

How to Establish a Farmers' Market on Federal Property

Farmers markets play a vital role in providing small- to medium-sized growers access to consumers wishing to buy their farm products. These markets provide a unique marketing experience for both farmers and consumers. Farmers sell their products directly to consumers, enabling them to stay in business and increase profit margins. Consumers can purchase farm- fresh products and get the chance to meet and interact with the people who actually grow the food. This form of farmer-to-consumer direct marketing has experienced phenomenal growth in recent years, as producers respond to consumers' demands with new and alternative marketing strategies for their farm enterprises.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is committed to developing effective marketing strategies to support sustainability of small farms throughout America. The inception of farmers markets at USDA headquarters in Washington, D.C., is one example of this commitment. The first of several USDA-sponsored farmers markets was held in August 1996. The markets were so successful that USDA expanded their size, coverage, and duration in 1997. The markets were also expanded to other Federal agencies, including the Department of Transportation, Department of Labor, Department of Energy, Department of Justice, and Department of State.

Farmers markets also make a considerable contribution to Americans' health and provide a venue to promote other USDA-sponsored programs, such as the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Farmers' Market Nutrition program which provides coupons for qualified mothers, and the Food Recovery and Gleaning Initiative, which supports collection of wholesome food for distribution to those in need.

Highlights of initial USDA farmers markets:

- The duration of markets was extended to the entire growing season: from 3 months in 1996 to 5 months in 1997;
- The number of market days was increased from 5 in 1996 to 11 in 1997;
- Overall vendor participation increased from approximately 15 vendors per market day in 1996 to about 20 vendors per market day in 1997;
- Outreach was expanded to include regional farmers from a wider geographical area, in addition to local farmers.
- The number of States supplying farmers increased from 5 in 1996 to 8 in 1997.

Guidelines and Operating Procedures for Establishing Markets on Federal Property

As USDA seeks to expand the growth of farmers markets nationally, this brochure provides steps to follow in establishing these markets on Federal properties, where public employees have primary responsibility for initial development. A goal of this brochure is to describe how these markets can operate in collaboration with the efforts of existing markets and/or local market-sponsoring organizations. A comprehensive marketing and operational strategy should be developed prior to initiating a farmers market, using the following guidelines to formulate the plan.

Identifying the Site

Preliminary identification and assessment of a market site are essential in determining the feasibility of the project. Give initial consideration to :

- Location: Identify a site with optimum visibility from streets and walkways.
- Space: Assess the number of vendors the site will accommodate.
- Availability: Determine days and hours the site is available.
- Restrictions: Determine if restrictions prevent non-Federal consumers from attending.

Market Cooperators/Sponsors

Groups to contact to identify farmers, determine product availability, and help coordinate market activities include the following:

State departments of agriculture
Cooperative extension offices
Farm Bureau
Farmers' organizations
4-H Clubs
Local community organizations

Identifying Farmers/Vendors

Local farmers and vendors should be identified in collaboration with market cooperators/sponsors. Considerations include:

- Establishing direct communication with farmers/vendors;
- Developing a good product variety/mix;
- Ensuring top-quality products; and
- Ensuring farmer/vendor diversity.

Schedule

Develop an appropriate operating schedule to maximize the potential of the local harvesting season as well as consumer participation. Issues to consider:

- Season: Determine the number of months to operate the market.
- Calendar: Determine which day(s) of week the market will operate, including market dates and times.

Rules and Regulations for Farmers/Vendors

To ensure an efficient and orderly market, it is important to adopt and enforce concise rules and regulations.

- Requirements for participation (producer-only farmers, donations of surplus food, etc.)
- Types of products for sale
- Commitment to schedule/season
- Timeliness (arrival, setup, disassembly, etc.)
- Cancellation (Specify a period of notification.)
- Display of products
- Signage (name, type of farm/product, location of farm, etc.)
- Vehicle size (Limit truck size for easy site access.)

Market Management

- Determine management and operating procedures.
- Enforce rules and regulations.
- Ensure appropriate access to utilities (water, electricity, etc.).

Security

All noncontract Federal buildings and properties need clearance by the General Services Administration. In other cases, State and/or local permits may be required. In conjunction with appropriate security personnel, the following security-related issues should be addressed:

- Site accessibility: If special passes or permits are required, can they be waived for consumers?
- Building access (restrooms, cafeteria, phones, etc.)

Market Activity

Entertaining and informative activities that complement the market environment should be planned for consumers. Consider:

- Special events (on-site chef/nutritionist, flower day, customer food drive, seasonal product promotion day, etc.)
- Promotional plans (departmental newsletter, posters/flyers, public service announcements, etc.)

Legal Issues

The Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act, Public Law 104-210, promotes food recovery by limiting the liability of donors to instances of gross negligence or intentional misconduct.

Gleaning

As an alternative to conventional market entrance fees for vendors, USDA requires that vendors participate in a USDA food-gleaning program. This strategy works effectively, as USDA formed a partnership with the D.C. Central Kitchen to collect all food and/or food products donated by farmers at the close of each market day. With donated food and/or food products from USDA, wholesalers, food banks, and other sources, the organization prepares over 2,500 meals daily and distributes them to adults and children in more than 80 nonprofit shelters and feeding programs throughout Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Virginia. Similar gleaning programs and networks exist within most States, providing services to deliver perishable surplus foods to the needy. During the 1997 market season, more than 8,000 pounds of food and food products were donated to the D.C. Central Kitchen from USDA and the other Federal Departments, through their farmers market gleaning efforts.

Developed by:

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If you have already started a Farmers Market on Federal Property, we'd like to know about it!

Please send an E-Mail to Velma.Lakins@usda.gov

Thanks!

**For questions, comments, or more information, call
1-800-384-8704**