

Engaging the Community for Farmers Market Success

Engaging the community is essential for the success of a farmers market. The information provided in this section uses examples from Vermont farmers markets to provide an overview of how a farmers market can engage the support of its community to achieve sustainable success.

Farmers market relationships are characterized by a handshake. The hand that pulled the potato, fed the chickens, and formed the cheese is the hand that accepts customers' money, answers questions, and seals a handshake contract: *This food is good and clean and safe. I know, because I grew it and I eat it.*

The relationship between farmer and eater—vendor and customer—is the primary relationship that exists at farmers markets. However, it is not the only relationship at a farmers market. Many community partners are involved in successful farmers markets, and building solid relationships with these partners can strengthen your market and contribute to its long-term viability and success.

The number and type of **community partners** that can contribute to supporting a farmers market is nearly limitless. Some of the major categories of potential community partners are:

- × Businesses and merchants
- × Government
- × Schools and educational institutions
- × Non-profit and faith-based organizations
- × Health and social service organizations
- × Customers



Community partners can support the farmers market by:

- × Serving on the market's **board of directors**.
- × Assisting with **operations** like site set-up, parking, signage, and gleaning.
- × **Fundraising**, including special events and grant writing.
- × Collaborating on **communications** like marketing materials and press releases.
- × Engaging in **advocacy** to speak on the market's behalf.

Relationships are at the heart of gaining and keeping community support. When meeting with any community partner, ask, “How can the farmers market better serve you?” Find out what it will take for a potential partner to support the market—and be ready with answers when community partners ask what they can do to support the market.

When it comes to supporting the farmers market, there is a role for all members of the community. The more people and organizations are engaged, the more vibrant the market will be. Anyone who supports the market can volunteer their skills; many community members are potential board members; and everyone who enjoys the market can be engaged in advocating for its continued operation and success.

When planning a new market, engage community members and partners in meetings to discuss the role of the market in the community, to identify who is available to support the market, and to determine if local farmers have the capacity to vend at another market.

Why should communities support farmers markets?

Farmers markets benefit communities. Markets create a place where local farmers can sell their food at a higher profit margin, which benefits the local economy and preserves agricultural land. Markets bring people together, strengthening the fabric of a community. Markets bring people into downtowns, creating a “spillover” economic effect for other downtown businesses. Farmers markets drive the development of new local food systems, make food more visible in public spaces, educate consumers about the diversity of healthy and local food products, and incubate new businesses.

Because of these many benefits, a wide array of community entities stand to benefit from a strong farmers market. However, the benefits of markets may not be obvious to those not directly associated with the markets. Successful markets prove their community value to all of their stakeholders, be it local government, neighboring businesses, or potential funders.

How can data help?

Markets need to ask themselves: “Why should this community support our farmers market? What are the potential gains to the community?” Markets should then collect the data that will prove these gains to the people who need to know, and communicate these findings effectively.

Be sure to DOCUMENT everything the market does. If you do an RMA to find out how many visitors come to the market, publicize those numbers. How many acres of farmland are represented by the producers at this market? Say so. Does your market donate gleaned produce to a local food shelf? If so, weigh or measure that produce and write a press release. Did vendors leave the market because their business got too big? Congratulations—your market just incubated a new business, and is a driving factor in the local economy. Don't assume that the public knows the benefits your market provides to the community. Document these facts, publicize them, and thereby prove the market's value to the community.

A short fact-sheet with this kind of data can be a powerful publicity tool for your market. You can regularly communicate your market's community impact through press releases to local papers, a report on your website, presentations at town meetings, and on your market's printed promotional materials.

Why does the market's mission statement matter?

A mission statement is a brief statement that outlines your market's purpose. It doesn't need to be long, but it needs to be clear. Having an up-to-date, accurate mission statement is really important for a market. It helps the market board and manager make decisions, because they know what the market's purpose is—and isn't. As you engage community support, ALWAYS check the potential partnership or activity to ensure that it is aligned with your mission. Having a clearly stated mission helps the market identify partners whose mission aligns with the market. Additionally, potential community partners are quickly and easily able to understand

how the partnership will benefit the market's mission. For more information about developing a mission statement and examples of other markets' missions, visit <http://www.marketumbrella.org/index.php?page=market-communications>.

Community Support for the Board and Mission

As noted above, a clear, concise, accurate mission statement is absolutely essential for a successful market. It is the board's responsibility to develop this mission, revisit it regularly, and make decisions that reflect and further the mission.

Traditionally, farmers market boards have been comprised primarily or entirely of vendors. Now, as new markets emerge, they are frequently organized by more diverse boards that include community members who are interested in bringing the benefits of a farmers market to their community. At these markets, vendors are among the board members, but are not the only board members. In Vermont, some markets are creating spaces on their boards for non-vendor community members. For example, the Bellows Falls Farmers' Market holds a community member spot on their board, which indicates the value the market places on integrating the host community's values in market decisions. A diversity of stakeholders on the board can bring fresh ideas and new ways of thinking about the market.

Community members can support the mission by serving on the board, or by supporting the market via one-time or ongoing assistance. Everybody knows somebody and word of mouth is a market's best promotion strategy. Find out who among your board members, manager, vendors, and regular customers has skills that can support the market. Then, ASK for help! Some professionals may be able to provide services free of charge; others may offer or be willing to charge reduced rates. Sometimes, all it takes is a well-timed, well-framed request.

As the market board of directors changes and grows, and as the types of members expand and diversify, community professionals can support the market board by providing services such as **board development, strategic planning, conflict resolution, and meeting facilitation skills**.

Community professionals can also provide **legal and accounting services** to the market and the board. This can be helpful for the decision-making and paperwork involved in becoming a 501(c)3, 501(c)5, or 501(c)6 non-profit, or an LLC. As the market undertakes new initiatives and begins to document its benefit to the community, professional support with **record-keeping and evaluation** can be essential.

Fundraising does more than raise money; it keeps the market fresh and alive in the minds of customers and community partners. Hold a fundraiser in the off-season (if yours is a seasonal market) to remind the community of the market. Invite all members of the community to participate in the event to promote inclusiveness and avoid polarization. Special fundraising events are a great way to engage volunteers; be sure to recognize them by name.

A local graphic designer can help with a **poster, brochure or display card**; a local web

designer can develop the market's **website** and/or **blog** to make it easy to update quickly.

Quality **photography** can make a world of difference in the market's publicity and marketing. Local photographers can document the market; the photos can be used on the market's brochure, website, Facebook page, press releases, and other marketing materials. A photo exhibit can be displayed at town hall, the local library, or in a storefront window before the market season, to build excitement. At the Capital City Farmers' Market in Montpelier, a local photographer took hundreds of colorful photos of the market's vendors, customers, and products. The following year, these photos were displayed in the storefronts of downtown merchants in advance of the market season, which built anticipation and excitement for the upcoming market season.

Community Support for the Market Manager

In Vermont, most market managers work as part-time staff or volunteers but perform many of the skills of a CEO! Managers can benefit from training and support in many areas, including:

- × Meeting facilitation skills
- × Conflict resolution skills
- × Working with a board
- × Partnership development
- × Fundraising
- × Volunteer supervision/management
- × Website update
- × Writing press releases
- × Implementing policy and procedures
- × Food safety regulations
- × Basic accounting skills
- × Computer skills, like database management



Quality management is integral for a successful market, and in one study¹ of unsuccessful markets, two metrics related to management—a volunteer or low-paid manager, and high manager turnover—contributed to market failure. The more skills a manager is able to develop or access (in the form of supporting volunteers and board members), the greater the likelihood that the market will succeed. The vendors at an established market are often the stable factor; it is the manager who changes more frequently. Vendors should have a stake in supporting the development of excellent management skills as the vendors (and market) are dependent on the quality of the management.

1 “When Things Don’t Work: Some Insights into Why Farmers’ Markets Close.”

By Garry Stephenson, Larry Lev, Linda Brewer. Oregon State Extension, July 2008.

This publication is available online at <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/pdf/sr/sr1073-e.pdf>

The same study suggests that market organizers should “have a plan in place for the transition from a volunteer to a paid manager position as market size approaches the mid-teens in numbers of vendors, and as growth requires the manager to work more than seven hours per week during the market season.”

Community Volunteers can Support your Farmers Market Operations

A lot of things need to happen on market day: Vendor parking needs to be blocked off. Vendor spaces need to be taped off or delineated in some way. Cones may be set up to slow traffic. Signs are set up near the market to entice new, and remind regular, customers. Many markets offer tables for customers to rest and eat; if these tables are stored off-site, they need to be brought out each week. Trash receptacles, recycling bins and compost containers must be set out. Special events require tables, tents, signs, and other materials. (And then, most of these tasks must be done in reverse when the market is over!)

The market manager, especially if s/he is paid, likely does most or all of these tasks. However, engaging volunteers builds a sense of ownership among those who participate—their sweat equity makes it “their market,” a market those volunteers are more likely to patronize and advocate for. Plus, work done by volunteers means lower overhead for the market—and higher profits for the vendors. *Engaging community members as volunteers at the market can keep farmers farming—and what better reason for folks to volunteer?*

Keep a sign-up sheet at the market table for potential volunteers. Ask if they are available every week, or weekly for a month, or for the entire season. You may be surprised at the offers of assistance. Below are several ideas of ways to engage volunteers in supporting the market. This is just a starting point—you know your community best!



- ✦ Designing and creating roadside signs can be a great project for a local artist or an art class. A design contest might engage the interest of a great number of community members. Local lumber yards can donate the wood, or a builder might donate scraps for the cause. Ask around for half-used cans of paint to finish the project. Remember to capture the artistic process in pictures, and post them to the market's website and use in a press release.

- ✦ One Vermont market is fortunate to have a volunteer who sets up the roadside signs before each market, takes them down afterward, and stores them off-site during the week.

- ✦ Local or school-based sustainability/environmental groups may be interested in collecting compost at the market. They may also be interested in collecting and weighing the trash for

zero-waste awareness campaigns.

- * At the end of the market, fruit and vegetable vendors usually have produce left over that they may not be able to sell, or that they may not want to take home. Gleaning these items for local food pantries is occurring more and more. If a local food shelf doesn't send a representative to collect the food, consider engaging a volunteer to help deliver. Be sure to quantify (weigh or measure) the amount of food that is gleaned and donated, and use this information in the market's publicity materials.
- * Don't forget to thank everyone who helps with the market. You might give long-term volunteers a market t-shirt or tote bag. Some markets host special events at the end of the season to thank customers and volunteers. All-star volunteers might deserve a special treat from the market, like a basket filled with vendors' contributions.

This section explores some ways to engage specific types of community partners to further support your farmers market. Be creative! You know your community, and its resources, best.

Businesses and Merchants

Support at a Glance

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| <p>For-profit enterprises, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Downtown merchants and area businesses * Chamber of Commerce or downtown association * Restaurants * Gardening and farm supply stores * Cooking equipment stores * Banks and credit unions * Realtors * Property management companies * Bus companies and regional transportation networks * Local media like newspapers, radio stations, and magazines | board of directors | Consider inviting a supportive merchant or business representative to sit on the market board. These folks have longstanding relationships and influence in the market town. |
| | operations | Chambers of Commerce and downtown associations sometimes pay for liability insurance and/or allow the market to use the association's EIN number. If the market requires storage, perhaps a nearby merchant could store the markets' signs or tents. |
| | fundraising | Businesses and merchants can be approached for seasonal financial support or underwriting for special events. |
| | communications | Businesses and merchants can post flyers for the market—all season long, and for special events. |
| | advocacy | If the business community sees the market as a benefit to the town, they may advocate for the market when the need arises. |

The Details

Getting support from local business will look different depending on your location. A municipality with a downtown is different from a rural town with only a country store. Wherever you are, the support of local businesses can help your market—and a lack of support may hurt it. Consider asking a supportive business owner or merchant to sit on the market's board of directors.

The Shelburne Business and Professional Association (SBPA) established the Shelburne Farmers' Market in response to the community's demand for a market, and in an effort to positively affect businesses. The market manager is a volunteer member of the SBPA. The SPBA board of directors directs the market, and is guided by an advisory committee of vendors. Because the market operates under the auspices of the SBPA, it has not had to establish itself as a non-profit organization. The SBPA pays the general liability premium for the market. Nearby businesses, including a supermarket that was initially wary of the market, have noted that their business increases on market days.

In Woodstock, the Chamber of Commerce established the Market on the Green as a way to draw more downtown foot-traffic. The Chamber provides insurance and bookkeeping services to the market, posts market materials on the Chamber website, and includes market information on all of the Chamber's advertising materials. The Chamber is the de facto market board, which has presented some opportunities for education; for example, the importance of a 60/40 vendor mix.

If there is a downtown business association or chamber of commerce in the market town, engage a representative of the group in a discussion. What are the group's goals? How does the group view the farmers market? Sometimes local merchants view farmers markets as good neighbors, and sometimes local merchants view farmers markets as competition. Try to find out what the prevalent view is towards the market, and why that is so. (Remember, of course, that merchants will vary in their opinions; and some will be more forthcoming with their thoughts than others.)

Invite an open dialogue, perhaps with several merchants and several business members. Merchants may not understand the needs of the market, and vice versa. The time spent building good will and understanding will build a strong foundation for ongoing partnership. Again: be willing to ask, be willing to listen, and be willing to engage in long-term relationship building. Find out what it will take for local merchants and businesses to regularly refer their customers to the market. Maybe they just need to be asked to do so!

Several Vermont markets have used coupon books to entice market customers to shop at local businesses. At the Woodstock Market on the Green, vendors compiled a coupon book (10% off purchase, free coffee with sandwich, etc.) which was distributed to market customers. In Bristol, the Bristol Downtown Community Partnership independently compiled a coupon book with offers for local businesses, and asked the market to distribute it to market customers. In Bellows Falls, customers who spent \$20 or more at participating businesses were given a \$5 coupon to redeem at the farmers market.

Perhaps local restaurants would like to buy from farmers who vend at the market. Chefs and restaurant owners can shop from vendors, or pre-order and use the market as a pick-up location. If this is the case, consider asking the restaurant to make a note to this effect on menus, table tents, and other publicity materials. Perhaps chefs would be willing to share a favorite recipe(s) with the market, available for pick-up at the market table. (“Shop with the Chef” is a popular market event. See page 28 of “[Organizing and Maintaining Your Farmers’ Market](#)” for more details)

A common collaboration between farmers markets and local businesses is advertising: Local businesses display posters or flyers for the market, on an ongoing basis, and/or for special events. If there is a print shop in the market town, perhaps the shop would consider donating the printing; or perhaps another merchant would subsidize the price of printing for a mention on the actual flyer/poster.

If the market pays site fees, donations from local businesses could offset or completely underwrite these fees. This could have the effect of reducing the space fees that vendors pay. Businesses could make a one-time or annual donation to offset market costs like printing, manager salary, etc.

If the downtown association or chamber of commerce sponsors events, allow the group a table at the market, or shared space at the market table, to promote their events.



The Bellows Falls Farmers’ market sponsors Local Town Day once a year.

On this day, any local business from town can promote itself and sell their products. No fee is charged unless the business makes over \$100.

However local businesses and merchants support the market, be sure to include them in ALL your advertising. Make sure their support is noted on the market website, Facebook page, press releases, print ads and articles, posters, flyers, banners, and signs. The market benefits from their support—make sure they benefit from the market's success, as well!

Government

Support at a Glance

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| <p>Elected and appointed officials, and paid employees, who are responsible for municipal issues, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Selectboard, board of trustees, or city council * Town manager * Town clerk * Police and fire department * Public works department * Road crews | board of directors | Consider inviting a supportive representative of local government to sit on the market board. They live in the market town and know its needs well. |
| | operations | Local governments sometimes provide the town green or a park for the market location, free or at low cost. Governments and markets can co-apply for grants. Local government is frequently involved with FM logistics like parking and traffic flow. |
| | fundraising | Local governments can act as fiscal agents for markets when applying for grants. |
| | communications | Municipalities can include the market and market events in their newsletters and annual reports. |
| | advocacy | Because the market is an asset to the town, government can provide support and advocacy if the market needs to negotiate with private entities. |

The Details

Every market operates within some kind of municipality. Markets often need the permission of the municipality for some reason—space, parking, and signage are frequent needs. A positive relationship with the selectboard or city council can go a long way towards ensuring the success of your market. While market vendors, and even the manager, may not be residents of the hosting town, the government representatives are. They know the community—it's theirs! Consider asking a supportive government member to sit on the market's board of directors. These representatives live in the market town and know its needs and assets well.

Spend some time each year in conversation with your local government. Ask your municipality what its needs are and how the market can work in partnership to help meet those needs. It may be as simple as planning for parking—or as complex as helping the town meet healthy-eating goals for all its residents. Be willing to ask, be willing to listen, and be willing to engage in long-term relationship building.

Each season, set up pre-market meetings with the town manager, selectboard, and other leaders to check in about the upcoming season. Don't assume that “no news is good news”—check in to make sure that established systems are working, and fix them if they're not. As one market

manager noted, “it's important for the important people to know that the market recognizes them as important.” Everyone wants to be heard. Validate their concerns and address them as best you can.

When the Woodstock Market on the Green was establishing itself, the board met with the town planners to map the market and review town regulations before going to the selectboard for approval.

Many markets use municipal land as the market location. Because consistency is critical to long-term market success, it is important for the market space to be available at the same time, year after year. Have a conversation with your municipality to underscore this point. The market might consider a letter of agreement or a similar document which would give the market sufficient notice of a potential change in the availability of the space. For example, the city or town might agree to several years' notice of a change in the availability of the venue. That would give the market adequate time to find another suitable location.

In its first season, the Lyndonville Farmers' Market was situated in a small park, on Sunday. The space was donated by the town, but it had limited parking and limited vending space. After the first season the board decided to change days, and asked the town for use of the park on Fridays. The park was not available on Fridays, but the town trustees offered a larger park, with more parking, on Fridays, free of charge. The market board and town board of trustees worked together to come to an agreement regarding which portion of the park the market could use, vendor parking (the town agreed to let vendors park on the grass for ease of vending), and a price for the use of electricity (\$25-30/week, although at the end of the season the trustees asked the market to pay only \$100 for the entire season).

The market flourished at its new day and location, and the trustees are looking forward to the market returning for a following year. The trustees also noticed the sign of another farmers market, liked it, and offered to pay for a similar sign to be set up on the town green throughout the entire market season.

Some municipalities charge the market a fee for using the space, and some provide the space free of charge. When negotiating this point, consider the costs associated with the market's use of the space. Is damage done to the grass? Does the town pay someone to clean up after the market? Is electricity provided to the space? The town may absorb these costs because of the market's benefit to the town. Or, the municipality may negotiate a fee. When asking for reduced or waived fees, provide data to prove the market's benefit.

The town of Williston provides: the town green park for no charge; use of a building at the site for tent and sign storage; bathrooms in this building; and free electricity. The town also allows for signs to be posted throughout town.

Likewise, Windsor provides market space and electricity to the market at no cost, and allows signs to be posted throughout town on market day. The town of Windsor also pays the general liability insurance for the market.

In Shelburne, the town provides free use of the town green in summer, and town hall in winter.

Municipalities have access to community development grant opportunities that can benefit markets, especially in the area of infrastructure. When the municipality understands the market's needs, it may be able to partner on a grant application.

Traffic flow and parking are two main areas in which market and municipality typically interact. Many markets find it beneficial to set up orange traffic cones near the market, to slow traffic and increase the likelihood that passing drivers will stop at the market. This will require approval from the town. Some towns allow a market representative to set up the cones; other towns make it part of the job of the police or public works department. Clearly outline where the cones can be placed, who will do so, when the cones can be placed, when they must be removed, and where they will be stored between markets.

Markets require parking—for vendors and customers. If certain spaces are required for vendors, someone may need to block off those spaces in advance of the set-up time. Again, a market representative or a municipal employee may do this; clearly outline who will do so and when.

If the best site for your market (or parking) is on private property, your local government can still be a market ally in this regard. Because the market is an asset to the town (which you have already proven and documented), the town has an interest in its success. Your local government can help you request reduced or waived fees for the space, as well as a long-term lease and sufficient advance notice of lease termination.

Municipalities are interested in strengthening the community. Think about how your market can contribute to these efforts: By expanding access to the market experience for low-income residents? By reaching out to youth and including young people in more of the market's operations and activities? Consider the market from the perspective of the community leadership: What gains does the community experience from the market, and what gains *could* the community experience from the market? Consider the market and municipality partners for the long haul—the effort put into long-term relationship building will result in a solid foundation for the future.



Schools and Educational Institutions

Support at a Glance

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| Entities with educational missions, including: * Schools at all levels – preschool through high school * Technical schools * Alternative programs * Colleges * Day cares * FFA * 4-H * PTA/PTO * Parenting classes | board of directors | A school garden coordinator, food service director, or enthusiastic teacher can help connect |
| | operations | When school is in session, students can help with customer counts and marketing as part of service- |
| | fundraising | Some schools have philanthropy clubs and other initiatives in which students fundraise for local |
| | communications | Consider publicizing the market in school newsletters, on the school website, and at school |
| | advocacy | Schools have health goals for students and staff. Because the market brings healthy food to students and staff, schools can write letters of support for grants. |

The Details

Parents, it has been noted, will follow their children almost anywhere, so finding reasons for young people to come to the market can open up a new customer base. As more schools participate in food education programs like [VT FEED](#) and school gardens, the potential for cross-over between schools and markets increases. Teaching kids about new foods at schools will drive demand at farmers markets, so co-programming is an area to consider.

If your local school or district has a school garden, consider asking the teacher in charge of the garden to serve on the market board; if the school food service has a goal of increasing the amount of local food served in the cafeteria, consider asking the food service director to serve on the market board. Of course, another member of the school community might be a better fit for reasons that are specific to your area. Having someone on the market board who knows the school's programs, goals, and systems can be a boon to connecting with all the people connected to the schools.

Most Vermont schools sponsor a healthy-living program for faculty and staff. The school nurse is often, though not always, the coordinator of this program. Ask the coordinator how the market can tap into this program to attract school staff to the market. Perhaps a recipe competition of quick, after-school recipes, made from market ingredients and submitted by teachers, could attract teachers and school staff to the market (where, while shopping, they will be exposed to new ideas for class activities).

Additionally, many schools are incorporating food into the curriculum. Teachers may not be aware of the many math, science, writing and communications elements that comprise the market operation. Classes may be able to cooperate with the market on service-learning projects wherein students participate in some element of the market operation to learn a particular skill. Students can track sales trends for statistics classes, compare the nutritional benefits of different foods for science classes, or write publicity materials for literacy and communications classes. Finding one teacher with interest and enthusiasm is all it takes to get started!

Many schools, especially middle and high schools, have a community service requirement that students must meet before graduating. If this is the case, find out how these requirements are structured and offer volunteer opportunities that will meet these requirements.

High school technical classes can construct picnic tables, stages, or other infrastructure items as part of their curriculum, and then donate the items to the market. Students will be proud of what they have done and will likely encourage family and friends to visit the market to see their work.

Over the years, the local high school shop classes have constructed and donated several picnic tables to the West River Farmers' Market in Londonderry. Customers linger at the tables to chat with friends and enjoyed prepared foods purchased from vendors.

Contests in schools can generate interest and excitement among the students and their families. *The Bellows Falls Farmers' Market had a market-related poster contest in the elementary school; the winner got \$40 in farmers' market coupons, and the winning poster became the market's publicity poster.*

The market can devise a short “scavenger hunt” for young children to complete at the market, with a small prize (perhaps a small food item donate by vendors) awarded for completing it. The scavenger hunt can be distributed with classroom or school newsletters. Alternatively, a class of students could visit the market and then devise the scavenger hunt themselves, and contribute it to the market for distribution to all young visitors.

Many markets sponsor “kids days” or “kids markets.” More information about these events can be found on page 29 of [“Organizing and Maintaining Your Farmers' Market”](#).

Schools can also be sites for farmers markets. A Williston school allows the market to use the cafeteria for winter markets. The school provides the space free of charge, along with tables and chairs; the market pays the janitor's time.



Non-Profit, Fraternal, and Faith-Based Organizations

Support at a Glance

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| Mission-based organizations, including: * Environmental groups * Sustainability organizations * Grange * Fraternal and Service organizations like Rotary and Lions Club * Libraries * Arts Councils * Museums * Churches | board of directors | An energetic member of an organization with a compatible mission could be a great asset to the market board—especially if that person has relationships with potential donors. |
| | operations | Organizations might engage their members in volunteering at the market. |
| | fundraising | Compatible organizations might partner with the market for grants. |
| | communications | Organizations with compatible missions can be asked to include the market in their newsletters and publications, and church bulletins. |
| | advocacy | Organizations with compatible missions can speak to the market's importance when the need arises. |

The Details

Non-profit and mission-based organizations are the “glue” of a community. Engaging their constituencies can bring new faces to your market. The missions of environmental and sustainability organizations can blend with the farmers market’s mission.

Your market might consider allowing one free space for non-profit and faith-based organizations. The space can rotate so that each week, a different organization uses the space to promote their mission. Depending on the nature of the organization, they can do demonstrations, show pictures of their programs, and recruit new members. The organization benefits from increased exposure to their program; the market benefits from the new faces that are drawn to the market because of the organization's display.

The Williston Farmers’ Market allows non-profits a space to set up; some of the groups that have participated include the AARP, Master Gardeners, and 8th Grade Challenge youth project.

There are a lot of different non-profit organizations, and some might be controversial for a number of reasons. This is an important place for the market to know its mission—and which organizations do and don't match that mission. Guidelines about how organizations are chosen for the space can help to minimize tension and mitigate potential controversy.



Fraternal and Service organizations can support the market in many ways. The Hinesburg Farmers' Market is organized by the Lion's Club, which holds the general liability insurance and offers the market use of their EIN.

Local Arts Councils are great partners. If there is a concert series in your town, co-sponsor the event to bring new people to the market and new people to the concert. *The Woodstock Market on the Green* partnered

with the Pentangle Arts Council by advertising the market in concert programs.

Non-profit organizations are usually powered by energetic people who care deeply about their community. Many of these people likely already serve on several boards, but someone with a deep knowledge of the community—and relationships with people and organizations who donate to various causes—could be a real asset to the market.

Health and Social Service Organizations

Support at a Glance

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| <p>Organizations that focus on serving specific populations, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Food shelves and food pantries * Soup kitchens and communal meal sites * Community health organizations * WIC offices * Domestic violence shelters * Hospitals and HMOs * Senior centers and senior meal sites * Youth development organizations and teen drop-in centers * Parenting support groups | board of directors | Health and Social Service Organizations are invested in the healthy, community building opportunities at farmers’ markets. Asking a representative from these organizations to join the board can help your market better connect with these organizations and their resources. |
| | operations | Youth organizations can volunteer at the market to learn about farming as a potential career. Health organizations can enhance the market with free health screenings and educational opportunities about healthy habits. |
| | fundraising | Organizations with compatible missions can partner with the market for grants. |
| | communications | All of these organizations can publicize the market to their clients, via newsletters, websites, and personal contact. |
| | advocacy | Organizations whose clients benefit from the presence of the market can speak to the market's importance when the need arises. |

The Details

Health and social service organizations can be good supporters of farmers markets because they often focus on healthy lifestyles and healthy eating. Many of these organizations may be food related, like food shelves and soup kitchens, and potentially great allies for the market.

These organizations may also have relationships with low-income individuals who can use their EBT benefits at the market. Connecting with caseworkers can be a way for markets to reach out to EBT recipients and build a new customer base. Low-income individuals may believe that products at the farmers market are out of their price range. The market can provide information comparing prices between grocery stores and the market to show that is not the case.

Hospitals and health organizations frequently sponsor “community health” days. The market can participate by staffing a table, showing photographs of products sold at the market, selling market items like tote bags and t-shirts, distributing market coupons, and holding a raffle for a

market gift-basket.

Customers

Support at a Glance

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| board of directors | Dedicated customers can provide an important point of view about the market's mission, operations, vendor mix, and special events. A customer who lives in the market town has a unique point of view about the market's benefit to the community. |
| operations | Customers can volunteer for one-time events or on a recurring basis. See the previous section, "Community Volunteers Can Support your Farmers Market Operations," for some specific ideas. |
| fundraising | Customers can be engaged as volunteers for special event fundraisers. Some markets have created "Friends of the Market" organizations which customers join via a donation; members receive gifts like market tote bags or t-shirts in addition to having their names listed as members. |
| communications | Customers are the market's best marketing tool! Satisfied customers tell their friends about, and bring their friends to, the market. Consider a "tell a friend" campaign to increase your word-of-mouth advertising. |
| advocacy | Markets sometimes need support when communicating their needs to local government; customers can be engaged to sign petitions indicating their support of the market and advocating for a particular action or policy change. Customers can also be engaged in advocating for action that will support farmers and farmers markets at a local, state, and/or national level |

The Details

Customers may fall into one, several, all, or none of the aforementioned categories. Customers are the reason that farmers markets exist. Remember to engage this dedicated category of support—the customers who love the market and return week after week, year after year. Some may be content just to shop and support the market with their purchases—others may be thrilled to volunteer their time, energy, and talent. Hopefully, these pages have inspired your market with ways to engage the many sectors of your community in partnership. Consider this document a starting point—be creative, make it your own, and have fun!



Resources

The **Farmers Market Coalition** is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to strengthening farmers markets across the United States so that they can serve as community assets while providing real income opportunities for farmers. Markets can become a member for \$25. Anyone can search their Resource Library, a database of hundreds of fact sheets, articles, manuals, and other documents compiled from a wide range of organizations, agencies, and academic institutions. <http://farmersmarketcoalition.org>.

Marketumbrella is a New Orleans-based nonprofit which operates several markets and works to build capacity for farmers markets. They have an online toolbox for FM's with TONS of fact sheets and how-to documents, in four categories: operations, communications, evaluations, and innovations.

Marketumbrella advocates a “4-M” paradigm:

mission—every market needs to know this

management—needed to hold and support the mission

marketing—how and to whom you communicate your mission

measurement—to make sure you stay on target as per your mission

<http://www.marketumbrella.org>.

The **Project for Public Spaces** helps people turn their public spaces into vital community places, with programs, uses, and people-friendly settings that build local value and serve community needs. PPS helps public markets become vibrant public spaces while also achieving broader social impacts – from community development, to health and nutrition, to preserving family farms. PPS' Public Market Program aims to foster innovation and new models for public markets that are economically sustainable while maximizing their benefits on their communities, and contributing to the creation of the public places that attract a broad diversity of people. <http://www.pps.org/markets>.

The **Cooperative Development Institute** is the Northeast's center for cooperative business education, training and technical assistance. CDI's mission is to build a vibrant co-operative economy through the creation and development of successful co-operative enterprises in diverse communities in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, Connecticut, Maine, Rhode Island and New York. The CDI has a web page devoted to business resources for farmers markets: <http://www.cdi.coop/farmersmarketlinkspg.php>.

The **Farmers' Market Federation of New York** has a variety of planning and management training tools available on its website, including the newly-released “Farmers Market Manager Training Manual.” <http://www.nyfarmersmarket.com/publications.htm>.

Collective Roots is a California-based nonprofit that seeks to educate and engage youth and communities in food system change through sustainable programs that impact health, education, and the environment. A page on their website serves as a clearinghouse for research and links related to farmers markets: http://www.collectiveroots.org/whats_growing/farmers_market_links.

The **USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** hosts a webpage on Farmers Markets and Local Food Marketing, which includes fact sheets and press releases for USDA-sponsored events. <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/FarmersMarkets>.

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