Farmers Market Vending

A GUIDE FOR INDIANA SPECIALTY CROP PRODUCERS

Indiana Cooperative Development Center

Indiana Cooperative Development Center
225 S. East St., Suite 737 • Indianapolis, IN 46202 • 317-692-7707 • www.icdc.coop

Purdue Extension
www.extension.purdue.edu

Edited by Dave Gutknecht and designed by Pat Thompson, Triangle Park Creative

COVER PHOTOS
TOP: COURTESY OF VISITBLOOMINGTON.COM
BOTTOM: PAT THOMPSON

ALL FARMERS MARKET PHOTOS INSIDE ARE FROM THE BLOOMINGTON COMMUNITY FARMERS MARKET UNLESS NOTED OTHERWISE

Farmers Market Vending

A GUIDE FOR INDIANA SPECIALTY CROP PRODUCERS

Written by Jessica Merzdorf, Local Foods Program, and
Jodee Ellett, Local Foods Coordinator, Purdue Extension

Published by Indiana Cooperative Development Center

INDIANA
cooperative development center inc.

www.icdc.coop

This publication was funded by a Specialty Crop Block Grant

through the USDA Agricultural Marketing Services

PHOTO FROM THE EAST BLOOMINGFOODS FARMERS MARKET BY ELLEN MICHEL

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER 1: **Are You Ready to Sell at a Farmers Market?** 3
- Things to consider 3

CHAPTER 2: **Identifying Markets in Your Area** 6
- Choosing a market 6

CHAPTER 3: **Selecting Your Specialty Crop Product** 9
- Assessing the field 9
- Specialty crop categories 9
- Things to consider 10
- Product diversification 11

CHAPTER 4: **Joining a Market and Learning the Rules** 13
- The market handbook 13
- The market master 15
- Other vendors 15

CHAPTER 5: **Legal Issues** 16
- Insurance 16
- Certifications 17
- Taxes 18
- WIC, SNAP, and SFMNP 19
- Safety 20
- Invasive species 20

CHAPTER 6: **Going to Market** 21
Structural design 21
Aesthetic design 23
Product packaging 25
Information and education 27
Packing up for market 27

CHAPTER 7: **Making a Sale** 28
Payment options 28
Display your price 28
Cost of production 28
Price competition 29
Quality of product 29
Product premiums 30
Bargains and discounts 30
Donations 31

CHAPTER 8: **Professionalism and Vendor Behavior** 32
First impressions 32
Sales etiquette 34
Educating customers 35
Money 36

CHAPTER 9: **Giving Back** 37
Why should I give back? 37
How can I give back? 38

APPENDIX A: **Expenses for Attending a Market** 40

APPENDIX B: **Additional Resources** 41

BIBLIOGRAPHY 42

Introduction

Farmers markets offer vendors a unique public setting for themselves and their products.

Farmers markets offer valuable services and opportunities for growers and producers as well as their customers and communities. As the United States continues to battle high rates of obesity, diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease, national attention is focused on what foods we are eating and where they come from. Health authorities on the federal, state, and local levels are encouraging consumers to make healthier choices in what they eat, specifically choosing more fresh fruits and vegetables—especially those grown locally.

In the last five years, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has launched the Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food program and the Farmers Market Promotion Program to fund and support better connections between consumers and growers for the distribution of fresh, healthy food (Merrigan, 2012). And the programs seem to be working—since 2008, the number of farmers markets nationwide has increased by 40 percent, and in Indiana, the number has doubled between 2009 and 2012 (USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, 2012). For Hoosier farmers interested in selling their products at a market, the time to begin may never be better.

PHOTO FROM THE EAST BLOOMINGFOODS FARMERS MARKET BY ELLEN MICHEL

For growers and producers, farmers markets expose their products to a wider market and gain word-of-mouth advertising, and they also encourage formation of networks with other vendors and offer benefits from face-to-face interactions with a variety of customers. Many vendors develop a brand and a "look" for their products and their market stand, which gives their farm an identity and boosts visibility (Cottin, 2013).

Perhaps most importantly, farmers markets strengthen a sense of community and friendship among the farmers who grow the products and the neighbors for whom they grow them. In their beautifully poetic work, *The Farmers' Market Book*, Jennifer Robinson and J.A. Hartenfeld put it this way:

Farmers markets strengthen a sense of community and friendship among the farmers who grow the products and the neighbors for whom they grow them.

> [I]n this time of virtual reality, screen-mediated experience, and air-conditioned isolation, people all over the United States gather weekly, out in the weather, with neighbors and strangers, to experience local community. At farmers' markets, customers and vendors, performers and pamphleteers meet neighbors, face to face and with the contrast, confirmation, and responsibility that contact implies (p. 1).

The present manual is designed for farmers just beginning the process of entering a farmers market, for farmers who have been selling at markets for many years, and for farmers whose experience lies anywhere in between. Navigating the regulations and marketing strategies of successfully selling at farmers markets can be a challenge to new growers who seek to begin selling their specialty crops in this venue, and for this reason, the Indiana Cooperative Development Center commissioned the creation of a manual containing the information that these growers need: how to select a market, meet all applicable rules and regulations, appropriately promote and price their products, provide superior customer service, and process WIC and other payments.

We hope that this manual will serve as a resource not only to help producers successfully begin selling at farmers markets, but also to help experienced vendors increase sales and improve relationships with their customers.

CHAPTER 1

Are You Ready to Sell at a Farmers Market?

With the many benefits associated with selling at a farmers market, it may seem easy to see why many farmers are choosing to branch out into this market. But before getting started, it is important to take stock and make sure you are actually prepared to begin. Not only do you need to have a product that is marketable and that you are passionate about, but you also need to ensure that you are able to make the weekly commitment of time, money, and resources that farmers markets require. There are certain personal characteristics that can be very helpful, such as a love of teaching and interacting with others. Finally, it is important to evaluate your objectives for selling at a farmers market,and to make sure that they are realistic and attainable in a reasonable amount of time.

By making sure that your goals and abilities are aligned before you move into this kind of marketing, you will greatly improve your chances of having a successful business.

One of your most important jobs as a farmers market vendor is to teach consumers about the products that you sell.

PHOTO BY ELLEN MICHEL

Things to consider

Do you like to talk and teach about your product? When you get to the farmers market, one of the most important parts of your job will be talking with customers who are curious about your product—what it is, where it came from, how it was grown or made, and how they can use it—and encouraging them to buy it. Customers may come into your booth with many questions, or they may just want to chat about your table or your farming experience. Does this sound like something that you would enjoy, or would it be burdensome?

Do you have a unique or new product, or products that are more common? If you intend to sell products that may not be familiar to market customers, you will need to be ready to provide information or personally teach the customers curious enough to try your product. If you are selling a product that is not unique, you will need to determine how to set yourself apart to entice the customer to your booth.

How far would you have to travel to the farmers market that is the best fit for you? Keep in mind that you will almost certainly have to travel to reach a farmers market. Are you willing to have a regularly scheduled traveling commitment? If so, how far are you willing to drive? How much would fuel cost, and how much time could you commit?

Are you ready to begin selling this year? Selling at farmers markets is a time-consuming, labor-intensive task. You will be spending time away from the farm—transporting products, setting up your booth, providing customer service, and driving back home—and you may not always get the return on your products that you would like. Are you ready to make this kind of an investment this season? Would it be better to take a year to plan your crops and marketing strategy and be ready for the next year? Or do you have the time and resources to get started right away?

Do you want to sell seasonally (part-time) or year-round (full-time)? If you are lucky enough to live near a year-round farmers market, you have the opportunity to sell your products when there is less competition. Winter markets can be very well attended, and if you have the potential to extend your growing season and/or offer an approved value-added product, this may be a wonderful option for your farming business.

Advice to a *new* market vendor

Farmers markets are a great place to find other people who share your interest and enthusiasm for a certain product, for a style of farming, or for a whole way of life.

What are your objectives for selling at a farmers market?

What is it about the concept of selling at a market that is attractive to you? What do you hope to accomplish while selling at the market? At the end of the day, what do you want your market to be about?

There are many correct answers to these questions, and your goals and objectives may be different from those of your fellow vendors. In the end, your farm is your business, and you know best how to make it tick.

Here are some common objectives that you may want to consider as you plan your business:

To make money. Many farmers market vendors, when asked about their objectives in selling at a market, will quickly joke, "Not making money!" Nevertheless, it *is* possible to make a profit with your market stand. Just as with any other small business, making a profit will require the right combination of a quality product, customer demand, skillful marketing, appropriate pricing, assertive networking and customer service, and hard work; and it may take several seasons.

To promote your farm or farm business. Bringing your brand and

product to a farmers market will give them the chance to be noticed by consumers and other growers who may not have otherwise known about your product. If your goal is to make your products or farm business more visible in your community, then selling at a farmers market may be a good move.

To connect with customers and vendors. Farmers markets are a great place to find other people who share your interest and enthusiasm—for a certain product, for a style of farming, or for a whole way of life. Taking your product and passion to a farmers market can be a great way to make these kinds of personal and professional connections, not only with consumers, but with other vendors and market masters as well.

To meet other vendors in your region. Maybe you are new to your region or would simply appreciate the chance to get better acquainted with other growers in your region. Getting together regularly at markets may be a good way to build your growing community.

To help build your community's local food networks. Advocates from the USDA and elsewhere are stressing the importance of building and expanding farmers markets and other food networks as a way to strengthen local economies and give consumers access to fresher, healthier foods (Hornick and Wasserman, 2012). You may want to contribute to this effort by offering fresh, healthy food at a market and investing your profit in the local economy. If this is your goal, you will want to look for a market that shares your passion, rather than a more profit- or pleasure-driven market.

PHOTO FROM THE EAST BLOOMINGFOODS FARMERS MARKET BY ELLEN MICHEL

To sell your food. Sometimes your goal for selling at a farmers market may be as simple as a desire to share the food you enjoy growing in your garden. If this is your goal, you may be able to take a more casual approach to your marketing and promotion, especially if you don't plan to sell large quantities of products.

You may have only one of these goals, or you may wish to pursue some facets of each or some goals of your own. Whatever your objectives are, it is important to keep them in mind as you start and build your business, because your objectives will determine how you plan and conduct your business.

CHAPTER 2

Identifying Markets in Your Area

Once you have made the decision to sell your products at a farmers market, the next step is to identify a market in your region. Fortunately, there are a variety of resources you can use to locate a market that is within driving distance and that aligns with your vision and goals for your business. (See the "Resources" sidebar below.)

Choosing a market

Once you have located a reasonably close market, there are several things to consider before sending in your application.

How do you like this market? When you visit the market, can you see yourself and your products there? Does this market align with your goals and vision? For example, if you are primarily interested in meeting others

RESOURCES

Several federal- and state-level agencies maintain databases of information on farmers markets in Indiana, which you can use to locate a market in your area:

Indiana State Department of Agriculture: This database is searchable by city, county, type of market, and what products are acceptable to sell at each market. www.in.gov/apps/ISDA_FarmersMarket/index.aspx

Indiana Market Maker: This online tool for matching buyers and sellers is an amazing resource for finding markets for your products, including farmers market locations. http://in.marketmaker.uiuc.edu

United States Department of Agriculture Agricultural Marketing Service: This database is searchable by distance from location, available products, payment accepted, and market type; and it may be filtered to show which markets sell in winter. The database also provides phone and email information for the designated state contact for farmers markets. http://search.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets/default.aspx

Extension agent: Visit your local Extension educator to request information on markets in your area. www.extension.purdue.edu

PHOTO BY ELLEN MICHEL

in your community and making a little money on the side, a large, formally organized market may be too intense for you—you may find a smaller, more casual market to be a better fit. In addition to reading the market manual and online information, it is recommended that you talk to the market master to get a feel for what it would be like to sell there.

How is this market managed? When you talk to the market master or administrator, ask about the management vision for the market. Many specialty crop growers are discouraged by markets that seem to turn into flea markets. This can be a problem for farmers because the customers who come to the market aren't there to buy fresh, local food. On the other hand, is there too much competition for your product? If there are more than 100 vendors, are there rules for entering the market (such as credit through a point system or years attended)? Does the market actively manage the number of similar products offered?

How will your product fit in? Another factor to consider is whether there seems to be a need for your product at this market. Are there other

vendors already specializing in the same or similar products? If so, what will set your product apart from theirs? Are you confident enough in this to take the risk and sell alongside them, or would it be better to select a different product or a different market?

How will you need to act? Next, look at the basic rules of the market and make sure you will be able to comply with them. Some markets have certain product restrictions, preferred growing practices, or geographic policies and only admit vendors who align with their vision. Most markets have a "sell your own product" policy as well, which means you can only sell the products that you raise on your farm, subject to verification by the market administration. If you plan to supplement your products with items purchased from other farmers, you will need to ensure that this is allowed. These policies are in place to ensure fair sales among vendors.

TRAVEL COSTS

One-Way Distance to Market	Fuel Cost per Market Visit
20 miles	$10
100 miles	$46

How far away is it? With volatile prices in fuel, it is important to consider the distance to the market as a part of your expenses. At left is a table to demonstrate cost based on a 15-mpg vehicle with gas at $3.50 per gallon.

Consider whether you will be attending the market once weekly, twice weekly, or every day—each scenario would have an effect on your budget. How much of your market profit will be used on gas prices? Is this amount worth it to you?

Some markets have rules about from how far from the market your farm can be. Check your market manual and make sure you live within the distance limit.

How much will it cost? Most farmers markets charge a fee for you to sell there. This can vary from a per-week fee, to hours worked at the market, to $500 per season. How much does it cost to sell at the market you are considering? Are you willing to pay this amount? Is there a full-season commitment or a more casual weekly availability?

CHAPTER 3

Selecting Your Specialty Crop Product

This chapter will cover the most important part of your farmers market plan: your product. Consumers have many different places they could go to purchase the products they are looking for—your product must be good enough to make them want to buy it from *you*.

Assessing the field

What can you grow? Clearly, this is the place to start when choosing your product. There may be high consumer demand for a certain product in your area, but if your land prevents you from growing this crop at a high-quality level, perhaps there are better choices. Are you able to grow a consistent product throughout the growing season? This strategy is important for repeat customers. This may mean investing in irrigation, protected agriculture (hoophouses, row covers), or other methods of extending your crop and protecting its quality.

What is currently selling at your farmers market? If you are preparing to sell at a larger market, such as the Bloomington Farmers Market, there will likely be a directory of vendors available online for you to research and see what other vendors are growing. It is also a good idea to talk to your market manager about what kinds of products he or she would like to see sold at the market, and whether your product will be a good fit.

What are customers looking for at your market? What kinds of customers does this market attract? Is it a multicultural urban market, attracting families and young professionals looking for a "greener" lifestyle? Or is it a small rural market primarily geared toward older, retired customers? You will likely be able to sell kohlrabi at the first market, but you may have a harder time marketing it at the second. Consider your audience when choosing your product.

Advice to a *new* market vendor

Diversify your product offerings to reach a larger variety of customers and give yourself some protection against bad weather or crop failure.

Specialty crop categories

The USDA defines *specialty crops* as "fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, and horticulture and nursery crops, including floriculture." This

manual will only cover products that fall into one of these categories; however, there are a wide variety of nonspecialty crops, value-added products, crafts, and other products that can be sold at farmers markets as well. A complete list of specialty crops can be found at www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/scbgpdefinitions. Talk to your market manager about what types of products are allowed at your market.

Things to consider

Have you grown this product before? Are you familiar with it? Has it grown well for you in the past? Do you feel able to reliably produce enough of your product every week to maintain a good supply?

What can you get for your product? If there are vendors selling a similar product at your market, how much are they charging? How much should you charge to turn a profit? (Pricing considerations and strategies will be covered in more detail in Chapter 7.)

How can you add value to your product? There are many more ways to sell your products beyond unprocessed fruits and vegetables—for example, making your apples into premade apple pies. This process is called adding value.

VALUE-ADDED PRODUCTS

Because most value-adding techniques are regulated in both what you may sell and what kinds of preparation you may use, it is important to make sure you are following all applicable rules at the market, local, state, and federal levels.

Using a Home Kitchen to Prepare Food for Sale: www.extension.purdue.edu/extmedia/FS/FS-18-W.pdf

The Indiana State Department of Health has information regarding state and county rules as well at www.state.in.us/isdh/21054.htm

PHOTO BY ELLEN MICHEL

PHOTO BY ELLEN MICHEL

Product diversification

In standard business language, to *diversify* means to offer a wider variety of products, sometimes even unrelated ones, in hopes of increasing the company's customer base and earnings. Your farmers market stand may not be a multinational corporation, but diversifying your product offerings is still a good idea. Not only will you be able to reach a larger variety of customers, but you also will give yourself some protection against bad weather or crop failure. If you lose your spinach crop, you may not lose your strawberries, for example (Johnny's Selected Seeds, 2011).

There are a variety of different dimensions in which you can diversify your products. Some dimensions you might want to consider include crop, variety, time, geography, marketing, and enterprise.

Crop. When you diversify by crop, you simply sell a variety of different crops—for example, your specialty may be salad greens, but you might expand your sales if you offered onions, tomatoes, or herbs along with your greens—especially since many of these vegetables go together well.

Advice to a *new* market vendor

Customers are trusting and want to trust your product as well as your information. Be sure you understand your product and have accurate information to share on market day.

Variety. Perhaps you would rather stay with your greens. Could you offer different varieties of greens to keep your selection fresh and interesting? For example, greens such as spinach grow best in cooler weather, so in many latitudes they will not grow in the summer; however, you can grow other varieties such as Malabar and New Zealand spinach that thrive in hot weather, and by doing so keep your products consistent and your sales up.

Time. It is a good idea to stagger your plantings so you always have fresh products ready to sell—this is called succession planting. Different ways to utilize succession planting include:

- Planting several crops with different maturity times
- Planting the same variety but spacing the plantings apart by several weeks
- Extending the season by using greenhouses and other structures

Geography. "Your farm may have several microclimates based on topography, or you may have fields with different types of soil," says the *JSS Advantage* newsletter. "You may be able to get an early crop from a south-facing field, which warms earlier, or keep a cool crop going longer by planting in a field that gets some afternoon shade. You may be able to split production between two separate pieces of land, such as at a farm in the country and a backyard in town. Some growers rent land away from their home farms to take advantage of specific growing conditions such as soil type or wind protection" (2011).

Marketing. There are many different ways to get your produce into the hands of consumers who are eager to buy it, and farmers markets are just one option. You could also sell at natural food stores or local gourmet restaurants, begin a community-supported agriculture (CSA) operation, set up a roadside stand, or connect with a wholesaler in your area. It may be more profitable for you to diversify by selling in a few of these different markets rather than concentrating on one.

Enterprise. There are a variety of ways to use your farm to increase your income that are not directly related to your produce. These can be as simple as making handcrafts or baked goods to sell, or as elaborate as starting a wedding venue or restaurant on your farm. By being creative and willing to experiment with alternate ways to use your land and products, you may be able to develop additional business ventures that will not only bring in extra income, but also help spread the word about your primary business of selling produce.

CHAPTER 4

Joining a Market and Learning the Rules

One customer's favorite vendor qualities:

- shaded areas to purchase
- prices labeled
- storytelling qualities about products
- offering advice on how to prepare the product (recipes)
- being friendly

Every properly regulated farmers market will have rules about who is allowed to join and what they are allowed to sell. You will have to complete an application process in order to be considered for joining, and if you are selected, you likely will be asked to sign a contract and provide documentation of your insurance. You may also have to comply with rules on parking, charging sales tax, becoming a certified food handler, submitting to inspections of your farm and/or production facilities, and any other type of regulation or certification that your market requires.

Applying to join a farmers market may sound daunting, but the good news is that most markets have their rules and regulations put together in a manual or on a website. In this chapter, we will discuss where you can find your market's rules and get a feel for how your market master likes your market to be run.

There are three ways you can get information about your market's rules and expectations—through the market handbook, by contacting your market master directly, and by talking with other vendors.

The market handbook

Virtually every market will have a market handbook, containing all of the information that vendors will need to sell at that market. It may be a physical book, or it may be a PDF document that you can download from the website. Some of the information your handbook likely will include is:

How to join the market. It may not seem intuitive, but in fact, most markets have strict regulations on who is allowed to join and what they are allowed to sell. This section of the manual will help you know what standards your market has for potential vendors and what you need to do to apply, including getting the appropriate permits and certifications, having your facilities inspected, and paying any fees the market requires.

How the market works. What this looks like will vary by market and handbook, but generally speaking the handbook also will tell you a little

PHOTO FROM THE EAST BLOOMINGFOODS FARMERS MARKET BY ELLEN MICHEL

about the market and what it will be like for you to sell there if you are accepted.

Market standards and practices. Some markets have rules of their own in addition to statewide regulations—for example, on whether you are allowed to use glass or plastic packaging, if you are allowed to distribute samples, how and where you are allowed to park your vehicle, and how you are allowed to use water and electricity. The market handbook will detail these rules.

Payment through SNAP, WIC, and SFMNP. Some larger farmers markets help equip their vendors to handle payment through federal and state assistance programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or the Women, Infants, and Children program (WIC), or the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP). The handbook will let you know if your market does accept payment from these programs and, if so, what you need to do to prepare.

Market dates and times. Information about when and where the

market meets may be found in the handbook, or it may be found online, where it can be updated more easily. Either way, your market will have clearly indicated the times and days when you would be expected to be there.

Space reservations. Last but not least, the handbook likely will explain the process for determining whose booth will go where. Many websites will also include a diagram of where each booth is located.

The market master

When you have questions about the daily operation of the market or more abstract questions about the market's direction and goals, you likely will be best served by talking to the market master. The market master is the person who is responsible for interpreting, implementing, and sometimes creating the market's policies. He or she sets the tone for the market through standards, goals, and marketing styles. While he or she may refer you to the handbook for specifics regarding the application process and requirements, more than likely he or she will be happy to talk with you about the market itself and what you could expect if you were accepted to sell there.

Robin Pickett, one of the market masters at the Sagamore West Farmers Market in West Lafayette.

Other vendors

Other sources of firsthand information about the market are the other vendors themselves. If you are assigned a space at the market, you will see your vendor neighbors every week. There can be good camaraderie among vendors as well as tension. It is wise to listen to and be mindful of your experienced neighbors as you talk so they understand you, your farm, and your products. During the market, it can be difficult to find a moment to talk with your market neighbor, so before market start is a nice time to meet and catch up with other vendors. Buying their products and talking about issues on the farm are welcome topics for growers.

CHAPTER 5

Legal Issues

While there certainly is some romance in the concept of bringing your lovingly raised produce to a friendly gathering and sharing it with your neighbors, farmers markets are very practically governed by rules and regulations for production, presentation, and practice. The most important reason for this is to protect consumers by regulating the safety and quality of the products. It would be a shame for a customer to become ill from something he or she had consumed at the market—and if that product came from your booth, you could face discipline or legal action.

In this chapter, we'll talk about some possible certification requirements and safety regulations that your market may have, as well as pertinent taxes and laws regarding invasive species. We will also discuss the benefits and processes of accepting payment through WIC, SNAP, the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program, and other state and federal agencies.

For a list of the resources consulted for this section, see Appendix B.

Insurance

Once you begin selling your products to customers, you will need product liability insurance.

Some farmers markets carry insurance for the vendors at the market, while others do not. It is important to understand how the insurance you have at your farm does or does not cover selling your product at a farmers market. Most insurance policies that farmers carry are for property or injury related to on-farm activities. Once you begin selling your products to customers, you will need product liability insurance. This is a topic to discuss with your insurance agent to ensure he or she understands your activities and that you are properly covered. Some policies can cost $100 for $1 million in coverage, so the peace of mind gained is worth the expense.

Here is an example of a situation that could have been avoided with proper insurance (Kochenburger, 2011):

> If a claim is brought against you, you will need to hire a lawyer to defend you. Even if you are not liable for the injury, legal fees and other costs can be extremely high. Case Study: Years ago, a

Massachusetts woman scraped her leg on a produce basket at a farmers market. The scrape required no medical attention, but the woman filed a claim against the market seeking $25,000 in damages. The Massachusetts market had an insurance policy that covered the claim and the cost of defense. Moral of the story? You do not want to pay $25,000 out of pocket. Get an insurance policy.

Certifications

Certification requirements vary from market to market, so you should consult your market handbook to see what your market requires. Two certifications you may want to pursue regardless of your market's requirements include a certified Legal for Trade scale and the ability to label your products as "organic."

Legal for Trade scale. Products that are sold by weight are required in every state to be weighed using a scale that has been certified as Legal for Trade. This means the type and model of scale has been reviewed by the National Conference on Weights and Measures and found to be accurate enough for use in business. Because Legal for Trade requirements are part of state law, most markets will require that your scale be certified if you are selling products by weight.

Sometimes the official will come to the market, others will want you to bring the scale to their office in the county. Once your scale passes inspection, the official will put a sticker on your scale. If your scale does not pass inspection, you will need to calibrate it. These officials will not calibrate your scale for you, but they may offer information on where and how you can do this.

Organic labeling. If you sell $5,000 or less of your produce each year, and you follow the exact protocols of the National Organic Program (NOP), you can label your product "organic." However, if you are selling more than $5,000 annually, you will need to become "USDA Certified Organic" in order for you to use the official USDA organic label for your farm products. See this link for federal rules on the NOP: www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/nop. This process can take three years, and there are strict protocols on products you use for weed management, insect control, compost application, and more. A helpful outline of the

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

The Indiana Weights and Measures Program is administered by the state Department of Health. The Weights and Measures official in your county will need to inspect your scale before you begin using it at the market.

To contact your local Weights and Measures Official, see: www.in.gov/isdh/23288.htm.

PHOTO BY ELLEN MICHEL

process can be found on the Purdue website: https://ag.purdue.edu/hla/fruitveg/Pages/OrganicVegProd.aspx.

Naturally grown. Certified Naturally Grown (CNG) is a certification program that identifies a set of growing practices, similar to certified organic, required for participation in the program. The process is called a Participatory Guarantee System, where certified farmers peer-review farmers applying to the program. The CNG program is not administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and continues to be an excellent alternative to the organic labeling program for small farms selling at farmers markets. As of 2013, there are 700 farms in 47 states in the CNG program: www.naturallygrown.org.

Taxes

Taxes that apply to farmers markets may vary from county to county, so you will need to check and see which apply in your county. Your business structure (for example, sole proprietorship or limited liability company) will affect your taxes as well. We have provided some general guidelines in this

manual, but for specific information, visit the Indiana New and Small Business Education Center at www.in.gov/dor/3939.htm.

Sales tax. In the state of Indiana, farmers market vendors are not required to register with the Indiana State Department of Revenue or charge sales tax, as long as they sell only food products not intended for immediate consumption (i.e., raw fruits and vegetables). Vendors who do sell products for immediate consumption (e.g., grilled veggie sandwich, soup, candy) or who sell arts and crafts items must register, charge, and report sales tax.

Food and beverage tax. If you are exempt from charging sales tax, by law you are also exempt from paying Indiana's food and beverage tax. Qualifying to pay sales tax may or may not mean you have to pay the food and beverage tax, however, so be sure to check with the Department of Revenue if you aren't certain. You can find contact information for your district's office at www.in.gov/dor/3390.htm.

WIC, SNAP, and SFMNP

There are several federal- and state-level aid programs that may be part of your farmers market program:

Women, Infants, and Children Program (WIC). WIC is a federal grant program that helps states to provide supplemental food, medical referrals, and nutrition and health education to low-income women and at-risk children. Recipients use these funds through the Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) system, using a card much like a debit card rather than paper vouchers.

Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP). The SFMNP program provides supplemental checks to low-income senior citizens so that they can purchase produce from farmers markets.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). SNAP is similar to WIC, in that it uses EBT cards to distribute funds for food to people living at or below the poverty line. This program is for anyone who meets the program's requirements, however, not just mothers or children.

Farmers market vendors can accept these EBT and SFMNP funds by applying for a license from the USDA Foods and Nutrition program, after which time they can apply for and receive an EBT terminal to use at their stand. Generally, the farmers market manager will enroll in the program since it involves some upfront investment. It has been dem-

SNAP RESOURCES

The USDA handbook for processing SNAP funds is located at www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5085298.

You can find more details about the EBT application process at www.fns.usda.gov/ebt/learn-about-snap-benefits-farmers-markets.

onstrated that markets that process and accept EBT payments increase both consumer access to fresh produce and vendor sales and revenue.

If you are interested in accepting EBT funds at the market, you can begin by contacting your market master and seeing whether your market has an official policy or already has an EBT terminal.

Safety

Some farmers markets may recommend that you be trained in Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) or Good Handling Practices (GHPs). Purdue Extension offers regular six-hour training sessions on GAP, and it may be possible for you to take a shorter version created for market farmers. For ongoing information on this subject, please check with your County Extension educator.

Invasive species

The Indiana Invasive Species Council maintains a list of plant and animal species labeled "invasive," or non-native and harmful to the environment in Indiana. These species are forbidden to be grown or kept anywhere in the state, due to their serious threat to the environment if they should be allowed to spread. If you are selling bedding plants for gardens, please ensure that you are not including plants from the invasive species list. Many markets specifically forbid these sales.

The Indiana Invasive Species Council list of invasive species is online at www.entm.purdue.edu/iisc/invasiveplants.php.

CHAPTER 6

Going to Market

Congratulations—you've applied and been accepted into the farmers market of your choice! Now it is time to get your products, equipment, and vehicle ready for market day. In this section, we will discuss how to plan the overall "look and feel" of your business in order to attract customers, and then we will look at what kinds of equipment you will need and how to set up your booth on market day.

Advice to a *new* market vendor

Your booth should be inviting and recognizable—that way you entice new customers and keep your repeat customers.

Structural design

If you have a reserved space at the farmers market, you will return to the same space every week to set up your market booth. This can help you design a tent and table setup to best utilize the qualities of your space. If you will be in a different location every week, you can put together your setup and adapt it to the changing spaces. Here are some different considerations:

Sunlight. During the market day, where is the sun? If you are at a morning market, do you start the day with sun and finish in the shade? Perhaps your booth is sunny or shady all day. Depending on what products you are selling, you will want to be prepared to protect them from the sun in some way. For example, if you are selling leafy greens, sunlight can wilt them very quickly, as can hot weather. You can bring a spray bottle, shade your product, and bag your greens and put ice underneath to help keep them fresh. Having a cooler for transportation will also allow you to display just a few bags of greens at a time, keeping the rest fresh and cool.

If you need to purchase a pop-up shade tent, they come in different sizes, so be sure yours fits your booth allotment. They are available online and in most local sporting goods stores. Your market master may require that you weigh down your tent as well for safety purposes. Other growers have many creative solutions for this, including using old weights, filling PVC pipe with cement with hooks and hanging them, using sandbags, etc. Look around for possible solutions from your vendor neighbors.

Vehicle. Does your market space allow you to sell from your truck

PHOTO FROM THE BLOOMINGTON FARMERS MARKET BY ADAM SOMMER, WWW.VISITFLYOVERCOUNTRY.COM

or van? If so, your booth setup and cleanup can be quite efficient. You could consider constructing a display using your vehicle or set up a display off your vehicle, using it for storage.

Accessible. Is your booth accessible for everyone? When you are displaying your products, keep in mind how you want people to choose their purchases. Will they be picking them up and putting them on the scale, or do you choose the product and bag it for them? Some folks are in wheelchairs or are children, so you will want to keep them in mind. Do customers have to walk into your booth to look at your products, or are the products easily seen by shoppers strolling the market lane? Most shoppers are accustomed to having a table of product between you and them and are less comfortable walking into a booth to shop.

Your place. Where will you be during the market? Do you have room to stand and have something to sit on for short breaks? Do you have room for another person to help you in your booth? What about the product that is not displayed, or your transport containers? It is important to know where you will be standing, weighing, taking money, and packaging your customers' purchases to best design your space for maximum efficiency.

Background. Are you surrounded by other vendors? Do you have nothing behind you, or have the sun coming in? Perhaps you want a background to your booth. Do you have a larger hanging sign, or a fabric cloth that can hang from the back of your tent? That can give your booth more of a "shop" feel and can be inviting for customers.

Shelving. Are you able to make your booth more accessible by creating tiers to display your products? Cinder blocks and boards with a tablecloth on top can make a very nice efficient use of a small booth space.

Product containers. How can you display your products and keep them fresh throughout the market? Perhaps you like the look of the bushel baskets but need to keep your product in water. Can you use a tub inside of the basket to employ both? Do you really want your beautiful farm products displayed in plastic tubs? For safety purposes, your containers should not be

Grocery stores work hard to make their products look clean, uniform, and fresh. How are you presenting those qualities in your products?

the same containers from the field. Best practices recommend that you harvest in one container, prepare your product, and then transport/display your product in a different, clean container that does not go to the field.

Aesthetic design

Consider the look and feel of your booth. Do you want a country kitchen look? Modern café or grocery look? Earthy colors? No matter your choice, your booth should be inviting and recognizable—that way you entice new customers and keep your repeat customers. Grocery stores work hard to make their products look clean, uniform, and fresh. How are you presenting those qualities in your products? What components are involved in achieving the look you want?

Colors. Do you have a farm logo? Perhaps you should work with those colors in your booth. What colors are your products? Are you selling leafy greens? Perhaps you want a red tablecloth. Selling tomatoes? Red is probably not the best choice. Not only should you consider the tablecloth, but also your signs, information handouts, tent color, shelving, product containers, and vehicle.

PHOTO BY ELLEN MICHEL

Dimension. Are you able to display your products on multiple levels? Choosing shelving and creative container displays can enhance your booth space and create an inviting look. Are you able to vend on a corner space? Three-sided? If you are the only person in your booth, how can you maximize the amount of display and still accommodate your customers? This is something that can progress throughout the season and years as you figure out what works best for your farm products.

Farm name or brand. Do you have a name for your farm? Perhaps this was something you thought of for many years before selling at the market. Now is the time to begin "branding"your farm name and perhaps creating a logo or sign to ensure customers recognize your farm products. Online you can find a number of

product labeling companies, and some will even assist with your logo design. You may even have a local printing shop that can produce a number of these items for your business. What sort of branding items are available?

- Tent or truck sign—these are becoming more and more feasible as prices become cheaper and graphics become better. Don't plan for a front tablecloth-style sign, since it could spend most of the market day hidden by shoppers' legs!
- Stamp—if you package anything in paper bags, you can purchase an inexpensive, pre-inked stamp that will get you through thousands of bags.
- Stickers—these can be stuck to most anything that the customer takes home, including plastic or paper bags, boxes, bouquet wraps, plant pots, twist ties, and paper handouts.
- Business cards/brochures—sometimes a customer wants further information about your farm or is asking for advice. A stack of business cards or brochures with your name and information provides a nice item to hand to the customer. You can also pop them into your packaging bags or boxes as you are handing over the customers' purchases.

Markets can be busy, and customers tend to walk down the middle until something catches their eye.

Signs. Are your customers able to easily shop your booth before approaching? Markets can be busy, and customers tend to walk down the middle until something catches their eye. We are drawn to information as we make purchase decisions, and a well-labeled booth can be a welcome sight to a market shopper. Your signs can identify prices and names of products, but they can also help your customer understand how your product is grown (see Chapter 5 for organic or naturally grown labeling). You can also notify a customer of bulk discounts, events at your farm, additional sales outlets for your farm products, or cooking advice. For example: "Ask me how to cook this!" Perhaps you would like to have a clever sign with a new saying each week to bring the savvy market customers back to your booth out of curiosity. As with everything in your market booth, there is a balance. You have to choose what information is most important to your customer and ensure that those signs are crafted well and properly displayed. A sign to remind customers that they need to wash your products before consuming may be

PHOTO BY ELLEN MICHEL

PHOTO FROM THE INDIANAPOLIS FARMERS MARKET BY CHANDRA FLACK

a nice addition next to your scale or where you package their product. Perhaps you have other safety information that you would like to share? Some signs you can create before the market, while others will need to be written once you are there. Whatever you choose to communicate with your signs, ensure that you have a way of keeping your signs attached to your booth, no matter the wind speed.

Your attire. You are part of your market booth, and it is important that you give the impression of a professional, trustworthy grower and seller of quality farm products. You do not want to offend your potential customers with clothing such as political buttons, provocative lines, or controversial themes. Do you want to wear your best overalls, or a kitchen apron? Perhaps you have a favorite shirt, but what does the front of your shirt say? Is it clean? Do you need a jacket or hat for weather? Perhaps what you wear can be an attraction for customers or a conversation piece? What about having some t-shirts made with your farm logo or farm name on it? Perhaps you can make others and sell them?

Product packaging

You want your customer to get home with a usable product and be happy with their purchase. Dumping your hand-picked blackberries in a plastic bag will not get that product home intact—and your customer will remember this. They are less likely to pay a good price for a product that is damaged when they get home. Consequently, packaging is a very important part of your business.

How do you package your products? What are your considerations? Where do you purchase packaging? What about sustainability issues? There are many considerations for packaging your farm products, and a lot of time can be spent finding packaging materials that meet your product needs, ethical criteria, as well as your budget. For example, you may be very interested in a certain clamshell that is #1 plastic, but the minimum number of clamshells per order is 1,000—what do you do? Will you be selling that much of your product this year? If not this year, can you store these clamshells in a clean area so you can use them for the following summer? Perhaps you have a friend who needs some, or you can convince your market master to purchase the 1,000 clamshells for the entire market and then resell to vendors at cost?

PHOTO BY ELLEN MICHEL

- One of the biggest costs associated with purchasing packaging is shipping. Is there a location nearby where you can drive to pick up these clamshells? Can you reduce shipping costs if you order early or order in bulk? Are there packaging companies that have lower shipping rates?
- What about "environmentally friendly" products? What are your options? What plastics are food-grade?
- Is there somewhere you can purchase everything you need including clamshells, wax boxes, and wood crates, for example?

Purchasing packaging is important and something that can be done in the winter to minimize frustration during the busy season.

Food Safe Symbol

This indicates that the plastic is food grade.

New research indicates that some plastics should be avoided for consumer safety. The chart to the right will help clarify the best choices.

With your food, use 4, 5, 1 and 2. All the rest aren't good for you.

Safer choices for food and beverages:

Avoid:

**Except new bio-based plastics labeled as such.*

Plastic: Must be food grade and should be #1 or #2 to ensure the easiest recycling for the consumer. Plastic bags are good for greens, herbs and other items that need moisture. Structured plastic containers such as clamshells, cups and bowls with lids are the best for fragile small items such as cherry tomatoes, berries and other fruits.

Wood: Not a recommended food container for harvest, transport, or storage. However, they can look very nice on a market table. Consider lining a wood crate or basket with clean fabric to enhance the display and safe practices.

Paper: Paper bags and formed baskets are a long-standing preferred item for some consumers. Bagging tomatoes snugly in a paper bag can lend structure to a consumer's purchase, helping to maintain the product. Other paper bag items are mushrooms, nuts, tomatillos, onions, nursery plants, etc. Often customers will thank you for a paper bag, and it is a great place for a sticker or stamp with your farm logo on it.

Paper wrap: Butcher paper or brown paper can make a nice wrap for some products such as cut flowers or nursery plants. You can use paper to line your wood crates each week so they look fresh and clean.

Where do you find more information on packaging?
See the resources section in Appendix B, page 41.

Do you have recipes to support a product that is less common for customers? Offering recipes can be an excellent tool for sales.

Information and education

Many customers come to the market to talk directly to the grower. It is important that you have the knowledge or can provide information for your buyers. Customers are trusting and want to trust your product as well as your information. Be sure you understand your product and have accurate information to share on market day. Can you stand and answer questions? If not, can you offer information on paper? Provide insight on growing the product? Perhaps you would like to educate your customers on your growing practices. What about health and nutrition? Do you have recipes to support a product that is less common for customers? Offering recipes can be an excellent tool for sales.

PACKING UP FOR MARKET

This list can help you pack a box for market that you take every week. Ensure you restock your market box before you leave for the day. Being prepared and having all these items can make you many friends at the market and make your market hours more satisfying and productive.

FOR THE PRODUCT & SALES

- Packaging for your product
- Extra packaging
- Scale
- Record-keeping book
- Money apron/cash box
- Coins/dollars for change
- Credit card swipe
- Paper/cloth towels
- Spray bottle
- Ice and coolers

FOR THE TABLES/DISPLAY

- Tablecloth
- Display containers for product
- Farm sign(s)
- Price signs
- Business cards
- Recipes
- Information handouts
- Paper weights
- Duct tape
- Waste or water bucket
- Paper/notebook
- Pens/pencils/Sharpies
- Tape/scissors/stapler

FOR YOU & THE TENT

- Tent weights
- Water
- Hat and sunglasses
- Chair/stool
- Jacket
- Binder clips
- Box cutter/pocket knife

The versatile binder clip

CHAPTER 7

Making a Sale

How much should you charge for your produce? That is a question with many different parts and many different answers. What may work for another vendor may not work for you. How can you know what pricing strategy will keep your customers happy and make sure you're earning a profit? This chapter will take a look at some steps to achieving this balance.

Shoppers want to know that you are not hustling them on price and that your prices are comparable to other vendors at the market.

Payment options

Market customers are used to paying with cash, but occasionally they are out, or perhaps your product costs more. Having the ability to accept credit cards can be a great marketing tool for your booth, and you can display this option prominently.

Keep in mind that mobile options are changing often, and this information could be out of date soon!

Display your price

Well-displayed product prices are a very important part of shopping for most farmers market customers. Shoppers want to know that you are not hustling them on price and that your prices are comparable to other vendors at the market. Most customers walk down the farmers market aisles and compare prices and will return to a booth based on price, among other favorable factors (product quality, variety, etc.). You should have confidence in the prices you are charging for your product based on cost of production, quality, and product premiums.

Cost of production

The first step in determining what to charge for your product is knowing how much it cost you to grow it. This calculation will in-

CREDIT CARD READERS

Credit card readers are generally free and can plug into your smart device. Some common options:

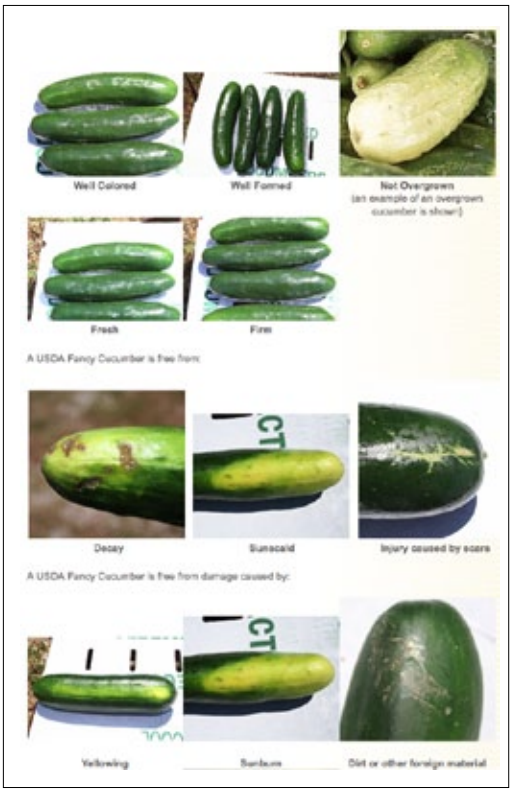
- **Square up:** www.squareup.com/register
- **PayPal:** www.paypal.com/webapps/mpp/credit-card-reader
- **Intuit:** www.payments.intuit.com/mobile-credit-card-processing

File A1-17 Page 7

Carrots: 100' x 4' bed

	Quantity		Your Quantity	$/Unit	Your $/Unit	Total	Your Total
Receipts							
Carrot sales	170	lbs		0.80		$136.00	
Total Receipts						$136.00	
Planting Year							
Supplies							
Seed - cover crop	0.75	lbs		0.60		$0.45	
Seed	3	packets		1.50		4.50	
Burlap	3	bags		1.80		5.40	
Fertilization	10	lbs		0.16		1.60	
Labor							
Cover crop	0.05	hrs		10.00		0.50	
Bed preparation	0.20	hrs		10.00		2.00	
Fertilizer spreading	0.10	hrs		10.00		1.00	
Planting, laying burlap	0.20	hrs		10.00		2.00	
Irrigation set up	0.25	hrs		10.00		2.50	
Weeding	0.75	hrs		10.00		7.50	
Interest on pre-harvest costs	$27.35			0.035		0.96	
Total Pre-Harvest Costs						$26.31	
Harvest							
Bags (1 lb)	170	bags		0.03		5.10	
Labor							
Harvest labor	3.50	hrs		10.00		35.00	
Packaging	0.30	hrs		10.00		3.00	
Total Harvest Costs						$43.10	
Total Variable Costs							
Per bed						$71.41	
Per lb						0.42	
Ownership Costs (Annual)							
Irrigation system						$1.14	
Machinery						7.14	
Land						2.29	
Total Ownership Costs						$10.57	
Total Costs (Annual)							
Per bed						$81.98	
Per lb						0.48	
Annual Returns Over Variable Costs						$64.59	
Annual Returns Over Total Costs						$54.02	

A sample page from Iowa's budget workbook.



A sample page from Purdue's illustrated guide to product quality

clude many factors such as production costs, labor, land ownership, equipment, and packaging.

How to calculate your cost. The enterprise budget worksheets from Iowa State will help you determine your cost of production for any of your crops. If you are selling many types of crops, consider going through this worksheet for your key sales crops: www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/crops/html/a1-17.html.

Price competition

What your competitors are charging? Calculating your cost of production is an important way to check that you are marketing your products at a price that is fair to you. Because every farmers market is different, it is important to understand how much it cost you to produce the product you are selling. It can give you the confidence to discuss this with your customers.

However, because you are selling your product at a farmers market, your pricing range is potentially constrained by your situation. Are you vending next to a grower whose products are consistently priced the lowest at the market? Perhaps that person does not need to make a profit? Some of these situations can be problematic and can be handled at the market management level. Are you vending at a market where your type of product is scarce, and you have little to no competition? In this situation you can charge a reasonable amount for your product—again, as long as you can explain to your customer how much it cost you to produce it.

Quality of product

Is your product as fresh, beautiful, and tasty as possible? Do you have repeat customers that understand this? Do you sell at a market that can support higher prices for higher quality? Perhaps you bring grade-A quality and grade-B quality to the market every week and you allow customers to choose if they want to pay more for the better quality product? Purdue's illustrated guide for product quality will help guide your grading process: https://ag.purdue.edu/hla/fruitveg/Pages/gradingguide.aspx.

PHOTO BY ELLEN MICHEL

Product premiums

Your product can be "worth more" for different reasons—again, based on the market where you sell. Keep in mind that you are working to make your farm business sustainable, and charging too little for your product does not keep you in business.

First to market. If you are the first to bring a product to market, this will make a difference in how much you can charge. In May and June, customers are hunting for the perfect strawberries, while in July they are seeking tomatoes. If yours are the first to the market and look good, you can charge more. The same principle applies in the grocery store, so consumers understand this.

Certified organic. You may have a customer base that appreciates the amount of physical labor required in these growing systems and will pay more for your product. Likewise, you may live in an area where "using organic practices" is good enough for most consumers, but generally you cannot charge the same premium.

Niche products. These are special products that are in demand and require little customer education. For example: wild mushrooms, weeds as greens, walnuts, and maple syrup. These products are less common but are part of nearly every market. However, customers buy these products less often, so you may need to include them in a diversified product selection at your booth.

Fruit can be a great product to have on your table, even if only a few pints. It is a high-demand product, especially if you can grow it without chemicals.

Fruit. Generally speaking, fruit can be a great product to have on your table, even if only a few pints. It is a high-demand product, especially if you can grow it without chemicals.

Taxes. The kind and amount of taxes you will be charged as a farmers market vendor will vary based on your average yearly sales and your business structure. For more information, see Chapter 5.

Bargains and discounts

When you experience changes in supply or demand, it is sometimes necessary to adjust your prices or your offerings to keep the customers coming. In some markets, you are allowed to sell products in bulk at the end of the market. "Selling in bulk" means that you sell a larger quantity of your product at a somewhat discounted price. When you sell in bulk, you may make a little less than you would if you sold individual products or small bundles, but you will move larger quantities of your product more quickly.

Sometimes you may be approached by a customer with a bulk discount request. There are a couple ways to handle this. You can ask the customer to come back at the end of the market, or you can decide to offer that product discount at the time of request. Your decision could be based on product availability, how well you are moving the product that day (for example, it is pouring rain and there are fewer customers than usual), or whether you will be able to store and sell your product at a later time. Keep in mind that if you do it for one customer, more are likely to come to find the same bargain.

Donations

You will almost always be left with some extra product when the market is over, whether it is product that you did not sell at the market, or product that you did not bring to the market in the first place due to imperfections. What will you do with all of this? Perhaps some of your vending neighbors do not produce the same product as you, and they are willing to barter. This is a great way to do your shopping while at the market.

Another option is to donate your extra produce to a local food pantry, food bank, or other organization that helps to feed those who are food insecure. These organizations may come to your market to pick up your product. Perhaps your market master is willing to arrange a post-market pick-up with a food donation organization. Donating your produce is a good choice for two reasons: it benefits your community by bringing healthy, home-grown produce to those that have limited access to food, and it benefits your farm with positive publicity.

If you would like more information about donating your extra produce, you can visit www.farmersmarketcoalition.org/produce-donation or contact your market master to learn his or her policy for donating unused food.

DONATIONS AND TAX DEDUCTIONS

At the time of writing, the Good Samaritan Hunger Relief Tax Incentive Extension Act of 2013 was sent to committee in Congress. Future information can be found on the IRS website: www.irs.gov/taxtopics/tc506.html

CHAPTER 8

Professionalism and Vendor Behavior

Let's start with a customer's perspective. It's a beautiful sunny morning, and you have just arrived at your local farmers market in search of some organic vegetables for your mother-in-law's visit the next day. You start walking through the displays, and your eye falls on a bright, professional sign advertising organic tomatoes and peppers—just what you're looking for! Eager to make a purchase, you hurry toward the attractively stocked stand and survey the fresh vegetables. They are full and ripe, absolutely perfect.

Yet when you look up to speak to the vendor, your enthusiasm quickly fades. He is sloppily dressed, sitting in a chair and reading a newspaper. He does not look up until you begin to speak, and then, all the answers you get are short and unhelpful. You begin to wonder if he wants to sell any product at all. Would you buy the produce? Probably not, especially if you could get it elsewhere.

The fact is, as a market vendor you may have the brightest, cleanest, most professional, most plentifully stocked booth at the farmers market, but if you don't conduct *yourself* professionally, you will not gain as many customers—especially repeat customers—as another vendor who does. Your appearance and behavior is just as important as the appearance of your stand.

Advice to a *new* market vendor

Try to develop a customer following. Consistent products, prices, and a presentation of the product in a classy display also help people "believe" in the product and therefore help to sell the product.

First impressions

You already know that first impressions count in the business world, and your market stand is your business. Make sure that you are presenting a good first impression to your customers.

Appearance. Your personal appearance is very important. When you are clean and neat, you show respect to the customers, and they will understand that you take your business seriously. Some helpful guidelines can be found in McKelvey, Hendrickson and Parcell's "Selling Strategies for Local Food Producers" (2007):

- Be clean and neat. Would you want to buy food from someone who has dirt under her fingernails or debris in his hair? Probably not.

PHOTO BY ELLEN MICHEL

It is important for you to keep your hands clean and nails trimmed, as well as making sure your hair and face are clean and tidy and your clothes are fresh.

- Think about the ink. Large or unconventional tattoos or piercings are a turn-off for some people. If you think your tattoo or piercing may offend customers, it may be better to cover it, if possible.
- But don't bring the tux. That being said, you don't have to wear your Sunday best to the market—generally, a clean pair of jeans and a T-shirt or polo are acceptable. In fact, you may consider ordering shirts and caps with your farm name and logo, to help promote your brand.

The booth. As we discussed in Chapter 6, the appearance of your booth goes a long way in communicating your product's quality, attractiveness, and safety.

Posture and nonverbal communication. Even a clean, neatly dressed people look sloppy when they slouch or drape themselves across a chair. The way you stand, sit, and address customers is just as important as your appearance (McKelvey, Hendrickson, & Parcell, 2007).

- Stand up straight. Practice good posture, while remaining open and friendly. Stand confidently behind your booth—you are proud of your product, and people will know it by the confidence you show in your stance.
- Keep your posture open and relaxed. Generally speaking, it is best to stand with your hands and arms away from your body—perhaps resting them on the table as you speak, for example. Crossing your arms, pinching your elbows to your sides, or standing rigidly can make you seem nervous or unfriendly.
- Make eye contact. Look your customers in the eye when they approach your booth. Eye contact with your customers indicates that you are honest and trustworthy, and also that you respect them enough to give them your full attention.

Sales etiquette

Just as there is a proper way to look and dress when you are at the market, there is also a proper way to address and assist customers.

Stand and be prepared for your customers' approach. When you stand behind the booth, you look more alert and prepared than if you are sitting. Pay attention to the customers—when they pause to look at your booth, give them a friendly smile to acknowledge their presence; if they come up to the table, greet them pleasantly and ask them if they're looking for something specific or just browsing.

Be friendly. Be relaxed and upbeat while you're in the booth. Take an interest in your customers—ask them about what they like; chat about the products, the market, the weather, or whatever they like. Smile and be cheerful while you interact with them. If they leave your booth feeling like you were happy to serve them, they will be more likely to come back.

Speak clearly. It's important to speak so your customers can understand you—this includes your pronunciation and tone as well as what you say. Not only should you use simple language that your (probably non-farming) customers will understand, it's important to deliver that language clearly and at an appropriate volume.

Be professional. While it is important to be friendly and make your customers feel relaxed and welcomed, it is also important to be professional and take every transaction seriously. Some aspects of professional behavior include:

- Being honest with your customers
- Pricing your products fairly
- Respecting the market master and cheerfully following all rules
- Going above and beyond to satisfy every customer's needs and expectations
- Maintaining a clean, neat appearance
- Treating every customer and fellow vendor with respect, even the angry and unreasonable ones
- Being reliably present and on time for every market to which you commit
- Only selling quality products that meet or surpass market quality standards

Advice to a *new* market vendor

Talk to your customers. Explain your products and how to use them. Give them a reason to buy what you are selling and come back for more. Hang in there.

PHOTO BY KATHLEEN PEGG, CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA

Keep an eye on the kids. It may be necessary to bring your children or other family members to your booth. It is important that they conduct themselves well for everyone's benefit—it is not fair to make the customer stand and wait while you deal with your child. In fact, many customers really appreciate seeing children "learning the ropes" of selling at a market by participating in the sales process, whether it is answering questions, bagging product, or making change for the sale.

Educating customers

One of your most important jobs as a farmers market vendor is to teach consumers about the products you sell. Not only are you enhancing their experience by making sure they know how to enjoy the food they buy from you, you are teaching them things that they can then teach to their friends and neighbors, their children, and their community.

Some of the things you may need to teach your customers include:

Growing practices. How do you grow your product? Is it organic? All-natural? Pesticide-free? More conventional? It's important to be able to describe this to the consumer.

How to grow it. Some customers will want to try growing the product themselves, and they'll want to know what you did to make your product so delicious. Be ready to give them some tips and tricks.

Varieties. Some growers are more secretive about what varieties they choose for their products. However, you will need to be prepared for these questions from gardeners, customers, and other vendors. Is it critical that you not share this information? If so, you can politely tell them this.

How to cook and eat it. If your product is unusual or typically found in ethnic cooking, some customers may be intrigued but not know how to prepare it. In addition to describing basic preparation for them, you may want to have some simple recipes handy.

Historical origin. Again, if your product is rarer than lettuce and tomatoes, it might be a good idea to know a little about its history. Where was it first grown? What kind of cultures first ate this product? How did they prepare it, and how does that differ from how we prepare it today?

Handling. Does this product need to be refrigerated, stored in a dark place, or set in a window sill to ripen? Let your customers know how to keep their product until they're ready to eat it.

Diseases. To what kinds of diseases is your product susceptible? Are

there any health risks associated with it? If a customer is interested in growing the crop themselves, do you have any advice on how to prevent disease?

Resources. In addition to your own knowledge, it's important to know where consumers can go to find more information on their own. Sources of information could include:

- Local Extension agents: www.extension.org
- Local and community resources, such as Master Gardeners, universities or colleges, or gardening clubs: www.extension.org/mastergardener
- Online resources for farming, backyard farming, or gardening, or for resources specific to your product.

Let your customers know how to keep their product until they're ready to eat it.

Money

A final and very important component of professionalism at your booth is the appropriate handling of money. The whole purpose of exhibiting professional behavior is to demonstrate to the consumer that you are trustworthy and that you value his or her business, and the way you handle consumers' money will go a long way in building their trust.

Counting. Be accurate in counting money, both when receiving payments from consumers and when returning change. Take your time—it is much better to be accurate the first time than to be fast and make mistakes.

Security. Put your money in a safe place that is out of the view of casual passersby. Not only will this help protect your own interests, but customers will see that you have planned ahead and know how to be responsible with their money. Many vendors choose to use an apron so the money can move around the booth with you. This can be especially important if you have a larger space and/or lots of customers.

Sanitation. Dollar bills and coins are dirty, so it is crucial that you handle and store your money separate from your products.

CHAPTER 9

Giving Back

Farmers markets provide many benefits for the vendors who sell in them. Not only are they a space where farmers can sell their products and make some money, but they are also a place where farmers can gain exposure and pass along information and advertising to bring in more customers. They are places where vendors can meet each other and exchange tips and ideas. They are gathering spaces where communities come together.

Farmers markets and their overseeing boards also provide a variety of ways that farmers can give back to their communities. Besides programs for donating extra produce, which we discussed in Chapter 5, many farmers markets allow not-for-profit organizations from their community to set up informational tables and pass out flyers at the market. Other farmers markets sponsor events in their areas and participate in fundraisers and food drives.

Every farmer has the chance to serve his or her community in another way as well: by working with others on boards or committees and in cooperatives to help make decisions that will guide the farmers market and the entire food system in their area.

In this chapter, we will discuss why it is so important to give back to the community in these ways, as well as list some ways that you can get involved individually and with others.

Advice to a *new* market vendor

Get involved in the decision-making process for your market, community, county, or state. It gives you the opportunity to actively protect and strengthen the network of producers and consumers in your area.

Why should I give back?

Why is it so important to "give back" to the community? After all, you already are providing produce to local citizens and helping them reach their goals for healthy eating. While this is true, there are some very good reasons why you should consider going the extra mile and doing a little more to help your community.

Strengthen the entire local food system. Getting involved in the decision-making process for your market, community, county, or state gives

A GROWER AT INDIANAPOLIS'S BROAD RIPPLE MARKET FROM BLOG.FITCITYINDY.ORG

you the opportunity to actively protect and strengthen the network of producers and consumers in your area.

Keep growers, consumers, and community needs connected. When you get involved in your market and your community, you will have a better idea of what needs exist in your community and how you and your market can meet them. If you prefer to get involved at a more grassroots level, you can work with food-donation programs to help get fresh produce into the hands of people who need it.

Create jobs and strengthen the local economy. One of the most important ways that farmers markets contribute to their communities is by keeping consumers' money within the community, rather than sending it to another part of the country or even overseas. When a consumer buys a product at a farmers market, that money goes to the farmer, who then reinvests it in his or her business and other local businesses. It is important for every farmer to do his or her part to keep these local economic systems strong.

How can I give back?

We already discussed some general ways that you can give back to your community, so let's take a look at a few more specifically.

Market board for market decisions. If you are selected to serve on the board for your farmers market, you will be able to contribute to important changes or decisions about your market that could affect you and other growers.

Growers' cooperatives/groups. Farmers' cooperative groups are partnerships where farmers combine their resources to better market and sell their products. If there is no co-op in your area, you may consider starting one. You can find more information on this topic at www.hobbyfarms.com/farm-marketing-and-management/starting-farmers-cooperative-group.aspx. For assistance in developing a cooperative, contact the Indiana Cooperative Development Center at www.icdc.coop. Cooperative grower groups can also function to create a support network and a common voice

in your community even though your products are sold separately.

Food policy council development. Food policy councils are formed by citizens and local, state, or national governments to advise decision-makers on matters relating to food availability, quality, distribution, and sale. These councils are typically made up of private citizens who are knowledgeable in their field of study or practice (Hodgson, 2011).

Community support for market/local food/sustainability. People in your community may want to create a nonprofit or another type of support system to sustain the market in your community. As a grower/vendor, it is important to play a role in this group to lend a voice to the needs of the growing community.

County/rural land-use decisions. Just as important as matters directly related to the market or food policy are matters related to how county and rural land is used and cared for. Some ways you could help in this area would be to run for your county council or to get involved with a committee or organization such as the Indiana Planning Association (www.indianaplanning.org) or the Indiana Farm Bureau (www.infarmbureau.org).

Convention and visitors' bureaus. Convention and visitors' bureaus, or CVBs, are groups of people from various disciplines and career fields who promote their county or community with the goal of attracting visitors and investors. To locate the CVB in your town or community go to www.in.gov/visitindiana. If you would like to see new farmers and consumers come to your area, this area of service might be interesting to you.

Economic and community development offices. Economic and community development offices, or ECDs, are agencies or groups of people who work to strengthen the housing, land use, tourism, and business development of their local and county economies. The statewide ECD, the Indiana Association for Community Economic Development, can be found at www.iaced.org. This website contains information about how to join and support the association in a variety of ways.

Extension board in each county. County Extension boards help and advise the Extension agents in their counties by helping start, publicize, finance, and sustain Extension projects. For information on how to get involved with your county Extension board, you can talk to your agent or visit the Purdue University Extension website at www3.ag.purdue.edu/extension/Pages/default.aspx.

APPENDIX A

Expenses for Attending a Market

When you begin organizing your market booth, having a list of items to consider is helpful. In addition, this worksheet can be kept with your tax receipts when you file in April.

	Cost	Importance
Durable goods		
Table		
Tent		
Farm signs		
Scale		
Money apron/cash box		
Coins/dollars for change		
Record-keeping book		
Coolers		
Display containers for product		
Tent weights		
Vehicle		
Consumables		
Ice		
Packaging for your product (boxes, bags, paper, clamshells)		
Business cards		
Information handouts		

	Cost	Importance
Low-cost or no-cost*		
Credit card swipe		
Price signs		
Tablecloth		
Recipes		
Paper weights		
Water		
Spray bottle		
Hat and sunglasses		
Chair/stool		
Jacket		
Paper/notebook		
Pens/pencils/Sharpies		
Tape/scissors/stapler		
Binder clips		
Paper/cloth towels		
Duct tape		
Waste or water bucket		
Box cutter/pocket knife		

* Or things you may already have in your possession.

APPENDIX B

Additional Resources

General resources for selling at a farmers market

Farmers Market Coalition . . . . . www.farmersmarketcoalition.org

eXtension . . . . . www.extension.org

Business resources

Indiana Department of Revenue Food and Beverage Tax . . . www.in.gov/dor/3983.htm

Information Bulletin #70: Farm Markets and Sales Tax www.in.gov/dor/reference/files/sib70.pdf

New and Small Business Education Center. www.in.gov/dor/3939.htm

NSBEC Business Tax FAQs. www.in.gov/dor/3335.htm

Indiana Cooperative Development Center . . . . . www.icdc.coop

Determining your cost of production . . . . . www.sfp.ucdavis.edu/pubs-Family_Farm_Series/Farmmanage/prodcost

Small Farm Management . . . . . www.sfp.ucdavis.edu/management/

Health and safety resources

Indiana Department of Health Weights and Measures Program www.in.gov/isdh/23288.htm

Farmers' Market Nutrition Program. www.in.gov/isdh/24776.htm

Indiana Invasive Species Council . . . . . www.entm.purdue.edu/iisc/invasiveplants.php

National Conference on Weights and Measures . . . . . www.ncwm.net

Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs). . . . . www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/getfile?dDocName=stelprdc5097151
www.onfarmfoodsafety.org
www.gaps.cornell.edu/educationalmaterials.html

Packaging

Putnam Plastics. . . . . www.putnamfarm.com

Indiana Berry. . . . . www.indianaberry.com/products.php?cat=12

Monte Packaging . . . . . www.montepkg.com/shop_category.asp

Marketing

Vista Print (cards, signs, stickers, etc.) . . . . . www.vistaprint.com

QR code generator . . . . . www.goqr.me

The product information provided is meant for reference only and should not be considered an endorsement for particular companies or services.

Bibliography

Corum, V.; Rosenzweig, M.; and Gibson, E. (2001). *The New Farmers Market*. New World Publishing; available on Amazon and elsewhere.

Cottin, C. (2013). "Branding." In C. Cottin, *Finding Your Niche: A Marketing Guide for Kansas Farms* (pp. 89–92). Whiting, Kan.: The Kansas Rural Center.

Cottin, C. (2013). "Marketing Strategies—Retail: Selling at Farmers Markets." In C. Cottin, *Finding Your Niche: A Marketing Guide for Kansas Farms* (pp. 3–9). Whiting, Kan.: The Kansas Rural Center.

Cottin, C. (2013). "Marketing Strategies: Product Price and Placement." In C. Cottin, *Finding Your Niche: A Marketing Guide for Kansas Farms* (pp. 80–84). Whiting, Kan.: The Kansas Rural Center.

Fort Wayne Farmers Market. (2013). Fort Wayne Farmers Market 2013 Rules and Regulations. Retrieved from Fort Wayne Farmers Market: www.ftwaynesfarmersmarket.com/images/vendors/FormsRules/FWFM2013RulesRev1.pdf

Hamilton, N. (1999). The Legal Guide for Direct Farm Marketing. Drake University Agricultural Law Center. www.directmarketersforum.org/the-legal-guide-for-direct-farm-marketing

Hodgson, K. (2011). *Food Policy Councils: Helping Local, Regional, and State Governments Address Food System Challenges*. Chicago, Ill.: American Planning Association.

Hornick, J., & Wasserman, W. (2012, July 2). "Top Reasons to Shop at a Farmers Market." Retrieved from USDA Blog: http://blogs.usda.gov/2012/07/02/top-reasons-to-shop-at-a-farmers-market

Horwitz, S., & Hashley, J. (2008, May). "Plain Language Guide to Selling at a Farmer's Market." Retrieved from New Entry Sustainable Farming Project at Tufts University: www.nesfp.nutrition.tufts.edu/resources/plain-language-guide-selling-farmers-market

Johnny's Selected Seeds. (2011, November). "Diversification strategies for market farms." Retrieved from *The JSS Advantage Newsletter*: www.johnnyseeds.com/t-jssadvantagenov2011.aspx

Kochenburger, M. K. Peter (2011, Jan. 31). Insurance Webinar #1: "Demystifying Farmers Market Risk and Being a Smart Insurance Shopper." Retrieved from Farmers Market Coalition: www.farmersmarketcoalition.org

Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources. (2013). "How to Sell at a Farmers Market." Retrieved from The official website of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs: www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/markets/farmers-markets/farmers-market-howtosell-generic.html

McKelvey, B., Hendrickson, M., & Parcell, J. (2007, December). "Selling Strategies for Local Food Producers." Retrieved from University of Missouri Extension: www.extension.missouri.edu/publications/DisplayPub.aspx?P=G6222

Merrigan, K. (2012, October 14). "Let's Move! Blog." Retrieved from LetsMove.gov: www.letsmove.gov/blog/2010/10/14farmers-markets-investment-fresh-food

Robinson, J.M., & Hartenfeld, J.A. (2007). *The Farmers' Market Book*. Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press.

Takele, E. (2012, June 15). "How to Determine Your Cost of Production." Retrieved from Family Farm Series: www.sfp.ucdavis.edu/pubs/Family_Farm_Series/Farmmanage/prodcost

U.S. Department of Agriculture Foods and Nutrition Service. (n.d.). "Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)." Retrieved from USDA Food and Nutrition Service: www.fns.usda.gov/wic

U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2000). *Part 205—National Organic Program*. Washington, D.C.

USDA Agricultural Marketing Service. (2012, Aug. 3). "Farmers Market Growth: 1994–2012. Retrieved from Farmers Markets and Local Food Marketing: www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/ams.fetchTemplateData.do?template=TemplateS&leftNav=WholesaleandFarmersMarkets&page=WFMFarmersMarketGrowth&description=Farmers%20Market%20Growth

BACK COVER PHOTOS

TOP AND BOTTOM: ELLEN MICHEL

CENTER: FINDLAY MARKET IN OVER-THE-RHINE, CINCINNATI, OHIO, BY WHOLTONE FROM THE WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Indiana Cooperative Development Center

225 S. East St., Suite 737 • Indianapolis, IN 46202 • 317-692-7707 • www.icdc.coop

Purdue Extension

www.extension.purdue.edu