



SELLING AT FARMERS' MARKETS

A Guide for Potential Stallholders

Selling at farmers' markets can make for a good business and be great fun. It can be really satisfying to meet the people who eat your produce and get their feedback. We want to encourage you to develop your ideas but also to make sure they are realistic.

There are over 450 stallholders already selling at Kent's farmers' markets. If you are going to develop a successful business, you need to think through how you will fit in, and whether you can make money from your ideas and skills.

WHAT CAN YOU OFFER THAT'S GOING TO SELL AND WHERE WILL YOU SELL IT?

One of the most common problems we've found is people who decide on a product before considering where they are going to sell it. Please don't assume that all that's required is a phone call to a couple of market managers to get you up and running.

Getting into a farmers' market is competitive, and you will often need to add something new, since managers may not have the space to have multiple stalls selling similar products. They also have to think about existing stallholders and ensure they can make a decent return from the market.

WHAT WILL MAKE YOUR PRODUCT AND ITS STORY SPECIAL?

Shoppers want value for money, so you need a good product and sell it at a fair price. But many come to farmers' markets because they are interested in food and want to meet the person producing it. Your recipe, ingredients and personal story can all contribute to making your product distinctive and sellable.

WHERE TO START?

We suggest you look on the Kent Farmers' Markets' website to see:

- Where and when the markets are,
- What stallholders already attend.
- What they sell.

However, the best advice we can give is to visit several farmers' markets before you invest any money in your ideas.



- See what stallholders are already attending and consider how you could add to the market
- See how many shoppers there are and what sort of things they are interested in buying.
- Chat to the manager and ask if there is a waiting list or if they have any ideas for gaps.

You should also ask about the criteria or standards the markets applies to stallholders. These will vary so you will need to find out if you are eligible.

If the market is weekly, you could ask if the manager allows some stallholders to attend only every fortnight or even once a month. Some products, like vegetables, meat and bread, sell well every week but others are rarely bought every week. Therefore, you might consider attending less frequently, saving yourself time and money but not reducing total sales.

Visiting markets will also give you ideas about what makes stalls and products attractive and how stallholders deal with shoppers.

BUSINESS PLANNING

If you come away excited by the opportunities, then you need to work up a business plan. This does not have to be complicated but it pays – literally – to work through the finances before you invest to make sure that, however great your product is, you can make a profit.

Costs, Income and Cashflow

How much will it cost to set-up and to run your business? How much can you reasonably charge for the product and how many do you have to sell each month to make a profit? Most critically, can you manage the cashflow – the time between paying for start-up costs and operating costs and receiving income from sales. Remember, it will take time to find pitches at markets and then establish loyal customers who will buy your product repeatedly.

It is vital that you calculate how you will cover your costs and manage your stock of ingredients, packaging and products while you wait for income from sales?



Start-up costs

Before you even start to sell at a farmers' market, you will need:

- 1.** Public liability insurance for £5m cover. This is likely to cost around £75-90 per year.
- 2.** Food hygiene qualification. One day courses are run by some local authorities and other organisations. You will need to complete one before you start production, and keep up to date with occasional refresher courses. A course usually costs less than £100.
- 3.** A table and, for most outside markets, a gazebo. These need to be sturdy, yet easily transportable. They are likely to cost £150-£250 pounds depending the quality you want. Better ones last longer – think of windy January markets – but obviously cost more up front.
- 4.** Equipment for production.
- 5.** Merchandising equipment to make your stall attractive (see advice on the Kent Farmers' Markets Association website).
- 6.** Marketing literature such as brochures, business cards, a banner for your stall, a name tag (farmers' markets are about making personal contact with shoppers, and letting them know your name is a great start); maybe polo shirts and aprons displaying your business' name.

Running costs

Depending on your product, you might need to price up:

- Ingredients.
- Costs of production (things like your time while growing/rearing/making your products and input costs such as feed, fertiliser, fuel and energy).
- Packaging and labelling.
- Stock: how much are you likely to need at any one time? Fresh products, like cakes, have to be sold quickly, but if you make a variety of jams or chutneys, you need to be able to afford to have dozens of jars of each variety in stock. Alternatively, if you are selling a fresh product, how will



you deal with unsold products before their sell-by dates, and what loss of income could this involve?

- Cost of pitches at markets and the transport costs of getting to them.
- Tasting samples – for some products these are pretty much essential, and could make a difference to sales.
- Your time. This has a very important value, don't forget it!

Income

There are a lot of costs, so you'll need a lot of income. Unless your product is unique, you should be able to work out a price from finding similar products. Our research shows that shoppers will not pay more just because a product is local. Yes, localness helps attract people to farmers' markets but what shoppers want is quality, taste and freshness.

The majority of spending at farmers' markets comes from the regular shoppers, not occasional ones or tourists. Therefore, you will need to earn their loyalty and, for this, you must offer a product that's worth buying repeatedly at a price that offers good value. Farmers' market shoppers are interested in food and are very savvy. They will pay for quality, but they will spot over-pricing.

Product Price

Once you have worked out a price, determine how much you need to sell to cover your costs and to make rewarding profit. Do you have enough time available to both make that amount and then to attend enough markets to sell it?

Commitment and regulations

Commitment

Shoppers and managers expect commitment. Finding a stallholder missing is equivalent to finding a supermarket shelf empty so you need to be able to commit to regular attendance at markets. Occasional absences, for example for holidays, are understood but you need to be willing to give the business priority.



Unless your product is seasonal, you can't cherry pick to attend only the popular summer or Christmas markets and expect others to keep the market going during quieter times in January and February. So, make sure you are happy to commit all year round.

Regulations

You need to know about food hygiene including preparing food at home, selling meat from a farm or giving away tasters, and trading standards regulations, such as labelling. Please note, all advice on our website is only for guidance. The Association accepts no responsibility or liability for its accuracy.

Finally, will you enjoy making and selling?

Some people consider selling at farmers' markets because their friends say how delicious their jam, chutney or cakes are and that they should be selling them. Yes, you need a good product but will you be happy selling it too?

Farmers' markets are fun places to be – the shoppers, managers and other stallholders are all there because they love good food and care about where it comes from. You'll find everyone is supportive and friendly.

But being a great farmer or a talented cook doesn't mean you will necessarily enjoy or be good at selling.

- Are you happy talking to strangers, and bragging (nicely) about how good your product is?
- Can you remain enthusiastic about telling a shopper about your product for the thirtieth time that morning?
- Can you encourage people to buy without making them feel uncomfortably pressured?
- Can you be cheerful at 9am on a cold and wet January morning?

If your answer to these questions is "yes", then selling at farmers' markets might be for you.

Disclaimer

The information and advice and guidance on this site is provided in good faith, and is for general purposes only, and any reliance you place on such information is therefore at your own risk. Weather conditions and seasonality may impact availability of produce and stall holder attendance at markets, and so we cannot guarantee the accuracy of all information.

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