

Farmers Markets Introduction for Vendors

Vendor Marketing Info Tab

As a vendor, you will want to research available markets in your selling area. Each market will have a different location, operational times, season, demographics and market rules. As a vendor you want to ensure that the market you choose will be a good match for you and your product(s). There may be management styles that you prefer over others. Perhaps some of the market rules will not fit into your style of vending. It could be the product you are growing/selling is not available for the entire market season, making you ineligible to sell at the market due to established market rules. All of these are contributing factors when deciding which market is best for you to participate in.

Creating a Vendor Space

Vendor space refers to the individual selling areas of each vendor. It is important to make sure your individual vendor space is as attractive, appealing, and well organized as possible. Products that are both attractive and well organized are more enticing to customers, and contribute to an overall positive experience for customers.

Vendor Signage

Visible, attractive, and effective signage is important to advertising your product and attracting customers. Signs indicate what product you are selling and help to create personal identification for your business. It is important to consider color, graphics, the relevance and the amount of information to include when creating your signs. Try to make your sign both easy to identify and memorable, so returning customers can find you and new customers will be more attracted to your booth.

Customer Service

Good customer service is essential to building a loyal customer base. Market participation

provides vendors the unique opportunity to interact with their customers, and offer information about their products that may not otherwise be available. It is also a great opportunity to hear from customers what they like or dislike about your product or your vendor space, allowing you the opportunity for continual improvement.

Choose your market workers with care. Someone who has good customer service skills, a sunny disposition, and good conversational skills is usually a better choice for selling at the market than someone who is soft spoken or shy. It is also important to make sure that your product is consistent, so returning customers know what to expect when they come to your booth. It can be difficult to maintain consistency with produce since individual plants and various crops perform differently throughout the growing season. The most important thing to remember is that size, shape, and cleanliness should be standardized as much as possible for your products throughout the market season, thereby providing your customers with accurate expectations of your products.

Market Experience

In addition to buying produce and other unique products found at the market, many individuals come for the “market experience.” Farmers markets are unique compared to supermarkets and malls, and individuals who have a good experience at the market are more likely to return. It is important that each vendor provides a good experience for the customers, and that the market manager promotes a positive environment for customers. A positive market experience is an important piece of building customer loyalty.

Marketing YOUR Market

In addition to marketing your product(s), it is important to market your overall market. Maintaining a positive attitude about the market

you participate in, and promoting the farmers market as a whole, can increase the customer base for everyone involved in the market. There are often other vendors who sell products that compliment yours, and by providing information to your customers about additional products available at their stands, you will help customers to fulfill more of their shopping needs in your market rather than having to go to a store.

Pricing

At present, Alaska has no rules regarding the price of products at market. In general, the price of your product(s) ([Appendix T](#)) should cover your overall costs while still leaving a fair profit for your efforts.

Observe Other Vendors and Markets

One way to remain competitive in the market place is by observing other vendors in your market, and in other markets. Pay attention to what other vendors do to draw in potential customers, and use those observations to improve your own vendor space or selling style. Observing marketing techniques at retail locations is another way to improve your own marketing skills and tactics. If all of the vendors in your market are constantly improving their selling spaces and styles, your market will improve overall, thereby increasing the customer flow to the market and improve business for all vendors.

Weights & Measures Tab

Alaska laws require that vendors have certified scales when selling anything by weight. Regulations governing casual venues, such as a farmers market, are the same as those that govern grocery stores. Vendors may sell produce using several “Methods of Sale:”

- direct sale by weight, price per pound
- sale by weight in prepackaged form, price per package weight
- sale by count, price per item

- sale by measure, price per ounces, gallons, etc.

The state provides a complete document ([Appendix U](#)) on measurement standards. Additionally, there is a compiled list ([Appendix V](#)) of scale companies that can service your scale, and a few businesses on the list also sell appropriate scales.

Food Safety on the Farm Tab

Food Safety/Health Requirements

Customers come to Farmers’ Markets with the expectation of purchasing fresh, quality produce. Unfortunately, improper practices in the production, preparation, transportation, storage, or handling of the produce can contaminate what should be a healthy product. It is up to the vendor to ensure that the product(s) the customer purchases are truly safe to eat. The produce must be kept safe “from farm to fork.”

Types of Hazards:

Biological Hazards are primarily contaminant bacteria and viruses that cause food borne illnesses. Salmonella, E. coli 0157:H7, and Campylobacter are among the bacteria that can cause serious food borne illness. The virus Hepatitis A can also be transmitted from an ill farm worker through contaminated produce.

Physical Hazards are foreign objects such as wood splinters, glass shards, dirt, and metal pieces that can be accidentally mixed into the produce. These objects can cause injury themselves or they may be a means of introducing biological contaminants.

Chemical Hazards include agricultural chemicals used in the production of fruits and vegetables such as pesticides and fertilizers. Heavy metals from the soil, contaminated organic fertilizers, and those chemicals used in cleaning and sanitizing are also chemical hazards to be aware of.

Food safety begins on the farm ([Appendix W](#)) and should be carried through to the point of the customer serving the food. Obviously, the

vendor has no control over handling practices after the sale, but the vendor is responsible for the safety of the produce right up to the point of sale.

Food Safety in the Field

The production fields need to be clean and free from physical hazards and contaminated soils. Equipment needs to be in proper operating condition to eliminate the possibility of dropping parts or leaking fluids onto the production area.

Animal feces and human contamination are two of the main sources of introducing biological hazards into the food stream. Water used for field irrigation should come from an uncontaminated source and be free of animal fecal waste. Although it can be difficult in most of Alaska because of wildlife, animals should be kept out of the production fields as much as possible. Migratory birds have been suspected of contaminating produce in Alaska, so consider all aspects of contamination when harvesting and using equipment.

Animal waste that is not properly composted should not be applied to the produce field until after completing harvest. Do not apply manure to a harvested area if other crops that have not been harvested are in close proximity because raindrops could splash the manure into the unharvested areas. USDA organic standards prohibit the application of raw manure in the final 60 days prior to harvest. However, properly composted animal manure does not fall under the 60 day limit since the 160°F temperature necessary in hot-composting maintained for the prescribed time length will kill hazardous microorganisms. For additional USDA Organic growing practices in Alaska, contact Barb Hanson, 761-3854 or Barbara.Hanson@alaska.gov, at the Division of Agriculture.

Individuals with open wounds that are not covered and those experiencing vomiting and/or

diarrhea symptoms should be prohibited from harvesting or involvement in the production process until the conditions have cleared up.

Harvest, Handling and Transportation Process

Harvest knives and bins should be clean and in good condition. All workers must wash their hands before handling produce. Produce workers/handlers must also wash their hands under running water with soap after using the toilet, changing a diaper, using chemicals, handling raw meat (or meat juices) or handling manure.

On a daily basis, all equipment coming into contact with produce should be cleaned with detergent and water, and sanitized with a 50-200 PPM bleach solution. To make a 200ppm bleach solution, add 1 Tbsp. of bleach to 1 gallon of water.

Food coming into contact with soil should be scrubbed to remove dirt debris. Water used to wash or rinse the produce should be potable (or drinking) water. Depending on the product, a final rinse with 50-200 PPM chlorine solution is helpful to remove microorganisms. Handling areas for harvested produce should only be used for that purpose, in order to avoid potential contamination from raw meat or animal waste.

Some produce needs to be chilled for storage. When storing these items, bring them down to the proper holding temperature as quickly as possible in order to provide a longer shelf life and hamper contaminating microbes. When transporting produce to market, make sure they are in clean containers and are protected from outside contamination (rain and road spray) while being transported.

Food Safety Permitting Tab

Food Safety at the Public Market

The food safety focus at the market is to keep clean food clean. All market tasks should be considered in light of, "Will this action have the chance to introduce contaminants to my produce?"

Certain activities ([Appendix X](#)) at the Farmers Market, such as selling prepared goods, i.e. salad, baked potatoes, berry juice, or handing out *cut* samples, may require a [permit](#) from [Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation](#) (DEC) [Food Safety and Sanitation](#). DEC has oversight throughout the State of Alaska. If there is any question on whether the proposed activity needs to be permitted and/or falls under DEC oversight, call 269-7501. The sanitation experts would much rather work with you ahead of time and avoid health concerns, than visit your stand because of a complaint. The complete [Alaska Food Code](#) can be found by clicking the hyper link in this text or look on the Resources page for the complete web address.

The Municipality of Anchorage is the only area in Alaska with additional regulation on food safety. If you are selling at a Farmers Market in Anchorage call the Food Safety and Sanitation Program in the Municipality's Department of Health and Human Services at 343-4200 to determine if a permit is required for your proposed activities. The [Anchorage Food Safety and Sanitation Program](#) also welcomes calls on determining which practices fall under regulatory oversight and general food safety questions.

Farmers Market Practices Requiring Regulatory Oversight

The following is a general overview of the need for permits at the Farmers Market. The [Cottage Foods Exemptions](#) list should be your first place to look for what is exempt from needing a permit. Call DEC for the most current regulations and the Municipality of Anchorage if you will be operating in Anchorage.

- **Examples of non-potentially hazardous foods:** Jams, jellies, pickled vegetables, bread, kettle popcorn, confections, trail mix, granola, tortillas, fry bread, fermented fruit and vegetable products, pastries, cakes, cookies, and waffles cones.

- **Prohibited foods:** Meat, poultry and fish products, cheeses, custards, stuffed breads, non-acidic canned foods, pestos, garlic in oil mixtures, and other foods that require refrigeration for safety.

Eggs:

Eggs produced in Alaska are exempt from the grading and labeling requirements only when the producer sells directly to the consumer but, it is still necessary to ensure *all* information on the carton is correct. If reusing cartons make sure to obliterate *all* information from the original producer/seller, ensuring that there is not any incorrect information displayed on the carton. A new resource "[Safe Egg Handling for Small Egg Laying Flocks & Operations](#)" was developed in 2011 and provides valuable insight. We have also included the complete Shell Egg Regulations ([Appendix Y](#)).

Meat:

There are two options for selling meat at a farmers market. One option is selling them on the hoof, where a customer purchases them directly from you, either a side or a whole animal (the animal is not present). When purchased in that form the meat cannot be resold by the individual who purchased the animal. The second option is having a USDA inspected animal slaughter. When the slaughter and processing of meat is USDA inspected, the producer has the additional option of selling individual packages of meat, i.e. ground meat, steaks, roasts, etc.

USDA inspected slaughter facilities are available at:

- Alaska Meat Company, Mobile Slaughter Facility:
http://www.alaskameat.com/Services_Available.php
- Delta Meat & Sausage, Delta Junction: 895-4006
- Mid State Meats, North Pole: 488-1024

- Mt. McKinley Meat & Sausage, Palmer: 745-5232

While there are many quality meat-processing facilities in the state, currently there are only three USDA certified slaughter facilities, where your meat can be slaughtered, processed, and legally resold. When processing your meat, these facilities will provide packaging that meets labeling requirements.

Milk:

Alaska law prohibits the sale of raw milk at a farmers market. This document ([Appendix Z](#)), produced by [DEC](#) discusses *raw milk* regulations.

Permitting Process Camaraderie

While some market vendors will target their production and market practices so they can specifically avoid the need for permits, the permitting process is not difficult. Most Farmers Market vendor practices that require permitting, such as handing out samples of sliced tomatoes or selling half a head of cabbage, fall into a relatively low food safety risk category and need only to follow proper sanitation and food safety guidelines. Be aware that vendors who must have a [Food Permit](#) ([Appendix AA](#)) are also required under both State and Municipal regulations to ensure that staff have obtained the appropriate [Food Worker Cards](#).

Farmers Market Practices Not Requiring Regulatory Oversight

Providing samples of cut fruits and/or vegetables would not require a permit but vendors should use best practices. These practices would include:

- Assuring that produce that is provided for sampling has been thoroughly washed.
- Using a clean and sanitized knife for cutting.
- Having a temporary hand washing station set-up and available for washing hands.
- Preventing bare hand contact with the food by the use of utensils, tissue paper, or gloves.

Whole produce in this sense means that the harvestable vegetable has been cut free of the non-edible portions of the plant (i.e. the lettuce roots have been cut off but the leaves themselves are not cut, or the rhubarb leaves have been removed but the stalk is still intact).

If you give away whole fruits and/or vegetables as samples you do not need to be permitted (giving away a whole carrot as a sample does not need a permit but cutting a carrot in two and giving half to each kid is a practice that may need a permit).

The proper food handling techniques for vendors needing a permit, such as cooking demonstrations or selling prepared foods, goes beyond the intended scope of this document. Several Cooperative Extension Publications from various states along with links to Alaska DEC Food Safety and Sanitation resources have been included in the resource section. Furthermore, numerous additional publications can be found using the terms “Farmers’ Market Food Safety” in your preferred Internet search engine.

Be sure to review the Resources page for more information.

Vendor Resources

Pricing

- **Appendix T:** Iowa State University: [Pricing for Profit](https://www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/wholefarm/pdf/c1-55.pdf)
<https://www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/wholefarm/pdf/c1-55.pdf>

Weights & Measures

- **Appendix U:** [Alaska Weights and Measures:](http://dot.alaska.gov/mscve/webres/WMFarmersMarkets.pdf)
<http://dot.alaska.gov/mscve/webres/WMFarmersMarkets.pdf>
- **Appendix V:** [List of Scale Companies:](http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/FMM/023APPVScaleCompanies.pdf)
<http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/FMM/023APPVScaleCompanies.pdf>

Food Safety on the Farm

- **Appendix W:** [Food Safety Begins on the Farm: A Growers Guide:](http://www.gaps.cornell.edu/Educationalmaterials/Samples/FSBFEngLOW.pdf)
<http://www.gaps.cornell.edu/Educationalmaterials/Samples/FSBFEngLOW.pdf>

Food Safety Permitting

- **Appendix X:** [Department of Environmental Conservation \(DEC\) Cottage Foods Exemptions](http://dec.alaska.gov/eh/fss/Food/Docs/Fact_Cottage_Foods.pdf)
http://dec.alaska.gov/eh/fss/Food/Docs/Fact_Cottage_Foods.pdf
- **Appendix Y:** [Shell Egg Requirements:](http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/folioiproxy.asp?url=http://www.jnu01.legis.state.ak.us/cgi-bin/folioisa.dll/aac/query=[JUMP:%27Title11Chap32!2C+a!2E+2%27]/doc/{@1}?firsthit)
[http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/folioiproxy.asp?url=http://www.jnu01.legis.state.ak.us/cgi-bin/folioisa.dll/aac/query=\[JUMP:%27Title11Chap32!2C+a!2E+2%27\]/doc/{@1}?firsthit](http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/folioiproxy.asp?url=http://www.jnu01.legis.state.ak.us/cgi-bin/folioisa.dll/aac/query=[JUMP:%27Title11Chap32!2C+a!2E+2%27]/doc/{@1}?firsthit)
- Safe Egg Handling for Small Egg Laying Flocks and Operations:
<http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/Inspection/LPM00344.pdf>
- **Appendix Z:** [DEC Raw Milk Page:](http://www.dec.alaska.gov/eh/vet/) <http://www.dec.alaska.gov/eh/vet/>
- DEC Alaska Food Code: http://dec.alaska.gov/eh/fss/Food/TFS_Home.html
- DEC Food and Safety Sanitation Program: [Food and Safety Sanitation Program](http://dec.alaska.gov/eh/fss/index.htm)
<http://dec.alaska.gov/eh/fss/index.htm>
- **Appendix AA:** [Municipality of Anchorage, Health Permit:](http://www.muni.org/Departments/health/Admin/environment/FSS/Food%20Safety%20and%20Sanitation%20Forms/Temp.%20Food%20Permit%20Application.pdf)
<http://www.muni.org/Departments/health/Admin/environment/FSS/Food%20Safety%20and%20Sanitation%20Forms/Temp.%20Food%20Permit%20Application.pdf>
- State Temporary Food Service Application:
<http://dec.alaska.gov/eh/fss/forms/food/TempEventApp.pdf>
- State Checklist for Setting up a Temporary Food Service:
http://dec.alaska.gov/eh/fss/Food/Docs/TFS_Setting_Up_TFS_Checklist.pdf
- State Temporary Food Service Fees:
http://dec.alaska.gov/eh/fss/Food/Docs/Temp_food_permit_fees.pdf
- Municipality of Anchorage, Food Worker Cards:
<http://www.muni.org/Departments/health/Admin/environment/FSS/Pages/AlternateFoodWorkerTesting.aspx>