

MARKETING TOOLKIT

Best Business Practices in Marketing for Farmers' Market Farmers

Mackin Creek Farm

Why Marketing Matters

Marketing your farm directly to consumers involves consideration of your target market, branding, communications, and sales. Farmers selling at farmers' markets must choose which marketing channels to sell through, decide how to reach new customers and create loyalty, and learn how to promote their farm and its products. Building relationships with customers through direct marketing also contributes to building supportive communities and strong local economies.

This toolkit was developed to support farmers selling at BC farmers' markets by highlighting key best business practices in farm marketing identified from 15 farm business case studies across the province. It is hoped that these **9 Marketing Best Business Practices (MBBPs)** will help new and existing farms grow and strengthen their farm businesses, in turn leading to a stronger local food system and farmers' market sector in BC.



Cutter Ranch

Use farmers' markets as the entry point to direct-market sales, and as a gateway to other direct marketing channels

Why It's Important

Farmers' markets are a critical point for accessing the consumer market, especially for new farmers, and can open up a variety of other direct-to-consumer marketing channels.

MBBP in Action

Tyler McNaughton and Sacha Bentall of Cutter Ranch started their business by delivering directly from their Kootenay region farm to customers as far away as Vancouver. In a marketing shift, attending farmers' markets became a way for them to tap into a growing local food sector and gain exposure closer to home. "When we started selling at farmers' markets, that is when the floodgates really opened," says Tyler. "We now had a direct point of contact with customers and were able to get the exposure and confidence we needed to consider approaching other markets."

What to Consider

- Are there additional sales channels you would like to start using or building?
- How does your presence at the farmers' market create opportunities to test out and grow additional sales channels (such as CSA programs, farm gate, direct-to-consumer delivery, grocery stores, or restaurants)?
- Does your farmers' market booth display provide clear farm name/brand recognition and contact info?

Produced and written by:





Zaklan Heritage Farm

Craft an engaging story about the farm

Why It's Important

Marketing is as much about telling a compelling story that customers can connect with as it is about the products being sold. This strategy can help farmers build understanding, appreciation, and customer loyalty.

MBBP in Action

Gemma McNeill and Doug Zaklan have been committed to building markets in their local community as they grow Zaklan Heritage Farm, and have focused on telling their unique farming story. "We are young farmers, growing on family land, and doing something unique in the suburbs... So that's the story we tell," says Gemma.

What to Consider

- What's unique about you, your farm, your products, how you farm, or why you farm?
- Are your marketing materials, including your farmers' market booth display, in line with your farm story?
- Are you using social media, such as Instagram and Facebook, to tell your farm story and connect directly with current and potential customers?



Little Qualicum Cheeseworks

Capitalize on the momentum of the local food scene in your community or region

Why It's Important

A growing interest in local, sustainably produced food is supporting farmers in communities across the province. Farmers' markets, local food events, and interest from retailers and restaurants are opportunities that can be capitalized on for marketing farm products.

MBBP in Action

By developing an agri-tourism experience on their farm, Clarke and Nancy Gourlay of Little Qualicum Cheeseworks and associated enterprises benefit from a growing interest in local food and increasing tourism in the region. Clarke and Nancy have capitalized on these developments by enhancing the experiences of those visiting the farm—by integrating the cheese plant, retail store, café, and new winery.

What to Consider

- Do you know what is happening in your local food scene (trends, other food-focused initiatives, new restaurants)?
- Have you reached out to other organizations in your community about opportunities for product collaborations or cross-promotion?
- Do your marketing materials tell the story of how your farm fits into the local food system?



Mackin Creek Farm

Dedicate time and resources to educate consumers about new products and services

Why It's Important

Dedicating time and resources to promote new products can open up new markets or draw in new consumers, which will pay off in the long run.

MBBP in Action

Early in their farming careers, Rob Borsato and Cathie Allen of Mackin Creek Farm took it upon themselves to educate local people about community supported agriculture (CSA) programs and the benefits to producers and consumers. "We wrote an article for the local paper about what CSA was and used that as a starting place for educating the community about local, organic food, which was a new idea at that time," says Rob.

What to Consider

- How can you contribute to educating consumers in your community or region?
- Do you offer product samples at the farmers' market to introduce customers to unfamiliar produce varieties?
- Do you provide recipe, storage, and preservation info at the farmers' market (and on your website)?



Promote transparency and authenticity

Why It's Important

Building a brand and a reputation as direct-to-consumer farmers requires honest communication and a commitment to sharing with customers your heartfelt values. Customers are interested and react positively to hearing about the everyday happenings of a farmer's life.

MBBP in Action

Pat Swan of Stonefield Farm integrates photos and information about how and why she farms into her farmers' market display—inviting questions and conversations with the public. "We are always happy to talk to people about what we do on the farm," says Pat. "People come to the farmers' market because they want to be able to ask those questions directly to the farmer, and that is a part of the job that we really love."

What to Consider

- Are you approachable and willing to share what you know with your customers?
- Is the following information clearly and prominently displayed at your farmers' market booth: farm/business name, address, contact info, growing methods, certifications (e.g., organic)?
- Do you have an easy-to-find online presence that clearly communicates the above information?



Test new markets by starting small and focusing on delivering quality products and building new client relationships

Why It's Important

Breaking into new markets can be a challenge, especially with uncertainty about volume, pricing, and consistency. When diversifying marketing channels, farmers often start small and adjust their approach by responding to the needs of their customers and ensuring compatibility with existing channels.

MBBP in Action

By establishing relationships with new restaurant clients, 3 Crows Farm focused on a few crops they knew they could supply consistently. As their production skills improved and relationships with restaurant clients developed, they were able to introduce new crops. "We were a little nervous to start selling to restaurants because we weren't sure if we could support the consistent demand of that market," says Michael Stevens. "So we started with microgreens and a few other things we knew we could supply consistently and built from there."

What to Consider

- Do you use the farmers' market to test out new products with customers, and to develop consistency in pricing, volume, and quality?
- How are you tracking the insights you gather, and are you integrating these into your farm business plan?
- Do you maintain regular communication with new clients to help manage expectations?



Use a variety of marketing channels to increase exposure and gain market share

Why It's Important

Taking advantage of a variety of marketing channels to access and gain market share is one way to manage risk and ensure a more stable income throughout the year.

MBBP in Action

Paul Murphy and Marlene Thimer have invested significantly in enterprise diversity at Happy Pig Organic Farm. They purchased a vehicle that they converted to a mobile food truck, which they take to farmers' markets and music festivals all summer long. "Some people might say we aren't getting the return that we should, [but] it's a way to get our food out to people and to get exposure. And in the end make a bit of extra money, too," explains Paul.

What to Consider

- What additional marketing channels could you sell through? What benefits (and costs) would each contribute to your overall farm business and lifestyle?
- Which marketing channels would help you meet your current farm business and lifestyle goals?
- Do your various marketing channels complement one another?



Understand the unique needs of the consumer market where farm products will be sold

Why It's Important

For many, farming is about pursuing what they love, but like any business venture, understanding the needs of the market is critical. Farmers should understand the size of the market and the type of products customers are looking for. This knowledge helps determine what to produce and how to sell it.

MBBP in Action

Tyler McNaughton and Sacha Bentall of Cutter Ranch sell their products in bulk, offering a box of mixed cuts that is affordable and could fit easily in the average freezer. With this strategy, Tyler and Sacha benefit by selling more product per order and making the most of marketing and delivery resources. "We have an idea of what mix of cuts people are looking for and about how long it takes our customers to go through one of our freezer boxes," explains Tyler.

What to Consider

- Do you know what your customers need or want?
- How do you decide which products to grow/produce when?
- Whether it's through reading blogs, talking to customers, or visiting restaurants, how do you collect info on food trends, fads, and market demand?



Work cooperatively to establish and access local markets and gain economies of scale

Why It's Important

Balancing marketing and sales with production and other business demands can be challenging. Working collaboratively can contribute significantly to the success of individual farms by opening up new channels, appealing to a wider consumer demographic, and building demand in the local market. Additionally, farm members can share critical and often expensive resources and infrastructure that no single farm can fully afford.

MBBP in Action

Merville Organics Growers' Cooperative was established in 2017, comprising four participating farms. The cooperative agreement was officially drawn up and executed with help from the BC Co-operative Association. Merville Organics Growers' Cooperative members make decisions as a group about crop planning, marketing, and operations while maintaining their individual farm enterprises.

What to Consider

- In what ways and with whom could you collaborate to create efficiencies, cost savings, stronger sales, and marketing?
- What beneficial tools, equipment, and opportunities are you currently unable to access because of limited resources?

This publication was written and produced by the BC Association of Farmers' Markets (BCAFM) and the Institute for Sustainable Food Systems (ISFS) at Kwantlen Polytechnic University. It highlights best business practices in marketing identified in the publication *Successful Farmers' Market Farmers in British Columbia: Business Management Lessons from 15 Case Studies*. For more information and to read the full publication, including additional best business practices, contact:

BC Association of Farmers' Markets
bcfarmersmarket.org



Institute for Sustainable Food Systems
at Kwantlen Polytechnic University
kpu.ca/isfs



Design by Uncover Editorial + Design



Funding for this project provided by:

DELIVERED BY

FUNDING PROVIDED BY

