refine and streamline your process for developing cooking demonstrations in the future.

For more information about planning and promoting cooking demonstrations, you may also want to refer to the following resources:

[Kansas Rural Center: *Cooking Demonstrations: Providing the Perfect Ingredients to Season Your Farmers' Market*](#)

[Arizona Nutrition Network: *Food Demonstration Guide*](#)

[Network for a Healthy California: *Food Demonstration Training Kit*](#)