

Market Manager Responsibilities

Farmers Market Management Tip Sheet #1



Introduction

For a farmers market to succeed in serving farmers, consumers, and communities, someone must be responsible for its daily operations and be accountable to a governing body elected or appointed to oversee the market's long-term sustainability. Making a market look effortless to the general public while being both profitable to farmers and a valuable shopping experience for consumers is both a science and an art. Though it may appear to an outsider to consist of little more than running around with a clipboard on market day, the reality is that markets are ever-changing organisms that require a great deal of work throughout the year to grow and thrive.



Many markets start out with a volunteer market manager. In the long-run, however, paying a manager a fair salary is the best way to maintain a manager's enthusiasm level and their ability to devote the hours necessary to nurture a successful farmers market.

Skills & Qualifications

Farmers market managers need a variety of interpersonal and technical skills to work effectively with farmers, consumers, and community partners. It is critical that market managers have the following skills to perform the job effectively:

- Effective problem-solving
- Creative thinking
- Self-motivation
- Organizational skills
- Communication skills
- Marketing skills
- Financial skills
- Passion and dedication to the community



Responsibilities

The duties of farmers market managers are numerous, varied, and unique to each individual market. Below are the twelve main responsibilities most managers have in common.

1. Determine the eligibility of those wanting to sell at the market based on the rules established by market's governing body. Actively recruit new producers to expand the variety or products for sale.
2. Collect rental fees from vendors and maintain accurate records of payment. Many markets charge a flat daily fee, while others collect fees based on a percentage of a vendor's sales (usually between 5 and 8%).

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3. Assign selling spaces if they are not allocated on a first-come, first-served basis. It is recommended to keep vendors in the same space throughout the season to avoid both vendor and shopper confusion.
4. Be knowledgeable of supply and demand conditions and their direct effect on produce prices. Do not set prices, but have information useful to farmers needing to determine fair prices. Recruit a volunteer “secret shopper” to compare your prices and quality with those of similar products in grocery or gourmet stores so that you can offer an educated response in the event of negative feedback about prices.
5. Ensure that all applicable licenses, permits, and insurances are filed with relevant agencies. Insist that all sellers use approved scales and obtain state or local permits as needed for the sale of certain products (e.g. eggs, meat, dairy, nursery products, etc.). Be knowledgeable about exactly where to refer a vendor in need of permits or registrations.
6. Advertise and promote the market. Research suggests that freshness is one of the main motivations for buying local produce, and your image should project freshness, quality, and value. Promotions may include special events, banners, signage, radio spots, and free coverage in local newspaper.
7. Stress the sale of high quality produce. Monitor each farmer’s products and encourage them to market only high quality goods, not excess or leftovers.
8. Assure the market is operated in a timely and efficient manner, and that sales occur only within the specific market hours. Establish and enforce regular hours of operation.
9. Settle or prevent disputes among the farmers as well as disagreements arising between shoppers and farmers over prices or correct weights of produce. Be friendly, courteous, and consistent in all dealings with both farmers and consumers. Do not play favorites.
10. Keep the Board of Directors advised of the market’s conditions, providing them with relevant data on gross vendor sales, market income, and feedback from customer and vendor surveys. Work with committees to review, update, or create market rules, strategies for future growth, and partnerships with other organizations.
11. Have clear emergency procedures in place for accidents, medical emergencies, safety or crime issues, severe weather, or natural disasters. Establish a chain of command and a phone tree in case communication is compromised by power outages or evacuations. Have quick access to a first aid kit and, in some cases, a fire extinguisher. Knowledge of first aid and CPR is beneficial.
12. Continually evaluate the markets strengths and weaknesses. Conduct customer surveys, track overall sales, and monitor for potential improvements in daily logistics, outreach efforts, and product selection.



As you can see, the position of farmers market manager is deserving of respect and professionalism, and the job can be as complex as it is rewarding. The right manager, when provided with resources and support, can position the market as the cornerstone of the community so that it can yield a growing number of benefits to farmers, consumers, and communities as it evolves.

Resources:

Visit www.farmersmarketcoalition.org to search the FMC Resource Library for sample market manager job descriptions and other tools to help markets operate successfully.