



A Farmers Market Advocate's Guide to Bonding with your Legislator (Part 2 of 3)

How to start building a relationship with your Senate and House Members

1) Do Your Homework

Search by zip code or state at www.house.gov and www.senate.gov to find out who represents your area. Both of these sites have a webpage for each legislator where you can find out what committees your member is on and learn what issues are important to them. You can also learn more about your Representative or Senator at <http://bioguide.congress.gov/biosearch/biosearch.asp>.

2) Set up a Meeting and Introduce Yourself

All legislators maintain at least one in-district office and a Washington, DC office. You are an important resource for your members of Congress, who need to know what's going on in their districts, so don't be afraid to contact them. You can meet with your members in Washington, DC or in their home offices, where they make themselves available when Congress is not in session. Members often host town hall meetings when they are in their districts and these are excellent opportunities to introduce yourself and share information about your farmers market and what resources it could use to serve the community better. See the calendar on the back of this handout for a 2014 legislative schedule.

- **Set up a meeting:** Call or email to schedule a meeting with your Congressperson when he/she will be in the home district or when you will be in Washington, DC. If the member will not be available, ask for the aide who handles agriculture and/or nutrition issues. Don't be disappointed about meeting with an aide; they advise the members on these issues and can be very influential.
- **Introduce yourself and your organization:** Explain clearly and succinctly what you do and how it benefits the community. **Be confident** because you are a first-hand expert on how an issue or program affects their constituency. **Be appreciative** of any support they have given in the past. **Be respectful** of demands on their time and do not expect more than 15 minutes if you are meeting with the Member, or 30 minutes with an aide. Bring a handout with your main points and leave it with them in case you don't get to cover all the issues.
- **Have data on hand:** Equip yourself with basic information like the number of farmers in your market, markets in the area, SNAP, WIC, and/or Senior customers served, and total market sales, as well as any other relevant stats.

3) Keep in Touch

After you introduce yourself and your organization, act as a resource by providing updates on your organization's activities and successes. Add key Congressional staff to your newsletter, press and event invitation lists but not to any fundraising solicitation lists. The goal is to maintain regular communication with them, but not overwhelm them.

4) Host a Site Visit

Invite your legislator to major events, celebrations, or meetings in the community. Legislators love positive media, so be sure to invite local newspapers and television stations, too.

National Farmers Market Week presents the perfect opportunity to host a site visit. Starting the first Sunday in August, there will be seven days of events all over the country celebrating the importance of farmers markets. Many members of Congress are in home districts in August, making it an ideal time to schedule an event and invite a legislator to come and witness first-hand the positive economic and social impacts on members of your community.

5) Say Thank You

Send a short thank you note or e-mail after each meeting or event and offer yourself as an informational resource. Get into the habit of thanking your legislator for their efforts in personal letters, in newsletters articles, and letters to the editor. Make sure to highlight these articles on your organization's emails, and forward them to the appropriate Congressional staff.

Have fun, and good luck!



2014 House and Senate Session Calendar

JANUARY

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u>	11
12	<u>13</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>17</u>	18
19	<u>20</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>22</u>	23	24	25
26	<u>27</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>31</u>	

FEBRUARY

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MARCH

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APRIL

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25	26	27	<u>28</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>30</u>	31

JUNE

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JULY

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AUGUST

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SEPTEMBER

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OCTOBER

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26	<u>27</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>29</u>	30	31	

NOVEMBER

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DECEMBER

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Dates not highlighted or underlined may be an ideal time to schedule a meeting at the home district office, and to invite your legislator to special farmers market events. A simple invitation from you can put time with you during National Farmers Market Week on their calendar!

Key

- Senate in session (DC)
- House in session (DC)



farmers * consumers * communities