
Displaying in a Farm Market

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Bringing awareness to, and development of effective roadside marketing techniques was first addressed in the bustling fresh vegetable markets of Ohio. Dr. Ed Watkins, now retired from Ohio State University played a significant role in helping to improve these markets. Though he conducted his work in the 1960-70's, the basic information is just as relevant for today's direct marketers as it was then. Selling products direct to customers involves an understanding of the subtle elements of human nature, and a fair amount of common sense is helpful too. Planning for and displaying agricultural products in a farm market is one of the important parts of an effective roadside marketing merchandising program. While displaying is at least as much an art as a science, there are definite suggestions which provide guidelines to consider as displays are located in a market, and as displays are built and maintained. Roadside market operators will need to consider which ones will provide the best response from their customers. Ideas on displaying may need to be tested to determine how effective an idea may be for a specific market.

The following pointers are adapted from Dr. Watkins work, and are presented as guidelines to be considered for more effective displays in roadside markets:

Layout and displays should encourage customers to "shop the market" - By developing a definite shopping pattern that encourages customers to shop the entire market, sales will be enhanced. This is accomplished by dispersing "power" items (see below) throughout the market, changing the width of aisles, and locating display fixtures so that customers are gently guided throughout the market. Ideally, they will pass by and are attracted to each display in the market.

Use unique and varied display fixtures. Tilt tables, half-barrels, baskets, shelves, crates, bins, sacks, wagons and old buckets. Old farm antiques in particular add character and appeal to a market and can double as a display fixture.

Mass displays sell - A large display will tend to draw customers attention to that display. Hence, a large sized or mass display will tend to move more products than a smaller display located at its customary spot on the shelf or table.

Group items of similar use together - Here the operator may place together in close proximity groups of vegetables, which may be used in salads, for example. Other groupings suggested may be those for cooking vegetables, such as green beans and potatoes, and snacking fruits.

Use color contrast in displays - A display that uses a mixture of red, green and yellow colors commonly found in fresh produce will tend to attract the eyes of customers. Red and orange in particular impact the eye and are retained in memory. Avoid uniform massing of green produce.

Use a contrast of texture and size - Variation and diversity in displays created by produce texture and sizes are a draw to the eye, and encourages exploration of the display by customers.

Use and locate "power" items throughout the market - Power items are high-draw crops that customers come to your market for, and result in the highest sales. These items should be displayed throughout the market rather than grouped together early or late in the shopping pattern. Sweet corn, strawberries, tomatoes, peaches are well-known power items.

Low volume items can be located near high sales volume items - If, for example, Delicious apples move readily at your market and some other fruit does not, then the fruit which is not moving may be helped by locating it near or adjacent to the Delicious apples.

Location of displays within the market should be changed periodically - Few display fixtures should be "nailed to the floor". This permits moving displays and fixtures to meet the needs of the particular season and the desires of customers. Customers will tend to see more of what you have to sell immediately after displays are changed.

Use a combination of loose bulk and pre-bagged displays - Customers come with differing degrees of desires and expectations. Market tests indicate that where customers are given a choice of displays in which they can individually select items, and have a choice of sizes of packages and bags, they will tend to buy more products than if restricted to either bulked or packaged products.

More floor space should be allowed around bulk displays - Customers will take more time to select individual items from bulk or loose displays than from displays that are bagged or packaged. Because of this, more floor space will need to be provided around these displays allowing customers to move freely around people who are shopping such displays.

Accent lighting helps - Accent lighting refers to the use of special lights such as spotlights or special fluorescent fixtures which to highlight a specific display. Accent lighting is more effective when overhead lighting does not overwhelm the accent lighting.

Do a quality job of signage in market- Clear, well-lettered signs communicate prices and draw customer attention to items for sale. Use color and unique designs or logos that reflect the atmosphere and of the market. Signs communicate the personality of the market and its owners.

Displays should be changed seasonally - Displays need to be completely revamped as major crops sold in a market change during the growing season. These changes will help customers concentrate on the seasonal products, and keep them coming back for new experiences.

Shrink is not necessarily higher for bulk or loose displays when used - Bulk or loose displays of products will need to be carefully monitored to make sure unacceptable produce is removed promptly. Total shrink or loss of products seems to be, for most products, little different than it is for packaged displays where a customer may get one or two items which are not acceptable in the package. Operators should rework packages that do not move promptly.

Customers do not penalize growers who also buy and resell products - Available information indicates that customers shop at a farm market because of freshness and quality of products. They do not indicate that they are disturbed if some of the products may be purchased elsewhere.

Offer some field-run crops - Some crops can be displayed and sold in bulk boxes directly from the field. Although pallet boxes may be of use for only a few crops, it accomplishes several things. First, it reinforces the idea that this is a farm market; second, it permits the operator to offer special prices (with many crops the packaging and grading expense may be greater than producing the crop) and third, displaying field-run products does offer customers an additional choice

Refrigeration helps maintain quality - Horticultural products deteriorate rapidly if temperatures of the product are not brought down to the point recommended for that particular product. In farm markets, many products should be held in the 30-40°F range to prevent rapid deterioration. There are exceptions, and ideal storage temps can vary. In non-refrigerated displays, remove over-ripe produce promptly.

Refrigeration equipment may not maintain the most desirable environments for products - Although most refrigeration equipment will tend to hold the temperature at a certain point, many do not maintain a desirable level of humidity. Humidity level is especially important to the soft fruits and vegetables to prevent moisture loss and fresh "appeal."

Iced displays can help - For some markets, it may be more desirable to buy an ice machine and display some products on a bank of ice rather than buying mechanical refrigeration equipment. Ice displays have the advantage of not only keeping the product cold, but also providing a moisture shield that can reduce shrink due to loss of moisture and loss of quality.

Price mark all products - Customers are accustomed to and expect to compare prices. In a smaller market where all items can be readily seen at the checkout and prices remembered, prices only on displays may be effective. In general, it is desirable to have each package or bag price marked.

Provide product use information - Recipe cards and other descriptive material on product use is attractive and useful to customers. This is especially true for items that may be unfamiliar to customers.

Encourage sampling by customers - Have a definite plan for providing samples to customers. Allow them to taste, smell, or see the difference between products; or sample a new item that you may have introduced into the market. Offering samples also adds to the feeling that the market is being helpful by allowing customers to judge some aspect of quality before they purchase.

Locate checkout conveniently, with "impulse" items within easy reach - Such things as gift packs, nuts, honey, jams, apple peelers, and canning items can be as much as 50% of total market sales.

What Customers Buy At Roadside Markets

| Fruits | Percent of customers % |
|---------------|-------------------------------|
| Apples | 90.0 |
| Peaches | 82.3 |
| Cantaloupe | 66.5 |
| Strawberries | 58.2 |
| Plums | 45.4 |
| Pears | 41.2 |
| Grapes | 40.9 |
| Cherries | 30.9 |
| Raspberries | 24.1 |
| Watermelon | 5.8 |

| Vegetables | |
|----------------------|------|
| Sweet corn | 85.9 |
| Tomatoes | 61.4 |
| Peppers | 46.3 |
| Cucumbers | 44.3 |
| Snapbeans | 36.9 |
| Cabbage | 35.9 |
| Lettuce | 27.7 |
| Carrots | 24.7 |
| Asparagus | 17.1 |
| Squash | 9.4 |
| Potatoes | 7.9 |
| Miscellaneous | |
| Cider | 72.1 |
| Pumpkins | 49.0 |
| Honey | 48.0 |
| Gourds | 25.6 |
| Jelly/Jam | 16.0 |
| Bread | 15.8 |
| Pies | 14.3 |
| Flowers | 3.0 |
| Popcorn | 3.0 |
| Indian corn | 2.8 |

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