

# Selling Local Foods in Missouri



## Farmers' Markets

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# Preface

## **Selling Local Foods in Missouri**

Selling is as important to fruit and vegetable growers as a high yield. Producing fruits and vegetable crops is often relatively easy, but finding a market or optimal combination of markets can be challenging. Low transportation costs and the ability to produce vine-ripe, fresh fruits and vegetables give Missouri growers a competitive advantage in marketing many types of vegetables. Season-extending technology, such as high tunnels, can expand the growing and marketing windows of many Missouri-grown fruits and vegetables. Missouri growers can grow varieties and types of fruits and vegetables that cannot be found on the average supermarket shelf.

Many market outlets are available to Missouri growers. These include community farmers' markets, "u-pick" (pick-your-own) sales, on-farm or roadside markets, wholesale produce auctions, restaurants, institutional sales, marketing cooperatives, supermarket sales and community-supported agriculture or subscription farming.

Selling Local Foods provides beginning growers, and existing growers that would like to diversify, with general information and tools to make important production and business decisions. Selling Local Foods will help you make informed decisions regarding new crops, diversifying your current operation, or adding value added products, and help you determine the best venue for selling your local crop.

Selling Local Foods puts you in the fast lane for success as a commercial producer. So be sure to take the first four modules, since these offer you a solid foundation for your dreams and plans of becoming a commercial grower.

Here's what they offer:

- 90 minutes will fly by in our *Business Planning, Budgets and Liability* module. Business planning provides information and resources for anyone in or considering commercial production. You'll also get hands on experience writing your business mission statement, business plan and goals.
- *Food Safety and Food Label Claims* functions hand-in-hand with *Produce Care and Management*. Food Safety is a fast-paced, 90-minute session that will cover best food safety practices from your field to market. Produce Care spends a quick 30 minutes providing details and resources to make sure your production efforts arrive at market in top form to command the best price! You must get these two modules so you can navigate regulations and deliver the freshest and safest products to your customers.
- If you sell direct-to-consumer, through a distributor, have a farm stand, or sell through any other venue, *Customer Service and Merchandizing* offers a wealth of customer service and marketing tips and resources in this 45-minute module. Communication and relationships are key – no matter where you sell.

Did you know: research has proven that selling through multiple venues is the No. 1 key to profits for most successful local market growers? So we offer you nine, 30-minute modules, each providing an overview of different sales venues. These modules will guide you through the ins and outs of selling -- from Amish and Mennonite produce auctions to agritourism and farm stands. Take advantage of as many modules as you can; they will help you make informed decisions and choose sales venues to put money in your pocket, right from the start.

Our sales venue modules include:

- *Selling at Farmers' Markets*—Have you dreamed about one day selling at a farmers' market? Come to this session to learn about the advantages, and yes, disadvantages of selling at a farmers' market. We'll provide you with information *you* need to decide if selling at a farmers' market is right for you.
- *Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)*—Why do a CSA? What are some of the common misconceptions regarding CSAs? Did you know there are multiple CSA business models, and advantages and disadvantages related to each? After you complete this module you'll know ways target, develop, grow and retain your CSA customers.
- *Produce Auctions*—How did produce auctions get started? How many auctions are in Missouri? Who do I contact? What are their regulations? Facilities? Come learn about

the many facets of selling at a produce auction. Find out how an auction might be a great venue for your products.

- *Selling to Institutions*—What is an institution? There are more kinds that you might think. In this module you'll discover how you can get your foot in the door and the benefits of partnering with different types of institutions. You'll discover how selling to an institution can foster community relationships and open the door to a variety of other marketing channels.
- *Selling to Restaurants*—Our Selling to Restaurants module will describe all of the benefits and unique opportunities associated with selling to restaurants. You'll hear directly from chefs what is important to them and how to get started. We'll include some key resources to make planning and communicating with chefs just that much easier.
- *Selling to Grocery Stores*—This session will provide you with some key tips for selling to grocery stores. This module will dive into the specific topics you need to consider if you sell to grocers including producer-retailer relationships, pricing, packaging, quality, and quantity.
- *Selling Wholesale/Food Hubs*—Learn about the different types of wholesalers and the advantages of marketing through distributors. We'll explain food hub classifications and identify potential challenges you might face when selling to wholesalers so that you are prepared. Wholesale appeals to many farmers because it allows you to focus on what you're good at - production.
- *Kitchens and Other Local Foods*—Did you know that the percentage of meat in a product determines which regulations you need to follow? This module will detail the ins and outs of regulations for jams and jellies to pasta and eggs, meat and jerky. While many farmers think of local foods as produce, you will find that there are other products that you can sell locally.
- *Agritourism, Farm Stands and U-Pick*—This session will explore the crossover between agriculture and tourism industries. You will learn about key ways you can adapt your farm and growing practices so that you can participate in the agritourism industry through u-picks, farm stands, and events.

Don't get surprised by the unexpected. Learn, plan and be proactive to ensure your success whatever sales venues you choose.

# Selling Local Foods in Missouri

## Farmers' Markets



UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI  
Extension

In this presentation some of the topics we will cover include:

- Advantages of selling at a farmers' market
- Disadvantages of selling at a farmers' market
- Keys to building a relationship with your customers
- Annoyances for farmers' market customers
- Explain what you need in order to sell successfully at a farmers' market.

What is a Farmers' Market?



A farmers' market as defined by the Missouri Department of Agriculture is more than just a group of farmers coming together in one central location week after week to sell their products. Yes, it is this, but it is also more than this. Keep that in mind while you continue reading the participant notes.

Farmers' markets may include:

- One or more producers at any location,
- Roadside farm stands or farmers selling directly from their home,
- Community Supported Agriculture (CSA's),
- Agritourism operations,
- Any operation where farmers sell farm products from their farms directly to consumers with a logical pattern, and
- Both the act of organization or assembly and the individual participants may be considered farmers' markets.

Did you know that roadside stands, CSAs, Agritourism operations, selling directly from the farm and anywhere a group of farmers are gathered to sell constitute them as a farmers' market?

What are some advantages of selling at Farmers' Markets?



There are lots of advantages to selling produce at a farmers' market. My presentation today will go over a number of them and you may have some of your own that we can discuss as well.

Customers who are interested in local foods will automatically go to farmers' markets to purchase their food.

Products are bought on the spot so payment is received immediately either as cash or checks. Today customers are accustomed to purchasing with their debit or credit card. You may want to check into tools such as Square to accept this type of payment.

A farmers' market is a good place for beginning farmers to start selling their products and a good place for experienced farmers to test new products with their existing customers.

Advantages of Selling at Farmers' Markets Continued

- Build reputation with customer base
- Customer preferences
- Customer connection
- Set your own price



Other advantages include the opportunity to build your own reputation at the market itself such as being the farmer known as “THE” spinach grower at the market. After a short time selling at the farmers' market you will be able to determine your customers' preferences and will be able to grow for them such as their favorite varieties of different crops.

You will have constant direct contact with your customers which enables you to build that personal relationship with them enabling the customer to “KNOW” their farmer. Once you build that relationship with your customers, it's hard for them not to continue to purchase from you.

Selling at the farmers' market enables you to be a price setter and not a price taker. In other words, you are able to set your own prices for your products.

What are some disadvantages of selling at Farmers' Markets?



Just as there are advantages to selling at farmers' markets, there are disadvantages as well.

Farmers who enjoy working with people are usually the ones who develop those personal relationships with their customers where sales then build.

Selling at the farmers' market takes a lot of time. Most farmers get up extremely early to load the vehicle, set up at the market with tent, tables and product and then must be at the market the entire time it is open only to reload the vehicle with tent, tables and any product that didn't sell and drive home. It's a very long and tiring day. Farmers must have a good mode of transportation to get their products and themselves to the market. The

transportation must be reliable and fit with what the needs are for the products; many kinds of produce need to be maintained at certain temperatures so being able to keep the produce cool is important. Some markets will have only a few vendors while others may have many. Most farmers believe the fewer the vendors the more sales they will make and the more vendors the more competition they will have. The reality is most sales go to the vendors with the very best and high quality products and the best customer service.

#### Disadvantages of Selling at Farmers' Markets (Continued)

- Must be there when open
- Need to follow market rules/regulations, guidelines, code of conduct



Just because you are selling at a market and customers show up doesn't mean that you are guaranteed sales. There is more to sales than just having the product available. Customer service and quality product will drive sales. Customers may be loyal to the market or loyal to buying local but they may not necessarily be loyal to you as a vendor. You will have to earn their loyalty.

Another disadvantage to selling at a farmers' market is that you must be there each time the market is open and for the duration of the market. If you only come when you have enough product to sell, you won't be able to build reliable loyalty. You are an actual vendor selling at the market but each farmers' market will have its own guidelines and code of conduct that each vendor will need to follow.

What actions do you believe are key to building successful customer relationships at farmers' markets?



So how can you develop customer loyalty? It can be accomplished through building personal relationships with your customers. Customers will expect you to be business-like just as any other type of business would be. Your appearance says a lot about who you are. Be neat and clean. If you show up with stains on or holes in your clothes, a subliminal message that your product isn't of high quality is conveyed. Engage your customers. Say hello and good morning. Ask how they are? Share your knowledge about your product. Tell them about your products and why you like to grow them and how great they taste. Go the extra mile. Everyone likes to feel important or special. And always be reliable. Nothing loses customers like not being reliable with your product, your business and yourself.

### Top 6 Customer Annoyances

1. Lack of acknowledgment to customers
2. Vendor inattentiveness
3. Vendor busyness



There are many annoyances that customers can give when shopping at farmers' markets. Here I will discuss the top 5 that have been identified from customer surveys over the years.

Customers do like to be greeted when they walk up to your booth space. Even if you're busy at least make eye contact and say hello.

Your posture says a lot about you as well. If you can, avoid sitting. Sitting can imply to the customer that you are lazy or disinterested in serving them.

And put away the cell phone. There is nothing like giving the impression that talking on the phone is more important than waiting on them.

When a customer is ready to purchase and the vendor isn't paying any attention to them to answer a question and provide them with a bag, they can become flustered and annoyed.

Another thing to avoid is busyness. Yes, it's important to refill your table or take empty trays away but your customer should always come first.

### Top 6 Customer Annoyances

4. Vendor cannot make change
5. Lack of signage – price not displayed clearly
6. Long lines



Other things that vendors do that can be annoying to the customer is not being able to make the correct change for their purchase. Also, be sure to provide good signage that is legible so customers will know as soon as they walk up what the product is and how much it cost. Many customers won't have the time or patience to wait and ask for the price. Or, if the signs are so small and can't be read easily, they will walk on by. And just as you hate to wait in lines, so do your customers.

### Supplies Needed to Sell Successfully

- Bags
- Tables
- Farm signage
- Certified scale
- Product/price signage
- Containers for display
- Canopy, if not already under cover
- Cash box with small bills/change



Coming to the market with great products and coming with a great attitude to sell is fabulous. But you will also need to be sure you have the appropriate supplies to be successful. The most common items are tables, a canopy if the market doesn't have a pavilion or overhead protection, signage and price signs, containers to make an attractive display for your products, cash box with plenty of small bills and change, a certified scale and bags for

customers' use. Plastic bags you get from the store can be used but think about the impression you are giving to the customer when you reuse your plastic bags for them to use. It may cost a few pennies more but purchase new plastic bags if you can.

#### Qualities for Success



So let's review. Selling at a farmers' market is not as easy as it may appear. There is a lot to think about in order to be successful. Your appearance is important. What impression do you want to give your customer? Think about everyone wearing the same colored t-shirt with the farm logo on it. Try to bring your best quality product to the market. If you have product that's not the best, mark the price down and call it seconds. Think about how you display your products. Is it eye appealing such as the potatoes in this photo? Coming to the market each time with a great attitude and providing great customer service along with the gratitude of thanking your customers will go a long way in making you a successful farmer's market vendor.

#### Summary

- Advantages and disadvantages
- Personal relationships with customers
- Quality customer service
- Success is more than just quality products, it includes
  - Price
  - Attitude
  - Personal appearance
  - Gratitude

In summary, selling at farmers' markets have both advantages and disadvantages and you must weigh these against each other to decide if this is the market you would like as your main market for selling your product. You must be able to develop personal relationships with your customers and provide quality service. Remember that success is more than just the quality of your product. It is also the attitude you portray to your customers, your personal as well as vending space appearance and the gratitude you give to your customers for purchasing your products.

## Glossary of Terms

<b>Acidified canned food</b>	A food whose ingredients are primarily naturally not acidic (pH > 4.6) that are acidified with vinegar or lemon juice before canning. This includes pickled vegetables and other products. To sell these products at room temperature, a process review and attendance at Better Process Control School is required.
<b>Better Process Control School (BPCS)</b>	Better Process Control School is required for selling some shelf stable canned foods. The course either includes two days (only for acidified foods) or four days (for selling low acid canned foods).
<b>Clean</b>	The removal of dirt and debris.
<b>Commercial kitchen</b>	Typically, this is a food processing facility that uses commercial-size equipment for preparing food and is typically not a home kitchen used for regular family use. Note that if a processor needs a food safety license to sell a particular food, they need to obtain such license for themselves, even if someone else using the same facility has a license, unless that person is willing to take on the liability for another processor.
<b>Co-packer</b>	A contracted processing facility that manufactures and packages food products for a client based on the client specifications.
<b>Crisping</b>	Refreshing harvested fresh produce in water or sprinkling leafy commodities with water or ice to restore moisture content.
<b>Farmers' Market</b>	RSMo. 144.527.2 defines a farmers' market as "Individual farmers or a cooperative or nonprofit enterprise or association that consistently occupies a given site throughout the season, which operates principally as a common marketplace for an individual farmer or a group of farmers to sell farm products directly to consumers, and where the products sold are produced by the participating farmers with the sole intent and purpose of generating a portion of household income."

Under this definition farmers' markets include but may not be limited to:

- One or more producers at any location
- Roadside farm stands or farmers selling directly from their home
- Community Supported Agriculture (CSA's)
- Agritourism operations
- Any operation where farmers sell farm products from their farms directly to consumers with a logical pattern
- Both the act of organization or assembly and the individual participants may be considered farmers' markets.

It is important to recognize the separation between markets as a common marketplace and markets as individuals and entities. The laws and

regulations governing a farmers' market as a common marketplace are determined by the market's organizational structure and the activities the market (organizing body) performs under applicable state and local laws. The laws governing vendors are determined by their legal incorporation and the types of products and services they provide under applicable state and local laws, whether they qualify as a farmers' market themselves or not.

<b>FDA</b>	The United States Food and Drug Administration. Generally, responsible for regulating all food products other than meat and poultry.
<b>Food Hub</b>	A centrally located facility with a business management structure facilitating the aggregation, storage, processing, distribution, and/or marketing of locally/regionally produced food products.
<b>Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA)</b>	A law signed in January 2011. It includes final rules released in 2015 on produce safety, as well as processed food safety. This is the first time that there have been governmental regulatory requirements for selling fresh, whole produce. More information is available from <a href="http://missourifamilies.org/foodsafety/newsletters/">http://missourifamilies.org/foodsafety/newsletters/</a> or <a href="http://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/FSMA/default.htm">www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/FSMA/default.htm</a>
<b>fresh-cut</b>	"...any fresh fruit, vegetable or combination that has been physically altered from its original form, but remains in a fresh state."
<b>GAPs</b>	Good Agriculture Practices. For the purposes of USDA's GAPs program, GAPs applies to produce growing, harvest, packing, and transportation. If a product is GAP certified, the grower has passed an audit that they are using good food safety produce growing practices. Not that GAPs is not a regulatory requirement, but may be required by a buyer.
<b>GFSI</b>	The Global Food Safety Initiative. Some buyers may request that producers pass one of the GFSI- recognized 3 <sup>rd</sup> party audits for food safety. Some of the auditing schemes recognized by GFSI include Primus and Safe Quality Food (SQF).
<b>GMPs</b>	Good Manufacturing Practices- the basic sanitary and processing requirements necessary to ensure the production of safe food. Implementing these is essential to meeting FDA and USDA food safety requirements.
<b>Grocery Store</b>	A market outlet for distribution of local food products for retail sale to consumers.
<b>Group GAPs</b>	A USDA food safety certification program which officially began April 3, 2016. Under the program, growers of any size can be USDA-GAP certified as a group.
<b>HACCP</b>	Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points. A HACCP plan and implementation program is a regulatory requirement for meat and poultry

products, seafood, some juice, some vacuum- packed products, and by some food buyers.

<b>High acid canned food</b>	The natural pH of the product is $\leq 4.6$ . This includes most fruits and naturally fermented foods. No process review is required but pH records must be kept.
<b>Hydro-Cooling</b>	When warm produce is cooled directly by chilled water, the process is known as hydro-cooling.
<b>Incubator kitchen</b>	A kitchen facility that can be utilized by start-up or other food businesses. May also be considered a “community” or “shared-use” kitchen. Note that generally, if a food product requires a food safety license to sell, the processor would still need to obtain such license for themselves, even if someone else using the facility has a license, unless that person is willing to take on the liability for another processor.
<b>Local</b>	There is currently no uniform national definition for this term. However, if the term is used, it must be truthful and not misleading. The 2008 Farm Act defined this term as < 400 miles from the origin.
<b>Low acid canned food</b>	A food product that has a natural pH of greater than 4.6. This would include canned vegetables and meats packed in water. To sell these products at room temperature, a process review, attendance at Better Process Control School, and commercial retort canning are required.
<b>Natural</b>	USDA defines “natural” related to how a meat product was processed, stating that it is “minimally processed and contains no artificial ingredients.” FDA does not currently have a definition for natural. However, FDA “has not objected to the use of the term if the food does not contain added color, artificial flavors, or synthetic substances.”
<b>Organic</b>	For any food product to be labeled as “certified organic” or “USDA Organic,” they must be certified to meet all the requirements of the <u>USDA National Organic Program</u> .
<b>pH</b>	A measure of the acidity of a food product, which has a major impact on the microbial safety of the product, since some organisms do not grow well in acidic conditions.
<b>Potentially hazardous food</b>	Often commonly called “perishable” foods. A food that is natural or synthetic and that requires temperature control because it is in a form capable of supporting hazardous microorganisms.
<b>Produce Auction</b>	A market outlet for locally produced wholesale products. Fresh produce, as well as a variety of other agricultural products, are offered for sale to the highest bidder.

<b>Restaurant</b>	A market outlet for locally produced food to be sold and prepared for consumption by consumers.
<b>Sanitize</b>	Treating to reduce the amount of bacteria on a surface.
<b>Trimming</b>	Removing the parts of harvested fresh produce which are most likely to deteriorate. It removes the dried plant fluid that seeps out after harvesting which clog the plants pores, not allowing for proper hydration, and it removes those parts that detract from taste and eye appeal.
<b>USDA</b>	The United States Department of Agriculture. Generally responsible for regulating meat and poultry products and also perform other roles supporting agriculture, such as conducting Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) audits.
<b>Water activity</b>	Water activity is a measurement of the water available for the growth of microorganisms in a food product. It is affected by moisture content, as well as salt and sugar content of the product. It ranges from 0 to 1 (distilled water is a $a_w$ 1).

# Marketing Vegetables in Missouri



Figure 1. Farmers markets provide an easy, convenient way for producers to interact with people interested in fresh, local fruits and vegetables.

**M**arketing is as important to vegetable growers as a high yield. Producing vegetable crops is often relatively easy, but finding a market or optimal combination of markets can be challenging. Low transportation costs and the ability to produce vine-ripe, fresh vegetables give Missouri vegetable growers a competitive advantage in marketing many types of vegetables. Season-extending technology, such as high tunnels, can expand the growing and marketing windows of many Missouri-grown vegetables. Missouri vegetable growers can grow varieties and types of vegetables that cannot be found on the average supermarket shelf.

Many market outlets are available to Missouri vegetable growers. These include community farmers markets, “u-pick” (pick-your-own) sales, on-farm or roadside markets, wholesale produce auctions, restaurants, institutional sales, marketing cooperatives, supermarket sales and community-supported agriculture or subscription farming.

When choosing suitable market outlets, consider factors such as the volume of produce you will be growing; the time you have available for marketing during the growing season; your willingness, time and ability to deal with customers directly; the perishability of your crops; price levels and price stability of the market; and barriers to market entry and expansion.

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Revised by  
**David H. Trinklein**, Horticulture State Specialist, Division of Plant Sciences

## Farmers markets

Farmers markets are excellent outlets for directly marketing fresh, local produce to people in the community. Farmers markets support local farmers and promote healthy eating habits while fostering community development. Farmers markets are an excellent way for consumers to connect with food providers. By interacting with growers, consumers learn how food is grown, discover new types of vegetables and even learn how the vegetables can be prepared to preserve their nutritional value. Most consumers shop at farmers markets for freshness, diversity and the opportunity to support local farmers.

Farmers markets are well suited to small, individual lots of mixed produce. Strict grading and packaging of produce are not required, and items grade two or lower can often be sold with ease. Farmers markets are relatively easy markets to access and do not require a significant amount of startup capital. Most farmers markets require vendors to grow their products within a certain distance from the market and will often have rules and regulations governing how the items are sold. A space or booth rental fee may be required to sell at the market. Most farmers markets are centrally located, open-air markets within a community, so advertising by grower-vendors is not necessary. Farmers markets are compatible with off-farm employment because most market days occur on evenings or weekends.

Because farmers markets are well suited to small volumes of produce, they may not be the sole market outlet for a large-scale vegetable grower. Obtaining a premium price for produce at a farmers market may be difficult if there is



Figure 2. Pick-your-own marketing works best with crops for which it is easy to identify harvest maturity.

competition for the same item. Farmers markets are usually seasonal and transient, often opening in April and closing by November. However, covered farmers markets may be available year-round. Farmers markets require a significant amount of time for marketing the produce and may not be an efficient use of time for all growers. Missouri has more than 100 community farmers markets. To find a farmers market in your area, consult the Missouri Farmers Market Association.

## U-pick marketing

U-pick, or pick-your-own, marketing is popular for vegetables such as asparagus, green beans, peas, sweet corn, pumpkins and tomatoes (Figure 2). Most growers use u-pick to market vegetables for which pickers can easily recognize harvest maturity. Some growers open fields at the end of the harvest season to u-pick customers to clean up the fields.

U-pick marketing of vegetables is not capital-intensive and works well for perishable vegetables. U-pick lowers costs for labor, transportation, packaging and marketing but requires time for supervising customers. In sparsely populated rural areas, u-pick may not be a successful market outlet. And because the grower is inviting the public onto the farm, accident liability insurance may be required.

One of the challenges with u-pick marketing is coordinating harvest frequency with customer volume.

Advertising is essential to maintain a steady flow of customers to the farm. Consideration must be paid to parking and traffic flow on the farm. Pickers must be supervised and shown the proper way to harvest each crop to maximize marketable yield without damaging the plants.

## On-farm or roadside markets

Many Missouri vegetable growers sell their produce through on-farm stores or roadside stands (Figures 3 and 4). This method works particularly well in high-traffic areas. Generally, this form of marketing is not capital-intensive and is easy to access. The on-farm store can also be used to sell a variety of products — vegetables, fruits, processed vegetables and crafts — produced on the farm or from neighboring farms.

Many roadside markets are seasonal and benefit from a steady supply of quality produce. Some roadside stands purchase produce from other growers in the region to supplement or diversify their sales volume. Operation of the stand requires labor through the season, and packaging and grading requirements are stricter than at a farmers market. Rules and regulations such as health permits, weights and measures standards, parking, sales taxes, handicap access and sanitation must be considered before starting the market. The market should be clean and neat and have a variety of produce to choose from. Roadside market prices often fluctuate during the season, based on local supply.

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### Grower organizations

**Missouri Farmers Market Association**  
710 S. Hickory St.  
Mt. Vernon, MO 65712  
417-708-1909

**Missouri Farmers Union**  
15593 Road 245  
Langdon MO 64446  
573-659-4787 or 660-787-0222

**Missouri Organic Association**  
20547 Creek Road  
Bunceton, MO 65237  
660-427-5555 or 573-619-9139

**Missouri Vegetable Growers Association**  
100 E. Newton St., 4th Floor  
Versailles, MO 65084  
573-378-5358

For farmers market locations, visit <http://agebb.missouri.edu/fmktdir>.

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## Wholesale produce auctions

Missouri has four wholesale produce auctions. A produce auction is a marketing cooperative organized as a limited liability corporation or general partnership. Each auction has shareholders, usually growers, who provide startup capital for the auction. Produce auctions allow grower-members to wholesale market large volumes of produce in a centralized facility to a diverse group of buyers. Grower-members are expected to grade and package their produce in standardized containers before the auction. Each auction has specific guidelines for grading and packaging produce items. The auction often sells containers or boxes to grower-members. Growers transport the



*Figure 3. Roadside stands and on-farm stores are most successful in high-traffic areas.*

produce to the auction building the morning of the auction, and the auction commences by midmorning. Growers are responsible for boxing, unloading, stacking and labeling their produce items. The auction is conducted in an open-air shed with wide floor space for loading and unloading produce. The produce can be auctioned in lots positioned on carts on the floor or in a drive-through for bulk wagons or trailers.

Each lot of produce has a card that identifies the type, quantity, grade and, sometimes, variety of vegetable or fruit in the lot. This card is the consignment sheet and is read aloud by the manager or auctioneer before auctioning the lot. Each tag has a number that identifies the grower. Each lot is systematically auctioned to the highest bidder. The auction is designed for wholesale marketing, but small lots of produce are sold at retail prices in a separate section of the auction. Since most buyers want larger volumes of produce, most auctions sell small lots — less than three boxes of any item — last.

Wholesale produce auctions bring buyers and sellers together for a short period of time, several times each week. Most buyers purchase for small supermarkets, roadside stands or restaurants. The auction does not perform any postharvest handling or store any produce, because every lot is sold regardless of price at the day of the auction. Most auctions have a “no no-sale” policy. However, some auctions choose to set a price floor or minimum acceptable price for each lot of produce. A commission of 9 to 12 percent is deducted from the sale price of each lot to fund operating costs of the auction and salaries of the market manager, clerks and other workers in the auction.

Produce auctions are an efficient market outlet for growers who don’t have time to market their produce. Both top- and low-grade produce can be sold at the auction. Transaction costs are lowered because produce is transported to a central facility for market. Most produce auctions will only sell produce grown within a 100-mile radius of the auction facility. Produce grown outside the 100-mile radius is considered “shipped or imported produce” and is usually auctioned after local produce.

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### Wholesale produce auctions serving Missouri growers

**Barton County Produce Auction LLC**  
669-A NW 30th Lane  
Lamar, MO 64759  
417-681-0123

**C-Highway Produce Auction**  
Short State Highway P  
Seymour, MO 65746  
417-859-3509

**Central Missouri Produce Auction Inc.**  
37808 Highway E  
Fortuna, MO 65034  
660-337-6227

**Clark Produce Auction LLC**  
1966 Highway Y  
Clark, MO 65243  
660-264-4555

**Four County Produce Auction**  
1162 NE 1400 Road  
Windsor, MO 65360  
660-684-6844

**Highway 60 Produce Auction LLC**  
Seymour, MO 65746  
417-935-2791

**Leadmine Produce Auction**  
839 State Road T  
Tunas, MO 65764  
417-993-0086

**North Missouri Produce Auction LLC**  
32633 State Highway F  
Jamesport, MO 64648  
660-684-6844

For more information about wholesale produce auctions, visit <http://agebb.missouri.edu/hort/auction>

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Growers who wish to sell produce grown more than 100 miles away should contact the market manager before bringing produce to the auction. During the peak growing season, most produce auctions have two or three sales per week. Often, special auction events are conducted for items such as flowers, bedding plants, small animals, hay or straw, and crafts. The auction system is well suited to relatively nonperishable vegetables and fruits. Given the nature of the auction system, prices can vary, but an auction with low prices is often followed by auctions with high prices. Average seasonal prices for produce at most auctions are usually above wholesale final market prices or prices received from supermarket contracts. Growers should use the auction system throughout the growing season to get the most out of the changing prices.

## Marketing cooperatives

Although wholesale produce auctions are marketing cooperatives, other forms of marketing cooperatives can be established in Missouri. Growers in a region who produce similar types of vegetables or use similar growing practices, such as organic, may consider coming together to form a cooperative. A cooperative is a business organization owned by grower-members. Cooperative ventures can be organized as partnerships, corporations, cooperatives or limited liability companies. In Kansas, for instance, eight growers formed a community-supported farm that offered a wide variety of crops and served a larger number of members than could have been done by individual producers. In northeast Iowa, a small number of growers cooperatively own a packing and grading facility and a delivery truck that serves nursing homes and other institutional customers.

Cooperative marketing can offer many benefits to growers. These include specializing in vegetable crops best suited to their soil type, labor availability and management skills; marketing a larger volume of production, which reduces the marketing cost per product and allows access to new markets, such as wholesale distributors; complementing their own skills and abilities with other necessary production, grading and marketing skills; and spreading investment costs in equipment and facilities among a larger number of producers. Most wholesale market outlets desire a consistent quality and quantity of produce. The cooperative structure allows growers to sequence their planting to maintain a steady supply of produce for each market. Using a cooperative, growers are able to label and differentiate their produce. The cooperative can help with harvesting, processing, cooling or freezing, packaging, labeling and transporting produce to market. Growers market a specific quantity of produce through the cooperative relative to how much they have invested. The cooperative has a market manager who coordinates production and seeks new markets for the cooperative. With a diligent market manager and a larger volume of produce, each grower-member spends less time marketing relative to producing the crop. The cooperative can purchase input items, such as fertilizer or seed, in bulk quantities, resulting in significantly lower prices. Labor and equipment for planting and harvesting can be pooled and shared among members of the cooperative.

Depending on its size, a cooperative can have significant capital requirements, such as packing equipment, freezing units and coolers. For the cooperative to succeed, growers must work together and put aside self-interest. A marketing agreement among members that specifies the type and volume of vegetables sold by each member must be implemented. Some cooperatives do not take possession of members' produce but serve only to connect members with buyers. Quality control is essential, and the cooperative must enforce grading and packing requirements. Growers should use the cooperative as the dominant marketing outlet for their vegetables. Growers considering any form

of cooperative entity should read *The Farmer's Legal Guide to Producer Marketing Associations* by Doug O'Brien and co-authors (see the *Resources* section) and should seek expert legal assistance.

## Community-supported agriculture

Community-supported agriculture farms (CSAs) appeared in Missouri in the mid-1990s after being imported from Europe and Japan to the Northeast in the mid-1980s. CSAs are community farms where consumers interested in healthy, safe food enter into an economic partnership with growers seeking stable markets. Consumers pay in advance for a whole season of produce with a membership fee ranging from \$300 to \$600, depending on size of share. In return, members receive a supply of six or more varieties of vegetables on a weekly basis from roughly mid-May until October.

CSAs have traditionally had core groups of consumers who take on some tasks of planning, organizing and other labor — weeding, hoeing, harvesting, marketing, distribution, coordination — in addition to the membership fee. The benefits to growers include sharing the harvest risk with members who join knowing they may receive reduced harvests or variety depending on weather conditions or other problems. Traditional CSAs excel at creating loyal customers and friends, resulting in tremendous community partnerships.

A more common form of CSA in Missouri is subscription farming, which normally eliminates the work requirement for members. These CSAs may charge an advance fee for the entire season, or growers may opt to have a nominal membership fee with weekly or monthly invoices for the market basket provided.

In either form, the greatest benefit of CSA is the financing available from upfront membership fees, which enables the grower to buy seeds, supplies and labor.

CSAs require excellent management skills. Planning is essential to provide the expected variety and quantity of crops through a 20- to 24-week season. Growing such



Figure 4. Roadside stands and on-farm stores should be clean and neat and offer a variety of produce.

**Table 1. Summary of market outlets for Missouri.**

Market outlet	Farmers market	Roadside market	U-pick market	Produce auction	Market cooperative	Direct store sales	CSA	Institution sales	Restaurant sales
Suitable for large volumes of produce per grower?	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Marketing time required by individual grower	High	Medium	High	Low	Low	Medium	Medium–High	Low	Medium–High
Degree of grower contact with consumers	High	High	High	Low	Low	Low	High	Low	Low
Suitable for very perishable vegetables?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Price stability	Medium	Medium	High	Low–Medium	High	High	High	High	Medium–High

a wide variety of crops — usually 60 or more different vegetables, herbs, fruits or other crops — throughout the growing season requires knowledge of different growing techniques and carefully planned planting and harvesting, in addition to extra labor. By charging weekly or monthly fees based on the market value of vegetables provided, subscription CSAs exert less pressure on growers to supply a good variety every week than traditional CSAs. Growers considering developing a CSA should have several years of vegetable farming experience and good planning skills to manage the variety of crops, planting and harvesting schedules required to produce vegetables for 20 to 24 weeks. Growers considering a traditional CSA arrangement should also be adept at managing members' labor to make the most of the member work requirement.

Some growers form cooperative CSAs with other vegetable growers or producers of eggs, meat and honey. Such arrangements allow producers to specialize in different crops that are better suited to their land assets and management skills. Cooperative partnerships can take a great deal of time to plan and manage, but much of this can be done during the offseason. CSAs in general have medium to high marketing costs but can help stabilize farm incomes, minimize risk from specific crop failures and provide outlets for extra produce. CSAs are almost always used in conjunction with wholesale outlets or farmers markets to diversify funding sources.

## Restaurant and institutional sales

Selling to chefs and institutional food services can help growers diversify their markets. The most likely market targets are independently owned and operated restaurants that frequently change menus. Many are upscale restaurants that depend on high-quality ingredients to serve a sophisticated and discerning clientele. Such restaurants tend to use a limited amount of product and have little storage space on site, which means they need multiple deliveries each week. Lower-priced or high-volume restaurants can also be potential clients, particularly for highly perishable items that suffer from long shipping

distances, such as tomatoes or strawberries. With today's food trends, many chefs feel market pressure to source locally produced, high-quality products.

Benefits of marketing to chefs include a higher wholesale price if the product is delivered to the restaurant; a larger sales volume than retail sales, resulting in lower marketing costs; a market for unique and highly perishable products; and exposure for the farm's product to a wider audience, particularly if the chef uses the farm name and product in a marketing strategy.

An intangible benefit of selling to chefs is the invaluable feedback that growers get from food professionals, who may recommend earlier harvesting or different postharvest handling or packaging. To sell to chefs, growers need to have good postharvest handling and sorting, grading and packaging capacity. Growers will also need to be able to provide a standard business invoice that can be entered into the restaurant's accounting system and, in most cases, cannot expect payment upon delivery. (The exception is if growers can receive credit card payments. Setting up such a system can have multiple advantages in working with large-volume customers.) Growers should also consider that chefs have a schedule almost opposite their own — chefs finish cleanup from dinner service after midnight — which means farmers need to be able to accept orders by email, fax or, as a last resort, an answering machine. Growers should also be able to provide advance product price lists and availability on a weekly basis.

A great way to break into restaurant sales is to offer chefs samples of products to find out if your products are high enough quality for them to use. Chefs expect products they order to be delivered as promised and need to know about crop shortages far enough in advance to order replacement products from other distributors. Never deliver to a chef during lunch or dinner service (11 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 5 to 10 p.m., respectively) or you are likely to lose the sale because of the inconvenience to the chef.

Another potential marketing outlet is institutional food services, such as campus dining, elementary and secondary school cafeterias, hospitals and nursing homes. Many of the benefits and rules about selling to chefs also apply here.

Note that most food services will require product liability insurance, standard packaging and grading, and readable invoices. Many food services use a purchase order system that can require a grower to be approved as a vendor before an order can be placed, unless the grower has a credit card system in place. Food services generally pay the standard wholesale price but are often interested in contracting for product throughout a season, which can balance out price fluctuations from week to week. In addition, to protect themselves from legal claims, many food services require that suppliers have a hazard analysis and critical control points (HACCP) safety audit system in place.

## Direct store sales

Regional wholesale marketing of vegetables to chain or independent supermarkets is a viable marketing outlet for both large- and small-scale vegetable producers in Missouri. Many consumers request that their local supermarkets buy locally grown produce. To evaluate this market outlet, identify all food retailers in your area, and visit or call each store to determine if they are interested in purchasing locally grown produce.

Direct marketing to supermarkets eliminates the need for a broker and allows growers to label their produce. Large-scale producers can market large lots of produce by selling wholesale to a supermarket. Small-scale producers can fulfill the demand for niche produce items that supermarkets cannot purchase through traditional wholesale channels. Many upscale or specialty supermarkets may be looking for premium, farm-fresh produce items, such as organic, ethnic, heirloom or baby vegetables.

Harvest scheduling is crucial for marketing to supermarkets, since produce cannot be delivered to market every day. Supermarkets require a consistent supply and quality of produce. The labor or equipment to harvest produce on a timely basis must be available, and coolers may be needed to preserve postharvest quality and for short-term storage. Most supermarkets require product liability insurance, and some require growers to attend food safety training, to have a third-party auditor and to have specific requirements for harvesting, packaging and handling produce. For example, most supermarkets require the items to fit on a 40-by-48-inch pallet for ease of handling in the warehouse or store.

Some supermarkets will accept locally grown produce at the local store, and others may require the produce to be delivered to a central warehouse facility. Contact the local produce manager from the supermarket you are interested in selling to, and establish a relationship with the buyers. Buyers may wish to inspect the farm and discuss production practices used to grow the crop. Prices for produce are negotiated with each buyer, but price levels do not fluctuate significantly.

## Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA)

The FSMA was signed into law in 2011 and establishes minimum standards for food safety. It was prompted by the report of many food-borne illnesses prior to that date and represents the first major revision of food safety laws since 1938. The goal of the FSMA is to ensure a safe supply of food by shifting government emphasis from reacting to food safety incidences to preventing them. As food suppliers, vegetable growers with annual sales of more than \$25,000 are subject to the terms of the FSMA and must become familiar with it. Visit [www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/FSMA/default.htm](http://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/FSMA/default.htm) for more information.

## Good Agriculture Practices (GAP)

There are several types of GAP certification; all are aimed at ensuring that food producers adhere to practices consistent with the production of safe food. GAP programs usually are buyer-imposed and set standards for growers to follow. Various produce marketing outlets may require GAP certification of some sort. The FSMA is altogether separate from GAP certification and is not a substitute. Check with your marketing outlet to see if their vendors must be GAP certified. If so, your local extension specialist can provide additional information on obtaining GAP certification.

## Pricing vegetables

Setting price is a critical component of successful marketing. Vegetable growers have a greater level of control than most other growers over marketable yields, input costs and price. The closer a grower is to the consumer, the more control over price the grower has. Buyers perceive price to represent value of the product. Underpricing, or pricing too low, gives the perception the product is inferior, and setting the price too high often drives customers away. Many growers make the mistake of setting the price too low at the beginning of the marketing season when competition is low and demand is high and then find it difficult to increase price later in the season. Before setting price, gauge the level of competition and the consumer demand for your product. For example, organic produce may have a stronger demand in urban areas, so prices can be set at a higher level. Also, early-season produce, such as tomatoes, has high demand with little competition in most markets, resulting in a higher price range.

There are several techniques for setting price. The most direct method is relative pricing. Relative pricing involves acquiring price information from competitors and setting your price relative to that level. Though a direct, easy way to set price, this may not be the most profitable method because individual growers have different production costs and quality. Local produce is fresh and often vine-ripe, and should therefore receive a higher price than imported produce at most supermarkets. So, the price of imported vegetables can often be used as the base price.

Cost-oriented pricing is the best method for setting price for vegetables. With cost-oriented pricing, the grower needs to know costs of production. When growers know both the fixed and variable costs of producing their vegetables, they can determine the break-even price. Fixed costs, commonly called overhead costs, are costs that do not change regardless of the level of production. Land rent, property taxes and depreciation are common fixed costs. Variable costs are input costs that vary with each production season and type of vegetable. Seed, fertilizer, boxes, fuel and labor are examples of variable costs. Variable and fixed costs added together are the total costs of production and can be averaged over the marketable yield to get an average total cost per pound, box or bushel. Break-even price is the price for a produce item at a certain level of yield where total costs are covered. This is the price floor for a grower's vegetables. Selling below this price level for a significant period of time will lower net income. However, once this price level is determined, most growers establish a price margin above this level to secure a profit.

Because most supermarkets, institutions and restaurants contract with growers, these market outlets maintain a relatively stable price through the marketing season. Wholesale produce auctions, farmers markets and roadside markets experience variable pricing based on local supply and demand.

## Resources

American Vegetable Grower. Toll-free: 800-572-7740.  
<http://www.growingproduce.com>

Building a Sustainable Business: A Guide to Developing a Business Plan for Farms and Rural Businesses. 2003. Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture. <http://www.misa.umn.edu/Publications/BuildingaSustainableBusiness>

Community Supported Agriculture. Alternative Farming Systems Information Center, National Agricultural Library. <http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/csa/csa.shtml>

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA): An Annotated Bibliography and Resource Guide. 1993. DeMuth, S. USDA: National Agricultural Library. <http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/csa/csadef.shtml>

Farmers' Markets: Rules, Regulations and Opportunities. 2002. Hamilton, Neil D. National Center for Agricultural Law Research and Information Center. [http://nationalaglawcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/assets/articles/hamilton\\_farmersmarkets.pdf](http://nationalaglawcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/assets/articles/hamilton_farmersmarkets.pdf)

The Farmer's Legal Guide to Producer Marketing Associations. 2005. O'Brien, D.; Hamilton, N.D.; and Luedeman, R. National Agricultural Law Center. [http://new.nationalaglawcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/assets/articles/lobrien\\_producermarketing\\_book.pdf](http://new.nationalaglawcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/assets/articles/lobrien_producermarketing_book.pdf)

Growing for Market. A newsletter and website for produce growers. Toll-free: 800-307-8949. <http://www.growingformarket.com>

LocalHarvest. This website is heavily marketed to consumers and is a great place to list your farm for free. Consumers moving to new areas can find u-pick, farmers markets and CSAs through this site. <http://www.localharvest.org>

Food Circles Networking Project is an MU Extension program that connects farmers and consumers around local food. The project offers guides to sourcing local foods and information on creating community food systems. <http://foodcircles.missouri.edu>

The New Farmers' Market: Farm-Fresh Ideas for Producers, Managers and Communities. 2001. Corum, V., Rosenzweig, M. and Gibson, E. New World Publishing, Auburn, Calif.

North American Farmers' Direct Marketing Association. Toll-free: 888-884-9270. <http://www.nafdma.com>

Marketing Options for Commercial Vegetable Growers. University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service, publication ID-134. [www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/id/id134/id134.htm](http://www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/id/id134/id134.htm)

Missouri Vegetable and Fruit Growers Database. <http://agebb.missouri.edu/hortgrow>

Missouri Produce Auction Report. <http://agebb.missouri.edu/hort/auction>

National Cooperative Business Association. Information on forming a cooperative business. <http://ncba.coop>

Sell What You Sow: The Grower's Guide to Successful Produce Marketing. 1994. Gibson, E. New World Publishing, Auburn, Calif.

The Legal Guide for Direct Farm Marketing. 1999. Hamilton, N.D. Drake University Agricultural Law Center, Des Moines, Iowa.

The Packer. A newspaper and website for commercial produce growers. Contains wholesale terminal market price information. Toll-free: 866-647-0918. <http://www.thepacker.com>

Vegetable Growers News. Phone: 616-887-9008. <http://www.vegetablegrowersnews.com>

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**ALSO FROM MU EXTENSION PUBLICATIONS**

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G6370 *Fresh Market Tomatoes*

G6372 *Growing Sweet Peppers in Missouri*

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