



Six Important Steps for Farmers Market Producers

Thinking of starting or expanding a farmers' market? Follow these six steps from the OSU for a successful venture.

Does the idea of producing and selling your own fruits and vegetables sound appealing to you?

With more consumers demanding fresh local food, many communities and farmers are realizing it could be the perfect time to start a farmers market or expand an existing one--as a way to sell your produce.

The USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) recently reported the total number of farmers' markets increased nearly 7 percent through August 2008, continuing an upward trend.

Before you take the plunge (or seek to attract more customers to your existing market), read these tips from the Ohio State University South Center's Business Development Network.

OSU has launched a program called "Growing! Ohio Farmers Markets" to provide no-cost consulting to farmers' market managers, vendors, producers and board members to aid in improving direct marketing efforts to the consumer. Start with a Plan.

Although farmers' markets can be a significant source of income for local producers, starting and maintaining one can be hard, says Christie Welch, OSU Extension farmers' market specialist.

"The biggest mistake people make is not carefully thinking through the logistics of managing a farmers' market," Welch says.

Staffing, marketing and location are three main factors that play an important role in the success of your farmers' market.

Staff Your Farmers' Market.

Welch says most farmers markets are staffed by volunteers. Because it is time consuming, she says it's important to find volunteers who are committed to the market.

Select a Location

Your stand needs to be in a place visible and convenient for shoppers, ideally a high-traffic area, with adequate space and handicapped accessible.

Welch suggests working with city, county and township officials, and local businesses to find a suitable location for the farmers' market.

"Some locations may charge rent, while other locations can be utilized free of charge," she said. "Some communities will allow a street to be closed on certain days and certain times to accommodate the farmers market. Some businesses will also host farmers markets within their location."

Sell Your Farmers' Market.

"Don't overlook the benefit of marketing. Developing a mission and vision statement that outlines the market's purpose and the types of products it allows is important for attracting consumers as well as vendors," Welch says. "Then develop and implement your marketing plan based on the mission of the market."

While developing your market plan, don't forget that developing a relationship with your customers is important--shoppers are not only looking for fresh, local foods, they also want to know the person behind the produce.

Welch says to invest in attractive displays, such as brochures, signs, and fact sheets to attract customers. She also suggests offering recipes or nutritional information on the products you're selling.

Be mindful of Your City's Laws and Regulations.

Welch says to invest in product and liability insurance and follow the rules and regulations set forth by the Ohio Department of Agriculture. Also, remember the requirements set by your local health department.

Maintain Good Fruits and Veggies.

Welch says most importantly, enforce a high quality for your produce.



"As a producer, be sure to choose a farmers' market that fits with your individual goal, but also meets the needs of the target customers," Welch said.

Visit these sites for more helpful resources: Ohio MarketMaker -- a free Web-based tool that connects farmers with consumers; 740-289-2071

Growing! Ohio Farmers Markets Program; 740-289-2071, ext. 234