

# Displays Create a Lasting Impression at Farmers' Markets

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From a manager's point of view, consider the displays at your market as the sum total of how you look to the customer—**the first impression**. Individual vendor displays, the set-up, site and amenities make up the total market shopping experience. With that in mind, take a walk through your market with a customer you don't know and get their impressions. Or find a retail designer to walk the market and provide suggestions. As with all retailing, the quality of the shopping experience makes a big impression on customers and influences their return visits.

At an established market, the ability to change or control the appearance of your site and surroundings may be limited. However, **enhancements and amenities can be added** to improve the shopping atmosphere. Colourful flags, signs, balloons or beautiful planters, though they may be temporary, help draw attention and create a festive feeling. If banners and planters can be left in place when the market is not operating, this serves as a reminder of market days to come. At a minimum, the site should be clean and waste containers provided. If cleanliness of the area is a problem, bring it to the attention of public works departments. Safety may be a concern in some neighborhoods, so having police officers present, if only to manage traffic and parking, increases customer security. Seating is an amenity that is also appreciated, encouraging customers to relax and stay awhile.

After looking at ways to improve the appearance of the area in which the market operates, next **consider the layout** and how easy it is for customers to shop. Take a clipboard with a map of the market and draw a line on the map that follows a customer through the market and place an "x" on where they stop. Do this with 20-50 customers and shopping patterns emerge that illustrate bottlenecks or dead spots. The arrangement of vendors may generate impulse sales to customers waiting in line. For most markets, a single or double linear arrangement encourages the customer to walk from one end to the other. Avoid having too many openings that allow them to escape.

**Dead spots** in the market are not only caused by the placement of vendors, but are greatly influenced by the products, quality, displays and personalities of individual vendors. New vendors are often at a disadvantage over established vendors, but can establish themselves fairly quickly if they focus on presenting unique, high quality, attractively displayed products.

Successful selling at a farmers' market begins with high quality products. It is important that vendors **differentiate themselves from the competition**. This can be accomplished through product quality, product mix displays, signs, enhancements and selling skills. Before a new member joins a market, they should be required to visit and discuss with the manager or board what they feel their unique contribution will be. This is not to exclude vendors from selling similar products but to help them focus on what they have to offer the customer that is unique. Having enough volume of demand products is important but diversity increases the values and convenience of shopping at a farmers' market for the customer.

**To build an effective display**, a vendor needs to bring sturdy and safe selling tables or display racks. Watch for splintered wood or table legs to trip over. Display tables or stands should be clean and attractive. A tablecloth can hide an ugly table and help to enhance a display. A display should be arranged within the customers view between knee to eye level, with a 30 degree slope no deeper than a customers reach. A tent is an effective way to delineate a selling stall and helps protect products from the rain or sun. Umbrellas may be colourful and attractive but are less useful in providing enough cover and are easily blown over in strong winds.

Displays are the silent salesperson at market and should communicate a vendors' image and product standard, as well as attract attention and be arranged for efficient selling. Displays should appeal to the senses using colour, texture, fragrance, and taste to attract customers.

**Mass appeal** is the minimum standard for an effective display. This can be achieved with one product or many products. The vendor with only a few products will want to keep them piled high and looking fresh. The vendor with several products will want to arrange these across the face of the display using colours and textures to visually enhance the display. A general rule is to display at least 3 larger items like cabbage or winter squash before moving to the next item. For smaller product, display 6-8 items and then move to next product. Smaller items should be closer to eye view while larger items can be lower in the display. Bulky items are effectively displayed in baskets, crates, or bags raised off the ground by at least 12-20 inches. It is important to consider the efficiency of selling when arranging a display. Avoid elaborate displays that lose their integrity as soon as one item is removed.

**If a vendor only has a few products to sell**, mass appeal can be created through enhancements such as tablecloths, baskets, flowers, photo albums, samples, etc. For example, meat vendors who may not be able to display their products can have farm photos, attractive signs, product information, recipes, cooked samples, etc. to attract customers. Given public concerns about food safety, it is critical for managers and vendors to adhere to all health and sanitary regulations to ensure public safety. A clean attractive display of quality products will go a long way towards gaining customer confidence.

The final strategy for successful sales at a farmers' market is to be **customer-oriented**. This begins with how the vendor looks—a clean shirt, apron or hat with the farm name signals professionalism and pride. Greeting customers with a friendly smile and talking to them about the products goes a long way towards personalizing the experience for the customer which is what makes markets unique from other retail food outlets.

A market manager can improve the success of farmer's market businesses by **helping vendors recognize product opportunities and ways to improve displays**. This contributes to the overall product selection and appearance of the market and enhances the customers shopping experience. It is the sum of the whole that creates the atmosphere which is unique to markets and which helps ensure their success.