



Market Matters

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“In Market” Getting Ready For the Farmers Market Season

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In my great-grandfather's diary of his farming activities, you will find entries for most Saturdays that say “In market.” One can imagine what it took in the late 1800's to get ready to be “in market.” It might be a bit easier to get to market today, but anyone who sells at a four-hour-once-a-week farmers market can tell you, the preparation takes much longer. Winter is usually the time for planning the growing season. But, as we all know, growing it means we also need to sell it—so winter is also a good time for planning for our *market* season.

Pennsylvania has seen a 30% growth in the number of farmers markets across the state since 2010. This presents an opportunity for farmers to basically have their pick of markets to participate in, but it also means that the *customer* has their pick of what markets they wish to patronize. Market patrons will want to buy from vendors whose products appear to be clean, high quality, clearly priced and attractively displayed. You can greatly increase your market day bottom line by taking some time to evaluate how you plan to sell your products at the farmers market.

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Selling Successfully at a Farmers Market

Excerpt from a document written by Nada Haddad, UNH Cooperative Extension Food and Agriculture Field Specialist. The full document can be found at extension.unh.edu

Engage with your customers

Besides providing a marketing venue, a farmers market allows vendors to build good relationships with customers. If you have (or plan to have) other market outlets for your products, loyal customers will eventually patronize your Pick-Your-Own operation, your CSA, or your farmstand. Excellent customer service should prevail at all times, regardless of the weather or business level at your booth. Delight your customers, anticipate and meet their needs, and infect them with your cheerful attitude.

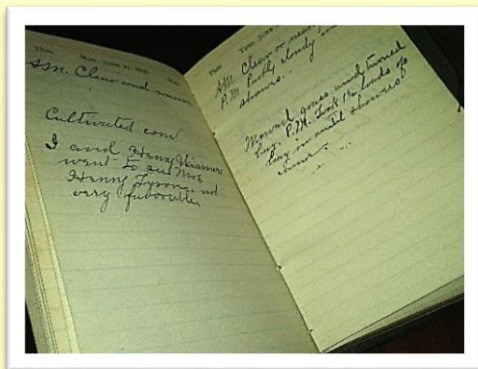
Be ready to answer customers' questions about the varieties, shelf life, and use of your products. Come prepared with information about how to store, prepare, and enjoy any product you sell. Make sure that your

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“Excellent customer service should prevail at all times, regardless of the weather or business level at your booth.”

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- **Signage:** Clean, colorful, and consistent signage is a must. Customers do not want to have to ask you the price of your produce. Customers are already making an effort to step outside of their shopping routine to come to the market and purchase something. Don’t make them work any harder than they have too. Signs should have:

- Clear hand writing
- Price
- Name of the item
- What’s special or different about it? Is it an Heirloom variety? Special flavor? Hot, mild, or sweet?

White board or chalk board is a nice and simple way to let folks know what is in season this week or what is on special.

“Rule number one; no products on the ground! No one really wishes to purchase food that sat on the ground even if it is in lugs or boxes.”

- **Canopy:** Have a good quality canopy and always use it even on good weather days. A clean canopy looks professional. It is your “store.” It also helps to keep your products clean and cool which will go a long way in maintaining the quality people expect to find at a farmers market.
- **Displays:** Rule number one; no products on the ground! No one really wishes to purchase food that sat on the ground even if it is in lugs or boxes. Set them on something. The general rule is, displays should be between knee high and shoulder high. Give some thought to how you will draw customers into your booth space. Once they are there, how do you want them to move through your booth? Say you have a ten foot by twenty foot space and you are selling produce. Maybe you will want to locate your register at one end of the booth. You will want your customers to enter from the other end so they will have to pass by every item you have to offer. You may want to place staple items like sweet corn, tomatoes and potatoes at one end with more “impulse” purchase items closer to the checkout area. One last item, make sure to keep your displays looking full as items sell throughout the market day. If an item no longer fits in a bushel basket, make sure you have some smaller containers with you so you can transfer the remaining items to the smaller container to maintain that “full” appearance.
- **Tell your story:** One of the attractions at a farmers market is you, the farmer. More and more consumers want to know where their food is coming from and who the people who grow it are. Some things to consider using to help you tell your story are:
 - Framed poster board with photos of your farm.



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entire sales crew is educated and ready to answer customers' questions, too!

Inspire customers to try something new at home

Provide simple recipes that use only two or three steps/ingredients or just suggest how to eat a particular food. Printed recipe cards or signs will inspire your customers, from kitchen novices to experienced cooks, to try something new every week.

Be sure your farm name/logo is printed on the card so customers will remember where the recipes came from and come back for more ingredients and more cooking ideas! Make sure you try the recipe beforehand.

Train the sales crew

Your customers want and expect a good product and outstanding service, and your sales crew can help deliver on those expectations. Make sure to tell your crew what you expect from them and why.

Every member of your crew should be friendly, courteous, and outgoing. They should enjoy interacting with all kinds of people. Tell them they will be multi-tasking, and insist on good hygiene practices such as washing their hands after using the bathroom.

A few days before the new season opens, make a dry run with the crew to set up the display. Review the task checklist: where and how to place the signs, greet and make eye contact with customers, keep produce fresh, use the credit card machine, verify the written information on checks, make correct change, and treat customers with respect.

Don't forget to familiarize the crew with the farm business, its history, philosophy, products and practices.

Keep a notepad on hand, so the sales crew can relay to you any questions they couldn't answer. Ask them to write down observations or ideas for ways you and the team could improve the booth for the next market day.

Stand up!

Standing in the elements for hours will stress your joints and muscles. However, sitting on a chair in your booth might suggest to passing customers that you're not open for business.

As an alternative, bring a three-foot stool, so during slow times you can lean or sit on it, while remaining at the same eye level as your prospective customers.



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- A logo that is on all your signage and farm sign.
- Brochures that tell your farm story.
- Copies of any good articles that were written about your farm.

Last but not least, make sure you have all the permits you may need to sell at market. Depending on what items you are selling, you might be required to have a permit from the local, county, or state health department (Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture). To find out what, if any, requirements you will need to follow, go to www.eatsafepa.com. There you will find downloadable documents and requirements for selling at farmers markets.

It is well worth taking the time now to have all these items in place so you will be ready for your market when the season begins rather than trying to get all your market items and permits together one week before the market opens. Waiting until the last minute may delay your ability to go to market if you have to wait for your permit. Needless to say, you will also miss a lot of sales!

“Prepared for market” was usually the Friday entry in my great-grandfather’s diary. If you take the time and do your preparation, your “in market” experience can be even more rewarding.



Upcoming Penn State Extension Events

Cooking for Crowds: A Volunteer's Guide to Safe Food Handling

When: June 7, 2016, 1:00 PM - 3:30 PM

Where: Lebanon, PA

Preparing food in large quantities is different than food preparation in the home. This program helps non-profit organizations and their volunteers understand the risks involved with preparing large volumes of food and the important food safety practices that need to be implemented to ensure a safe event.

<http://www.cvent.com/events/cooking-for-crowds-a-volunteer-s-guide-to-safe-food-handling/event-summary-7c757403531a48889ca874bddfac57fb.aspx>

Food for Profit

When: June 14, 2016, 8:45 AM - 4:30 PM

Where: Reading, PA

The Food for Profit workshop takes you step by step through the information necessary to start and run a small food product business, especially directed to individuals who will be making and packing their products for resale through grocery stores, farm markets or restaurants.

<http://www.cvent.com/events/food-for-profit/event-summary-75c2d48e788646769056aeacf6bec0b4.aspx>



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