

Promoting Your Alberta Approved Farmers' Market



Alberta

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Promoting Your Alberta Approved Farmers' Market

Before anyone can shop at a farmers' market, they must be aware that the market exists. Getting the word out about a market takes time, careful planning and effort. It is not simply a matter of "build it and they will come."

"When I first started visiting farmers' markets with my job at Agriculture and Rural Development, I went with our brochure in hand to these different communities. Some markets were easy to find and others required a bit more searching. At that time, a lot of managers commented they didn't need to put out sandwich boards or hang signs because "everyone knows where the market is in town". That may be true of the locals but it isn't true of the tourists or even the people who are new to town. People can't shop when they don't know you exist and with 75 per cent of Alberta households shopping at farmers' markets, we want to be sure your market is on their list of markets to frequent."

Eileen Kotowich, Farmers' Market Specialist, Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development

Defining Your Target Audience

There are a number of tools you can use to help get the word out. Some will be more effective than others in your community and with your target audience, ie customers. The first step in deciding what promotional methods to use is to define your target audience. Who are you hoping to attract to your market? Are they men or women, young or old, working people or stay-at-home moms, tourists or locals? Once you have defined your target audience, do some research on how and where that demographic likes to receive information. For many markets, your target audience will be varied and you will need to use a number of different techniques.

Tools to Promote Your Market

There are many different ways to promote your farmers' market. The following are a number of different tools you can use:

Word of Mouth

Word of mouth advertising can be your best tool for spreading the word about your market. It can happen as a result of customers and vendors sharing what they know about the market. You can also help spread the word. Talk about the vendors you have coming and some of the products you have in the market. Customers flock to markets when they hear that baby potatoes or tomatoes will be there that week.

Customer Newsletter

Many markets produce a vendor newsletter to keep their vendors informed of changes to rules, new vendors, upcoming events, etc. Some markets also produce a customer newsletter to help keep their customers connected to the market. Tell them about new products, featured vendors, seasonal produce that is available, upcoming events and any other interesting tidbits about the market. Be sure to use pictures!

A customer database can be developed in a number of ways: sign-up button on the website, sign-up form at the market information table or an entry form for your various contests. The newsletter can be electronic and go to the database via email or you could also print off some copies to give out at the market in order to entice new members.

You will need to decide if your newsletter will be electronic, paper or both. Most people have an email address but some may be reluctant to give it out and would prefer a paper copy. Decide how much budget you have, if any, to cover printing and mailing costs. If a budget doesn't exist for mailing, the newsletter may have to be electronic only.

Branding

Companies put their name and logo on everything they make. This is called "branding." According to marketing expert John Stanton, "A brand is a statement of trust which a person is willing to pay for". As a manager of an Alberta approved farmers' market, you have a branding tool at your fingertips...the Sunnygirl logo!

The Sunnygirl logo is an official mark held by the Government of Alberta. It is available for use by Alberta approved farmers' markets. This logo helps the consumer identify that the market is approved and they are affiliated with a chain of high quality markets offering Alberta-produced products that consumers can trust. Use the logo as part of your market brand and gain customer confidence in your market.

Place the Sunnygirl logo on things such as:

- Signs/banners
- Advertisements
- Letterhead
- Shopping bags
- Vendor aprons



Electronic copies of the Sunnygirl logo are available from Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development (ARD). Contact Eileen Kotowich at 780-853-8223 (dial 310-0000 first for toll-free access) or email eileen.kotowich@gov.ab.ca.

ARD Tools

All Alberta approved farmers' markets are listed in the annual "map" brochure as well as on the interactive map found at www.sunnygirl.ca. The information for the brochure is collected from the markets in the winter for spring distribution; the website is updated throughout the year as new information is supplied. ARD has created these tools and offers them as a free service to help promote approved farmers' markets to customers and vendors. Approximately 27,000 copies of the brochure are distributed through the markets, visitor information centres, libraries, chambers of commerce and to individuals.

Internet

An internet presence is critical for businesses in the 21st century. According to the 2010 Canadian Internet Use Survey conducted by Statistics Canada, 80 per cent of Canadian households access the internet with half of those connected using more than one device to go online. Households use the internet to search for information, to purchase products, to stay connected, etc. There are several ways to get word about your market onto the internet.

- **Website**

Many markets have their own websites that describe their markets, operating information, contact information and information about the vendors. Often these websites will also be connected with the market's Facebook and Twitter accounts so that interested customers and vendors can receive updates about the market as they happen.

If the market offers a newsletter, be sure to put a link to it on your website along with a signup link.

If the market has a website, be sure to notify ARD so that a link can be put on the interactive online map found at www.sunnygirl.ca.

In some cases, the market sponsor also has a webpage. If this is the case, be sure to have them link to your site and vice versa.

Member markets of the Alberta Farmers' Market Association (AFMA) will also be listed on their website at www.albertamarkets.com. In August 2013, AFMA released a new phone app, making it easier for consumers to find information about their member markets right on their smart phones. If you are interested in becoming a member of AFMA to take advantage of these additional promotional opportunities, visit their website and click on the Member tab.

- **Social Media**

Social media sites like Facebook and Twitter are becoming extremely popular with markets, sometimes replacing websites entirely. This is because these tools are free to use and user friendly. They help market management keep track of "friends," share information with vendors and customers very quickly, get feedback on special events or future changes to the market, etc. If you do use social media as well as have a website, be sure to link all these tools together so that your social media posts also show on your website.

Signs

Signs are an effective tool for promoting your market. They need to be well designed in order to make an impact on potential customers. People often drive by signs quickly and with the abundance of other distractions, your sign may be missed unless it stands out. A sign gives the reader the information they need to make a decision quickly. Your sign should include the following information:

- Name of market
- Hours and days of operation
- Location
- Sunnygirl logo

There are a variety of effective signs to choose from:

- **Sandwich Boards**

These signs are an effective, low-cost, portable choice that can be put out on market day and taken down afterwards. Check with local officials regarding placement of sandwich boards and how long they can be left out. Consider attaching balloons to your sandwich board occasionally to draw the attention of people passing by.

- **Highway Signs**

There are two types of highway signs you could consider. The first are signs you have made up yourself. They need to be large enough to see from the highway and to read easily. They need to have enough information about the market so it can be found but not too much to be distracting to drivers. Every municipality will have rules regarding the placement of highway signs. Check with local officials prior to having a sign made.

The second option is the blue tourism highway signs. These can be helpful to bring in tourist traffic and raise public awareness of your market. They are meant to help point travelers in the right direction to the market. The signs consist of the Sunnygirl logo and the day and hours of the market.

The cost of tourism highway signage will vary depending on the type of signage desired and number of signs. A five year permit fee is paid by the business to cover the cost of fabricating and maintaining the sign. Maintenance of highway signs will be worked into your contract with Alberta Traffic Supply Ltd.

All applications for tourism highway signs must be submitted to Alberta Traffic Supply Ltd. who administers the Sign Up Alberta program on behalf of the Government of Alberta.

Contact:

Alberta Traffic Supply Ltd.

9015 - 14 Street NW

Edmonton, AB T6P 0C9

Toll-free: 1-866-560-7446 Fax: 1-866-561- 7446

Email: inquire@albertatraffic.com Website: <http://signupalberta.com/>

- **Banners**

Banners can be used to identify your market location. A good location is across a major road/ street near your market. Contact local officials to find out the rules about placement of banners. If the market takes part in a parade, banners can be re-used on floats.

- **Posters**
Place posters where your target audience will see them. Posters can be effective in the following areas:
 - Tourist information booths
 - Community centers
 - Elder care facilities
 - Community message boards
 - Hair stylists
 - Banks
 - Medical clinics
 - Bus stations
 - Churches
 - Campgrounds
- **Other Ideas**
Be creative with your signage. Often the unusual will attract attention.



Brooks



Andrew



Vegreville

Check with city officials for available signage on buses, bus seats and shelters.

Media Promotion

When you do a media promotion, focus on a specific target population: families, seniors or baby boomers, for example. Media such as newspapers, radio and television are helpful ways to get information about your market out to the public. “We can’t afford to advertise!” you might say. If you are creative, it doesn’t have to cost you much, and it may be a worthwhile investment.

- **Media Releases**
A media release or press release is an article you write about an upcoming event or something important happening in your market. It is directed at the news media and answers the five Ws – who, what where, when, and why. Often media releases are “picked up” by the media and may be used exactly as sent to them or they may do some background research, interview some key players and write a story or report on it.
- **News Stories**
Sometimes you have to “make news happen.” Develop special events and invite the media to attend. Give local reporters a story about your market, the vendors and customers. The media loves to find good local stories, especially with photos or video. Find something unique in your market such as two generations of vendors, young entrepreneurs or a product only made at your market and develop a story about it. You won’t have to pay a reporter to write a story; it’s their job!

- **Radio**

Focus your energy on approaching radio stations that broadcast to your target population. To get a radio station involved, try the following ideas:

- Once a season fill a basket of samples from the market and deliver to the local radio station to get them interested. They may mention different items throughout the day's show, which gives them often needed time fillers.
- Have a radio station do a live broadcast from your market. Having a station do a "remote" may cost you so be clear when you approach the radio station what you are hoping to have happen.
- Invite radio celebrities to take part in a market event like a chili cook-off, pie eating or corn husking contest.

Just like everyone else, reporters may need to be educated about the seasonality of produce sold at the market as well as the unique features of all the other fantastic products on offer in the market. Use this opportunity to share even more information about the market.

- **Paid Advertising**

Another option is paid advertisements. These can work because they gain the consumer's attention for longer periods of time and you get to control the message that gets broadcast.

- Submit ads for the classifieds section in the local newspaper.
- Purchase ad space in the in the first "hard news" section of the newspaper. The bottom-right corner of the page is best. This option may cost you more than the classifieds section.
- Purchase radio advertising that runs during times of the day when your target audience is most likely to be tuned in.
- Mail flyers or coupons to your target market.
- Advertise your special events in local TV community calendars. This is usually free.
- Mark your TV and radio submissions as "Public Service Announcements." Put a little note at the end that explains the market is a not-for-profit Alberta approved farmers' market.
- For TV or radio ads, send the actual wording. Keep it short but be enticing.

Special Events

Special events serve to increase publicity, excitement and traffic at the market. Events are an excellent opportunity for community sponsors to play a role with donations and volunteer help. The following are some special events your market can try. Some activities will take more time, investment and volunteers than others. Start small and think big!

- **Contests**

Contests are designed to find a winner of something. The prize can be a ribbon, a gift certificate for the market or a basket of market products. The more fun the contest is, the more likely it will drum up some excitement! Add the participants' names, addresses and e-mail addresses to your mailing list to keep them informed of upcoming events, product availability or other goings-on at the market.

- **Baking Contest**

Invite the food editors from your local newspapers or television news or radio personalities to be the judges. They may also report on the event, helping to make your market even more popular.

- **Halloween Costume Contest**
Invite children to come dressed to the market. You can either have an overall winner or multiple winners – scariest costume, meanest pirate or most beautiful princess. The children will bring their parents who will also shop the market.
- **Photo Contest**
Have customers come out and share their pictures of the market from the whole season. This can be a good way of obtaining quality photos of the market that can be used in the future for little cost.
- **Chili Cook-Off**
Have the local fire crew come and judge the best chili in town!
- **Holiday Events**
Capitalize on the festive atmosphere throughout the year. You may want to hold a special market day at a different time than usual so more customers can attend. Promote the sales of seasonal products and provide activities and entertainment that will keep customers coming back year after year.
 - **Easter Egg Races**
 - Use eggs from your market and have a relay race for the children.
 - **Appearances by Santa**
 - Have a volunteer dress up to entertain the children.
 - **Mothers' Day Flowers**
 - Purchase flowers from a vendor or local florist and give them out to all the ladies.
 - **Harvest Corn Festival**
 - Have a corn grower provide corn to cook and sell to customers
- **Parade**
Represent your market at community parades, either by entering a float or just by walking as a group in the event. You could even have one of your group dress-up as Sunnygirl. If your community doesn't sponsor a parade, find others nearby to attend. This can be a lot of fun for everyone and really helps to get the word out that your community has a farmers' market!
- **Classes and Workshops**
Have a local expert come in and demonstrate uses for products that can be bought at the market.
 - **Freezing and Canning Techniques**
Many people don't know how to freeze, can and preserve fruits and vegetables. This will give customers a reason to buy more products from your market that they would not normally be able to store.
 - **Local Chef Demonstrations**
People are always looking for new ideas on how to cook the items found at your market. In this case your customers get new cooking ideas, vendors increase sales and the chef is promoting his or her restaurant.
 - **Flower Arranging**
Bring in the local florist to show customers how to arrange the cut flowers they have purchased at the market.

No matter what the event, don't forget to bring your camera! The pictures can be posted on your website, Facebook or Twitter accounts or included in the market newsletter. It helps to spread the word about your great events and bring in even more customers.

Community Outreach

Invite organizations to the market to interact and educate the public. This can help gain goodwill within the community. Customers like to be educated about different issues facing the community.

- **Blood Donor Clinic**
The Red Cross is always looking for new locations to hold blood drives.
- **Blood Pressure Check**
Your local health professional could offer free blood pressure checks.
- **Fundraisers**
Allow a well-known group to hold their fundraising activities or special events at your market. The group does the planning and the work, and the market provides the space and an opportunity for consumers to buy at the market.

Other Resources

There are a lot of good resources available for free or on the Internet as well as for purchase through different organizations. Many industry associations in both Canada and the United States will have resources listed on their websites. There are also a number of businesses who specialize in this type of information. To help you get started in your search, type promoting your farmers' market into your internet search engine.

For More Information

For more information about Alberta approved farmers' markets and how to promote them, contact:

Eileen Kotowich
Farmers' Market Specialist
Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development
4701 52 Street, Box 24
Vermilion, AB T9X 1J9
Phone: 780-853-8223 (dial 310-0000 first for toll-free access)
Email: eileen.kotowich@gov.ab.ca