

CHAPTER 10

Creating a Welcoming Atmosphere

Creating a welcoming atmosphere and providing good customer service is an excellent way to build the market customer base. This section provides ideas and examples of how markets can create an atmosphere that is open and welcoming to customers of all income levels. Evaluation tools to measure the impact(s) of changes to the market atmosphere and customer service are at the end of this section.

“I personally enjoy the thought of talking to the person who actually grows the food, the vegetables...”

-Focus group participant

For limited-resource Kentuckians, just as for all Kentuckians, the opportunity to know the person who grew their food is a real selling point. Conversely, they may be more hesitant to ask about pricing or to initiate conversation than others. It is important to make all shoppers feel welcome at the market.

“If you’re just walking by their stands and they ain’t talking with you, or if you stand in front of their stand and they don’t talk with you, then you’re like...”

-Focus group participant



Photo provided by the Lexington Farmers' Market

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Some ideas to promote interaction have been suggested in previous sections of this toolkit. The children's activities, especially the Meet Your Farmer card, encourage children to engage with producers and farmers' market volunteers. Displaying unusual fruit and vegetables, providing demonstrations, and offering samples and recipe cards are ways to engage adult and young shoppers. Vendors might be encouraged to post conversation starters, such as "Ask me about my farm," in their booths.

Other programming ideas to encourage interaction between farmers and shoppers include:

- Walking tours that introduce new shoppers to the market — particularly tours with a focus on topics such as healthy eating on a budget or nutrition education.
- Providing an education area within the market, showcasing the benefits of locally grown food. Provide a "meet the producer" display showcasing a vendor each week, with photos of those producing the food and the location where the food is produced.
- Meet Your Farmer events at local businesses
- Community dinners or tasting parties featuring products of local farmers
 - Integrate farmers' markets with other community events, such as festivals, Second Sunday events, or fundraising runs.

Run a Meet-the-Farmer Happy Hour

If you like to be social, try running a meet-the-farmer happy hour at a bar or restaurant. Even better if this restaurant buys from your farm! This is a win-win because the restaurant can help you market the happy hour and they get to burnish their local food credentials.

The market may consider engaging a farmers' market ambassador, either as a volunteer or paid position, to assure a welcoming atmosphere for limited-resource shoppers, and to clarify market layout and procedures.

Eagle Scouts, Master Gardener or AmeriCorps VISTA volunteers may be candidates for such a position. Find a sample position description at the end of this chapter.

Some suggested responsibilities for this position include:

- Welcoming patrons to the market
- Providing a map of the market with vendors' names and booth numbers
- Guiding SNAP, WIC and SFMNP recipients in redeeming their vouchers or electronic benefits
- Advising patrons about incentive programs (such as Double Dollars) or additional services or activities available (e.g., children's activities or cooking demonstrations)
- Distributing relevant educational materials, such as produce cards or the trifold brochure on using an EBT card
- Providing information about transportation, parking, or market layout and hours of operation
- Assisting the elderly and handicapped to ensure accessibility

A sample position description follows. It may be adapted to fit the needs of any individual farmers' market.

- **Position:** Farmers Market Ambassador
Type of position: (Paid/Volunteer)
- **Market/Location:** (Name and Address)
- **Time Commitment:** (Hours/Week)
- **Start/End Date:** (Dates/Months)
- **Experience Level:** (Does this person need prior background knowledge? Degree? Years of experience?)

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- **Age Requirement:** (18 and older?)
- **Goal of Position:** To help clarify market layout and procedures with limited-resource audiences. This person will be at the market to guide SNAP, WIC and SFMNP recipients on how to redeem and use their benefits at the farmers market. (If the market participates in Kentucky Double Dollars, this person will also explain this procedure as well.) The hope is that this person will help increase redemption rates and therefore increase fresh, local food consumption within our community, especially with the limited-resource population.
- **Duties/Expectations:**
 - Thorough understanding of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infant and Children (WIC) and Senior Farmer's Market Nutrition Program and how these nutrition services are redeemed at the farmers' market
 - A consistent presence at each farmers market (We want people to learn your face so they know who to turn to for questions)
 - Willingness to socialize with people from a variety of backgrounds and explain potentially intricate processes in a simplified way
 - Ability to stand and casually walk around for ~five to six hours at a time with short sitting breaks
 - Ability to have a friendly, approachable presence that welcomes limited-resource audiences into the farmers' market
 - Direct participants to (or hand out) relevant educational materials, such as produce cards, trifold brochures on using EBT card or Plate It Up KY[?] Proud cards
- **Assist Farmers' Market Manager:**
 - Advise on promotional or additional services being made available that day (children's activities, Summer Food Service Program, bookmobile, etc.)
 - Advise on parking and transportation, as well as hours of operation
 - Provide services for elderly or handicapped, such as directions to handicapped accessible ramps, carrying packages to the car or holding purchases at the market welcome table/tent
 - Provide information about upcoming promotional events, such as farmer meet-and-greets, etc.
- **How to gain more information or apply:**
Market Contact: Please fill out application (found here/share link) or send resume to contact above.

Creating a Welcoming Atmosphere Evaluation

If you would like to assess the results of your activities, the following table may be useful in evaluating a program or project from the Farmers' Market Toolkit, either as the result of a work plan created after implementing the Assessment Tool worksheet or for a predetermined activity.

For Extension agents, this table provides examples of ways to evaluate a program or project from the Farmers' Market Toolkit and construct measures to determine outcomes for success stories, KERS, and PSE activities reported via the Food Systems Impact survey.

Examples of related success stories copied from KERS follow the table below. The highlighted sections in the stories show how specific results were reported.

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Action	Type of PSE Change	Indicators	Outputs
Market Promotion/ advertising	Promotional change	Number and/or type of promotional activities (taste-testing, live demonstrations, children's activities, social gatherings, etc.)	Report the number and type of the activities and resulting number of attendees participating in promotional activity.
		Number of flyers or posters posted advertising FM	Report the number of flyers or posters posted to show potential PSE reach.
		Number and/or type of permanent and/or semipermanent signage promoting farmers' market	Report the number and type of permanent and/or semipermanent signage promoting farmers' market.
		Number of locations where flyers/posters advertising farmers' market	Report the number of locations flyers or posters are posted to show geographic scope of promotion (neighborhoods, sq. miles, etc.).
		Number and type of media advertising farmers' market	Report media reach (newspaper subscribers, mailers, radio listeners) to show PSE reach.
		Number and type of websites that are promoting farmers' market changes	Report type of website and number of website hits promoting farmers' market.

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Market Outreach and Promotion Success Stories

All stories reported below were accessed from the Cooperative Extension Reporting System (KERS).

Farmers' Market Opening Day

Menifee County, as well as many other Eastern Kentucky counties, has a high obesity and chronic disease risk rate, especially in limited-resource audiences. Increasing consumption of fruits and vegetables has been shown to decrease the risk of some chronic diseases and improve health outcomes. The Farmers' Market provides an opportunity for the community to buy local produce and is in a desirable location for shoppers. This also helps financially support the local economy and farming community.

Menifee County Cooperative Extension Services partnered with the Menifee County Farmers' Market

Coalition to help plan, advertise, and host the Farmers' Market Opening Day in June. Ag Agent Mary McCarty assisted the vendors in obtaining their necessary training for SNAP and WIC sales. Family and Consumer Sciences Agent Kayla Walton advertised for the event on social media and in our bimonthly newsletter. Additionally, Kayla partnered with SNAP-Ed Assistant Vanessa Harris to host a booth at the opening day event with recipe samples and demonstration for sweet potatoes and cucumber, tomato and bean salsa, recipe cards with nutrition and MyPlate information, as well as providing information about other Extension programs and resources. We encouraged shoppers to buy and eat produce available at the farmers' market using the recipe cards and samples, which they could buy ingredients for at the surrounding vendors.

The Farmers' Market and Extension Office were able to work together to encourage fruit and vegetable consumption in our community. Most shoppers who



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tried our samples enjoyed them and took a recipe card. One shopper even stated, “This smell is helping bring more people in!” Another shopper said, “This recipe is really simple,” when referring to the grilled sweet potato recipe and demonstration. He showed interest in making the recipe at home.

Taylor County Farmers’ Market

The Taylor County Farmers’ Market received a USDA small business promotion grant last year to use toward the farmers’ market in Taylor County. In cooperation with the health department and the Extension office, the market is working toward a revitalization. *We worked increasing interest with the market throughout the community by increased advertisement on radio, paper and social media while also providing opportunities for vendors to use free advertisement resources provided by the market. A Facebook page was developed. Each week we add a post of what buyers can expect to see at the market. We also post pictures on Saturday morning at the beginning of the market. The market currently has 660 followers and 634 likes.*

This season we have gained five new vendors. Going into this season the market was a stronger organization, bettering the community by providing a larger selection of fruits and vegetables, and of course assisting producers in the sale and marketing of their produce and products. The new cooler continues to provide a storage option for market members’ vegetables this year. Members have commented on how much that has helped them and also on the tables provided. It saves them space, time,

and money being able to use the tables the market provides. The local Taylor County Farm Bureau donated \$800 this season for the Kentucky Double Dollars program and a portable toilet. This is another example of the community seeing the benefit of the market and graciously showing support for it.

Farmers’ Market Association Inc., of Taylor County Spring Festival

The opening day of the Taylor County Farmers’ Market raised concern for the 2022 season, because of the low turnout of customers. Upon reviewing last year’s numbers, the next market day was projected to be even lower. *The Horticulture agent, the ANR agent, 4-H agent, and EFNEP assistant, worked together to plan, set up, and host the first Spring Festival at the Farmers’ Market. The festival consisted of Taylor County Master Gardeners working centers for children to learn how to plant zinnia seeds, learn about plant propagation through planting spider plants, obtain a DIY lettuce growing kit with literature on health benefits, recipes, and planting guide resources. Children also had the opportunity to create coffee filter butterflies, paint a terra-cotta pot, and make a paper pinwheel. Trees from the local Forestry Department were also given away at the market. In comparison with the 2021 season on the same market day, the Spring Festival caused an increase of 83% in attendance, thus increasing customer count and retention of vendors for the 2022 season.* Other festivals and events will be held throughout the season. Because of the success of the 2022 Taylor County Farmers’ Market Spring Festival, it will be held again next year.

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