# Table of Contents

- **Purpose & Introduction**
  - Healthy Food Access & Farmers’ Markets
  - The Importance of Marketing
  - A Marketing Primer
  - Branding: Mission Statements, Taglines or Slogans, Talking Points, Logos and Websites

- **At Market**
  - Layout
  - Product Display
  - Product Mix & Pricing
  - Effective Signage

- **In the Community**
  - Working with Community Partners
  - Social Media & E-Newsletters
  - Traditional Media Avenues & Press Releases

- **Conclusions & Resources**
Purpose

This guide was prepared for Transform Wisconsin by The Food Trust in 2014. The purpose of the guide is twofold: 1) to provide farmers’ market stakeholders in Wisconsin with strategies and best practices around marketing and promoting farmers’ markets in underserved areas, and 2) to encourage Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participation at markets. Stakeholders may include public health professionals, farmers’ market managers, vendors, farmers’ market boards, and community members with a vested interest in ensuring the success of markets aimed at reaching underserved populations.

Introduction

Healthy Food Access & Farmers’ Markets

Lack of access to healthy food has become a critical public health issue in the United States. People in underserved communities are more likely than those in higher-income communities to be affected by diet-related diseases, like obesity and diabetes, due in part to a lack of access to fresh fruits and vegetables.¹ These diet-related diseases are also often accompanied by other negative health outcomes, including conditions like hypertension, stroke, and heart disease. When healthy food is unavailable, a nutritious diet is out of reach, and along with it, the ability of individuals to achieve better health outcomes for themselves and their families.

In underserved areas, residents often have to travel significant distances to find fresh produce, which can be high-priced.² In urban areas, for example, many supermarket chains have moved to suburban areas leaving neighborhoods with only small corner stores as primary food outlets and few full-service grocery stores. Rural communities and small towns also struggle with access to healthy foods. Even though rural communities produce much of our country’s food, residents in these communities may not have access to retail options due to population losses or economic changes that have made these areas less viable places to support full-service grocery stores.

² Ibid
As a result, the health of urban and rural communities has suffered. In Wisconsin, for example, 35% of adults consume fruits or vegetables only once daily.\(^3\) As communities work to improve the food environment of underserved areas, it is important to consider all forms of food retail. Over the course of the last decade, the number of farmers’ markets in the US has increased greatly—by more than 300% nationwide since 1994 (see graph on page 3). In 2014, there were 292 farmers’ markets in Wisconsin.

Farmers’ markets play an important role in increasing the availability of quality, fresh food. Farmers’ markets often offer a higher ratio of fresh fruits and vegetables to unhealthy foods than their retail store counterparts. The farmers’ market model is also flexible as the markets can take place more informally in community spaces, and farmers’ markets require less capital to launch than other food retail options. Markets also have the potential to strengthen the local economy in various ways, but most effectively as a direct sales model, giving farmers the opportunity to retain a larger percentage of the product sale price. Ultimately, farmers’ markets address a triple bottom line—the health of our communities, the environment, and the economy.

One way for farmers’ markets to address healthy food access for underserved communities includes accepting payment through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as Food Stamps. This program is known as FoodShare in Wisconsin. SNAP is the nation’s largest food assistance program, with an average of nearly 1 in 7 Americans receiving monthly benefits in 2013.\(^4\) Nearly 1 in 5 Wisconsinites participated in SNAP in 2012.\(^5\) Historically, the shift from paper vouchers to the Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) system negatively impacted SNAP redemption at farmers’ markets. EBT cards are similar to debit and credit cards; they help to streamline SNAP purchasing by using machines to process sales. Unfortunately, the transition to


EBT had an unintended negative effect of placing a high burden on direct sales farmers who didn’t already have the capacity to accept credit, debit, and EBT cards at markets. SNAP redemptions at farmers’ markets decreased during the 1990s, reaching a low point in 2000, as shown by the graph above.6

Contrary to the negative trend in SNAP redemptions at farmers’ markets in the late 90s and early 2000s, interest in use of SNAP benefits at farmers’ markets has increased significantly over the course of the past decade. Also seen in the graph above, SNAP redemption at farmers’ markets has risen 400% since the low in 2000, with the biggest increases occurring between 2010-2013.7 One significant factor that aided in increasing SNAP redemption was the Farmers’ Market Promotion Program, which provided funding for EBT machines. While these gains are significant, only .022% of total SNAP dollars were redeemed at farmers’ markets during the USDA’s fiscal year 2012. These trends show that there is great potential for growth in SNAP redemption at farmers’ markets, both in Wisconsin and the US. One strategy for increasing redemptions at farmers’ markets is to grow the number of farmers’ markets that accept EBT; In 2014, only 13% of Wisconsin farmers’ markets accepted SNAP.8 Another strategy is to increase SNAP sales at farmers’ markets that already accept the benefits.

**The Importance of Marketing**

SNAP participants have identified many barriers to shopping at farmers’ markets, including the lack of awareness that a market exists or that a market accepts SNAP, and a negative perception of food prices.9 However, these barriers can be addressed through effective marketing and promotion strategies. Studies show that prices at farmers’ markets are the same or lower than the prices of conventional grocery stores.10 Promoting affordable items is an effective way to address any misperceptions people may have. Marketing and promotion are essential in increasing SNAP participation at farmers’ markets.

**A Marketing Primer**

Marketing is generally defined as a strategy to attract and retain customers by creating real and perceived value. This is accomplished by giving attention to four key areas of marketing known as the *four P’s*: **product**, **placement**, **price**, and **promotion**.

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8 USDA farmers’ market directory, 2014
Below are sets of questions related to each of the four P’s for consideration when developing a marketing program aimed at increasing SNAP participation at farmers’ markets.

1. **Product**
   What does the SNAP customer want? What will the SNAP customer accept? What should products be called? How is the product different from others in the marketplace? Is the product mix culturally appropriate (i.e. vegetables popular in Asian or Latin cuisine to reflect customer demographics)?

2. **Placement**
   What kind of display does the vendor use? Is the arrangement aesthetically pleasing? Are the displays conducive to purchasing fruits and vegetables? What should displays look like?

3. **Price**
   What are the prices of the product(s)? Do the prices match the budgets of people using SNAP benefits? Is the vendor able to make an adequate profit? What types of payment are accepted at the market and how is that made clear?

4. **Promotion**
   Where and when are marketing messages best communicated to customers? How are those marketing messages best shared with the customer? Are there better times and ways to share those marketing messages? Are specific, varying items highlighted?

These guiding questions can inform a marketing plan, but there are other marketing fundamentals to consider, as well. The next sections discuss some of these elements: branding, mission statements, taglines or slogans, talking points, and logos and websites.

**Branding**

Part of the appeal of farmers’ markets is the opportunity for customers to meet face-to-face with the farmers who grow their food. An important aspect of cultivating positive participant-grower relationships is by positively promoting farm businesses through branding. Branding is defined as “the marketing practice of creating a name, symbol or design that identifies and differentiates a product from other products.”

Branding is important because it aids in the decision-making process of the consumer. However, a brand is more than just a logo; a trusted brand communicates and promises a certain experience.

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As part of branding, market staff should develop a mission statement, tag lines, and talking points in addition to a logo. Other stakeholders, such as community members, farmers, nonprofits, and vendors should be well versed in these topics as well, to ensure the success of a farmers’ market.

**Mission Statements**

Mission statements explain the purpose of an organization and what needs the organization seeks to address. Mission statements should be written in layman’s terms to which the general public can relate, leaving out technical jargon. The development of a mission statement and branding strategy requires the collaboration of key stakeholders who ideally sit on the market board. Discussions about the vision, values, and objectives of the market all help to inform a mission statement and subsequent marketing plan.

Beyond the formation of mission statements, farmers’ markets should be welcoming and inviting to all types of shoppers; injecting language around inclusiveness in a mission statement can help ensure this as a priority. Below are two examples of markets that accept SNAP and are committed to inclusiveness:

- **The Food Trust, Pennsylvania**: “Ensuring that everyone has access to affordable, nutritious food and the information to make healthy decisions”

- **Beverly Massachusetts Farmers’ Market, Massachusetts**: “Aims to support local agriculture while making healthy food available to all members of the Beverly community at affordable prices, promote sustainable living practices, and foster community development”

Inclusive language can also reinforce a market’s mission statement in the form of a vision or a value statement. Below is an example:

- **Riverwest Gardeners Market in Milwaukee, Wisconsin**: “Strong community-based food systems are critical components of a more sustainable and socially just future”.

**Taglines and Slogans**

Taglines and slogans are other written forms of marketing that can add interest to branding. While not as critical as an organization’s mission statement, taglines can be effective and are worth considering. They should be short and easy to remember. For example, New York City’s Greenmarket’s logo incorporates the words “healthy, fresh, local” and the Fair Food Network of Michigan uses the tagline “grow the good.”
Talking Points

Talking points ensure that market boards and other stakeholders are talking about the market in a consistent way. This helps to reinforce the branding and the mission statement and presents the market to the public in a cohesive and coordinated manner. Talking points can be developed for general purposes, such as discussing the health benefits of fresh foods, or they can be developed around certain topics, such as the Farm Bill.

Logos and Websites

Logos and websites are the visual components of a marketing campaign. The following list of recommendations is helpful in developing logos and websites for markets:

- Images should invoke food and/or farming.
- All words and images should be easy to read and see, even when the size is shrunk down to fit on a business card.
- Color schemes and fonts need to be carefully considered and should be the same across all promotional materials. Consistency is key in marketing.
- Note acceptance of SNAP and include SNAP images wherever possible.
- Written components, as well as the logo, should be revisited about every five years.
- Ideally, logos should be professionally designed using design software. If paid design work is not an option, look to community members to provide this in-kind support. Professional designers in the community may be willing to take this on or college students could incorporate this work into schoolwork or the development of a portfolio.

Navigating the Internet and social media is a crucial piece to the marketing puzzle. The majority of American adults use the Internet and as of September 2013, 73% of adults used social networking sites. More than half of all adults use smartphones, including 43% of those living in households with an income of less than $30,000. Because of these trends, additional design work will be necessary for a website: logos should be prominently displayed on all electronic media; fonts and colors should coordinate across marketing materials; social networking sites, blogs, and mobile websites should all present the same messages as the full website; and, finally, applications (or, apps) for devices should be considered as viable online marketing platforms. More information on social media and the Internet will be covered on page 16 of this guide. When these infrastructure topics are in place, markets can begin creating a marketing plan.

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At Market

Layout

Generally, markets should be set up in a clean, attractive, and efficient manner. Displays should be tidy so customers can easily find what they are looking for and the market as a whole should be free of trash and debris. Market managers should keep a trash bag and gloves at their disposal, and vendors should keep empty produce boxes stored away and out of sight.

Signs should be highly visible, as should the market manager’s table and point of sale areas. A line management plan should be in place, as market crowds can fluctuate. All staff should be trained on all forms of payment accepted and be aware of typical shopping patterns. For example, SNAP benefits are distributed within the first 15 days of the month for most participants, so that may be the best time for SNAP participants to shop.

There is no prescriptive way for a farmers’ market to be set up. Stalls should be arranged to facilitate shopping, but different vendor layouts will suit different markets.

Larger Markets

U-shaped and L-shaped vendor configurations (pictured to the left) are excellent layouts for larger markets. They both make efficient use of the overall market square footage as well as attract customers into vendor spaces to browse goods. One drawback to the U-shape layout in particular is that some shoppers may feel pressured or committed to purchasing items. As such, markets with established customer bases may find this display layout more effective than markets with less-established groups of customers.

Smaller Markets

For smaller markets, horizontal line or open-air layouts (pictured to the right) are excellent choices for vendor displays. A horizontal line layout allows shoppers to observe the products in a no-pressure way without stepping into the market space. However, this layout requires strong staffing, as line management can be challenging.
**Product Display**

Using attractive containers, such as wood crates, baskets, and shelves helps display products in a visually interesting and aesthetically pleasing way. Use colors and vertical spaces to the make the most of the display space. For example, tiered displays with alternating colors are a good way to make use of vertical space and to differentiate the products for sale. Also, everything should be within reach of the customer, displays should always look abundant, and the produce should always look fresh. Use spray bottles of cold water to spritz on greens. Keep herbs in containers filled with water. Bring different size containers, and as things sell out, move them to the smaller containers.

**Product Mix & Pricing**

The product mix should be appropriate for the target audience, in this case SNAP participants. SNAP participants can purchase any food items, excluding prepared food, with their SNAP dollars. Because farmers’ markets are a great way to increase access to fresh produce, vendors should highlight these items through display and signage. The produce should consistently be top quality. If produce is brought to market that is not top quality, it should be set aside and marked “seconds,” and its price should be reduced accordingly. This is not to say that produce needs to be cosmetically perfect, but rather the quality needs to be held to high standards. For example, not all zucchinis need to be uniform in size, but if a zucchini has visible rot, then it should be set aside as a second. The product mix should reflect the needs of the community; and the preferences of the community’s ethnic groups should be taken into consideration either through surveys or informal conversations. A list of products and sold-out items should be kept for future reference.

All products should be clearly labeled with price tags in consistent and legible fonts and colors. A recommended practice is for vendors to keep a board (e.g., dry erase board, chalk board) with a list of all items brought to market, like the one shown to the right. As products sell out, they should be crossed off the list. This way, even if a customer arrives at the end of market when the selection is smaller, he or she is aware of all that was offered and can plan accordingly in the future.

Everything sold at market should be labeled by product name and price. Additional information to include could be descriptions of the item, including taste, appearance, and ways to cook (e.g., baking potatoes). Another recommended practice is pre-weighing and pre-packaging items. This way, customers know the price without having to ask or put anything on the scale. Some customers, including SNAP participants, will feel more comfortable knowing the price before engaging in the sale process. A third recommended practice for pricing is to mark down certain items for a temporary period of time (e.g., one market day). This will entice customers to try new products, and to continue buying those products even when they are
not on sale. Successful sale strategies include two-for-one pricing models, mix and match pricing (e.g., three different items for two dollars), or buying a certain amount and getting some free (e.g., buy a dozen ears of corn, get one more free). A final recommended practice is to price items in increments that align with food assistance benefits. For example, if the market provides two-dollar tokens in exchange for SNAP benefits, it would be logical to price items in increments of two dollars (e.g., two half pints of raspberries for four dollars).

Finally, incentive programs are helpful pricing models for encouraging SNAP participants to purchase fresh foods from markets. For example, The Food Trust’s farmers’ markets incentivize SNAP participation by providing Philly Food Bucks. Philly Food Bucks is a program where two-dollar vouchers are given for every five dollars spent using SNAP. The Food Trust developed price tags that reflect that pricing (example shown at left).

**Effective Signage**

Effective signage is an essential component of any marketing campaign. Examples of signs commonly used at farmers’ markets include banners, flags, flyers, small signs, and sandwich boards.

It is recommended to include the market’s hours of operation, location, and forms of payment accepted on most signs, as well as to include several signs that highlight just one thing (e.g., SNAP acceptance). Signs should be printed and include graphic design elements when possible. Hand-written signs are not ideal because they are often less consistent and less aesthetically pleasing. When a market accepts food assistance benefits, signage should emphasize this point. The USDA now recommends using the language “we welcome SNAP benefits,” rather than “we accept SNAP benefits.” Vendors should be encouraged to bring their own marketing materials and signs that promote their brand. A large part of the appeal of farmers’ markets is the ability for customers to interact with farmers.

**Banners**

Banners come in many shapes and sizes. A best practice is to work with community partners and/or local government to establish a location in which a banner or banners could be hung permanently. However, if that is not an option, banners can be strung from tent poles or trees on market day. Ideally, farmers will have separate banners that promote their individual farms, “The USDA now recommends using the language ‘we welcome SNAP benefits’ rather than ‘we accept SNAP benefits.’”
while the general farmers’ market banner would have the farmers’ market’s name, hours, location, and payment forms accepted.

*Flags*

Flags, such as the one pictured to the right, are eye-catching because of their size, color, and shape. This particular sign highlights The Food Trust’s incentive program, Philly Food Bucks, and also reminds shoppers that EBT cards (called Access cards in Pennsylvania) are accepted at the farmers’ market. This sign is nearly eleven feet tall, and is weighted down by a doughnut shaped pouch filled with water. The sign breaks down and fits into a manageably sized bag with a strap.

*Flyers and Small Signs*

Flyers announcing the opening date and existence of a farmers’ market should be distributed to community partners, residents, and business owners in the community. Senior centers, WIC offices, and offices that administer SNAP should be provided with flyers about the market, particularly if the market plans to accept alternate forms of payment. Additionally, plenty of flyers should be available at the farmers’ market manager’s table for customers to take home. Flyers should include market time, location, and information about the alternate forms of payment accepted. A recommended practice is to keep flyers relatively small (e.g., 4” x 6”) and to print on both sides. Below are three examples of flyers and small signs produced by The Food Trust and other Wisconsin farmers’ markets.
In the Community

Working with Community Partners

Strong community engagement and community partners are important to many aspects of successful farmers’ markets, including the marketing strategies. For example, community partners can help spread the word about farmers’ markets, hand out flyers, and educate potential customers. They can also help reach target populations, like SNAP participants. Below is a short list of potential partners.

- Residents
- Faith-based organizations
- Health clinics, hospitals
- County Cooperative Extension
- Local nonprofits
- Schools
- Local businesses
- Government officials and agencies
- Health agencies
- Economic Development/Revitalization groups
- Community groups
- Human and Social Services agencies

As an example, The Food Trust has partnered with Lankenau Medical Center, a nonprofit hospital in the Northwest section of Philadelphia. Because Lankenau is a nonprofit hospital, a portion of the hospital’s earnings is federally required to be spent on community health initiatives (commonly referred to as community benefit dollars). In this case, Lankenau uses their community benefit dollars to support The Food Trust. One portion of the funds is allocated to marketing materials. Another important aspect of the partnership is to provide Lankenau’s SNAP-eligible, at-risk patients with Philly Food Bucks. This is one example of an innovative partnership that increases SNAP participation at farmers’ markets.

Social Media

People of all income brackets, including SNAP participants, use social media and it is an increasingly important mechanism for marketing and promotion. Popular social media sites used by farmers’ markets and the general public include Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The amount of time dedicated to social media can vary greatly depending on what services are used. If farmers’ market stakeholders are interested in utilizing social media, a best practice is to start with Facebook. Facebook is the most widely used social media site among adults. Using photos is effective, but only if the photos are top quality. Posts that are interactive, such as quizzes, information on events/links to registration, and links to interesting articles are similarly effective. Generally, a recommended practice is to post to Facebook once a day. It should be noted, however, that Facebook

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is beginning to charge fees to ensure that posts reach higher numbers of people. The social media landscape is always evolving, so new opportunities will constantly be emerging.

E-newsletters

With software for creating newsletters widely available and often free, writing a farmers’ market newsletter is a viable marketing mechanism for many. A best practice is to send out weekly newsletters during the farmers’ market season (and less frequently during the off-season for markets that are not year-round). Additionally, it is best to keep newsletters short and focused. A sign-up sheet or link to email sign-up should be readily visible at the market, and market managers and farmers should encourage shoppers to register. An example of The Food Trust’s e-newsletter, Fresh Times, is below.

Traditional Marketing Avenues

Traditional marketing avenues, such as newspaper and radio ads, are recommended in addition to Internet advertising. Neighborhood newspapers are great to target and will often give exposure to local markets for free. Be sure to promote SNAP acceptance as part of a press release. Gaining media attention will aid in the promotion of a farmers’ market. The following are general guidelines for writing a press release14:

1. Review press release basics: Who is the release going to and does it match that journalist’s “beat”? Is the news compelling or was a similar story recently covered? What makes the story being pitched innovative, interesting, and fresh?

2. Format appropriately: Include the written press release in the body of the email and also attached if desired. Send copy to journalists as plain text. PDFs are appropriate for a broader audience, however, journalists benefit from the simplest text format possible. Sample press release templates are provided in Microsoft Word software.

3. Craft a smart headline: The headline should be short, interesting, devoid of puns, and should include the value of the press release to the reader.

4. Use plain language: Avoid too many technical terms, superlatives, and trendy turns of phrase. Write the press release using lay terminology to explain why the audience should care.

5. Think like a journalist: Be sure to answer the “who, what, where, when and why” of the story being pitched. Do not bury the main point or finding of the story - put it front and center.

6. Keep it short: If possible, limit press releases to one page or about 250 words.

7. Choose quotes wisely: Only quote individuals who will be available for a full interview. Only use actual quotes, not paraphrased sentiments.

8. Be judicious with images: If images are essential to the press release, only include those that are clear enough to be printed or used online. Include images in the actual press release; do not redirect the reader to a website or other location where images may be located.

9. Provide good contact information: Include the phone number of the person who sent the press release, not just the email. Be sure the contact person is available to take calls to respond to media inquiries in an efficient, timely manner.
Conclusions & Resources

Programs that engage the SNAP population have the potential to drive business at a farmers' market. Sometimes these programs are necessary to implement in addition to marketing strategies.

Below is a short list of programming ideas:

- Farmers’ market table that includes recipe cards and nutrition education hand-outs
- Cooking demonstrations and taste tests
- Walking tours that introduce new shoppers to a market, particularly tours with a focus on topics like healthy eating on a budget or nutrition education
- Health screenings
- Arts programming including live music and art installations
- Activities for children
- Bonus incentive coupon programs
- Fruit and vegetable prescription program

Additional resources on marketing, promotion, and program ideas can be found at:

Farmers Market Coalition:
www.farmersmarketcoalition.org

Healthy Food Access Portal:
www.healthyfoodaccess.org

Wisconsin Farmers’ Market Resources
General resource page: http://fyi.uwex.edu/cfsi/foodaccess/

University of Wisconsin-Extension Publications
New Directions in Marketing for Farmers’ Markets:
http://learningstore.uwex.edu/Assets/pdfs/A3895.pdf

Keeping Farmers’ Markets Strong and Sustainable:
http://waukesha.uwex.edu/files/2013/02/Farmers-Market.pdf

Creating a Successful EBT Program- A Guide for Wisconsin Farmers’ Markets: