

FARMERS MARKETS

Adapted from UNL Local Foods Network, ATTRA, University of Missouri Extension, & UNL Food

Farmers markets present a tremendous opportunity to connect local producers with local consumers. They strengthen the local community both economically and socially. Food dollars are spent supporting local farmers, ranchers, and businesses. Strong connections are established between vendors and consumers. Fresh, healthy, and safe food is provided to communities, many of which may be left otherwise without.

There are already dozens of farmers markets established in Nebraska. Odds are good your community already has one. For a list, see the NDA's Guide to Nebraska Fresh Produce: <http://www.agr.state.ne.us/pub/apd/produce.htm>.

The Guide to Fresh Produce is also a worthwhile publication to get included in, as it is the go-to resource for chefs, homes, and businesses looking to purchase local food in Nebraska. Fill out this profile: <http://www.agr.state.ne.us/forms/161.pdf>

If your community does not have an operating farmers market you should consider helping to start one. In the resources section at the bottom, there is a FAQ page for farmers market managers and here are a few of the dozens of guides to starting a farmers market:

- ❖ University of Missouri FAQ: <http://extension.missouri.edu/publications/DisplayPub.aspx?P=G6223>
- ❖ Guide to Starting a Farmers Market in Kansas: <http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/library/hort2/S140.pdf>
- ❖ Iowa Department of Agriculture Farmers Market Development Manual: <http://publications.iowa.gov/1751/1/IFMDevelopmentManual4.pdf>

[Note: While some of the information in these guides is state-specific, this document includes links to Nebraska rules and regulations below and, in most cases, the state agencies in charge of licensing, inspection, et al are the same in each state.]

Business Planning

Selling locally is a profitable business, but budgeting and planning is necessary. UNL provides helpful model horticulture budgets here and a local market cost calculator at the following links:

- ❖ Budgets: <http://liferaydemo.unl.edu/web/agecon/resource/hortbudgets.html>
- ❖ Calculator: <http://agecon.unl.edu/localmarketcalc>

Nebraska EDGE, part of UNL's Center for Applied Rural Innovation, can also be a useful resources for business planning.

The Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) run by the USDA provides travel scholarships, competitive mini-grants, regional training and conferences, as well as web-based education. It's AgriMarketing Toolbox is a useful source for marketing and business assistance.

- ❖ AgriMarketing: <http://nesare.unl.edu/agrimarketing>

Postharvest Handling and Storage

The best quality gets the best prices. You want to bring to market a high-quality, safely-handled, well-packaged product.

The National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service (ATTRA) and the Department of Defense each have thorough guides on the safe postharvest handling and storing of fresh fruits and vegetables:

- ❖ DOD: http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/programs/dod/DoD_Training_Prg-StorageFFV-071405.pdf
- ❖ ATTRA: <http://www.attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/postharvest.html>
- ❖ UNL's Guide to Storing Postharvest : <http://elkhorn.unl.edu/epublic/live/g1264/build/#target4>

Guidelines and Regulations

Whether or not you are beginning a farmers market or simply joining one as a vendor, you will need to familiarize yourself with legal and health guidelines from postharvest handling to your actual stand. Here are a few helpful guides:

- ❖ The NDA's Guidelines for Farmers Markets: <http://www.agr.state.ne.us/pub/daf/market.htm>
- ❖ UNL Local Foods' Safety and Health Considerations: <http://food.unl.edu/web/localfoods/safety-issues>. (See especially their guide to food safety at farmers markets.)

When it comes time to sell, the Nebraska Weights and Measures Act governs the packaging. UNL has two helpful guides, one on the common units of sale and the other on the regulations of the Nebraska Weights and Measures Act. If you use a scale at the market, it needs to be certified (link below) though if you weigh and prepackage products at home it does not need to be. It simply must have *at least* the amount stated on the packaging.

- ❖ UNL Guide to Common units of sale:
http://food.unl.edu/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=6d239fbb-81c1-4ecd-82b1-547153bf4e39&groupId=4089462
- ❖ UNL Guide on the Regulations of the NE Weights and Measures Act:
<http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/epublic/live/g1944/build/g1944.pdf>
- ❖ NDA List of Small Scale Service Agencies:
<http://www.agr.state.ne.us/division/wam/small.htm>

If you are selling home-baked or value-added goods, then you will either need to attend a farmers market training or have a Level II or Level III Food Handler's Permit. There can be no onsite preparation of food, it cannot be potentially hazardous, and all goods must be labeled with producer's name and address. For more information, check with your county health department official. If you need a permit, contact your area health inspector:

- ❖ NDA Map of Area Health Inspectors:
<http://www.agr.ne.gov/division/daf/inspectors.htm>

Stand

- ❖ **Stand Presentation:** You want your stand to be neatly organized and clean. Keep your food off the ground in food grade containers. Always wear disposable plastic gloves when handling fresh produce. You should have a trashcan nearby so that no trash accumulates. For hot days, consider keeping your stand/products in the shade. You might want a colorful table cloth to add color.
- ❖ **Produce Presentation:** Produce should be presentable (either washed or at least with the dirt cleaned off depending on the product) and neatly labeled. Group produce by use (say, for a salad) or by type (all your peppers together). Pay attention to color, don't put all your green produce together. Remove damaged produce. Always keep your stand full, but as you run out of produce, switch to smaller containers. (Have a board with a list of what you've sold out of so that customers know you had it and will think to come earlier the next time.)
- ❖ **Keeping Produce Looking Fresh:** (LFN) Keep a small bottle of water for misting your produce every hour. (Water must be from tested well or city water supply.) Put a container of ice under the container your produce is located in. Consider putting some out for presentation and keeping the bulk of your produce in an insulated container (must be drainable). Some produce (like asparagus) could actually be placed in cool water.

Selling

- ❖ **Branding:** Local food is about stories. For the consumer, it's about putting a farm to a product and a face to a farm. They want to know where what they are purchasing came from. Think about the story you're trying to tell. You want to develop a logo and brand that helps tell that story.
- ❖ **Cash Box:** You need a cash box, seed money (for making change), and something to ensure that bills don't blow away.
- ❖ **Flyers, brochures, etc:** You want your customers to remember where they brought their product so make sure you have something with your name and logo to either put in the bag with their purchase or to handout such as brochures or flyers. Family recipes or guides to handling and storing food are great ideas. They are great ways to educate and inform the consumer while also keeping you in their mind. Check UNL's Recipe Central for ideas (<http://food.unl.edu/web/fnh/recipe-central>) or this page for information on consumer food safety: <http://food.unl.edu/web/localfoods/safety-issues>.
- ❖ **Samples:** Samples are a good way to both gain and keep customers. For new customers, they gave you a chance to show off the quality of your product. For returning customers, you can let them try new or different products that they might be interested. You do not need a permit for samples, but you must have a hand washing station at your stand or have prepared individual portions/pieces beforehand.
- ❖ **Salesmanship:** There are dozens of guides to salesmanship, but here are a few broad tips. Be friendly, courteous, kind, and outgoing. Be professional and look professional. Be knowledgeable about your product. Always be attentive, ask questions, and pay attention to your customers. Ask for the sale. The University of Missouri has a very helpful guide to selling at farmers markets, that is recommended reading for anyone: <http://extension.missouri.edu/publications/DisplayPub.aspx?P=G6222>.
- ❖ **Pricing:** Post prices. Try to know what your costs are per unit (include labor costs), and give yourself a fair markup. Know your competitors prices and quality. (Don't panic if they slash prices.) Keep your prices stable, remember that it's easier to lower than raise prices, and don't sell yourself short. People will pay reasonable prices for high-quality produce and the personal interaction and relationships.

Nebraska Opportunities and Resources

- ❖ **Nebraska Buy Fresh Buy Local:** You should list your operation in this guide to increase your exposure. The guide includes Nebraska farmers markets, community-supported agriculture providers, restaurants & groceries that offer local foods, and local farmers & ranchers who grow and produce local Nebraska foods and products. With over 25,000 copies in distribution and even more access online, members get marketing access to new consumers as well as community and assistance for a small fee.
 - Site: <http://food.unl.edu/web/localfoods/home>
 - Telephone for individual assistance: 402-472-5273

- ❖ Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program: The Nebraska organization of the USDA's National SARE Program provides travel scholarships, competitive mini-grants, regional training and conferences, as well as web-based education.
 - Site: <http://nesare.unl.edu/>
 - Nationally, grants include research and education grants, professional development grants, and producer grants.

- ❖ Nebraska Rural Development Commission: The Nebraska Rural Development Commission's Value Added Agriculture (VAA) and their Build Entrepreneurial Communities Act (BECA) grant programs can be incredibly helpful in supporting local food systems. Site: <http://www.neded.org/content/view/373/552/>

- ❖ Nebraska Local Foods Network: Run by the University of Nebraska's Rural Initiative, NLFN provides advice and a dozens of other resources for local foods on their website including a farmers market module that was a major source for this piece. (http://ruralinitiative.nebraska.edu/nebraska_foods/).

- ❖ Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society: Focusing on sustainable agriculture and food systems, NSAS supports Farm to School programs, helps run the Buy Fresh Buy Local Nebraska Campaign, and runs Farm Beginnings Nebraska, a "farmer-led educational training and support program designed to help people who want to evaluate and plan their farm enterprise." Their website (<http://www.nebsusag.org/index.shtml>) contains many helpful links/resources.

- ❖ Nebraska Food Cooperative: A cooperative of farmers/producers and consumers aimed to increase market access for farmer producers and local food access for consumers. As a producer your farm or ranch maintains its identity throughout the process, you set your own prices, and have marketing help and networking. The Coop operates in a market of over 1,000,000.
 - Site: <http://www.nebraskafood.org/>
 - Their reasons for joining: <http://www.nebraskafood.org/about.php>
 - Joining: <http://www.nebraskafood.org/join.php>

- ❖ Nebraska Our Best to You: An official logo designed to identify and increase the marketability of Nebraska food products. It helps to promote local producers and restaurants and retailers who use local products. It also provides members with access to promotional materials and their website has other resources as well.
 - Associate Membership: Commodity groups, government agencies, educational institutions, retailers, and wholesalers are eligible: http://www.ourbesttoyou.nebraska.gov/associate_membership.html
 - Producer Membership: It's free for producers and a big benefit so farmers and ranchers should sign up http://www.ourbesttoyou.nebraska.gov/producer_membership.html

National Resources and Opportunities

- ❖ **USDA Rural Development Nebraska**: The USDA Rural Development Nebraska Office provides all of the USDA Rural Development's resources in Nebraska. This includes technical assistance, training, grants, and other resources. They also have several resources devoted specifically to helping develop cooperatives. Notable programs:
 - Website: <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/ne/index.htm>
 - Cooperatives: http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/ne/cooperative_services_programs_index.htm
 - Know Your Farmer Know You Food Grants and Programs including:
 - Business and Industry Guaranteed Loan Program
 - Rural Business Enterprise/Opportunity Grants
 - Rural Cooperative Development Grants
 - Value Added Producer Grants
 - Rural Energy for America Program
 - Community Facilities Program

- ❖ **Agriculture Marketing Service**: The Agriculture Marketing Service provides numerous grants, including a Farmers' Market Promotion Program:
 - **The Farmers' Market Promotion Program**: Annual competitive grant program to promote the domestic consumption of agriculture commodities by expanding direct marketing opportunities. <http://www.ams.usda.gov/FMPP>
 - **AMS Specialty Crop Block Grant Program**: Exists to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops (fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, and nursery crops inc. floriculture). Grant website: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/SCBGP>
 - Nebraska Contact: Casey Foster (Department of Agriculture: Ag Promotion Coordinator – Value Added)
 - **The Federal-State Marketing Improvement Program**: A competitive matching grant program available to State government agencies and agricultural experiment stations. (The Nebraska Fresh Produce Model is the result of such a grant.) Supports marketing research and technical assistance projects. <http://www.ams.usda.gov/FSMIP>

- ❖ **Farm Service Agency**: Operated by the Nebraska Farm Service Agency in the state, two loan programs may be helpful:
 - Farm Loan Programs: Direct and Guaranteed Farm Ownership Loans, and Direct and Guaranteed Operating Loans, with targeted funding for Beginning and Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers
 - Farm Storage Facility Loans
 - NE Programs Site: <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=ne&area=home&subject=prog&topic=landing>

- ❖ The Agriculture and Food Research Initiative: Provides funding for numerous areas. See their website for details based on the fiscal year:
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/care/Grants.htm>
- ❖ Risk Management Agency: RMA provides risk management advice to farmers and ranchers through partnerships with educational and community based organizations:
<http://www.rma.usda.gov/aboutrma/agreements/>
 - Community Outreach and Assistance Partnerships
 - Risk Management Education Programs
- ❖ Food and Nutrition Service: Provide grants to increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables through farmers markets, CSAs, and roadside stands:
 - Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition: Aimed at providing low-income seniors with coupons to exchange for fresh, unprepared, and local fruits, vegetables, herbs, and honey at farmer's markets, roadside stands, and CSAs
 - Nebraska site: <http://www.agr.ne.gov/sfmnp/sfmnp.htm>
 - NE Brochure: http://www.agr.ne.gov/sfmnp/sfmnp_brochure.pdf

Other Resources

- ❖ UNL's Selling Local Foods Guide: http://food.unl.edu/web/localfoods/selling-local-food#farmers_market
- ❖ A further guide on marketing at farmers markets (Kansas RMA):
<http://kansasruralcenter.org/publications/MarketingTheMarket.pdf>
- ❖ Handy guide for Market Managers including FAQ:
<http://farmersmarketcoalition.org/managerfaqs/>

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