



10 Principles of a Successful Farmers' Market

There are currently over 300 farmers' markets in New York State and that number continues to grow on a regular basis. These markets are being run in a number of management structures – farmer-driven boards of directors, single manager operations and programs of a sponsoring organization.

Whatever the management structure, it is important that it provides strength and sustainability to the markets. When the market management provides proper attention to detail, fair and equitable rules and regulations and is responsive to the farmers and vendors, the consumers and its surrounding community, the chances for success and longevity increase. To help farmers' market managers achieve that level of success, the Federation has developed a guideline, 10 Principles of a Successful Farmers' Market.

1. **A time, location and season that coordinates the needs of farmers, consumers and the local community.** The needs of each component -- farmer, consumer and the community in general -- need to be balanced to satisfy the goals and objectives of each group – sales and profits for the farmers, access to fresh, locally grown foods for consumers at a time that fits with their schedule, and community revitalization, downtown development, and a sense of place for the community.
2. **A central, visible, and permanent location.** The market should be located in a central, high traffic area. It should also provide ample space for the market to grow, as well as room for customer parking, and amenities for shoppers. It should be planned to be a permanent institution in the community or neighborhood for farmers and consumers.
3. **A diversity of products and producers.** Customers are attracted to a farmers' market for a diversity of fresh, high quality, locally grown products. They want the widest possible selection of products and diversity within those product lines. They also want to have freedom of choice between producers of the products available. The more choices the market offers its consumers, the more attractive and exciting the market becomes for them.
4. **Fair and enforceable rules and regulations.** Rules and regulations reflect the mission of the market and provide a format for its daily operations and, if written clearly, uniformly and enforced fairly, will provide a defense for the market should their rules or actions be challenged. Rules should provide guidelines that include:
 - A mission statement for the market
 - Who can sell in the market
 - What products may be sold in the market (including a definition of the term “local”), including whether farmers can purchase for resale, how much, and under what conditions
 - An application and crop plan requirement that ensures the market has production and marketing information for each vendor
 - Standards of vendor behavior
 - Market operations information, including season, times of operation, rents, application and space assignment procedures, etc.

- Rules enforcement procedures, including penalties for failure to comply and a grievance procedure.
- Compliance with state and local laws, regulations, and requirements (e.g. FMNP)

5. **A strong market manager who is passionate about the market.** A manager must be able to:

- Creatively promote the market to consumers
- Enforce the market's rules and regulations fairly and with a minimum of conflict
- Represent the market to the local municipality and community groups
- Administer the day to day operations of the market, both on-site and off.
- Arbitrate disputes that may arise between vendors and/or with consumers
- Work with a board of directors or market committee
- Maintain the financial records of the market
- Understand the needs of farmers and balance them with the needs of the consumers and the community at large

A market manager should be a paid position, even if part-time. Many markets start out with a volunteer market manager, but fail to plan for the transfer from volunteerism to a paid manager. While volunteerism runs high with new markets, it does fade over time. The best way to maintain a manager's enthusiasm level, as well as maintain his or her ability to put in the hours of time needed to adequately manage and promote a farmers' market, is if market managers are paid a fair salary.

6. **A management structure that allows for vendor input.** Whether the input is from a vendor-based board of directors or a vendor-consumer advisory committee, a market is more cooperative and inviting to both farmers and consumers when farmers have a sense of ownership in the market through regular input into management decisions.

7. **A marketing plan that clearly defines a target audience with a strategy for reaching that audience.** The plan should include a combination of both advertising and promotional activity, as well as entertainment and educational activity within the market.

8. **Adequate funding.** Market fees paid by sellers should cover the expenses of the market – rent, insurance, advertising and promotion, office expense, memberships & permits, manager salary, etc. However, additional funding should be sought to cover programs to enhance the market, special events to promote the market, nutritional, agriculture, and farm-to-school education programs, etc. Sponsorships, grants, and donations can be solicited to help to support these and other types of programs.

9. **A successful market involves the community in which it serves.** Local municipalities, chambers of commerce, community groups, non-profit organizations, local foundations, health agencies, and youth and senior groups can offer support to a farmers' market on various levels, including overall sponsorship and operation:

- Site and management support: providing space for the market, providing a paid market manager, and insuring the market through their own insurance program.
- Promotional support: helping to publicize the market and its benefits for the community through advertising and public service messages.

- Financial support: community groups can offer grants and sponsorships to support the general operations for the farmers' markets
 - Special project support: financial or in-kind assistance with programs such as food and nutrition education, special events, market facility development projects, and environmental education programs
 - Consumer support: when a community organization supports the market, it brings their members and their members families to the market as shoppers
 - Volunteers: an enthusiastic volunteer base to help with various aspect of the market.
10. **Continuous self-evaluation.** Market management should be continuously looking to improve and grow the market to be more economically and socially valuable to farmers' consumers and the local community. Rapid Market Assessments, focus groups of consumers, surveys of the farmers, will all provide valuable information that can help steer a market toward improvement and ultimate growth.

Source: Farmers' Market Federation of New York, 2005