Suggested Market Rules

The market members or the sponsoring entity should establish rules for the day-to-day operation of the market. Market rules contribute to the experience for the customer, the success of the farmers and keep squabbles to a minimum if they are enforced consistently.

Rules should reflect the purpose for the market and protect the credibility of the market in the eyes of the customer. Many markets operate successfully with a single page of 10 rules. Some choose to be more extensive. Either way, you should make sure each member gets a copy of the rules and reads and understands them. Many markets require members to sign a copy of the rules as part of their membership agreement to ensure they are understood.

How to get started

Decide basic information about how you want the market to work and make rules that ensure those basic items. Democracy is great, but getting everyone to agree on every rule will be difficult. It is best to appoint a committee and have the committee develop some working rules for the season. Ask everyone to direct any comments, questions, or complaints to the committee so they can revisit the rules after a couple of months. Don't be hesitant to make needed changes; but don't do it on the basis of one person's complaint. For every complaint, someone may be very happy with the way the rule reads now.

One of the first rules that should be established is how to make and change rules. This process needs to be fair and open and allow for producer input but should limit endless discussion or arbitrary changes at the whim of one or two members.

Hints for making rules

- Rules should be easily understood.
- Rule should be written down and made available to all members and sponsors.
- Rules need to be fairly and consistently enforced. Rules that can't be enforced should be scrapped.
- Rules should work to the advantage of the producers selling at the market.
- Rules should protect the credibility of the market by requiring producers to properly label and represent product at the market.
- Most importantly, the rules should protect and direct the market rather than settle squabbles between vendors.

Membership and fees

The rules should specifically state how a producer applies for and maintains his or her membership. Fees should be outlined in detail. Any restrictions on space usage or required number of days at market should be spelled out.

Markets do not have to take all applicants and should set criteria for producers to meet in order to be members. How many market days are they planning on being at the market? Will the product they offer add to the diversity of the market? Competition between vendors is good and should not be discouraged by severely limiting tomato producers, for instance, because your president happens to grow tomatoes. But if space is tight, then a judicious look at applicants who offer something different may be in order.

Enforcement of rules

Success of rules depends on the enforcement of those rules. Every market should try and keep from dissolving into numerous petty arguments. Each member should be aware of how the rules are enforced and agree to submit to the process before joining the market. Some markets have instituted levels of violations; for example, being late for the market opening is a small violation whereas selling misrepresented product would be a big violation. Some develop "three strikes and you're out" provisions. Fair, consistent enforcement and an established way for vendors to lodge a complaint is the key. Market days and times. The days, times and location of your market should be outlined in the rules. Opening date and closing date should also be covered. Opening and closing dates help producers who want to offer early or late product. Established times will help customers find you and know when to shop. If your market closes a market day or location late in the season, or has a location and day that is only open part of the year, the criteria for that decision should be spelled out. Along with establishing and keeping market hours, this is important if your market hopes to accept vouchers for the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program - WIC or Senior.

Sources of Products

<u>CONNECTICUT GROWN ONLY!</u> No exceptions. For information on people bringing products or items they don't produce themselves, please see the Section Titled "Market Types"

Licensing and necessary permits

Vendors are required by the health department to obtain different types of permits or licenses for different products. To eliminate market liability for each vendor complying with all regulations, markets may include a catch-all rule that states that each vendor shall be responsible for complying with all applicable state and local laws, regulations and requirements.

Products allowed

Each market can determine what products will be allowed for sale at their market. When discussing these rules, it is good to revisit why the market was started in the first place. Products besides agriculture products can give a market a flea market feel that does little to lead to the success of the local farmer.

On the other hand, restricting products to only fresh fruits and vegetables can limit some farmers from branching out into value-added products as well as preventing the market

from attracting all the customers it could. Meats, flowers, jams, gourd art, eggs, and more will help the market grow.

Spaces

How spaces are assigned should be included in the rules. Some markets choose to assign spaces based on seniority. Others, in order to encourage and reward producers who come the entire market season, allow producers to choose their space on the basis of number of days they were at the market the previous year. To those starting a new market this issue becomes critical and should be given sufficient attention as it causes many disagreements at markets.

Some agreement needs to be reached on when vendors can move into another vendor's reserved spot if the vendor doesn't come to market that day. A specific time for any moves needs to be set so those who wish to move can do so without upsetting a vendor who is running late.

The size of the space each vendor requires will vary. We recommend planning on each vendor needing 3 parking spaces or approximately 24 feet wide. Not all vendors will need all that space and you can adjust you plans from there.

For further information contact the Connecticut Department of Agriculture:

Rick Macsuga	Mark Zotti
(860) 713-2544	(860) 713-2538

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