




Cooking Demos at your Farmers Market

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Cooking demonstrations are a great way to engage shoppers and add excitement at your farmers market. They highlight seasonal produce, inspire shoppers to try something new, and increase sales for vendors. As with other events, cooking demos require planning, dedicated staff (or volunteer) time, partnerships, and a modest amount of space and equipment.

What are Your Goals for Your Cooking Demo?

Defining one or two clear goals at the beginning of your planning to guide your planning and help you communicate clearly with staff, partners, and shoppers.

Think about your farmers market organization, community, shoppers, and vendors, and brainstorm what types of Cooking Demonstrations would they like the most. Do you want to highlight specialty items from your vendors? Would your shoppers want to learning basic cooking techniques? Do you want to focus on meals that are simple and under \$10? Kid-friendly recipes?

Build your Cooking Demo Team

Local chefs are a natural choice for conducting cooking demonstrations. If they are not available, try other culinary professionals such as cooking class instructors, caterers, hospital chefs or even dietitians. You may also want to be creative in your recruiting and find someone with solid cooking experience and an engaging presentation style.

The overall team will need more than someone to lead the cooking part. You'll need help with outreach, permits, and logistics like setting up, handing out samples, cleaning up, tracking information, etc. The Team can include any of your farmers or

vendors who have a fun personality and a favorite recipe? Be sure to check with your local SNAP-Ed team at the Health Department or WSU Extension to find out if they can help with promotions, planning, and day-of support. Are there other organizations such as the local food bank, or social service agency that have a similar educational mission?

Once you have identified your Cooking Demo team, work together to select any recipes to feature and make sure that ingredients are in season and can be found at your market that day.

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.

WORKING WITH SNAP-ED PARTNERS

Almost every community in WA has people in who work on “SNAP-Ed” and may be able to support a Cooking Demo and other nutrition education activities at your farmers market with time and supplies. “SNAP Nutrition Education” is a federally funded program to improve health and nutrition for individuals who are eligible for SNAP. Your community partners may be part of your County Healthy Department, WSU Extension, or local nonprofits.

Your local SNAP-Ed partners can help by distributing information about your farmers market, helping to find recipes and nutrition information about ingredients, organizing kids’ activities, and being part of your cooking demonstrations team.

To find your local SNAP-Ed partners, go to <https://wasnap-ed.org/> and search based on your region. You can also ask your WSFMA Regional Lead to help connect you with SNAP-Ed partners and resources.

Establish a Budget

When creating a budget for your cooking demonstration, consider 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 for promotions or educational materials such as recipes that shoppers can take with them. You also need to decide if you are asking a chef to volunteer or if you are budgeting a stipend for their work.

Follow Local Health Department Requirements and Get Permits

If you intend to sample any of the recipes demonstrated at your farmers market, you will need get a sampling permit from your Health Department, just like your

vendors do. In many cases there is not cost, but they do need to have the application submitted prior to the event.

The Health Department's Food Inspection team will want to know your plans and make sure that food safety plans are in place. If you plan on using a propane grill or range, you may also need to follow guidance from your local fire authority (like your prepared food vendors). If you are not already a pro at local health department and fire permits, try to take care of this early in your market planning season to avoid delays.

If possible, it can be helpful to have someone in your market organization have a current Food Workers Card so that they can step in and lend a hand during demonstrations.

 **Booth Set Up Factsheet from Spokane Regional Health District**

<https://srhd.org/media/documents/Factsheet-TemporarySetUpChecklistTFEsCaterers.pdf>

 **Food Worker Card**

<https://doh.wa.gov/community-and-environment/food/food-worker-and-industry/food-worker-card>

Create Cooking Demo Plan

To make sure everything goes smoothly the day of your demonstration, plan out each step of the process. Do you want a cooking demo that lasts 20-30 minutes, or would something shorter work better for quick engagement? Make a list of all the supplies you will need and know where they will be stored. If you are borrowing any equipment, when will you receive it and how will it be returned?

Identify what ingredients you can shop for in advance and what you plan on getting at the farmers market. Will your vendors be donating ingredients or will you buy them? Either way, how will you recognize market vendors during the cooking demonstration? It goes without saying that ingredients should be seasonal and readily available at the market on the day of the cooking demo.

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.

Selecting Recipes


The length of prep time, ease of obtaining ingredients, skill level, and cost should all be considered when selecting a recipe. Recipes with shorter ingredient lists and simple preparation are easier to execute in a market setting.


When targeting SNAP eligible shoppers, try to select recipes that are 5 ingredients or less that use common staple spices and don't include oils. Washington SNAP-Ed providers can help with finding recipes and may be able to help with accessing recipes available in multiple languages.


Finding recipes that can be mostly prepared in an approved off-site facility, and finished at the market will free up the chef to have more direct interaction time with the people viewing the demo.


Have a printed recipe available for people to take home, and a QR code for people to scan linking to a resource page on your market website or the other agency website.

Where to find recipes with nutrition info:

 **SNAP-Ed Recipes** (English/Spanish/Russian): <https://wasnap-ed.org/resources/recipes/>

 **Additional SNAP-Ed Recipes** (English/Spanish): <https://wasnap-ed.org/resources/recipes/a-bite-of-snap-ed/>

 **WSDA Food Assistance:** <https://agr.wa.gov/services/food-access/hunger-relief-resources/recipes-and-nutrition-resources>

 **WSDA WA Grown Food & Recipe Kit:** <https://agr.wa.gov/departments/business-and-marketing-support/farm-to-school-toolkit/wa-grown-food-recipe-kit>

Consider adding prompts to your recipes that help improve food safety.

 **Safe Recipe Style Guide to Provide Food Safety Instructions in Recipes**
<https://www.saferecipeguide.org>

Promote your Cooking Demo

Include information about your cooking demonstration in your farmers market's usual promotional tools such as 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 shoppers 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.

To engage SNAP shoppers, work with market staff to promote the cooking demonstrations when distributing SNAP/EBT tokens and SNAP Market Match dollars. Be sure to notify staff in advance when the cooking demonstrations will be happening throughout the day. You can also have a set of recipe handouts available in various languages to share at the market information booth. Consider offering children’s activities next to the cooking demo booth to draw attention and boost engagement.

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.

Consider promoting Cooking Demo in local languages and with community groups that may not speak English.

Cooking Demo Day at the Farmers Market

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 shopper 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. Try using a small display board to list of all vendors selling the recipe ingredients.

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

market fresh produce last longer can be helpful. Be sure to thank your audience at the end for their participation and support of the market.


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 with a very 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.

Recommended Resources

 **Arizona Health Zone**
<https://www.azhealthzone.org/>

 **Effective Food Demos from the LA Public Health**
http://lapublichealth.org/nut/docs/Effective%20Food%20Demos%20training%206_30_15.pdf

 **Kansas Rural Center's *Cooking Demonstrations: Providing the Perfect Ingredients to Season Your Farmers' Market***
<https://agr.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/agr/consumers/farmersmarkets/documents/cookingdemosatthemarket.pdf>

 **Network for a Healthy California: *Food Demonstration Training Kit***
<https://centerforwellnessandnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/FoodDemoTrainingKit.pdf>

Cooking Demo Checklist

FOOD SAFETY

- Food Handlers Permit (for each cook)
- Sampling Permit for the Farmers Market (varies by County)
- Sanitizing bucket with sanitizing tablets
- Hand washing station: insulated water container, catch bucket, soap, and paper towels¹.
- Garbage can/waste basket
- Lysol wipes
- Propane outside of tent (if used), with fire extinguisher and ability to do leak test
- First aid kit
- Food handlers' gloves

SET UP

- Booth tent
- Tent weights
- Tables
- Chairs/stools
- Tablecloths, staging and decor
- Banner with bungee cords
- A-board or easel and paper
- Chalk and/or markers
- Extension cord, if applicable
- Dolly or collapsible wagon for transporting supplies, equipment

COOKING DEMO EQUIPMENT & SUPPLIES

- Serving utensils

- Sampling cups or plates
- Napkins
- Two-burner propane cooktop or electric burner
- Propane in compliance with local fire regulations
- Pots and Pans
- Cutting utensils
- Good-quality cutting board that can be sanitized.
- Salt, pepper, other common spices
- Any needed ingredients not available at the market such as cooking oil, spices, etc.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

- Name tags
- Camera and person designated to take photos
- Photo release forms (double-sided, English/Spanish)
- Participant sign in and tracking forms

NUTRITION EDUCATION

- Recipe cards in appropriate languages

KIDS ACTIVITIES

- Scavenger hunt bingo
- Prizes
- Crayons/colored pencils/scissors/pencil sharpener

Adapted from Farmers Market Flash Toolkit by WSU Skagit Extension & Cooking Demonstrations: Providing the Perfect Ingredients to Season Your Farmers' Market by Kansas Rural Center

¹ Please specific hand washing requirements here: <https://wafarmersmarkets.org/wp->

[content/uploads/2021/10/Hand-Washing-Station.pdf](https://wafarmersmarkets.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Hand-Washing-Station.pdf)