

# Farmers Market Manager Frequently Asked Questions



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# Welcome

## to the Farmers Market Manager Frequently Asked Questions

> This is a starting place for WffYbhand prospective farmers market managers and organizers looking to develop, expand, and improve their organizations.

This resource is made possible thanks to the contributions many market leaders have made to the [Farmers Market Resource Library](#), discussions among peers on the [FMC Listserv](#), and the expertise of the FMC Education Committee. Support for these Frequently Asked Questions is the result of a partnership between the [Farmers Market Coalition](#) and the [Wallace Center at Winrock International](#), with funding from USDA's [Risk Management Agency](#).

The FAQs are broken into seven categories: [Market Fundamentals](#); [Market Policies](#); [Market Staff](#); [Insurance, Liability and Regulation](#); [Market Growth, Outreach and Evaluation](#); [Extending the Market Season](#); and [Increasing Market Access](#). You can use the [Table of Contents](#) to select a link to a specific category or question, or simply browse through. Additional resources are available online at [farmersmarketcoalition.org/managerFAQs](http://farmersmarketcoalition.org/managerFAQs).

Throughout these pages, you will find lots of links to specific resources from the FMC Resource Library. You can help us improve the content of the library, and the FAQs, by rating or commenting on these entries.

Please use the [Contact Form](#) to suggest additional questions and answers, as well as to clarify or add detail to an existing question or notify us of broken links. Updates will be made to the FAQ periodically based on this input.

To share resources with your peers by adding a new resource to the FMC Resource Library, please use the [Submit Form](#).

And finally, special thanks to Kathleen Stewart for all of her hard work in researching and preparing this resource.



## Category: Extending the Market Season

**Category Description:** *Though a growing number of farmers markets operate in what might traditionally be called the ‘off-season,’ there are generally some months of the year in which the climate and product diversity make an open-air market less appealing. As a market evolves, it may naturally look for creative ways to extend the season in order to help producers maximize their annual sales and to ensure that shoppers continue to have access to nutritious local food. Even if a market closes for the winter, there are still many organizational tasks on the to-do list.*

### How can we operate our market online in the off-season?

Although a busy market season and the approaching cold winter may justify hibernating during the off-season, there are still many ways you can operate your market online to maintain a presence or link your farmers who are still busy producing with customers ready and willing to buy.

If just maintaining a presence in your community while the market is closed for the season is what you’re after, consider maintaining a strong web presence by keeping your newsletter or other online communications going during the off-season. You can write articles about what your farmers are up to for the winter or about their plans for the upcoming season. You can even offer recipes for the peak-harvest bounty you encouraged your customers to preserve. Keeping communication going during the off-season can get your customers excited about the new season and ensure they don’t forget about the joys of shopping at the farmers market during their sleepy winter.

If you have farmers that are still producing in the winter and a regular winter market does not make sense in your community, consider establishing a way for your market to connect customers to those farmers online. You can do this through establishing an online-buying club or website for your customers to purchase products from local producers who still have products available during the off-season. [LocallyGrown.net](http://LocallyGrown.net) is one website that allows you to set up your own market website to connect farmers to consumers and sell products online. Check out these examples for different ways of doing this:

- [Philadelphia Winter Harvest](#)
- [Farmer Girls](#)
- [Athens Locally Grown](#)

Resources from the FMC Library:

- Rodale Institute’s [Internet Buying Clubs Combine Emerging Technologies and Community Values](#).

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### How can we operate our market indoors in the off-season?

Finding a suitable location within your budget is essential—a large part of the draw of the farmers market is the friendly, open-air, organic feel, so you may want to avoid basements or low-ceiling rooms that may not feel welcoming enough to attract many customers. Be sure to provide sufficient ventilation for the number of people you expect to attend, seek out a location with windows, and make sure vendors will be able to get their products in and out of the facility easily. Accessibility for those in wheelchairs or using rolling carts is also a concern. Local schools, universities, religious and community institutions, and shopping centers are all good places to seek out indoor space for your market.

Fewer people will just happen upon your market when it’s indoors (unless you locate it in a mall or other high-traffic area), so marketing and advertising are essential. Create ample signage, and let your customers and vendors know during the regular market season about the winter location and hours for the market. Take advantage of opportunities to [expand your web presence online](#), especially since more people are hibernating in front of their computers in the winter.

Take a look at the FMC newsletter article, [Winter Farmers Markets: Extending a Season of Warmth](#) for more information about operating a market during the ‘off-season.’

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### What are the best ways to keep a market going year-round?

If you live in an area with a warm year-round climate, the adjustments might be minimal—not quite as many vendors or customers as in May, but the existing structure, schedule, and rules may still hold nicely. Simply call your market a year-round market and make a few tweaks as necessary. If you live in a more northern climate with a longer winter season, you will have to creatively work with a much more limited array of local farm products, and a much more inhospitable outdoor environment for shopping. Consider reducing vendor fees for your first winter or two, or offer flat rates instead of percentage-of-sales to attract more vendors. Encourage vendors in the summer to plant hearty winter crops and storage crops, letting them know that you will offer a market for those products come November. Demonstrate your commitment to this promise in the winter, even if only a few vendors show up every week. Find vendors who can offer value-added products such as sauces, jams, and jellies, as well as meats and cheeses to round out the less-abundant winter supply of fresh produce.

As a compromise between year-round and seasonal markets, you may also think about holding holiday markets. Great Barrington, MA has had success hosting holiday-oriented farmers markets—one before Thanksgiving, the other before Christmas—so hard-core locavores can buy bulk items, and others can buy value-added items to use as gifts or as part of their holiday meals. The West Virginia Farmers Market Association hosts a [‘Winter Blues’ Farmers Market](#) to take place immediately before a statewide small farm conference when many producers are already gathering in one place. No matter what you decide, be sure to ask your farmers what their preferences are for the off-season—many of them might enjoy having a break in the winter! It’s also not a bad idea to survey your customers about their willingness to brave snow and ice to visit the market in February.

Take a look at the FMC newsletter article, [Winter Farmers Markets: Extending a Season of Warmth](#) for more information about winter markets.

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### What do we need to do to prepare for the market season?

There is no shortage of tasks for a Market Manager during the off-season to prepare for the next market season. These include activities that should take place before the season begins and right after the market ends to make sure the market for next year is an even greater success. Here are some things to consider during these times.

#### **Pre Season:**

- Decide how you will advertise and when you will hold promotional events
- Develop your media campaign
- Get together your promotional materials such as signs and brochures
- Decide on and start planning special events
- Review and update market rules and regulations
- Develop or review the market's strategic plan
- Meet with and report to the market board/committees
- Develop or review the market's long-term marketing plan
- Review and update the market's emergency preparedness plan
- Review the market's operating hours
- Secure all permits
- Secure market liability insurance
- Review and improve the layout and design of the market
- Determine if your market is missing any products
- Develop a recruitment strategy and recruit new farmers and vendors
- Establish your budget and secure funding
- Determine or review vendor fees
- Establish community partnerships
- Certify market for the Nutrition Assistance Programs
- Hold a vendor meeting to discuss policies and changes

#### **Post-season:**

- Evaluate the market season:



- What were the strengths and what changes can be made to improve the market?
- What events/promotions added to market sales and what brought in more customers?
- Develop and update your advertising campaign
- Hold vendor meetings to give vendors a chance to offer ideas, discuss issues, and celebrate the end of the season
- Find professional development opportunities for management and staff
- Repair and maintain market grounds and supplies

Take a look at the What Does it Mean to Be a Market Manager section of the Farmers' Market Federation of New York's [Farmers Market Manager Training Manual](#) for more details.

If this list seems overwhelming, remember that you don't have to do this alone: establishing a board of directors or an advisory board and keeping good volunteers will provide you with many talented minds to offer feedback and provide support for accomplishing these tasks.

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The Wallace Center supports entrepreneurs and communities as they build a new, 21st century food system that is healthier for people, the environment, and the economy. The Center builds and strengthens links in the emerging chain of businesses and civic efforts focused on making good food—healthy, green, fair, affordable food—an everyday reality in every community.

Winrock International is a nonprofit organization that works with people in the United States and around the world to empower the disadvantaged, increase economic opportunity, and sustain natural resources.



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The Farmers Market Coalition (FMC) is a national 501(c)(3) organization devoted to strengthening farmers markets through education, networking, and advocacy. FMC members include farmers, farmers markets, regional and state farmers market organizations and agencies, and individuals and businesses supporting farmers markets.

