

marketshare [mahr-kit shair] -noun

1. Is a program of marketumbrella.org, which works to cultivate the field of public markets for public good.
2. These free documents (called "shares") are the best of "lessons learned" from public markets everywhere.
3. Employ as needed, & please feel free to tell us about your results, so that we can share those with other markets.



market preparation: markets as business incubators

Successful farmers markets depend for their own survival upon thriving local food producers. Clearly, it's in the best interest of farmers markets to help local farmers be successful at what they do. Yet, your own limited organizational time and resources will doubtless require you to strategize the kinds and amounts of help you offer to participating farmers. In other words, you want to make sure that the areas in which you focus your technical assistance are the most cost-effective for you *and* your recipients.

The most common areas in which vendors need help include developing a basic business plan, developing and executing a marketing plan, negotiating legal and human resource issues, and assessing and acquiring appropriate insurance (including re-pricing it periodically). Help advising vendors in these arts may come from local:

- colleges (business and marketing students, or even their professors)
- county agricultural extension offices
- RSVP (Retired Senior Volunteer Program)
- Small Business Administration (SBA) offices
- chambers of commerce, Main Street, downtown development, or other community revitalization organizations
- sustainability organizations, and
- other nonprofits concerned with local economic development in general, or farm preservation in particular.

At marketumbrella.org, we have found that for-profit professionals (attorneys, insurance agents, marketing and small business consultants) also have been willing to offer workshops for no or nominal cost, betting on the likelihood of acquiring one or more new clients as a result. And, even in tough times like after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita many financial and business professionals offered help and many have remained in the region providing increased technical support to our small businesses.

Beyond the basics, the most important driver of technical assistance should be the wants and needs of the food producers themselves. These will vary by market and even over time, and you may have to do some digging to discover what they are. Do you have a face-to-face conversation with your vendors on a regularly scheduled basis to make sure you know what their needs are? Do you consider evidence such as dwindling product supplies, difficulty paying rent on time, or spotty attendance as possible indicators that they're in trouble?

Vendors might not think to tell you that they're having difficulties. They won't necessarily assume that you have the time, inclination, or resources to help, so it may be up to you to broach the subject. Perhaps the best way to do this is to communicate broadly with vendors on a regular basis about technical, marketing, financing, and other assistance that might be available.

As noted, partners are essential for extending the reach and depth of your assistance offerings. Your mission might help you to further target your technical assistance offerings.

New York City's Greenmarket, for example, leverages a partnership with Cornell University's Cooperative Extension Program, the National Immigrant Farming Initiative and its affiliate, the Northeast Network of Immigrant Farming Projects, to offer the New Farmer Development Project (NFDP), which identifies, educates, and supports immigrants with agricultural experience by helping them become local farmers and establish small farms in the region. NFDP offers comprehensive training through workshops and conferences in the spring; help identifying suitable farmland for lease or purchase upon completion of the training; help obtaining microcredit financing provided by Heifer International; access to direct marketing and intensive one-on-one support. The program helps to address several points of the Greenmarket's mission: preservation of farmland and rural communities, strengthening of regional food security, and expanding public access to high-quality, locally grown farm products.

There also may be other resources in your region that can offer your vendors invaluable assistance. ALBA, for example, the Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association, is an organization serving Monterey County, California, that provides a variety of education and support programs for farm workers and limited-resource aspiring farmers, including business and marketing education programs, organic farm incubators, and conservation and farm innovation programs.

ACENet, the Appalachian Center for Economic Networks, located in Athens, Ohio, operates a "flexible manufacturing network" that links existing and new small businesses in emerging specialty markets so that they can share knowledge, costs, and other resources for their individual success and mutual

benefit. Serving a 10-county region of Appalachia, ACENet offers support for new and existing businesses in three targeted industries, one of which is specialty foods. ACENet provides access to capital, through a small revolving loan fund; business advice via referral to existing institutions including Ohio University and the Enterprise Development Center, another Athens-based non-profit; workforce development through training programs; computer technology and telecommunications and training in their use through a local "freenet," a network of accessible computers in libraries, schools and institutions. ACENet also operates a small-business incubator with room for 18 small businesses and support services including computers, bookkeeping and receptionists.

In Ocean Springs, Mississippi, the Ocean Springs Chamber of Commerce—Main Street—Tourism Bureau hosts the weekly Ocean Springs Fresh Market in the parking lot of its converted L&N Train Depot headquarters and sponsors several special events at the market, including the Red, White and Blueberry Festival in the spring and "Feast of Flavors" in the fall. Diane Claughton, market manager, says that the Chamber is happy to offer all sorts of workshops to its members—noting that farmers must be members of the Chamber to participate.

Many universities offer widely accessible training programs for farmers interested in retail sales and other direct marketing approaches. For example, the Rutgers Food Innovation Center (www.foodinnovationcenter.rutgers.edu) offers an online course for farmers who wish to transition to direct-to-consumer sales and, thereafter, maximize the opportunities available at the markets in which they participate. Similarly, the University of Maryland Cooperative Extension Small Farms Institute has an extensive list of publications to assist small farmers. Many of these, and other resources, are listed on the Farmers Market Coalition website (www.farmersmarketcoalition.org).

In sum, as market organizer, you are in a position to broker many types of technical assistance for the benefit

of your food-producing vendors. Doing so effectively requires that you:

- a. Know what your vendors need
- b. Understand your own mission and objectives so that you make optimal use of organization resources, and
- c. Effectively partner with local agencies on behalf of your vendors and, ultimately, the success of your market.



mission | management | marketing | measurement

Thank you for using a share document. This 4M worksheet below is to help you think through what you just read and how to apply it to your situation. Read the share titled “The Strategy of the 4Ms” to learn more about this marketumbrella.org teaching tool.

Is this issue or strategy covered in your current mission (or values)? _____

Does your management structure allow you time to handle this, or is there another organizational partner to help?

How will you communicate to others about this issue or strategy (marketing)? _____

When and how will you measure the impact of this resolution of this issue or the completion of this strategy?

