

Envisioning the Farmers Market in Your Community

This chapter will enable you to:

- ▶ **Articulate your vision for a new farmers market in your community.**
- ▶ **Understand the steps involved in creating a new farmers market.**
- ▶ **Identify individuals and organizations as potential partners or supporters.**
- ▶ **Establish an effective organizing committee and working committees to conduct a feasibility study.**

The previous chapter provided a history of farmers markets so that you could see their origins and purposes from the early days of European settlement of North America to the present. This chapter will help you to look forward and use the rich history of farmers markets to create a vision of the farmers market you would like to see developed in your community.

The idea for a farmers market can originate with farmers, consumers, a community organization, or a combination of groups. One person may wish for a source of fresh local produce and work to make that wish a reality. Or an urban development group may see a farmers market as part of a larger plan to revitalize a neighborhood. The starting points differ but the development process follows a pattern: articulate a vision, gain community support, and create and implement a plan. The start-up process generally takes about a year.

An Overview of the Start-up Process

The year that is typically devoted to start-up activities is a busy one. It involves first articulating your vision and then bringing together a core group of partners and assessing the feasibility of starting a farmers market in your community. Once the feasibility of the market is established and you decide to move ahead, you develop the organizational structure and begin forming the board of directors. The board then hires the market manager and oversees the remaining start-up activities. Start-up activities can be categorized as organization building; assessment, planning, and infrastructure building; and preparation for opening day and beyond.

Establishing and developing the organization begins with an organizing committee made up of members who actively work to make the market a reality. Identification of potential partners and supporters, initial outreach, and meetings of organizers and of farmers and other potential vendors are key activities for suc-

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cess. It is important to create working committees of committed, results-oriented individuals and to establish an effective, productive board of directors. These are the people who will make decisions and establish the bylaws and policies for the market, and their efforts will be crucial to the market's success.

Assessment and planning includes gauging community support, analyzing consumer demand, preparing a written plan and budget, establishing the business and financial structure of the market, writing rules and bylaws, choosing a site, and researching and complying with permitting requirements and other regulations.

Preparation for opening day consists of promoting the opening of the market, planning special events for opening day, and ensuring that all the participants—from vendors to volunteers—know what to expect and are adequately prepared.

Articulating Your Vision

The first step in starting a farmers market is getting your ideas on paper. You probably have a mental picture of the farmers market you want to create or of the problem to be solved with the addition of a market in your community. But to make your vision a reality, you need to put that vision into words so that others can understand it and share it.

Following are descriptions of several farmers markets. Each one is successful and reflects a unique vision. Read the descriptions and highlight the attributes of each market that appeal to you. You also can note things that do not appeal to you or that do not seem relevant to your community. You can then use these notes to describe your vision for your farmers market.



Market 1

Greenmarket – New York City

Greenmarket in New York City runs open-air seasonal farmers markets in neighborhoods throughout the city. According to the Greenmarket website, “Greenmarket, a program of the Council on the Environment of New York City, promotes regional agriculture and ensures a continuing supply of fresh, local produce for New Yorkers. Greenmarket has organized and managed open-air farmers markets in New York City since 1976. By providing regional small family farmers with opportunities to sell their fruits, vegetables, and other farm products to New Yorkers, Greenmarket supports farmers and preserves farmland for the future.” Some market facts from the website illustrate the Greenmarket vision and how it is put into action:

- Forty-seven markets in thirty-three locations in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx, and Staten Island.
- Twenty-three of the markets in sixteen locations operate year round.
- More than 250,000 customers frequent the markets each week during the peak season.
- Coupons offered by the Farmers Market Nutrition Program worth more than \$800,000 were redeemed at Greenmarket in 2000.
- More than 105 restaurants obtain ingredients from Greenmarket farmers each week.
- Three thousand students from eighty-two schools participate in Greenmarket’s educational tours.
- Greenmarket farmers donate about 500,000 pounds of food to City Harvest and other hunger relief organizations each year.



To ensure an adequate supply of farm products for New York City consumers, Greenmarket collaborates with Cornell University Cooperative Extension in the

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New Farmer Development Project, an effort that helps immigrants with farming experience to become farmers in the New York metropolitan region.

Market 2

Dane County Farmers Market – Madison, Wisconsin

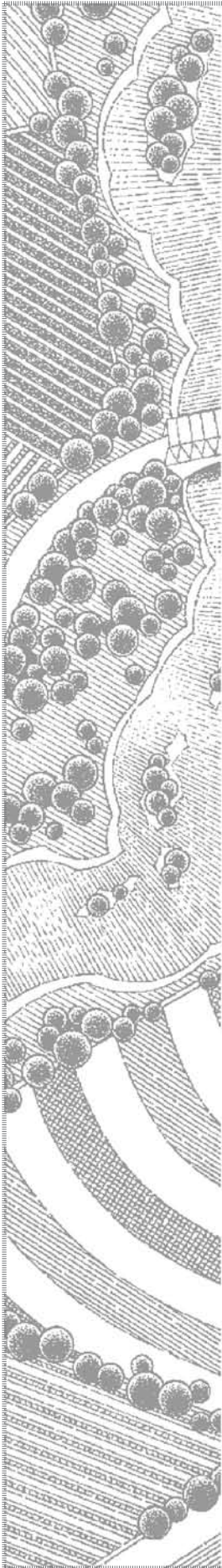
The mission of the Dane County Farmers Market reflects another vision. Dane County Farmers Market, Inc. is an organization founded to pursue the following goals:

- To give growers and producers of Wisconsin agricultural commodities and other farm-related products alternative marketing opportunities.
- To promote the sale of Wisconsin-grown farm products.
- To improve the variety, freshness, taste, and nutritional value of produce available in the Madison area.
- To provide an opportunity for farmers and people from urban communities to deal directly with each other rather than through third parties and to thereby get to know and learn from one another.
- To provide an educational forum for consumers to learn about the uses and benefits of high-quality, locally grown or prepared food products.
- To provide educational opportunities for producers to test and refine their products and marketing skills.
- To enhance the quality of life in the greater Madison area by providing a community activity that fosters social gathering and interaction.
- To preserve Wisconsin's unique agricultural heritage and the historical role that farmers markets have played in it.



The market's website (www.dcfm.org/aboutmkt.asp) offers the following details:

- The Dane County Farmers Market on the Square is a Saturday and Wednesday tradition in Madison.



- You will find the season's best bounty of vegetables, flowers, and specialty products from approximately 300 vendors. All of the agriculturally related items are produced in Wisconsin. The market is reported to be the largest producer-only farmers market in the country!
- Both the Saturday and Wednesday locations are easily accessible by bike, bus, or car. Dogs (except service dogs) are NOT ALLOWED on the Square during the Saturday Market—it is a safety issue.
- The Saturday Scene on the Square is really four different events going on at once.
- The Dane County Farmers Market is the heart of the activities on the square. Our vendors line the outside edge of the state capitol grounds. They sell agriculturally related producer-only products from Wisconsin. The market has strict rules and a three-year waiting list for new vendors.
- The interior of the state capitol grounds is used for nonprofit, political, and public information booths and for various entertainment activities. All permits are handled through the capitol police.
- The arts and crafts vendors are located across the street on city property. Permits for this market are handled through the City of Madison.
- Also, many street musicians play across the street on city property and add to the festivities.
- Enjoy the market as often as possible. It is about fun, food, and friendly vendors. Early arrivals get first choice of the fine selection. It is a great place for people watching too.

After reading the descriptions of these two markets, it is easy to see the different visions of the markets' founders and directors. Greenmarket's vision is oriented toward building a healthy, nutritious food supply that is accessible and affordable to low-income consumers and that protects the region's agricultural heritage and capacity. Dane County Farmers Market includes agricultural preservation as well, but it also includes quality of life, interactions between farmers and consumers, and education. Dane County Farmers Market is a "destination" market, while Greenmarkets are "stop and shop" markets; one entices consumers to linger and enjoy the area, while the other is designed for convenient access.

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Market 3

Urban Oaks – New Britain, Connecticut

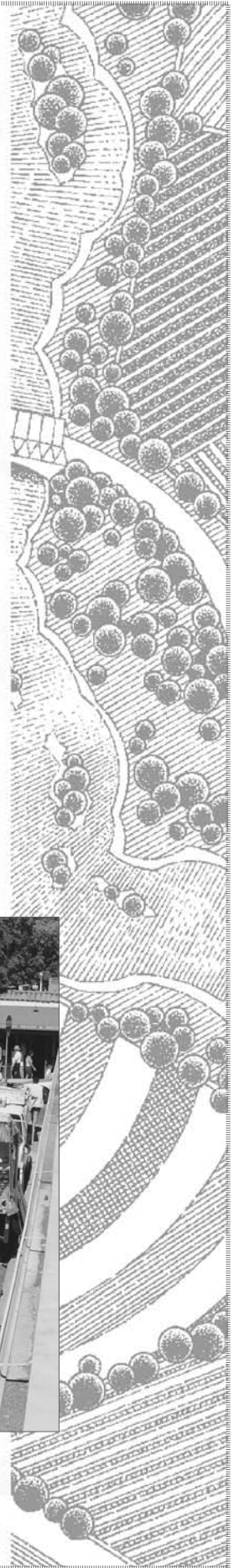
Yet another vision is demonstrated in the case of Urban Oaks farmers market in New Britain, Connecticut. Urban Oaks is a small organic farm in the heart of industrial New Britain. When farmland in rural Bolton was being gobbled up by suburban housing development, Tony Norris and his partner gave up their rented Bolton farmland and returned to Tony's hometown of New Britain, where they converted an abandoned lot into an organic farm. Urban Oaks is a financially self-supporting nonprofit organization. Tony hires local youth who can work on the farm as long as they keep up their grades in school. He also helps young employees to navigate the admissions and financial aid systems to attend college, many as the first in their families to do so. In addition to supplying restaurants and university dining halls, Urban Oaks is the source of healthy organic fruits and vegetables in its neighborhood, and it has become a distributor for organic farms throughout the region. One day a week Urban Oaks offers a farmers market that makes high-quality produce available to the largely immigrant community in its New Britain neighborhood as part of its larger commitment to contributing to the neighborhood and to the viability of organic farming.

What is Your Vision?

The markets described here offer just a few of many possible variations for a vision of a farmers market.

Now that you have read them, which ones appeal to you? What would you include in your vision of the farmers market you want to create?

List the characteristics you envision for your farmers market on the next page. You can use the elements shown in the boxes to help you define your vision and check the ones that interest you.

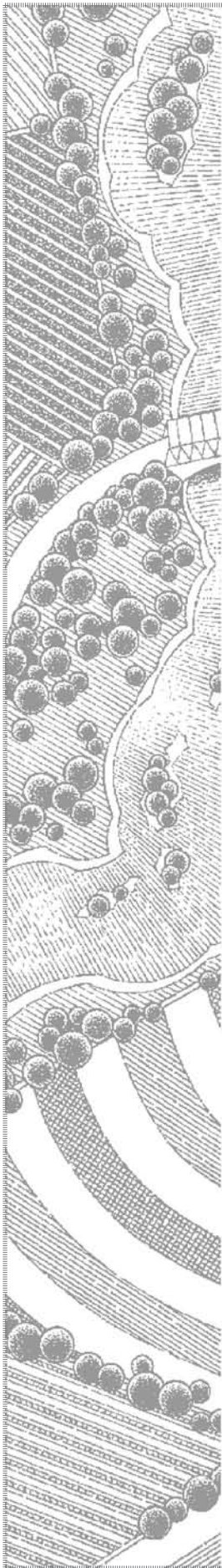


My vision includes:

Vision statement:

Desirable Characteristics for your Farmers Market

- Affordable produce
- Accessible by public transportation
- Lots of variety
- Individuals/families as customers
- Neighborhood-based
- Downtown
- Convenient
- Community gathering place
- Cultural forum
- Information dissemination
- Free speech
- Gourmet products
- Meat, fish, dairy, eggs, honey
- Restaurants as customers
- Entertainment
- Family friendly
- Arts and crafts products
- Value-added products
- Education
- Product demonstrations
- Fundraising
- Agricultural heritage
- Sustainable agriculture

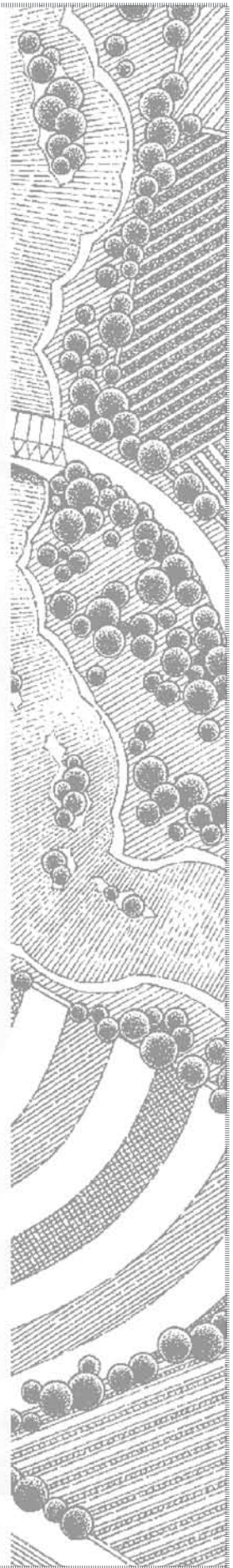


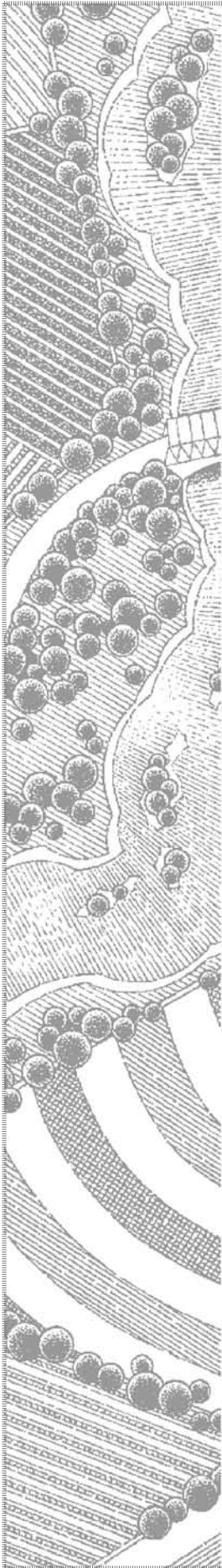
Using Your Vision to Create an Effective Organizing Committee— Forming Partnerships and Building Community Support

Your vision for the farmers market will direct your search for partners and supporters. There are many possible sources of collaboration and support, and your venture will be most successful if you involve the organizations and people who share your vision and will work with you to make it a reality.

Some potential partners and supporters are listed on the following page. Put a check next to those whose work seems most closely aligned with your vision for the farmers market.

Once you have identified potential partners and supporters, you should share your vision with them and invite their participation in making that vision a reality. This happens through the initial contact, by an invitation to an organizing meeting, and during the meeting.





- 4-H Clubs
- Chambers of commerce
- High school or university agriculture departments
- Commodity boards and marketing orders
- Community development corporations
- Community gardens
- Consumer cooperatives
- County farm bureau offices
- Economic development
- Food banks
- Sustainable or organic farming
- Direct marketing programs and organizations
- County nutrition programs
- Restaurants
- Health clubs
- Religious groups (churches, synagogues, mosques, etc.)
- County agricultural commissioner's office
- Elected officials
- Future Farmers of America
- Town, city, and county governments
- Food buying clubs
- County economic opportunity commissions
- Downtown improvement districts and development associations
- Community development programs at local colleges
- Garden clubs
- Cooking classes/clubs
- Food pantries/soup kitchens
- Ethnic organizations
- Local U.S. Department of Agriculture office
- State departments of food and agriculture
- Farmers market associations or federations
- Herb societies
- Master gardeners
- Local Grange
- Service organizations (Elks, Lions, Rotary Club, etc.)
- County farm advisors/Cooperative Extension offices
- Local production or marketing coopera-
- Local farm trails

Reaching Out to Potential Partners and Supporters

Outreach to potential partners and supporters can happen formally or informally. One approach is to begin with people you already know who are involved in any of the organizations you would like to recruit. Call and ask them to participate and for an introduction to their colleagues in other organizations. Another approach is to write a letter that accomplishes both the introduction and the invitation to an initial meeting. In your letter, describe your vision for a new farmers market and any partners or other details that have been determined and outline the roles and responsibilities you foresee for partners.

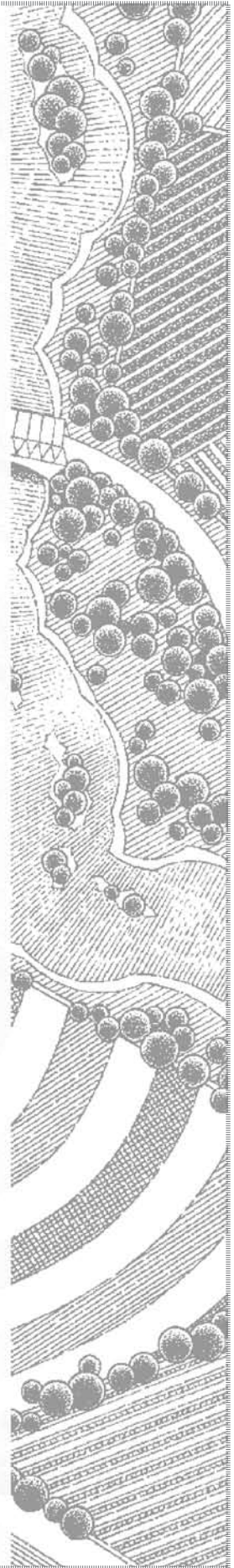
As you recruit organizations and individuals, consider the following characteristics:

- The organization's goals, activities, and approach to partnerships add an important quality to your organizing committee and the individual recruited is willing and able to represent the organization.
- The individual representative has the authority to make commitments on behalf of the organization or is in communication with those who have the authority.
- The individual has the time and energy to participate actively in the start-up process.
- The individual will work positively and collaboratively with other individuals and organizations in the group.

If any of these criteria are not met, you may need to reconsider the commitment you are requesting, the role you want that organization or individual to play, the suitability of that individual representative, or even whether to invite the organization's participation. Consider your organizing committee members carefully because they are the people whose work will determine whether you move forward with starting a market. If you are planning a market for a low-income area, you should read through Chapter Three, *Organizing a Market in a Low-Income Area*, so that you can address issues specific to such neighborhoods from the beginning.

The Organizing Meeting

When you bring together potential partners and supporters for an initial organizing meeting, you can have a basic framework prepared so that all participants can form a realistic idea of the commitment and activities involved in starting a new farmers market and decide whether they can make a commitment to the project.



Before the Meeting

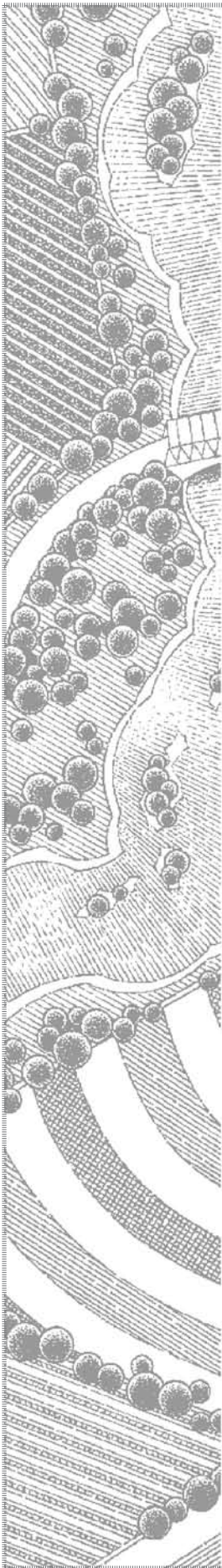
- Send out invitations three to four weeks in advance of the meeting.
- Secure a functional, comfortable, accessible space.
- Plan your agenda.
- Send reminder emails or make reminder calls to ensure good attendance.



Write a letter of invitation to the meeting. The first meeting is an opportunity to bring prospective partners and supporters together to share information and ideas. To establish a small group of active partners, you need to reach out to a somewhat larger group. Introduce the idea of the farmers market and invite people to the organizational meeting with a brief letter that includes:

- A one-sentence description of the purpose of the meeting, which is the formation of an organizing committee and working committees to establish the feasibility of starting a farmers market.
- The meeting date, time, and location.
- The benefits that markets bring to farmers and producers, consumers, and communities.
- Your vision for a local farmers market.
- Any people and organizations that are already involved in the effort to establish the market.
- Contact information.
- A request that they RSVP.

The next two pages contain a sample letter of invitation and a sample agenda.



Sample Letter of Invitation

Your Name
Address

Recipient's Name
Recipient's Organization
Address

March 1, 2006

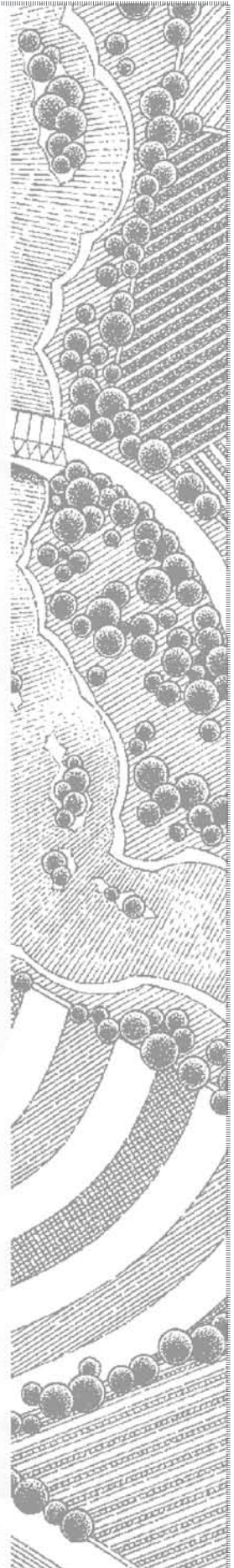
Dear _____:

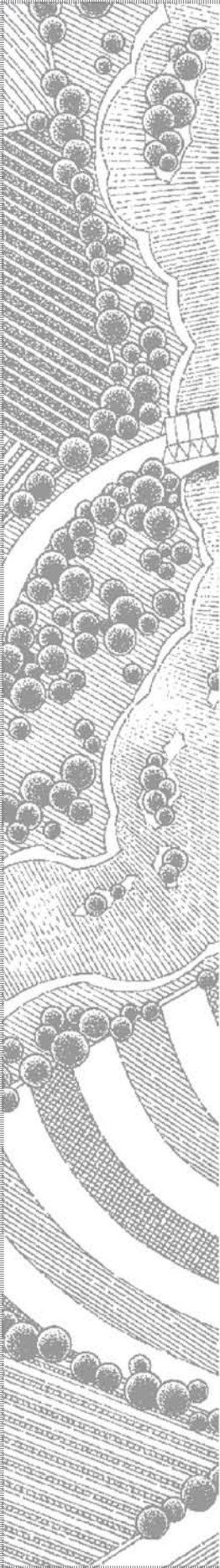
I am writing to invite you to a meeting to discuss starting a farmers market in our town and to create an organizing committee and working committees that will assess the feasibility of creating a farmers market. The meeting will be held in the Public Library Community Room on Tuesday, March 23, from 4:30–5:30 p.m.

Starting a farmers market in our town could bring many benefits to farmers, consumers, and communities. For farmers, a market means the opportunity to sell directly to consumers, thereby earning a larger share of the price than when selling wholesale. It also means the opportunity to hear consumers' preferences directly and to test new and specialty products. For consumers, a farmers market means access to high-quality, locally grown produce and other farm products. For communities, a farmers market can have both social and economic benefits. Farmers markets can be popular gathering places, strengthening a sense of community. They also can bring economic benefits as people come to buy at a farmers market and stay to shop at neighboring businesses. We envision a farmers market that is an enjoyable gathering place, a source of healthy local food, and a strong contributor to the social and economic vitality of our town and surrounding agricultural communities.

The Chamber of Commerce and the Grange Hall have both expressed an interest in supporting the project, and they join me in inviting you to this organizational meeting. Please contact me at 555.123.4567 by March 15 to RSVP and if you have questions or would like to discuss the project. We look forward to seeing you on March 23rd at 4:30.

Sincerely,





Create an Agenda for the Meeting. Create an agenda so that you will use the meeting time productively. The meeting should achieve three objectives: Share your vision, gain commitments from a sufficient number of people to form an organizing committee, and create working committees to take on the tasks involved in assessing the feasibility of starting a market. The sample agenda at right includes agenda items to support each of the meeting's objectives, along with an estimate of the amount of time to spend on each item. Try to balance time for discussion with the need to keep the meeting manageable in length so that people do not start leaving before committing to working on making the market a reality.

Running a Successful Meeting

Especially in an initial organizing meeting, it is crucial that interest and commitment not be undermined by poor meeting facilitation. Everyone has been to meetings that do not start on time, continue well past the expected adjournment, or do not accomplish anything because they are poorly run. The worst possible outcome is that people who could be instrumental in the success of a new market simply do not want to be part of your project. If you are not an experienced and confident meeting organizer, you might want to use the information that follows to help make sure your meeting is a success.

Farmers Market Organizational Meeting Agenda

Place:

Date:

Time:

1. Welcome and introductions.
(ten minutes)
2. PowerPoint presentation: What is a farmers market and what would it mean to our community?
(ten to fifteen minutes)
3. Questions and answers.
(twenty to thirty minutes)
4. Outline of the start-up process.
(fifteen minutes)
5. Next steps: Establishing the organizing committee, forming working committees, and recruiting committee members and chairs.
(thirty minutes)
6. Next meeting date.
(five to ten minutes)
7. Adjourn.

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Beginning the Meeting

- ▣ Provide name tags at the entrance area. All attendees should have name tags, as this makes it easier to start conversations with new people.
- ▣ Begin on time.
- ▣ Start by clearly defining the roles of the facilitator, notetaker, timekeeper, and any others participating in running the meeting.
- ▣ Ask participants to introduce themselves to those near them and briefly describe why they are there.
- ▣ Set ground rules, such as clear time limits for each item and the amount of time available for questions and discussion.

Facilitating the Meeting

- ▣ Follow the agenda and stick to time limits. If any new issues come up that are obviously important to people, add them to the agenda or schedule them for the next meeting. But do not let these other issues distract you from the agenda item at hand.
- ▣ Distribute a mailing list sign-up for attendees to fill out during the meeting.

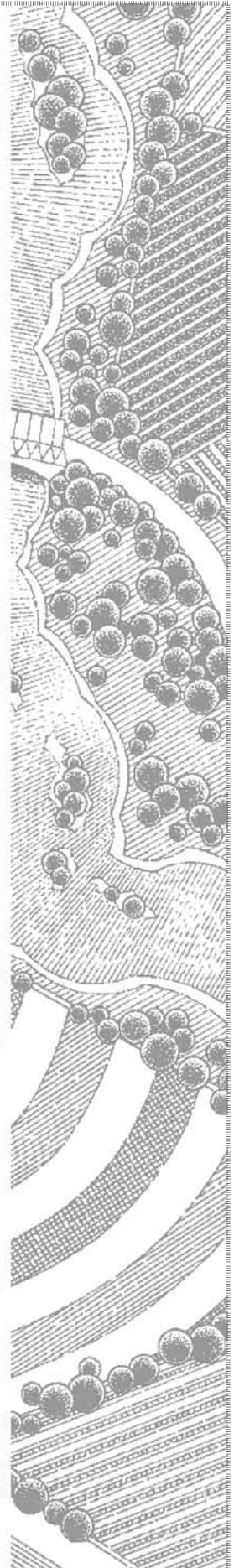


Concluding the Meeting

- ▣ Give a quick summary of the discussions and the decisions that were made at the meeting. Re-establish action items: who, what, when.
- ▣ Read the list of people and organizations that have committed to joining the organizing committee.
- ▣ Take a count of potential volunteers for working committees.
- ▣ Set the date and place of the next meeting and develop a preliminary agenda.
- ▣ Close the meeting on a positive note and on time.

After the Meeting

- ▣ Evaluate the meeting with the other organizers.
- ▣ Clean up and rearrange the room.
- ▣ Prepare the group memo for the next meeting and send out thank-you cards to key community members for their participation.



- Follow up on action items and begin planning for the next meeting.

Committees and Their Roles and Responsibilities

The Organizing Committee

The organizing committee has several major responsibilities. First, in working committees, this group conducts the assessment and analysis necessary to establish the feasibility of starting a market. Second, the organizing committee analyzes the findings of the working committees and decides whether to proceed. Third, the organizing committee determines the organizational structure of the market and creates the board of directors, which then writes bylaws and hires the market manager.

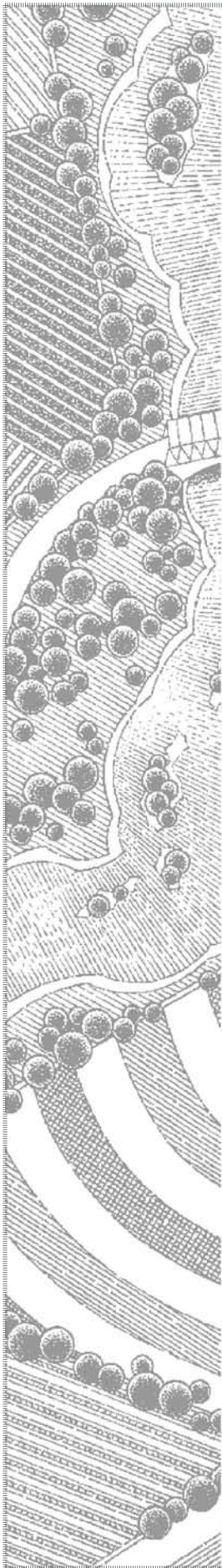
The importance of the organizing committee and the working committees cannot be overstated. The individuals who comprise the organizing committee must be eager, action oriented, and keenly focused on completing the early tasks of assessing the feasibility of the market and creating an effective board of directors. Gaining the commitment of this core group is critical. Team members should be aware that starting a farmers market requires hard work, excellent communication skills, and superior organizational abilities.

If a sufficient level of commitment is not achieved at the first meeting, it may be necessary to seek individuals who are especially interested in helping to start the market and have the time to commit to the project. Continue to network with established committee members, city officials, and key community activists to recruit people so you can build a solid team.

Once an organizing committee is in place, the next step is to create working committees to assess the feasibility of starting a new market. If farmers themselves initiate the market, their views will be strongly represented in the working committees. However, if community organizers are starting the market, they need to ensure that grower interests are represented on all committees.

Designate teams of volunteers and/or members of the organizing committee to serve on the following key committees.

- **Market Analysis**—This committee assesses the need and potential support for the market in the community. Part of this committee's work may involve consumer education to strengthen demand for the locally grown products available at a farmers market.



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- **Site Analysis**—This committee assesses potential sites for a new farmers market.
- **Financial Analysis**—This committee assesses potential revenue and costs to evaluate the financial self-sufficiency or profitability of the market and the potential for profitability for vendors.
- **Vendor Recruitment**—This committee’s work involves not only assessing whether there is a sufficient number of local farmers for a successful market but also recruiting farmers to sell at the market.

Chapters Three and Four deal with special considerations for starting a farmers market in a low-income area, including some issues that affect the feasibility study. Those chapters are followed by several chapters that outline how to conduct a feasibility study to determine whether to move forward with a market.

