

Farmers Sales Training Video and Manager
Resource Notebook to Enhance Marketing and
Sales at Farmers' Markets

To improve the ability of Agricultural Extension Agents to provide relevant assistance to farmers market managers and vendors in their communities through the development of targeted training materials.

[Final Report](#)

Farmers' Market Video and Resource Notebook
2007-8 FMPP Final Report
Submitted by Steve Miller,
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1) Project Need

This need for this project was stemmed from the exponential growth of farmers' markets and the interest on the part of consumers to buy local foods. The number of farmers' markets in New York has doubled in the last eight years, approaching 400. Even small communities are organizing markets. A 2005 survey of market managers in New York showed that most managers are volunteers or are paid nominally. They also have little or no applicable experience to help them manage a market. Likewise, few education professionals in the field of agriculture are equipped with the tools to provide consultation or educational programming in management skills for market managers, nor in marketing skills for the farmer/vendor audience.

In addition, because of growth in the number of farmers' markets there is a dire need for more farmers to fill these markets. Many new markets discover that they cannot find enough farmers to provide reasonable competition or diversity of product for their market. Even farmers that have used farmers' markets for years may be able to improve their skills related to this activity.

There are two primary deliverables for this project. The first is a resource notebook (Farmers' Market Resource Manual) to be utilized by county based Cooperative Extension staff and other professionals who work with farmers who are interested in selling at a farmers' market. This notebook would provide a variety of information about how and where to access information that would help farmers make the decision to sell their products at a farmers' market or to improve their skills in doing so.

The second portion of this project is a video that will help farmers improve their skills in merchandising, customer service, and preserving product quality and safety when selling at a farmers' market. Much of this information would also be applicable to selling at a roadside market but the intent here is to describe and showcase techniques that will help improve sales and customer confidence in their products. The original grant request was for the production of a video. During the process it was decided to include other materials on the DVD so that more information would be able to be included than what could be shown through the video alone.

2) Work team

A Work Team was formed of Cooperative Extension staff that have experience working with farmers' markets Steve Miller project leader, Monika Roth, Rosalind Cook and an industry professional Diane Eggert from the Farmers' Market Federation of New York. Additional input was given by Jennifer Wilkins from Cornell University and Jonathan Thomson from NYS Dept of Agriculture and Markets. The team met regularly to organize the entire process from developing the script to editing the final products. Their input was given in addition to their normal work as an in kind contribution to the project. The formation and utilization of the Team greatly added to the end product.

3) Production and Filming

Filming of the video began in June of 2007. Over the course of the summer, filming was done at five farmers' markets in central New York, The Syracuse Regional Market, Ithaca, Auburn, Trumansburg and Vestal. These were chosen because of their range in size, variety of growers, and type of community. Central New York was chosen because there is a long tradition of successful farmers' markets and to reduce travel costs for the videographer who is based in Ithaca and the rest of the work group.

As filming proceeded, the work group communicated regularly to make sure that we were capturing the message we wanted to portray. Dozens of customers and vendors were interviewed on camera with over 14 hours of actual filming. An individual farm family was selected to be followed through the process of harvesting, washing, packing, market set up and sales. The particular farm we chose earns their living from fresh vegetable production and sales at farmers' markets only. Discussion and comments made by this farm family and other growers provided many insights for others to learn from. While filming progressed the project leader continued to gather information to be included in the DVD. By working closely with an authoring company it enabled us to make a package that is user friendly. A great deal of effort goes into setting up materials on a DVD to make them accessible by computer and it was necessary to have assistance from a company that does that work. The final product included power point presentations, a slide show, user guide, internet links and a number of printable documents that can be used as handouts for educational sessions. In the process of developing the video it was decided that the video would have a wider audience if we included both English and Spanish subtitles, English for those with hearing impairments and Spanish for that portion of the agricultural community where Spanish is the primary language.

4) The Video and DVD Materials

The Video entitled "Shared Wisdom: Selling Your Best at Farmers' Markets" is 23 minutes. It may be shown on a DVD player or through a computer with DVD capability. It is closed captioned in both English and Spanish and these options are accessed via the "Subtitles" menu option in the main menu. The video flows from subject to subject and can be shown in chapters of approximately 4 minutes each. The story line highlights a farm family that relies on farmers' market sales for their primary income. The video begins with harvesting and preparation for market and follows them through loading, set up, selling and packing up at the end of the market day. Subjects covered include products, display materials, booth set-up, signage, and customer service. Farmers and customers share their insight and experiences with farmers' market sales. This video is not only useful for training market vendors but is also a great tool for recruitment of new vendors, farmers' market board members and sponsors of markets. In fact, it may also be shown to the general public as a promotional tool.

A) PowerPoint Presentations

Slide Show by Steve Miller and Monika Roth
"Selling Your Best at Farmers' Markets"

The slide show is a collection of images from markets around the country that show

examples of displays. It is organized into subject sections including signage, display mechanics, pricing and salesmanship. The slide show contains brief notes for the presenter but is not meant to be used as a presentation in itself. The slides are a resource for trainers and could be added to a power point presentation or used as a tool for discussion about what is good and not so good about a particular market set-up

Making Market Sales Sizzle by Diane Eggert, Executive Director of The Farmers' Market Federation of New York.

This presentation is colorful and packed with information drawn from many years of experience as a farmer/vendor and marketing professional and can easily be shown by market managers, and staff from Cooperative Extension and State Agriculture Agencies. It takes almost an hour and a half to show the entire presentation although the user can easily edit for each audience.

Strategies for Increasing Farmers' Market Sales

By Monika Roth, Marketing Educator, Cornell Cooperative Ext., Tomkins County, NY. This presentation parallels "Making Market Sales Sizzle" with excellent details on display mechanics and connecting with your customers. The author has many years experience providing educational programs on direct marketing of farm products.

Marketing The Farmers' Market

By Lynda Brushett of the Cooperative Development Institute in Massachusetts. This presentation is meant to be used by professionals as a tool to raise the skills of farmers' market managers, board members, and volunteers. It is first in a group of five presentations funded through a USDA SARE grant. Organizers involved with farmers' markets could benefit from the information offered.

Business Planning for Farmers' Markets

By Lynda Brushett of the Cooperative Development Institute in Massachusetts. Another in a series that offers professional level training to farmers' market managers and boards. This presentation offers insights into important market business management needs.

B) Printable Documents

User Guide and Flow Chart

These two documents help the user navigate through the materials offered in the DVD.

Movie Notes by Monika Roth.

This document is a companion to the video. Notes help the presenter to engage the audience in discussion and provide details on merchandising, displays and customer service. In addition there are resources and websites referenced for each subject.

A to Z of What a Farmer/Vendor Should Bring to a Farmers' Market by Jane Desotelle, Manager of the Adirondack Farmers Markets in northern New York State. A helpful reminder for vendors about what selling aids to bring to market.

Farmers' Market Vendor Evaluation

by Monika Roth with additions from Diane Eggert. This checklist allows managers and vendors to evaluate the vendors' display and booth space. It could also be used by a farmer to rate an employee that represents their farm at the market.

Farmers' Market Evaluation by Monika Roth.

This checklist is a tool to evaluate the overall attributes of any farmers' market. A very handy tool for managers and vendors alike. Vendors may want to use it when considering whether or not to participate at a particular market.

Maximizing Your Sales by Diane Eggert. This four-page document provides detailed information to help vendors to visually connect with their customers at the market.

Selling the Whole Truckload by Gail Hayden, Executive Director of the California Farmers' Market Association. The document is an outline of a presentation that Gail has given focusing on effective marketing strategies for farmers' market vendors.

Ways to Offer Customer Service at Farmers' Markets by Monika Roth.
Helpful tips and creative ideas for offering customer service at farmers' markets.

Closed Captioned Script for Video, English and Spanish These documents provide a complete script of the insights provided line by line in the video.

Websites and Publications Includes a brief listing of useful websites and publications that provide additional information on farmers' market operations and sales.

C) Credits

The USDA Agriculture Marketing Service Farmers' Market Promotion Program provided grant funding for the video.

The New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets provided additional funds to add to the materials in the DVD package.

Video Production Services by Peter Carroll Productions, Ithaca, NY

DVD Authoring by Photosynthesis Productions, Ithaca, NY

Project Work Team:

Rosalind Cook of Cornell Cooperative Extension of Jefferson County, NY

Diane Eggert of The Farmers' Market Federation of NY, Syracuse, NY

Monika Roth of Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County, NY

Steve Miller of Cornell Cooperative Extension of Madison County, NY.

Other documents were contributed by: Lynda Brushett of the Cooperative Development Institute Inc. of South Deerfield Mass., Gail Hayden, Executive Director of the California Farmers' Market Association, and Jane Desotelle of the Adirondack Farmers' Market Cooperative, in New York.

Spanish translation by Dora Flores, USDA - Agricultural Marketing Service.

Volunteer Actors: Dennis Hartley of Littletree Orchards, Newfield NY for his memorable portrayal of the bad vendor and the customers who put up with him: Lisa Fernandez, Tom Terrizzi, and Dan Klein, all of Ithaca, NY.

Thank you to all of the farmers and customers who provided their ideas and comments about selling and buying at a farmers market.

Lastly, a very special thank you goes to **Lisa and Brendan Bloodnick**, of Apalachin, New York, our featured farm family in the video. They were willing to open their farm up to us and offer much insight into their growth and success in the farmers' market business. They are a great example of how hard work, planning, and enthusiasm can create a very successful farm enterprise.

5) Distribution of Product

The grant called for the distribution of the video/DVD to Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) Offices in New York State and to the appropriate Agriculture office in each of the other 49 states and this has been done. A copy of the DVD was mailed with a letter about its use to each CCE office along with the Farmers' Market Resource Manual. In addition the project leader promoted the availability through a variety of industry conferences, newsletters and websites. Approximately 50 additional copies of the DVD have been sent directly to farmers' market managers at their request. Many professionals from outside of New York have also requested a copy and some were sent out to those who needed it immediately to show at a conference and others were instructed on how to receive a copy from USDA AMS. That organization obtained 500 copies to be sent out around the country by request. A copy of the Resource Manual with the DVD enclosed was sent to each Director/Commissioner of Agriculture in each state with a letter of explanation. The Manual was developed with New York circumstances and regulations in mind and the other states were encouraged to use their copy as a template to develop one specifically for their state.

In the process of showing the video to farmer/market manager groups, an added value to the project was the recognition that there would be a benefit to the industry to show the video to consumer audiences. It has been used by some market managers already for that purpose as well as to use with community leaders. The project manager approached the local PBS stations in upstate New York and they were interested in airing the video on television. In order for this to happen it was necessary to have the video closed captioned and to have a specially formatted copy made that is compatible with the TV station's equipment. Additional outside funding of \$325.00 was obtained to cover these costs. The copy was made and the video has now been shown on PBS twice in Central New York, counties surrounding Syracuse, and again in the Capital District, counties surrounding Albany, New York.

The project leader continues to receive feedback and requests for the video from farmers' market managers and agriculture professionals from around the country. It has been shown at farmers' market conferences and groups in California, Massachusetts, Indiana, Missouri, and New York. Most recently the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association requested materials to use for their conference in the fall of 2008. The

project leader will also be showing the video and speaking to the annual meeting of the New York State Grange in October of 2008, and it is scheduled to be shown at the New England Direct Marketing Conference in February of 2009.

6) What did we learn

Working on this project from start to finish was a great learning experience for everyone involved. As the project developed it became evident that more information was being gathered than what could be included in the original 15 minute video that was proposed. The impediments we encountered were actually the result of adding to the product. This required additional time and funds to make the changes needed. The element that was the most difficult to overcome was the English to Spanish translation for the subtitles in the video. Translation may vary by who is doing it and whether they use casual or more formal ways to interpret what is being said. In the end it was decided that a USDA staff member would provide the translation.

The videographer that was hired, Peter Carroll Productions, became so enthusiastic about the project that he did not charge extra for his services even though the final video was 50% longer than what was originally agreed on. He and the authoring company, Photosynthesis Productions are both very skilled in what they do and their efforts not only simplified the process but also were highly responsible for the quality of the end product. The addition of English and Spanish subtitles, power point presentations, slide show, internet links, printable documents and closed captioning were all products that were not in the original deliverables for the grant. These all added to total package and made a product that has far greater uses as evidenced partially by the airing of the video on PBS. The costs were covered by special funding from New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets and by USDA AMS. It was felt by all parties at the time that the additions to the video far outweighed the inputs that were necessary.

7) Contact Information

The project leader works as the Cornell Coordinator for The Farmers' Market Nutrition Program. He may be contacted by mail, Steve Miller CCE of Madison County, PO Box 1209 Morrisville, New York 13408; email sgm6@cornell.edu and by phone 315 684-3001x0206