

Marketing to Enhance Farm Viability



Better Merchandising for Increased Sales

First impressions are everything. When merchandise is displayed neatly, creatively and attractively, it will attract customers' interest and openness to buying your products. This gets you one step closer to making a sale! The following five steps provide practical advice for better merchandising.

STEP 1 CONSIDER YOUR PRODUCT MIX

Obviously the things you grow or produce on site belong at your market. But what else? All things offered must work

If it works with your store's look and then sells, it belongs.

together to create a unified theme and look. There are many ways to branch out in what you offer; only some of them make sense. Ideas for themes in a store could include locally made products, hand crafted food products, garden related products,

or products related to beekeeping or sheep. The most important thing to remember is that you don't need to



carry everything. All merchandise must work together to promote the mission of your enterprise and to create a unified shopping experience for your customers. Most farmstands are too small to offer a very

broad product mix. Being selective in what you offer helps differentiate you and brings focus to your store.

At Annie's Garden Store, we have 3 buying guidelines: *uniqueness, high quality, and inspirational.* Beyond that, it "just must fit." When we are shopping at trade shows, we visualize the new merchandise in the store. We pass on many things, and we buy some products that we don't personally like. If it works with your store's look and then sells, it belongs.

STEP 2 GROUP LIKE SHAPES, COLORS, OBJECTS, AND TEXTURES

Blocks of similar colors or objects focus a person's eye. Sara Porth of Atlas Farm creates a "tower of color" at the front of her farmers' market display. This grabs people's attention from farther down the market and focuses their eyes on Atlas Farm's beautiful produce.

Grouping also helps people find things. At Annie's Garden Store, we have a room with candles and soaps, a room with tools, a room with table linens. Within those rooms, we mass like objects together.

A spring display may include a group of pink, yellow, and green pots and plants with similar colored candles and gifts. Any store will appear less cluttered when there are blocks of similar colors or shapes.

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STEP 3 CREATE A SENSE OF ABUNDANCE

It is not news that the last three tomatoes at market are harder to sell than the first three hundred. People believe they have a better choice and are more inclined to buy when they are surrounded by abundance. The Walmart mantra, "stack them high and watch them fly," actually holds a lot of water.

You can create a sense of abundance on a much smaller scale. Remove empty bins and tables. Have smaller but more lush displays. Put false bottoms in containers once supplies get low, so that the containers still appear full. Supermarkets use red cloth under tomatoes and green under lettuce. This creates an illusion that there is more product than there actually is.



Continually freshen displays. For permanent stores, this should be done at least daily. For farmers' markets, you may do this every 20 minutes. Never allow customers to feel that they are buying picked-over merchandise. It has no appeal.

STEP 4 BE INFORMATIVE WITH SIGNS

You can silently promote your products and engage your customers with good signage. Atlas Farm uses several creative signage techniques to promote their produce and educate their customers at farmers' markets. Each price card is preprinted in a neat, computer generated font.

Tell them what makes your product special and why they can't pass it up.

Signs are laminated and all contain the Atlas Farm logo, vegetable price, and the words "Certified Organic". Many of the signs also give information on how to use the vegetable. This saves

your time because you don't have to spend all your time answering questions, and good signage also informs customers without making them feel ignorant or like they are bothering the salespeople on a busy market day. Making good signs requires some planning and preparation, but it will pay off.

People like a story. If they can connect with your product, they are more likely to buy it. Tell them what makes your product special and why they can't pass it up.

If you are part of CISA's Local Hero Program, use the Local Hero logo in your signage. Consumers in western Massachusetts are aware of the message (82% know the slogan), and they are buying local products because of it (70% of people who know the slogan buy locally every week as opposed to only 30% who don't know the slogan). Take advantage of any regional "buy local" campaign and adopt the logos that they are promoting.



STEP 5 SUCCESS IS IN THE DETAILS

Be attentive! Consider the following tips:

Keep merchandise fresh and clean. The removal of a wilted head of lettuce can make the whole display look better. Sara Porth takes a sprayer full of ice water to farmers' markets to mist greens. This keeps them from looking tired. Dusty merchandise looks old and unwanted. If you offer gifts or processed food, make sure everything is always clean.



Get merchandise off the ground.

Bending over to shop ruins the mood. Bruce Baker, a marketing consultant, calls this the "butt bump." If people have to stoop over, they are likely to rub bottoms with other customers or with merchandise.

- ❖ Have good lighting over people's heads and over merchandise.
- ❖ Table height should be 30–38".
- ❖ Put your best merchandise forward. If people like what they see at first glance, they are more likely to explore your booth or shop.
- ❖ **Refresh and rearrange.** Simply moving an object will often make it sell. If you do not have anything new to offer, move what you have around. It will make the store appear fresh and exciting.

There are many ways to merchandise your products. Always be searching for new ideas. Visit other farmstands, have friends critique your displays, and read books on merchandising. Trade publications and books on market research are often the most helpful. Apply merchandising principles of big stores to your own store. They've already done the research; take advantage of their free ideas!

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