



## DIRECT MARKETING STRATEGIES

# FARMERS MARKETS

Farmers markets are multi-stall, popup type markets where farmers, ranchers, and other producers sell local goods directly to customers. Farmers markets often also include art and prepared food vendors, and usually operate seasonally. They are an excellent way to directly market your products, build your communication skills, and develop your unique customer base.

### **BENEFITS OF SELLING AT A FARMERS MARKET**

Farmers markets do their own advertising and marketing that you benefit from without cost. These markets often share and/or cover insurance, and provide helpful information for getting a seller's permit and connecting with your local inspectors, etc. Established markets also have long standing customer bases and serve as an attraction for tourists, which can help you broaden your customer reach.

Selling at a farmers market may require less volume of products than wholesaling or even operating a CSA and are a great place for beginning or small acreage farmers to start marketing their products. Many established farmers and ranchers producing larger quantities of product, sell at one or more farmers markets per week and may also sell through a number of direct and intermediated markets.

Because farmers markets allow for face-to-face time with your customers, they provide ample opportunities to communicate directly about your growing techniques and farm or ranch practices. They are also the ideal place to experiment with new products to get a read on customer interest and engagement before committing to the product on a larger scale.

### **GETTING INTO A FARMERS MARKET**

If you are considering selling at a farmers market, contact the market manager as early as possible. Markets often have an open enrollment period for new vendors and may not accept vendors on a rolling basis. Ask about market policies as each market has its own set of rules and regulations, vendor or stall fees, what products are allowed, etc.

### **STALL DISPLAY**

An attractive stall with a good product display will help you draw customers in and finalize sales. Make sure your stall and products are clean, your signage is clear and apparent, including product names, prices, and your business name. Customers want to know who you are and how to find you again! Abundance in your display is always helpful, especially with produce.

### **FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS**

Many farmers markets participate in and accept food assistance programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP Electronic Benefits Transfer or EBT), WIC (Women, Infants, and Children), and the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program. How the programs are handled varies by market. Check with your market's manager for more information.

### **COLLECTING SALES TAX**

All vendors in Idaho are required to collect sales tax and remit the funds to the Idaho State Tax Commission. You will need to have your seller's permit displayed at your market stand. If you forget your permit, most market managers will be able to issue a temporary form. (See *Fact Sheet 2.1 Taxes for more information*).

## FOOD SAFETY AT THE MARKET

Farmers markets present a unique sales arena with their own best practices for food safety. Some things to keep in mind while selling at a farmers market are outlined below. (See *Chapter 5 Food Safety for more information*).

### *Basic Hygiene*

Farmers markets are held in a variety of places, from main streets to city parks to gymnasiums. Regardless of the setting, you need to be prepared to set your stand up from scratch each day and practice the same level of sanitation you would on your farm. Be sure to pack the supplies you need to keep your stall clean and sanitary. Never place food items directly onto the ground. Make sure you and your employees are washing your hands before handling your products and after using the restroom or eating. If possible, have separate people handling money and produce. Avoid handling your products unnecessarily. Your market may or may not have trash services; be prepared to haul away your refuse at the end of the market day.

### *Health Department Requirements*

Check with your local health department about any regulations you're subject to based on your products or activities. All farmers markets are subject to routine inspections by representatives of the local health department.

### *Product Sampling*

Providing product samples can be a great way to increase sales, especially with foods most customers will be unfamiliar with. Many times, however, a food permit, issued by your local health department, is required for sampling. There may be regulations on such things as temperature control methods of your samples, supplies (toothpicks, tongs, sample cups, etc.), and how long they can remain available before being composted. Check with your local health department or market manager for more details.

### *Temperature Control*

Make sure your products are ready to withstand hours in the elements, whether they have health department standards for temperature control or not. Having coolers on hand is always a good idea. Make sure you have enough ice or water (your market may not have a water source) to get you and your product through the day.

## RELATED FACT SHEETS IN OTHER CHAPTERS:

2.1 Taxes

5.1 Creating a Food-Safe Environment

