



How To Be Successful At A Farmers' Market

Fact Sheet 4.008

Horticulture Series | Economics

By Rita Azaltovic and Alison O'Connor*

Introduction

This Fact Sheet was created to give existing and new vendors selling at any farmers' market hints and tips on how to be successful. Information was adapted and gathered from various university Extension Fact Sheets and presentations. It also includes the results of a survey sent out to vendors who sell at the Winter Farmers' Market (Fort Collins, CO) and the Craft Market (Greeley, CO). The experience and knowledge of these vendors was just as valuable as the information collected from University Extension offices in putting together this Fact Sheet. The hope is all vendors – food, craft or other – can be successful in establishing and growing their business within their own community. Local businesses are an asset to their community and are often run by members of the community. With farmers' markets growing in popularity all over the United States, it is important for vendors to have resources like this one to help them be successful. Keep in mind that this Fact Sheet is not a substitute for reading the vendor guidebook, including rules and regulations, for your local farmers market. Be sure to follow the rules but also have fun!

Top 5 qualities of an attractive booth

#1 - A smile

Whether it's the owner or an employee, customers notice posture and non-verbal communication long before they approach the booth. Be sure to have good posture if you are able, make eye contact, and greet each customer!

#2 - Cleanliness, Abundance, & Flow

A tablecloth will allow for a clean and orderly looking booth, as well as out of sight storage under the table. Keep containers full to convey abundance and options. Create a natural flow with levels, angles, and color. This will make your booth easy to navigate and draw a customers' eye from one end of your booth to another.

#3 - Signs & Branding

Be sure you have signs for product name and price that are legible and easy to read. Simple is better for all signs and banners. Create a brand using complimenting colors, fonts, and materials. Creating a brand makes it easier for customers to recognize you and your products!

#5 - Vertical Displays

Make good use of vertical space, displaying products from waist level up to about six inches above the head. Tilt containers forward at about a 15 degree angle – this will allow people to see your products from a distance. (Reference: UNH Cooperative Extension)

#4 - Samples & Information

Use samples to highlight products. This can be a sample to taste or even samples of a craft product for consumers to try. If your craft is something like candles or jewelry, try displaying some of your products for consumers to handle and look more closely at. Use materials to educate your consumers. Give them more info about how you make or grow your product and how to use it, such as suggested recipes.



Illustration by Marc Vargas



Quick facts

Smile! Make eye contact and smile at people walking by to engage customers.

Use social media to share your upcoming locations, interact with your customers, and engage people outside of the markets.

Get to know your fellow vendors and collaborate whenever possible.

Be sure you have good signage, clear pricing, and a clean, organized booth.

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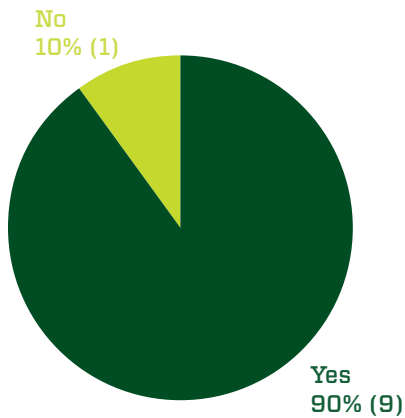
Creating a Social Media Presence

Social Media is bigger than ever! With various outlets such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat, there is no shortage of marketing and promotional opportunities. Creating and keeping an updated online presence will allow your market manager to promote you and share what's new with consumers. Consumers will be able to find you and help promote you by sharing your profile with their family and friends. Post when and where you will be for events and gatherings, such as a farmers' market, and when you create sales or special promotions. This allows consumers to find your booth with ease and encourages them to come out and visit the market or event for a special deal.

Survey Says

Do you maintain a social media presence to promote your business? (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.)

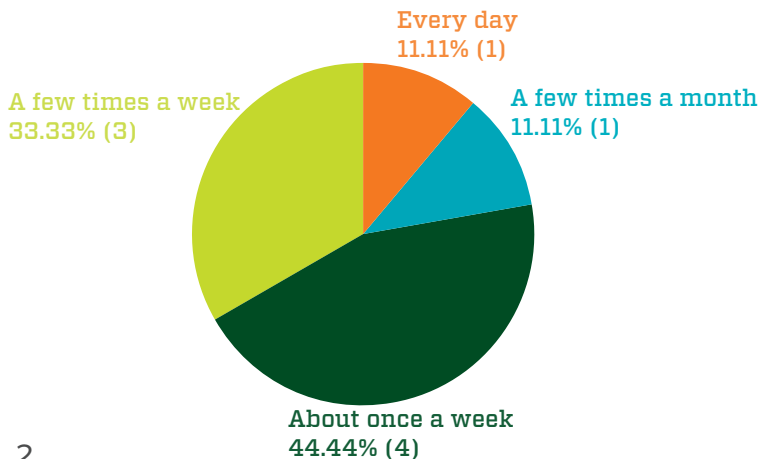
Answered: 10 Skipped: 0



The image above shows that nine out of ten farmers' market vendors have a social media presence! Out of those vendors most post once to a few times each week, as shown by the image below.

If you answered 'Yes' to the previous question, how often do you post?

Answered: 9 Skipped: 1



Creating a Customer Base

What do customers expect at a farmers' market? Customers come to a farmers' market because they buy local, they want to discover new products, they want to get to know YOU, and support local family businesses! Customers want to get to know you and your product(s), including why you do what you do and how you do it. A farmers' market is the perfect place to build real relationships with customers, creating loyal customers that will buy from you again and again. If your business is new, building relationships with customers now will only help grow your business through repeat customers, who can then offer recommendations to family and friends. Once you do have a store front, or other outlet to sell your product, loyal customers will be the first in line!

Most customers who attend a farmers' market want to learn more about what they're buying; they will have questions and you need to be ready for them. Come prepared with information on the history of your business, your practices (growing or crafting methods), and how to enjoy your product. That could mean offering up recipe ideas or showing customers how to utilize your product. What is your product good for? Can it be used in place of another product? Why is your product better than other options? Be sure you and any employees who staff your market table and well educated and ready to answer customer questions! Customers will see your passion and want to come back for new products and to support your business.

Get to know your fellow vendors!

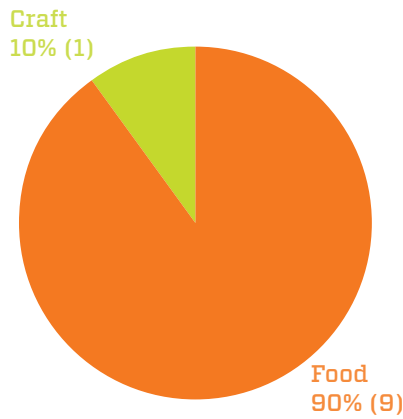
Be a good neighbor and get to know your fellow vendors. Communicate any problems with a positive attitude and support each other at the market. Think proactive and consider partnering with another vendor to help sell both your products! For example, if you sell homemade tortillas or tortilla chips and another vendor sells homemade salsa, try giving out samples together and showcase the combination. Remember that a farmers' market is not a competition, it's a place for consumers and vendors to come together as a community!

Survey Says

From the survey we can see that most of our vendors sell food and run their business full-time. Keep in mind that this is from survey size of only ten vendors. Some vendors work only part time and there are certainly many craft vendors as well as food vendors.

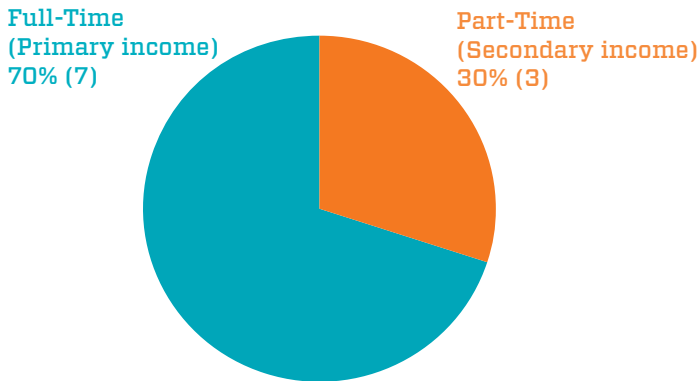
What do you sell? (Check all that apply)

Answered: 10 Skipped: 0



Do you run this business full-time or part-time?

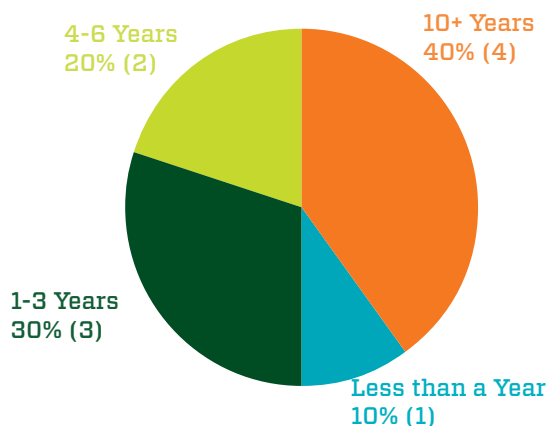
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The big take away is that there are all kinds of vendors and some have 10+ years of experience operating their business, and some are just starting. It is important to recognize the resources available to you at a farmers' market, including your fellow vendors. Their experience and knowledge might be the most valuable resource available to you, so get to know them!

How many years have you been operating this business?

Answered: 10 Skipped: 0



Quick Tips from Seasoned Vendors

"Be there on a regular basis."

– MouCo Cheese Company

"It's a great source of income, a great way to practice selling your product (getting your pitch down) and learning who your customers are."

– Just Plain 'Ola, LLC

"Talk to people."

– Cranked Up Coffee

"Stay engaged with the crowd. Don't read. Keep your eyes on the crowd and be present."

– Old Town Creations and Bees Knees

"Good Signage and show pricing so customers don't have to ask each time."

– Old Town Creations and Bees Knees

"Do as many markets as you can."

– Kogler's Bakery

"Don't pressure people into buying your product, just be easy going and have conversations with people. Also, give out free samples."

– Just Plain 'Ola, LLC

References

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