

## **Fertilizer on the Bounty: Stimulating Farmers Market Growth in the Ozarks**

To develop a regional, unified effort to increase the visibility, strengthen the infrastructure, and improve the usage of Federal nutrition programs in the small farmers markets of south central Missouri. The project will provide infrastructure and support to 12 existing farmers markets in 10 south central Missouri counties, providing training opportunities and networking events for the vendors. Promotional programs such as guest chefs, recipe swaps, tastings, and signage to increase overall customer attendance at the market will also be provided.

[Final Report](#)

# Farmers' Markets

## Top of the Ozarks Region



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Top of the Ozarks Resource Conservation & Development Council

## **Background**

Rising prices for consumer items at supermarkets and other retail establishments have been attributed to many causes over the past several years. Among the factors are energy costs, transportation costs, and packaging and marketing costs. At the same time there has been a revival of direct marketing of foods at road side stands, increased interest in organic and natural production. Concern for herbicides and pesticides in the food stream has been highlighted regularly in popular media. And the pressure for families to supplement or replace primary incomes has been mounting.

One opportunity to respond to these factors is to increase production in a distributed manner and retail items directly by the producer. While the rise of interest in farmers' markets has been seen across the nation, the financial viability of the markets and the diverse producers has not been supported in any systematic way. The effort of this project has been to offer an assessment of each market for the review and possible improvement of profitability of the aggregate market as well as the individual producers.

## **Project purpose**

Some of the hoped for outcomes were:

- identify opportunities for expanded marketing such as cooperative selling to wholesale markets;
- encourage producers to expand production for institutional markets;
- assist with expanded products and extended seasons for existing markets; and,
- assist vendors to identify opportunities for specialized products/markets.

## **Project area and scope**

Markets known to exist in the 10 county region of south central Missouri served by Top of the Ozarks Resource Conservation & Development Council were included. Those counties are: Dent, Douglas, Howell, Laclede, Oregon, Ozark, Pulaski, Shannon, Texas, and Wright. Existing and emerging markets were identified as well as many of the vendors/producers working the markets. In addition, producers/vendors not included in the markets were solicited for participation and shared interest in growing the visibility and profitability for the markets and vendors.

## **Project Activities**

The original work outline called for:

1. an assessment of local markets with an eye to location, products and programs, traffic-access, promotions and advertising;
2. producer/vendor development with those ready-and-willing to grow;
3. assisting markets with organization and networking opportunities;
4. developing communication materials and media;
5. strengthening growing markets;
6. market branding to supplement emerging producer/marketing co-ops; and
7. marketing assistance to individual markets.

The initial effort was to engage partners in identifying the developmental needs within individual markets. Through conferring with colleagues in University of Missouri Extension and known producer leaders, we identified the most likely potentials as:

1. assisting producer/vendors to expand their productive capacity;
2. exploring producer co-ops for expanded markets; and,
3. helping markets to broaden the seasons of selling.

A project technician visited each market multiple times in order to learn of their current operations, discern the vendors interested in growth opportunities, and to build momentum for profitable production and distribution. Individual vendors and leaders were approached and varying levels of interest in expanded labor and investment, diversified production, or combined marketing were expressed. It became quickly clear that the current producers in this region are close to their capacities in terms of time and fiscal resources available.

Producer-Vendors in this region seem to look at their market activity more in social and personal terms than in financial. While they are interested in gaining more income, they are generally satisfied with how much money they take home from the market each week. It's only when trying to determine their annual income from the market that they recognize the narrow range of profitability. And, after all, it does subsidize their hobby of producing ... whatever the item. They look forward to the chance to visit with kindred spirits at the market and gain pleasure from those associations. And it gives them status in a public interchange.

We approached vendors at local fairs and festivals to try to identify some that would join in a crafts co-operative. This could have been allied with the fresh fruits and vegetables co-op for some wholesalers we talked with. There was interest from a limited number, most of whom already have websites or sell regularly on E-Bay;

The project technician contacted wholesale produce buyers, hospitals, schools, grocers, nursing homes, prisons/jails, senior centers, and group homes to determine the potential for marketing locally produced (fresh) fruits and vegetables. The buyers were interested - with reservations. For example, they need products to be graded; they want to deal with a co-operative so that they can limit the number of vehicles at their dock(s); and they want UPC labeling on products for retail sales. They also want to contract for certain volumes of product(s) and assurance of delivery throughout the year. We were unable to identify enough like-minded producers to build up a producer-marketing co-op.

The focus then turned to trying to fortify the existing markets and develop new markets. To these ends, the project technician developed radio spots – 30 second ads to run as public service announcements throughout the area. These spots covered such topics as “buy local”, “eat fresh”, and “support you neighbor”. One thrust of these spots was education. A sample is as follows:

**What does the term “organic” mean?** *In order to be labeled “organic,” a product, its producer, and the farmer must meet the USDA’s organic standards and must be certified by a USDA-approved food-certifying agency. Organic foods cannot be grown using synthetic fertilizers, chemicals, or sewage sludge, cannot be genetically modified, and cannot be irradiated. Organic meat and poultry must be fed only organically-grown feed (without any animal byproducts) and cannot be treated with hormones or antibiotics. Furthermore, the animals must have access to the outdoors, and ruminants must have*

*access to pasture (which doesn't mean they actually have to go outdoors and graze on pasture to be considered organic.*

Another sample for buy local is as follows:

**Why buy locally produced food?** To build a self-sufficient, caring community. *Knowing those who grow your food, their practices, ethics and cultural heritage helps foster rich and lasting relationships and caring communities. Saving farmers is an important way to saving our way of life. Communities that save their agricultural diversity retain their own options for growth and self-reliance. Missouri's small farmers are the backbone of a sustainable and safe food supply in your community.*

In addition, the project technician met with market leaders to offer help in growing sales. Such ideas as a visiting chef, food tasting events, allied group (e.g. health or family related) presentations, healthy recipes, and recipe card display racks were explored in various markets. There was limited adoption in a few markets.

Some consideration, by a limited number of markets, was given to a program to allow customers to use EBT cards and/or bank debit cards. There was even a State of Missouri sponsored program to make the capital costs minimal. Still, only two markets explored this and only one adopted it as a way to ease customers' buying. The primary hurdle for EBT customers is price, not quality; thus, they shop at major retailers to receive the higher volume/weight per dollar.

The project technician asked vendors if they would like to receive a newsletter that would have current information about farmers markets. Envisioned was general information such as sales tax issues; health laws/rules compliance and enforcement; displays that make customers buy; how to have plants/produce earlier and/or later in the season; keeping track of your costs and how to price for profits; etc. The general consensus was that they had more than enough to read and too little time for what they already receive.

There was some limited interest in very specific - niche – topics that did not have broad appeal. We provided the niche-interested producers with article reprints from trade publications that applied to their particular interest. We also furnished copies of new-or-emerging publications with specific product articles to vendors expressing interest. In addition, we guided these individuals to specialists in University of Missouri Extension for specific production help and assisted in web site review to aid those producers expand their marketing effectiveness.

Among niche producers, the project technician was able to assist at least three with expanding on their production levels, and in one instance, was able to help the person write a business plan to get started on a profitable venture. These ranged from a producer of flower bulbs to a producer-processor of free range chickens. And two of those producers look forward to expanded-profitable production for the coming year.

One new venture explored-but-not-supported was establishing a rentable code-compliant kitchen. This would be used by those canning fruits, jellies, jams, etc. and could support baked goods for the commercial market. The feasibility of that venture is still in question, but is still being supported by a group in one community. If it can be demonstrated to work, this is a possibility to explore in the form of a business incubator.

Throughout the period, the project technician visited at the various markets to meet with vendors, customers, and market managers, soliciting their concerns, interests, and sharing ideas for improvement and development. The project technician also attended events such as chamber of commerce luncheons, Rotary meetings, etc. speaking about farmers' markets and the issues surrounding them. These were a continuous public education effort covering such topics as:

- Children don't know where the food comes from.
- Uniformed/uneducated consumers who do not appreciate products
- Lifestyle choices – e.g. inactivity and wrong food choices
- Losing touch with how to raise food
- Producer-consumer connection
- Less desired products – especially less convenient choices
- Too much competitive and not enough cooperation
- Time/knowledge needed to prepare food
- Eating healthy requires you to think – Oh my gosh!
- Marketing and distribution systems unavailable for small farmers
- Is quality really more expensive? Does my neighbor support me?
- Ways to help young people start farming
- Need for qualified leaders at the local level
- Entrepreneurial skills needed by farmers
- Where do new and beginning farmers get started?

### **Observations:**

Although the outcomes changed drastically from the initial expectations, the activities were adapted to fit the situation of the market producers and vendors. The organized markets are adopting practices that will help to draw in customers. For example, several markets have either added directional signs along streets, or changed the placement of signs to improve legibility. A few vendors are leading the way in developing displays that use colors, textures, and/or props to display items for sale; some even are using table skirts to hide unsightly-but-needed supplies.

There are a number of emerging markets – in very small communities. In order to thrive – not just survive – they must be able to produce profits for the vendors as well as their gardens produce vegetables. In general, population numbers determine viability. Markets in communities of less than 1,000 persons struggle. Markets in communities over 3,000 become more profitable. It's just the numbers of customers available in the market place.

Training is needed throughout the regions' markets for:

- Displays that catch the eye and sell the merchandise
- Hospitality, and customer service
- Accounting – profits-and-losses
- Consumer education on quality of goods
- Consumer education on buying/eating healthy
- Niche market opportunities
- Expanding seasons for sales

Much effort could be concentrated in each of these areas with bottom line meaning attached to every aspect for the producers.

## **Summary and Conclusion:**

The project was most successful in helping a limited number of individual producers/vendors. The markets as-a-whole will benefit from the growth and development of the individuals more than directly on market days.

The indirect benefits of the project will extend for a period of time in which the vendors in the markets choose to adopt improved marketing techniques such as visual displays. As a few vendors improve sales through better displays, signs-and-marks, the remainder will mimic their success.

Likewise, overall marketing strategies will improve over the next year or two. For example, two of the markets are regularly using radio opportunities to advertise both market hours and the particular products available on a given week. As customers become better informed and buy, the incentive for added advertising and promotion will grow.

Newspapers and radio stations are now accustomed to receiving regular air/print ready information for their use. The choice of whether to air/print is now an easier one with markets continued efforts.

Niche market producers have been enabled to grow and are primed for moving into better market positions. This includes: organic producers for nuts and herbs, locally adapted flowering plant producers, free range meat producers, and local crafts artisans.

Attached are individual market assessments for each of the existing markets and a group assessment for the emerging markets.

**Existing markets:** *Ava, Houston, Lebanon, Mountain Grove, Mountain View, Salem, West Plains, Willow Springs*

**Emerging markets:** *Birch Tree, Buckhorn, Cabool, Gainesville, Mansfield, Thayer*

## *Ava Market*



**Organization:** The Ava, Missouri market has been organized for several years and has a formal structure of officers, operating by-laws, and an annual meeting of the members of the market. Members pay dues and are entitled to space through assignment by the market manager. The market has been affiliated with the AgriMissouri program of the Missouri Department of Agriculture and displays their sign on the gazebo in the square during the hours of operation.

**Location:** The market vendors fill the square in downtown Ava. The center of the square, normally divided into two parking areas, is devoted to the market, and customers park around the outside of the square and on side streets to visit the vendor booths. It is a bit awkward moving between the upper and lower portions of the market. Vendors are clustered by the types of wares – fresh produce, baked goods, crafts, animals, etc., and customers are generally able to circulate among vendors with little difficulty.

Traffic circling the square presents a safety hazard to patrons coming to the market. After parking, they must cross circling cars to get into the actual market area. This location has the advantage of continued use and is well accepted by local patrons.

**Operating Season:** The market is open each Saturday morning from late April until October each year. This is a choice made by the vendors, taking into account their experience with customers, readiness of fresh plants and products for the season. Dates are set each winter for the coming season.

**Vehicle Traffic:** The location was once the highest traffic volume location in town. In recent years, the relocation MO Highway 5 about 1 mile to the west has through traffic bypassing the town square. Likewise, major retailing is focused along the new highway and a portion of the old highway a little more than one-quarter mile to the north of the square.

**Type and Number of Vendors:**

There is a wide selection of products available, including fresh vegetables and fruits, eggs and cheeses, baked and canned foods, crafts, live animals, etc. The only way to get more vendors, on a regular basis, is for vendors to share the limited set up area available.

**Advertising & Media :**

Advertising has been limited. The cost of space advertising and radio spots has been a challenge to the market making a campaign. They do advertise the annual opening, and some other ads to note the hours of operation. Fliers on vehicles at other local sites, regular space or times in the media are not being used. I did not see any signs to direct traffic from higher volume sites to the market.

**Displays and Layout:**

Once customers arrive at the market, most of the area is paved hard surface. Only the transition between the upper and lower areas is grass covered. Because of the difference in elevation, there is a limited ability to move smoothly between the two areas.

Each vendor makes their own display using folding tables, their vehicle or other materials such as wire cages, and may provide a canopy - or not. The only permanently covered space is the small gazebo in the center of the grassy area. Displays vary according to the products; e.g. sewn goods may be on hangers, canned fruits and pickles may be stacked, and fresh cookies and/or pies may be arrayed on a table.

Identifying signs for vendors, the particular types of goods and prices are the responsibility of individual sellers. Typically prices are placed on displays and/or each item. Several sellers use printed price labels on goods, but hand lettered improvised signs still prevail.

**Allied Events & Promotions:**

The market has not used partners and co-promoted events in conjunction with the market due to space limitations – and parking limitations. Some vendors with herbs or other unique products exchange how-to tips with customers, but there is no organized attempt to provide a cache of recipe cards or demonstration of cooking or other crafts on site.

**Health and Safety:**

No public restrooms are available; nor is water. All food handling therefore must be limited. Individual vendors are responsible for their booth and products.

**Vendor Training:**

The market does not require members/vendors to meet a set of standards for customer service, signage, displays, or sanitation. This is an opportunity to expand the effectiveness – and sales – of all vendors.

**Organization:** The Houston market is not an organized market, but has been working for several years as an informal group of vendors. Those producers meet on a parking lot in the downtown area. Some of the vendors take part in other markets, both organized and not, and bring both experience and skills to the effort. Since they are not an organized market they are not a member either AgriMissouri through the Missouri Department of Agriculture or the Missouri Farmers Market Association.

**Location:** The market meets on a parking lot about a block off the main street in the downtown area. Nearby traffic is generated by the U.S. Post Office and the county library.



**Operating Season:** The season is determined informally and is dependent on when the vendors have sufficient plants and/or produce to bring to market. The market meets on Friday mornings so as not to conflict with vendors other market opportunities

## **Houston Market**

**Traffic on Adjacent Streets:** The customer traffic volume has been built on the reputation of the producers, rather than the location. Much higher visibility and vehicle volumes are available along US Hwy 63 and or MO Hwy 17, but this space is available at no cost.

**Vendors:** Vendors arrive with a variety of plants, fresh vegetables and fruits, root crops, meat, eggs/dairy, herbals and some crafts, etc.

**Advertising & Media:** The local newspaper has provided limited coverage, including pictures and seasonal updates, as well as the site for the market. Radio ads and flyers/handbills have not been used.

**Displays and Layout:** Displays generally consist of the tailgate of a truck and/or a folding table. A limited amount of canopies are beginning to be used. Vendors are clustered together and no identifying signs make them stand out from each other. Prices for bulk produce are minimalist, and for packaged items are hand placed on each item.

**Allied Events & Promotions:** There have been no promotions, special events or organized efforts to entice, educate or retain customers.

**Health and Safety:** There are no public restrooms available; nor is there running water. Vendors are each responsible for sanitary product handling.

**Training:** The need for an organizing force is growing; the relations with other retailers, the Chamber of Commerce, and community leaders may be developed into stability and leadership for the market. The need for an advantageous location, access to a permanent all-weather facility, improved product displays can be a focal point of organization.

**Organization:** The Lebanon market has been organized for several years with stable leadership, has a formal structure of officers, operating by-laws, and an annual meeting of the members of the market. Members pay dues and are entitled to space through assignment by the market manager. The market has been affiliated with the AgriMissouri program of the Missouri Department of Agriculture for some time and benefits from that program are evident in the permanent overhead sign displayed on the site.

**Location:** The market is located on the major north-south street through the heart of Lebanon. It is MO Highway 5, allowing people to stop in on their way to enjoy a Saturday on Lake of the Ozarks. And it is just a few blocks off the I-44 business route, which brings additional local traffic. Since the street is 4-lane, a left turn is hazardous for south bound visitors. Experienced local customers are more apt to use side street access and the east side for parking. Ample parking is provided at the east-and-west sides adjacent to the vendor booths.



**Operating Season:** Vendors annually choose to open the market in early April and close in late October, keeping booths open each Saturday until 12:00 noon.

## **Lebanon Market**

**Traffic and Visibility:** The overhead sign along the highway is very good by itself; but it is not distinctive enough to catch the eye of the casual driver. The market is on a paved parking lot, approximately 4 times deeper than the length of highway frontage. The clearest view of the market is from the north, across the railroad tracks; the lesser view is from the street. Since most vendors set up under temporary canopies, there is little height and/or color to attract the eye from the heavily traveled street.

**Type and Number of Vendors:** The market has an excellent balance of plants, crafts, fresh produce, baked-and-preserved foods, etc. There are a small number of vendors that have improved displays and there are several who are providing competitive home-produced items.

**Advertising & Media:** The market uses minimal media – radio – to announce the opening-and-closing dates, but does not exploit the available space or time media to attract even more customers to the market. Nearby market, including national retailers may have discouraged the use of fliers and handbills; and a hawker on the highway may be considered a safety hazard.

**Displays and Layout:** The basic layout of the market is two opposing lines of vendors on an open lot. Only one vendor makes a significant display of their products using space not covered by their canopy. The use of straw bales for creature comfort, signs to greet /direct customers, and the use of eye-appealing displays is quite limited. The dominant display is a folding table under a 10' by 10' canopy. Each vendor makes prices available on their goods, including some with clever appeals to support the ventures of the vendors

**Allied Events & Promotions:** There has been no attempt to use co-promotions, special events sponsors, etc. to bring added customer traffic. Part of that is due to the costs associated with providing those attractions with a limited market budget.

**Health and Safety:** Restrooms are furnished by having port-o-potties available at the site on one side of the parking lot. Individual vendors are responsible for all other sanitation, including water for hand washing. There is no potable water available on site.

### **Vendor Training:**

The market does not require members/vendors to meet a set of standards for customer service, signage, displays, or sanitation. This is an opportunity to expand the effectiveness – and sales – of all vendors.

**Organization:** The Mountain Grove market has existed for a few years as an organized market with a formal structure of officers, operating by-laws, and an annual meeting of the members of the market. Members pay dues and are entitled to space through assignment by the market manager. The market has affiliated with the AgriMissouri program of the Missouri Department of Agriculture.

**Location:** The market during the months meets on the old town square in Mountain Grove. The primary traffic flow is on the north and west sides of the square, and vendors line the parking area and sidewalks to display their products.

**Operating Season:** The market meets on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons, and on Saturdays until noon, from May to October,



### **Mountain Grove Market**

**Traffic Pattern:** Vehicles approach the market from two directions with no focal point for awareness for the market's vendors. Major vehicular traffic is a few blocks away on Business US 60, especially at the intersection with MO Hwy 95. Even though MO 95 flows around the square, the major retail and services area is north on MO 95 and east-west on Business US 60.

Maximum public exposure

**Type and Number of Vendors:** The variety of vendors varies throughout the season. Vendors have narrow niches of products and, for example, fresh vegetable sellers tend to concentrate product competition during the peak season. The crafts booths and plant sellers tend to spread their business and customer base over the course of the season. A variety of baked goods, canned and preserved goods and dairy is available during the season.

**Advertising & Media:** Limited use of media has been tried, but the cost for frequent and regular use is considered prohibitive. Public service announcements are used irregularly.

**Displays and Layout:** Folding tables and occasional canopies are the dominant vendor display. There is not a central circulation pattern, organizing area, or focal point for customers. Customers park next to vendor booths or across the street and then find their vendor of choice. Displays are limited only by the creativity of the vendor, several using the abundant open space to spread goods out or to lead customers into a part of their display. Prices are attached or posted by vendors and are sometimes difficult to find.

**Allied Events & Promotions:** The square lends itself to co-promoting or co-hosting events to draw customers to browse and buy, but such events are not common. There has not been a concerted effort to offer product samples, recipe ideas or "how to" tips.

**Health and Safety:** Potable water and restrooms are not available on site. Vendors are individually responsible for sanitary food handling and labeling.

**Vendor Training:** The opportunity exists for training in visual arts for displays, hospitality-customer service training

**Organization:** The Mountain View market is an organized market with a formal structure of officers, operating by-laws, and an annual meeting of the members of the market. Members pay dues and are entitled to space through assignment. The market has been affiliated with the AgriMissouri program of the Missouri Department of Agriculture for some time and benefits from that program are evident in the sign displayed on the park shelter during the hours of operation.

**Location:** The market uses a city park shelter for the Saturday morning market hours. Limited parking is available directly in front of the market and on a side street behind the shelter. The site is about 2 blocks south of US 60 and on the designated route for MO Hwy 17 south.

**Operating Season:** The market meets once weekly on Saturday mornings, starting in early May until October.



## **Mountain View Market**

**Traffic Volume on Adjacent Street:** The street in front of the market is well traveled, even though there are not other retail services as neighbors. The two local food stores are just a few blocks away to the east and north, and Wal-Mart is at the intersection of US 60 and MO Hwy 17. The traffic volume is much lower on this street, but there is limited access on US 60. Commercially printed signs are used on the main streets to alert and attract customers.

**Vendors:** The variety of vendors includes plants, herbal products, fresh vegetables and fruits, dairy, including goats products), baked and preserved foods, crafts, herbals, etc. Limited space requires that some vendors share tables inside or set up outside, which happens frequently.

**Advertising & Media:** The market became more assertive in 2009, giving market location and times on local radio, and giving buyers tips on the products as they become available through the growing season. The costs for space ads in newspapers and for flyers to handbill have not been thought beneficial.

**Displays and Layout:** Buyers typically enter and circulate between 2 rows of vendors set up along the exterior of the shelter. Signage to identify vendors and their product lines is very limited. Some vendors use hand lettered cardboard to indicate prices for bulk products, and most vendors stick labels on individual items for sale. Improved displays, such as shelves, baskets, banners and decorations are generally not used.

**Allied Events & Promotions:** This market tried their first promotional event in 2009, a guest chef to demonstrate cooking the items at the market. It was considered a success and will be expanded in the future. Individual vendors have use/preparation tips and some recipe cards to share with customers.

**Health and Safety:** Restrooms are available nearby as part of the park setting. No running water is available; and vendors are responsible for sanitation and health considerations.

**Vendor Training:** Training opportunities exist for hospitality and customer relations, creating eye appealing displays and sales aids, and in market promotion.

**Organization:** Salem has an organized market with a formal structure of officers, operating by-laws, and an annual meeting of the members of the market. Members pay dues and are assigned space by the market manager. The market has an active partner in the Salem area Chamber of Commerce. The market has been affiliated with the AgriMissouri program of the Missouri Department of Agriculture and is actively looking to expand their building size using grant funds.

**Location:** The market pavilion is situated behind the Chamber office building on the main north-south street a few blocks south of the courthouse square. There are significant retail services and food establishments nearby that help to generate traffic.

**Operating Season:** Vendors set the dates for annual opening and closing, usually May through September, selling on Tuesday afternoons and Saturday mornings. As a growing market, there is interest among some vendors in bolstering the early and late months, if not broadening dates a little.



**Traffic Volume on Adjacent Street:** Traffic volume on the street is second highest in the community. Market visibility from the street is difficult due to the prominence of the Chamber building at the street. Vendor signs are used along the street to help alert and guide customers into the market area.

### **Salem Market**

**Vendors:** The market has a broad set of products available, including plant, fresh products, packaged meats, range fed-and-or-organic, organic and natural products, honey, backed and preserved goods, etc. Vendors are well versed in product features and readily serve customers with their knowledge of methods for use/preparation or adapting plants to specific environments.

**Advertising & Media:** A member of the market places a weekly ad in the local newspaper regarding the seasonal products available, planned promotions, etc. And the local radio station notes the operating days and hours on the community calendar.

**Displays and Layout:** Vendors are responsible for their own displays, some using the tailgate of a truck, or a folding table under the roof. Eye appealing displays, using shelves, colors, textures etc. have not become common. Prices are sometimes listed on well-placed cards, but are more often marked-or-stuck on individual packages. One vendor has a custom designed unit for product display.

**Allied Events & Promotions:** The Chamber of Commerce hosts a customer appreciation day and the market hosts demonstrations such as blacksmithing. The market is assertive in bringing in youth groups or musicians to spice up the atmosphere of the market – and to attract customers.

**Health and Safety:** Water and restrooms are available at the back of the Chamber of Commerce building. Individual vendors are responsible for hand washing and sanitation for their products.

**Vendor Training:** An opportunity exists to help vendors with developing eye-catching displays, alternate methods of displaying goods and customer relations.

## *West Plains Market*

**Organization:** The West Plains market has been organized for years and has a formal structure of officers, operating by-laws, and an annual meeting of the members of the market. Members pay dues and are entitled to space through assignment by the market manager. The market has been affiliated with the AgriMissouri program of the Missouri Department of Agriculture and benefits from that program are evident.



**Location:** The market has its own building on a city owned site near the downtown area. Traffic rerouting on MO Hwy 17 in recent years has lowered the number of vehicles going by. The market has adequate on-site parking very convenient for customer access.

**Operating Season:** The market is open from late April through October, on Wednesday afternoons and Saturday mornings, closing at noon. The market has been extending the season recently to cover an early Christmas season date.

**Traffic Volume on Adjacent Street:** There are much higher traffic volumes in other parts of the community, and the market has explored relocation to more visible sites. However, the costs of moving, rebuilding, bringing in utilities, etc. has been prohibitive.

**Type and Number of Vendors:** There is a pleasant variety of vendors selling a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, eggs, dairy, meat, baked and canned foods, plants and crafts, etc. Until recent years live animals were sold immediately adjacent to the market, but that has now moved off-site.



**Displays and Layout:** Vendors are developing improved product displays and using attached price tags for customer convenience.

**Customer relations:** The market has credit card payment available, though not promoted. And they make complimentary coffee available – especially nice in the cool seasons.

**Health and Safety:** Water is available on-site, but not restrooms. Sanitary handling of products is left up to individual vendors.

**Vendor Training:** Vendors are ready to receive training in eye-catching displays that sell, hospitality and customer service.

## *Willow Springs Market*

**Organization:** The Willow Springs market has been organized for a number of years with a formal structure of officers, operating by-laws, and an annual meeting of the members. Members pay dues and are entitled to space through assignment. The market has been affiliated with the AgriMissouri program of the Missouri Department of Agriculture and the sign is displayed during the hours of operation.

**Location:** The market meets in the shelter at “Booster Field”, the ball park. Primary access is from Business US 60, with ample parking readily available.

**Operating Season:** The market is open on Wednesday and Saturday mornings from May through October.



**Traffic Volume:** Business US 60 is a primary local traffic carrier in town, with other retail and commercial services spread along the street into the downtown area. Because the shelter is back away from the street and right-of-way, and other businesses are closer to the street, it is not easily seen from the street. Minimal signage is in place to alert and guide customers into the site.

**Type of Vendors:** There is a variety among vendors and products through the season, including plants, fresh fruits and vegetables, baked and preserved goods, and crafts items.

**Advertising & Media:** The market has used the community calendar on local radio to advantage. The cost for space and time media has kept those ads to a minimum.

**Displays and Layout:** The market has ample space for vendors, and adequate customer parking. The signage to get customers alerted and drawn into the site needs to be developed. As the number of vendors grows, there will be growth in the quality of product displays, arrangement and pricing.

**Allied Events & Promotions:** The market has not participated in co-sponsorships, co-promotions, or such activities as visiting chefs, food tastings, recipe exchanges etc.

**Health and Safety:** Restrooms are available nearby; however water is not. Vendors are responsible for sanitary handling of food items.

**Training:** The greatest training opportunity for this market lies in vendor recruitment, hospitality and customer service.

### **Emerging Markets:**

**Alton, Birch Tree, Buckhorn, Cabool, Gainesville, Mansfield, Thayer**

**Organization:** These markets are in varying degrees of organization. Some, by drawing on leadership from existing nearby markets, have made quick progress in setting up at established off-street locations, regular hours, operating guidelines for vendors, etc. Others range down to a minimum number of vendors working from the tailgate of a truck on the town square. At least one has discovered how to leverage membership in trade organization for insurance coverage and marketing support.

**Location:** These markets have the best opportunity to locate with optimum exposure to traffic. The smaller communities frequently offer less flexibility in high volume roadside places, and must rely on other public places. Some of those places less visible - off the beaten path and less visible; and some of the best locations are retail sites that see the market as competition for their products-services. Adequate parking can be a problem in smaller communities. Location-Location-Location.



*Parking is more than a convenience. Convenient parking, like this, is a selling point.*

**Operating Season:** These markets have an opportunity to show how to stretch the season, by using greenhouses and cold frames to start plants earlier in the year; or

by using second crop rotations to have extra produce later in the fall. Flexible days and hours can be an advantage by serving smaller populations with convenience.

**Traffic Volume:** A major issue for vendors is the number of customers per hour – reflected in the sales volume. Many “free” spaces within communities are not the most advantageous spots for selling. Customer convenience must be a consideration. How many drivers can easily be brought into the site? They have to be going past; they must know the market is present; they need to be assured of a selection of quality products; they expect hospitality; and much more. But it starts with having the volume of traffic close by.



*This site, along a 4 lane street with a (5<sup>th</sup>) center turn land and a 45 mph speed limit exhibits the tension between having high traffic volumes and the ability to get customers to turn into the market.*

**Displays and Layout:** “Customers eat with their eyes”. Displays that look the best sell the most. These vendors must merchandise effectively, offer taste tests – who doesn’t want to know that the peach is really sweet? Put the customer at ease – Americans are just learning to “haggle” – make the prices easy to see. Show who you are – so they can support local agriculture.



Plants lend themselves to outdoor displays.

**Health and Safety:** Make visible efforts to demonstrate a concern for health and safety. For example: where there is a lack of potable water, prominent use of gel type hand sanitizers may overcome any customer question about sanitary handling of food products. Signs and cards that extol the health benefits of eating fresh can inform customer's choices. And, active sharing of preparation how-to's and tips can help buyers to try "something new".

**Vendor Training:** Most market sellers started with an interest in growing or making the product. And their winning personality is a distinct "plus" factor. To turn those attributes to winning customers, an emphasis on customer service – hospitality – is a large bonus. With eye-appealing displays that inform and entice buyers, the sellers can increase both sales volume and profitability. Signs for alerting and directing customers to the market are frequently needed and often ignored. And signs that inform buyers of the competitive features of the products invite a discussion about quality, healthy living, and other desired virtues. Such signs also can make prices clear and well accepted.

**Sanitation:** Sanitary practices at the market, such as running potable water, clean/graded food products, and concerns for health give customers safety and

comfort. Knowledge of safe handling can be used to help customers in their buying and use of food items.

**Competition:** Farmers' markets need to make a distinction between the market and individuals selling from a stand in front of their house along the streets and highways. Likewise, in Missouri, a farmers' market requires that the people growing and/or producing the item may qualify as a farmers' market. Those who buy-and-resell the items are retailers and do not qualify as a farmers' market. It is up to the individual markets to develop the relationships in their communities so that other retailers and businesses will recognize and support local agriculture.

