

noteworthy

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Selling produce at farmers' markets

Farmers' markets are rapidly growing in popularity as an ideal way for small producers to sell their locally produced and value-added products.

Before becoming involved in a farmers' market it is vital that you do your research and incorporate it into your business plan.

Each market has guidelines that cover site access and applying for a stall to stallholder responsibilities and legal requirements (e.g. labelling of food and food safety).

You will also need to consider the type of product you will sell and how you will market it to your target audience.

Markets provide an environment for farmers and food producers to sell products of farm-origin, value-added or processed artisan food direct to customers.

Be it organic, bio-dynamic or conventional production systems, the fresh produce available at farmers' markets continues to attract a loyal and enthusiastic following.

One of the biggest farmers' markets in Western Australia's south-west is the Margaret River Farmers' Market (MRFM).

The MRFM operates every Saturday hosting a mix of undercover and open stalls at the local community resource centre.

Stalls number around 25 in winter and up to 55 during summer.

Up to 2000 people regularly attend, rising to around 5000 during gourmet food and wine festivals and holidays.

The MRFM was put together initially to support local farmers and food producers, who in turn support the local economy by providing a more sustainable food supply.

Market guidelines

Farmers' markets, although operating under the umbrella of the Australian Farmers' Markets Association (AFMA), may have differing rules and bylaws for stallholders.

Provided the guidelines for participation are well understood,

selling produce at a farmers' market can be a cost effective alternative to wholesaling to retail outlets.

The guidelines generally cover all aspects from site access to stallholder responsibilities and legal requirements.

MRFM Manager Kat Lombardo said the Margaret River markets have rules and guidelines in place to ensure that products sold are all freshly grown, bred or processed.

Applying for a stall

When applying for a stall many farmers' markets will require the applicant to first read the rules and regulations.

Fresh food is always popular at markets.



Sometimes interviews are conducted to ensure an applicant can comply or property inspections conducted to verify local production.

For example, the MRFM only allows stallholders from outside the Margaret River region when no one is locally producing and selling that particular product

“Some of our stallholders are growers who value-add their produce, taking it right through from growing, processing, packaging and finally selling the finished product.

“Availability of stalls is primarily based on the product to be sold.

“If demand for an item is already satisfied by one or more stalls, then no more stall allocations for that item will be approved. The greater the demand the more room there is for sellers, however absolutely no re-sellers are accepted.

“Seasonality is important in the principles of farmers’ markets, so although it sounds like a quick, profitable idea to buy out of season fruit and vegetables from another region and sell them at our market, it will not be allowed, “ Kat said.

Choosing a product to sell

When choosing a product to sell at a farmers’ market, or which farmers’ market(s) to participate in, consider the following questions:

- Is there a need for the product in the market place?
- Would you buy it?
- Do you enjoy selling and promoting the product?

Be sure there is demand for your produce and that your cost price



and selling price calculations are accurate.

If an item is popular it may already be supplied by another stallholder.

The more unique the product you’re offering, the better chance of less competition.

Always make sure you bring your best produce to a farmers’ market.

Leave the damaged, bruised and lower grade produce for value-adding or to be sold through other marketing channels at discounted prices.

Participation in a farmers’ market can be a good opportunity to test consumer reaction to a new product or an addition to an already successful range of products.

The market stall can provide exposure via photo boards, leaflets and recipes to showcase other produce you have for sale at retail outlets or online.

Labelling, packaging and food safety

Appropriate labelling compliant with the *Food Act 2008* and the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code is essential.

Markets provide a suitable environment for farmers and food producers to sell products of farm-origin, value-added or processed artisan food direct to customers.

Stallholders should be familiar with the requirements of the relevant codes.

Under the *Food Act 2008* businesses that sell food are generally required to be registered as a food business with their local government authority (LGA) in which the place of manufacture or business is based.

Contact your LGA for more information.

Stallholders advertising organic and bio-dynamic produce must have current certification displayed on their stall and labels.

Quality and food safety are also issues that need to be considered.

Environmental health officers from your LGA may request and conduct inspections of food businesses based within their area.

When participating in a farmers’ market where you will transporting

Table 1 Farmers’ markets can have many benefits for producers, consumers and the local community.

Farmers	Consumers	Communities
Opportunities for higher profits	Fresh seasonal food	Maintain important social ties, linking rural and urban populations
Less handling, transport and time in storage	Social event	Generate traffic for nearby businesses and revitalise town and public space
Markets can be used as an outlet to introduce or test new products and gauge consumer interest	More variety – organic, free-range, handmade, heirloom produce and heritage breeds	Create distinction and uniqueness, which can increase pride and encourage visitors to return
Supplement or diversify the farm income	Enjoy the outdoors while shopping	Can help teach children about food origin and nutrition
Interaction with consumers	Often people can get better prices as the process cuts out the middlemen	Promotion of fresh and local produce consumption

and displaying food products ensure they are:

- transported and displayed at the correct temperature
- sheltered from any sources of contamination during transportation and display
- handled in a clean and hygienic manner.

Be creative with advertising

When thinking about marketing your produce be creative.

Consumers who frequent farmers’ markets often do so as they like the interaction with the person who actually grew the product they are purchasing.

Use you signs to not only inform the consumer about the price, but also about the story behind the product.

For instance if you are selling eggs and your chickens have a names use this in your marketing - “Penny lays the yummiest eggs in Margaret River!”

Other sinage suggestions nclude:

- organic, free-range
- heirloom, rare
- what is good about it (e.g. tender, juicy, unique)
- how to use it (e.g. recipes, best way to cook it).

Decorating your stall with pictures of your farm and animals can also be a good way to market your produce. Also provide customers with a business card to take home with more information about your business and a link to your website (e.g. QR code).

Make sure your produce is arranged in a way that looks appealing to the customer. Baskets and bins overflowing with fresh and colourful produce will entice customers to your stall.

Farmers’ markets – part of your business plan

Developing a business plan can be vital to the success of your business.

Farmers’ markets can be a great way to start selling your product or diversify the selling channels you already have in place.

Be mindful that using a farmers’ market as a low cost shop front does not mean the basics of running a business can be ignored.

Research the market and how it will benefit or compliment your venture thoroughly, before investing time and money.

Do not base your business decision on attending a market or two.

Conduct research on how the market works by reading the rules and guidelines and how well the market performs before submitting an application for a stall

Successful markets:

- are located in busy or central areas
- have good integrity (e.g. sell only locally produced food)

- have an effective market manager to promote the market and reinforce the rules
- have a good number of stalls and a good mix of products.

Also consider what it will cost to set up a stall before you apply.

A regular stall at a farmers' market should require very little capital investment.

You will need a table, shelter, packaging and signage to identify your business name, products and their price.

You will also need to ensure all food products are kept at the right temperature and sheltered from any source of contamination.

Visual promotion is important - bright colours on signs and high quality product will draw customers to you.

Costs may also include stall fees, equipment, packaging, public liability insurance, sales labour, transportation and storage.

Advertising costs are commonly low as it is done en-masse by the farmers' market you are participating in and is usually included in your stall fees.

Being involved in a farmers' market can provide many benefits, but make sure you do the research before deciding whether a farmers' market is right for you.

For more information

Noteworthy 44 - Marketing for small producers

Noteworthy 48 – Business planning for small producers

Noteworthy 49 – Quality assurance schemes for fresh produce

Department of Health - Food Businesses - public.health.wa.gov.au/2/1620/2/food_businesses.pm

Australia and New Zealand Food Standards Code – foodstandards.gov.au

Australian Farmers' Markets Association (AFMA) – farmersmarkets.org.au

Margaret River Farmers' Market - margaretriverfarmersmarket.com.au

Contact details

Small Landholder Information Service (SLIS)
agric.wa.gov.au/small_landholder
 +61 (0) 8 9733 7777
 or +61 (0) 8 9780 6100

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