

## Farmers Market Vendor FAQs: Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. *Why should I provide samples?*

Samples are a great way to increase consumer interest in your products and research suggests that providing samples at farmers markets does create economic benefits for the producer.

### 2. *How much will sampling cost me vs. the return in sales?*

Sampling costs are fairly direct: product for samples, sampling materials, required market wash stations, time/fees for sampling certificates, and staffing time to set up, deliver, and clean up samples. Benefits can be measured by resulting direct purchases, but also future purchases made by patrons who would otherwise NOT have purchased the product. There is some variation by product and customer, but our research suggests that over half the farm market patrons sampling purchased product when they hadn't planned on it after sampling. Further, they increased their intention to purchase from the vendor later and indicated significant referral activity for both the product and the vendor.

### 3. *What licenses do I need to have?*

In Kentucky, farmers market vendors must have an up-to-date Sampling Certificate from the Kentucky Department of Agriculture. It is also a good idea to have product liability insurance to cover you and your product.

### 4. *Where are good venues for sampling?*

Venues for food sampling that we asked survey participants about were: farmers markets, grocery stores, festivals, club stores, restaurants, supercenters, on-farm retail markets, specialty food stores, gourmet food stores, and natural food stores. Other interesting places that respondents noted were: museums, Pampered Chef parties, wine tastings, bakeries, and a number of other places. See page 35.

### 5. *I have several products I would like to sample. Is it a good idea to sample several at one time?*

It will depend upon how much of your help is able to provide samples during the market. If your samples are complementary products, try sampling them together. If you are thinking of sampling all 12 of your jam flavors one day, you might be overwhelmed, customers might be overwhelmed, and samples could easily get mixed up. In this case, try featuring 2-4 types of your jams at a time. This will give customers the opportunity to try all of them at some time, and might draw them back next week, just to try one kind they are interested in.

### 6. *My product needs to stay cold. How do I do that safely?*

Products that need to stay cold should be maintained at 41F or below. This can be done by supplying ice above and below it. Samples put into cups at home can be easily managed in a small cooler. Also, remember to monitor samples on the table, none should remain out for more than 30 minutes.

### 7. *Who else can provide samples if I am busy helping a customer?*

In Kentucky, all persons (producers, employees, family members, etc.) who will be offering samples must complete their own Sampling Application and have an approved Sampling Certificate.

### 8. *How do I organize a pooled sampling event?*

Start by talking to your farmers market manager; he/she might be able to help coordinate an event for your farmers market. Also, county Extension agents are able to provide samples and might be very interested in having a table at your farmers market to promote their services to the community. See page 28 for Boone County's "A Taste of the Market" program, and page 52 for the University of Kentucky's Pooled Sampling Project at the Owenton Farmers Market write-up.

**9. *What size should samples be?***

Samples are a bite-sized portion of food which is offered to demonstrate its characteristics. Many vendors use 2 ounce plastic containers with lids to serve samples.

**10. *What kind of information should I provide with my samples?***

Recipe cards and cooking tips, whole meal planning ideas, and nutritional information are often of interest to customers. Many people are becoming interested in production methods as well, so it may be a good idea to provide information about how your product was produced.

**11. *How do I deal with people who don't like my product?***

Thank them for trying your product and maybe ask what they don't like about it. It could be useful feedback for you as a producer.

**12. *Should I sample every week?***

A way to decide when to sample and how many customers to expect, is to keep track of "traffic" counts from previous market events. Also, take into consideration holiday weekends and county-wide events that may take business away from the market for a day.

**13. *Does pooled sampling have the same impact as individual vendor sampling?***

Not necessarily. Research on pooled sampling projects suggests that some customers will not even approach the sampling table because it is too crowded or not all of the products are available to be sampled. Others reported that they liked the convenience of having everything at one table. Still other customers place a high value on interacting with vendors during sampling.

**14. *Should I offer recipe cards and cooking tips for my products?***

Providing a take-home handout for customers is not only enticing, but it also provides you with a place to include your farm's name and contact information.

**15. *Can I cut fresh fruits and vegetables on-site?***

Yes, but in addition to acquiring your Sampling Certification from the Kentucky Department of Agriculture, you must also go through their Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Training and receive your GAP Diploma. After going through the GAP Training, you will be certified for "All Samples." All fresh, raw produce must be washed and scrubbed off thoroughly under running potable water. Make sure the washed produce is packed in clean bags or containers to keep them clean until you arrive at the market. Knives used to cut up fresh fruits and vegetables must be frequently cleaned, and you must have an appropriate cutting board available.

**16. *Does my insurance cover any liability associated with sampling?***

Talk to your insurance provider about this. Product liability insurance is a good thing to have as a farmers market vendor too.

To access our *Best Practices for Sampling at Farmers Markets: A Practical Guide for Farmers Market Vendors* publication online, please visit this link: <http://www2.ca.uky.edu/cmsspubsclass/files/extensionpubs/2012-19.pdf>

For more information, contact Miranda Hileman at [miranda.hileman@uky.edu](mailto:miranda.hileman@uky.edu) or 859-218-4384.