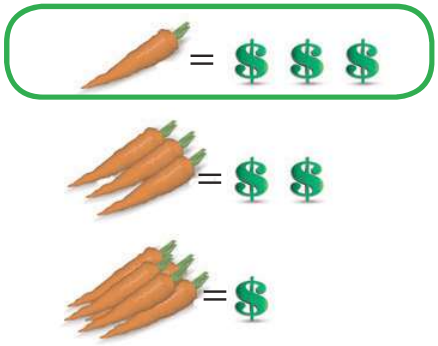
NCAT Marketing Tip Sheet Series

Tips for Selling at: Farmers Markets

Farmers markets are temporary retail establishments typically held outdoors, where farmers come to sell their produce at a specified place and time. Farmers markets are growing in popularity across the country and can be a good entry-level selling place for beginning farmers.

For this market you can expect:
- ***Lower volume of product***
- ***Higher prices per unit***



Advantages

- You may receive more money per unit, since you sell directly to customers.
- You generally have flexibility in the variety and volume of products you take to market.
- No standard pack or grade is required, but your produce should be good quality.
- Direct contact allows you to find out what your customers want.
- You have the opportunity to build a loyal customer base, including local chefs.

Considerations

- The volume of sales will vary with the popularity of the market. Think about how to incorporate deliveries to other outlets in the area to increase your sales and efficiency.
- Labor costs can be relatively high (time and travel to and from market, time away from the farm).
- If you sell at several farmers markets, schedules can be demanding.
- To sell at popular farmers markets, it helps to have unique products.
- Being successful requires positive interactions with the public.
- Most farmers markets have an application process and rules to participate. For example, in California you must register as a "certified grower" with the county agriculture commissioner before selling at a certified farmers market.

Photo: Rex Dufour, NCAT

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(Parent organization of the ATTRA Project, www.attra.ncat.org)

ATTRA

Tips for Selling at Farmers Markets

✪ *key point*

- ✪ **Have an attractive product mix and clear signs for your market stand.**
- Ensure that you have a consistent supply of popular products.
- Consider providing samples of your product if local regulations permit.
- Set up a service system where customers do not have to wait too long in line.
- Invest in a scale that not only calculates weight but also gives you the sales price. A calculator that prints on a paper tape is another useful tool.
- Visit markets seasonally to figure out what's missing from your market that you could supply.
- Extend your season for popular products before or after the main season. This can increase your sales and attract new customers to your market stand.

Key Questions to Ask Yourself

- ✪ **Do I enjoy working with the public? If not, can I hire someone friendly and competent for my booth?**
- Where are the nearest farmers markets? Are they accepting new vendors?
- ✪ **Do these farmers markets have enough customers to make it profitable for new vendors?**
- What are the other vendors selling? What's my niche?
- ✪ **How much time will I spend at the market? How early will my day start and end? Am I willing to do this each week?**
- What is the application process for the farmers market? What are the rules? For example, can I sell products I have not grown?

Resources

- **ATTRA Publications**
  Prices vary for individual publications. Many are free. An inexpensive subscription will give you access to all 350+ publications and databases. ***www.attra.ncat.org***
  - — **Scheduling Vegetable Plantings for Continuous Harvest** (2008)
  - — **Season Extension Techniques for Market Gardeners** (2005)
  - — **Postharvest Handling of Fruits and Vegetables** (2000)
- **Find a Farmers Market** by searching the USDA's online directory: ***http://apps.ams.usda.gov/FarmersMarkets***

Photo: Rex Dufour, NCAT

- **Growing For Market** magazine offers the free issue, "Selling at Farmers Markets:" ***www.growingformarket.com/categories/SellingAtFarmersMarkets***
- **Local Harvest website** is a nationwide directory of small farms, farmers markets, and other local food sources. The site helps consumers buy what they want directly from the farmers and ranchers who produce it. ***www.localharvest.org***

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