



Maximizing Your Sales

Customer's come to a farmers' market for many reasons: freshness, quality, abundance and variety of product and farmers to choose from. But as farmers, we are all competing for the same consumer's attention, with similar products. So how do we set ourselves apart from our neighbor and maximize our own sales.

Display

Your display should create attention and draw customers to your table. A well groomed display will appeal to the customer's senses, create excitement, increase sales and will also allow you to get higher prices because people will perceive a higher value in your products.

- Abundance – create the look of abundance. Stack high, use layers, or a wide presentation if you're using baskets. The fuller a display, the more appeal it has and the less able people are to resist purchasing the product. A small display, or one that is not full, looks picked over and gives customer's the impression that the best is already gone. All that's left is the dregs.
- Continuously restock and condense the display as you begin to sell out – impression of fullness
- Color coordinate your display. Mix up colors. Reds next to greens next to yellows. A colorful display is eye-appealing and therefore draws attention to your table. (example, diagonal design of beans, berries and squashes)
- Table covering – color of cloth and small pattern so as not to dominate the products displayed. But it creates a clean, professional look to your display.
- Keep things neat and orderly, both in your displays and behind your table – safer, appearance of cleanliness, healthier and more appealing
- Tarp covering, white works best, light and airy, red & blue are darker underneath and cast produce in unnatural and unflattering light
- Put something on the table to draw attention if your product cannot be adequately displayed, such as meats that are displayed in closed coolers– pictures, bouquet of flowers, unusual signage can draw attention to your table
- Aroma, crush herbs to release their scents. Apple producers can use cinnamon oils to dab the table to create an appealing aroma.

Signage

Signage is critical to success – a sales display without signage is just a display because there are no sales. Customers are not comfortable asking for prices – it makes them feel committed to the sale before they know if they really want it. Instead of asking, they will walk on to the next vendor who has made the effort to put out signs.

- Each product needs a price sign, in bold, easy to read lettering.
- Sign should also include additional information, minimally what the product is.

- Informational signs can be as good as having an additional sales person if they include enough information
- Signs should be placed up where customers can see them, even if they are 3 deep at your table. Large enough to be read from the aisle.
- Coloring – avoid white background – it draws the eyes away from the product; black on yellow; green, red or black on off-white
- Laminated signs don't wear out as quickly, can be cleaned and if you use a grease pencil, can be changed.
- Always include a sign with your farm name and location so people know who you are and can begin to identify with you. Keep this sign high and prominent.

Create a herding effect

Customers do not like to be the only one at your table. Rather they are attracted by others already at your table – they want to know what the attraction is. So create a herding effect and sales will rise.

- Sampling sells products. Rather than putting samples on a plate for people to pick up, have someone invite customers to try a sample by handing them a fresh piece with tongs. (This cuts down on the grazing effect and only those who show an interest are invited so as not to be annoying) Once this gets started others don't want to be left out and soon you'll be sold out.
- Offer recipes, cooking instructions or preserving instructions, especially for new products and varieties. Customers love to try a new recipe, so as they pause to look over a new recipe, they'll purchase the ingredients, but they'll also help to create the crowd at your table.
- Demonstrations – can you do a demonstration such as a beehive, a fishtank, a craft demo, etc. that will create attention?
- Step out from behind your table and get things started if necessary.

Your product

All the display and merchandising techniques and customer service in the world will not overcome bad product.

- Product should be first quality, anything less should be marked as such and not given prime display space.
- Product should be fresh. That's one of the key reasons people come to a farmers' market. If we don't satisfy that need for customers we'll lose them to the competition.
- All produce should be thoroughly washed before it comes to market. Clean produce looks more appetizing and actually will command a higher price again because it has perceived value. *(able to sell 17 bushels of squash at \$2 each, while a neighbor with unwashed squash could only move 2 bushels of the same squash at 75cents)*
- All products should be displayed up off the floor – no matter what it is. Nothing is appealing on the floor even though we know it grew on the ground, it was a muddy mess 2 hours ago – the customer doesn't need to know that.
- Intersperse popular items with other products to encourage customers to view your entire display. *(i.e. Chinese greens placed next to Swiss Chard introduced customers to a new green and created interest and sales for a lesser known product.)*
- Display similar products together; i.e. root crops together, varieties of peppers together, etc *(It creates a great visual – large, abundant display.)*
- Set yourself apart from your neighbor by growing a wide variety of products; i.e. 5 types of eggplant or 8 varieties of hot peppers. *(By offering a wide variety of choice it creates excitement for a product and it's harder for customers to resist trying at least one variety of the product each week. For example, 5 varieties of eggplant, created excitement for newer varieties like miniature, white and pink eggplant.)*

- Add value to your products. It can be as simple as painting a face on pumpkins, drying gourds and making birdhouses of them, or making jams and jellies from your produce. Value added products command a higher profit margin. (*a simple gourd birdhouse created enough attention that we sold bushels of gourds at \$4 each so customers could make their own.*)

Pricing

This is probably the area where I've seen the most failure at farmers' markets. Many farmers are afraid to price their products for what they are worth and then keep their prices there. Remember, price what the market will bear, not what you would be willing to pay. Most customers would be willing to pay far more than what you would for the same product.

Some key points about pricing:

- Price is a perception of quality. When you price your product too low, customers perceive it to be of inferior quality.
- Don't try to undersell the supermarkets. Customers will pay for high quality, fresh produce, direct from a farmer, even if the price is the same or slightly higher than the supermarket.
- You know your prices are too low if you sell out early or if no one complains.
- Use mix & match pricing to encourage larger sales (*ie cucs/zucs/yellow*)
- Use multiple pricing strategies to encourage larger sales; i.e. 3/\$100 rather than 35 cents each
- Do not reduce prices at the end of the day. It only teaches people to come at the end of the day to get bargains. You don't get the prices you need to maintain your farm and family, you don't significantly increase the amounts of product you sell to make up the difference in price and your early customers get angry if and when they find they paid more for the same product. And they DO find out.

Promote yourself

Promoting yourself is about customer service. And good customer service creates loyal customers who shop with you and only you, every week. So,

- Smile and be friendly
- Let customers get to know you. Farm and family pictures along with your farm sign allows the customers to get to know you. Wear clothing with your name on it or name tags. As they become acquainted with you, they develop a loyalty to you. Once this occurs, they won't buy the products you sell from anyone but you.
- Get to know your customers. Learn their names, their kids names. As they approach, call them by name. Again, it makes them feel a part of your family and they develop a loyalty to you.
- Learn your customers shopping habits and cater to them. Again, they develop that loyalty. (*purple cauliflower customer*)
- Invite your customers to come back. "I'll see you next week" makes them feel they are appreciated and they look forward to coming back next week. It makes them a more frequent shopper.
- When you're busy with customers, take a moment to acknowledge those waiting. "I'll be right with you" even just a good morning. This simple acknowledgement may mean the difference between them waiting the few minutes for your attention, or walking on to the next vendor down the market aisle.
- When you are not busy with customers, get busy with your display. Rearrange, restock, anything to give the appearance of busy. Customers are attracted to busy people. Those that are standing around, sitting on the tailgate, are not inviting to customers and they will walk on.
- Do not eat or smoke at your table. If you must, take a break from your booth and do these things elsewhere. People don't want to buy from someone with a cigarette or chewing on a sandwich.
- Are your clothes clean and neat, your hair clean and combed? If not, you're not maximizing your sales. Don't come to market straight from the fields. Customers expect their food and their salespeople to be neat and clean, even if you were in the fields harvesting just an hour ago.

- Always educate your customers about your products. Talk knowledgeably and share information with them. They are interested in how their food is grown and harvested, agricultural issues (as long as they are not controversial), and how to prepare and preserve the foods they are purchasing. Encouraging their connection to agriculture fosters their continued support of the industry and consequently your sales. (*Discussion of washing solutions and sanitizing practices was remembered by one customer, who now buys from me first before she looks at others tables.*)

The right combination of product, display, merchandising techniques, pricing and customer service will help you to increase your sales at farmers' markets. You'll not only be able to get a higher profit margin, but you'll increase customer traffic in your booth and increase the size of each customer's purchase. It takes time to implement and perfect the techniques that will work for you and show customers your new and improved salesmanship skills, but it will build over time and you will know the effects – where it counts – on your farm's bottom line!

Diane Eggert
Farmers Market Federation of NY