



An important step for any farm is to determine if joining a Farmers Market is a good option.

Some things to consider are:

- Why do you want to join the Farmers Market?
Make sure you are the one who wants to join and aren't being pushed into it by a friend.
- Can you make the time commitment to be at the majority of the markets?
- Do you have enough product to last the entire season? Or, do you have enough product to have a steady supply for a portion of the season?
- Do you enjoy interacting with the public and answering customer questions about your farm and your products?
- Can you afford to hire an employee to work at the market?

If you decide to join a Farmers Market, Congratulations! You are joining a group of people who have the same goals as you and are providing a valuable service for your community.

Marketing Your Farm at the Farmers Market

In Alaska, it is possible that there is only one Farmers Market in your area. If there are multiple markets in your area, you will want to research all the markets. 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.

Here are some basic tips for creating an inviting Vendor Space:

- Think about your space's layout. Try to make it flow so that customers come in one way and leave a different way. This way your booth doesn't end up having a traffic jam.
- Have an area for processing purchases. This way your booth traffic can still flow through and not disturb your buyers.
- Display setup is critical. Try to make your booth look full at all times. Put your products in decorative baskets, or arrange them on a shelf.
- Try adding different levels to your booth. The different levels give customers more to peruse.
- Adding color to your booth with signage, tablecloths etc. can make your booth look more appealing and professional. Adding photographs of your farm to the booth is a great way to help customers connect to your farm and products.
- Consider adding a hand-washing station for your customers.

For more tips, read "The Art & Science of Farmers' Market Display" by the University of Vermont Extension: <http://www.uvm.edu/extension/community/farmersmktdisplayfactsheet.pdf>

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 new customers will be more attracted to your booth. Keep your signage consistent from market to market so



that returning customers can find you easily. Consider taking the time to make your signage weather proof, so that you don't have to keep recreating signs for every market. Also, a well-made sign can be used year after year and help people find your booth.

Go to the Farmers Market in your area or surf the web to try and find sign ideas that fit your business.

Customer Service

Creating a pleasurable experience for customers is the best way to keep people coming back to your booth week after week. Take the time to engage the customers and find out why they choose to shop at Farmers Markets and what attracted them to your booth in the first place. This information will give you a better understanding of how to better serve their needs and improve your booth so that they keep coming back. Remember, word of mouth advertising is the most effective advertising you can receive and it's free. If people have a positive, quality experience at your booth, they will tell their friends about it.

The most important part of having consistent great customer service is training all your employees who will be tending the booth the basics about your business, such as: information about all the products you sell, how the farm grows/raises the products, estimated times of when certain products will be available throughout the season, fun facts about the farm, etc.

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.

Keep in mind that the majority of your business comes from repeat customers.

Don't forget that your actions affect not only your farm's reputation, but the Farmers Markets' reputation as well.

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. Market customers are able to see who grew the food they are purchasing and actually get to know the farmers. Being able to trace food back to its source is a growing concern in the United States, and Farmers Market vendors can tell their customers where their food comes from and how it was grown. They also provide a great sense of community because the farmer may be the customers' next door neighbor and they never even knew it before.

Customers 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 throughout the market. Customers will come for the food and return for the fun.

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 complement 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.

The three main ways pricing can be determined is that pricing can be based on customers, competition or costs. Customer based pricing determines price based on how customers respond to different prices for the same product and how customers value the product. Competition based pricing bases price on how competitors price the same product. Cost based pricing is determined by calculating the cost to create a product and determining a price that covers the cost and leaves a margin for profit.

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.

Always try to keep improving your booth. Take inspiration from fellow vendors or surf the web for fun ideas to incorporate into your business.

If you have more questions or request additional information, please contact the Division of Agriculture

1800 Glenn Highway, Suite 12 • Palmer, AK 99645 • (907) 745-7200

www.dnr.alaska.gov/ag/