

Market Leadership: The Market Manager

Public perception of a farmers market is that it's an effortless task of gathering farmers and artisans, setting up a few tables and tents, and voilà, you have a market! A well-run market looks seamless and easy. However, as market managers know, it is a monumentally challenging task that demands a diverse set of skills in order to succeed. And with farmers markets springing up almost overnight all over the commonwealth, the market manager is perhaps the single most important tool for market success. The manager must balance his/her work with farmers, consumers, and communities to keep the market functioning and prospering.

A market manager must possess skills that will drive them to work long and hard to ensure the market is a vital selling space. But what are these skills that make a good farmers market manager and what roles does the manager play in creating and nurturing market success?

Qualifications

WANTED: passionate, creative, self-motivated individual, with exceptional problem-solving, organizational, communication, marketing, and financial skills.

These qualifications are what a market manager needs in order to guide a market to success for its farmers, consumers, and its community partners. It's critical that markets understand the value of these skills and budget an appropriate salary for their market manager. High turnover is a disadvantage in any business enterprise, and this is especially true for farmers market when the market manager may be the only paid employee.

Duties of the Market Manager

The duties of a market manager make up an extremely varied job description. A market manager wears a number of different hats, and the hats change with the seasons. While farmers markets tend to be seasonal, there is plenty of work to be done by market managers throughout the year. The following is a summary of the tasks that market managers may need to perform—it will of course vary market to market considering that some managers will solely be responsible for coordinating onsite operations and others will also oversee all the paperwork and other behind the scenes duties.

Pre-Season tasks:

Develop advertising and promotions calendar, including

- Media campaign
- Promotional materials (signs, banners, brochures)
- Special events

Work with market board/committee to review, create, and/or update the market systems to promote sustainability for the market

- Rules and regulations
- Strategic planning for the market
- Board/committee development
- Long-term marketing and promotions plan

Develop market operations

- Identify opening/closing dates for upcoming year
- Secure necessary permits
- Secure market liability insurance
- Review market site for improvements

Recruit farmers/vendors

- Assess market needs for consistent supply of product
- Develop recruitment strategy

Establish budget and secure funding sources; set stall fees

Develop community relationships

- Get involved with community organizations on behalf of the market

Hold pre-season vendor meetings to communicate all of the above

In Season tasks:

Enroll farmers and vendors in the market through vendor agreements/leases/market applications; ensure that all necessary insurance certificates and licenses are current and on file.

- Maintain database of all vendors, contact information, and all other pertinent information (licenses, etc.)

Attend to finances—collect stall fees; set up and maintain an accurate accounting system

Assign stalls to seasonal vendors, assign stalls each week to daily vendors

Place all signage prior to market opening; carry out promotional plan

Ensure all market rules and state/county regulations are adhered to

Resolve any disputes that arise between and among market constituents

Maintain market grounds in a safe manner

Operate informational booth for consumer questions, nutrition education materials, POS materials; operate EBT terminal for SNAP (food stamp) sales, if applicable

Act as liaison between vendors and market board/committee

Conduct periodic customers counts and collect vendor sales information

Ensure market grounds are clean after all vendors have left for the day

Conduct farm inspections as needed

Post-Season tasks:

Evaluate the market season—what worked, what could be improved upon

Hold post-season farmer/vendor meeting to recap and celebrate the season

Attend the VFMMA Market Managers Conference and other professional development opportunities to further your management skills and improve the market

Do maintenance and repairs on market grounds, equipment, and/or supplies