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Creating a Winning Display for Your Farm Products

An attractive and inviting display is crucial for anyone selling farm products directly to customers. It may seem obvious that an attractive display helps sales, but the nuts and bolts of creating one may be less readily apparent.

The customer's first impression is critical—you never get a second chance to make a first impression. Displays can enhance or detract from the overall image you are trying to create, whether you are selling at a farmers' market, roadside stand, on-farm store or other location. An abundant, well-tended presentation will draw new customers and encourage them to buy. A sparse, unkempt display will attract minimal attention and may be perceived as an indication of inferior products.

Develop a concept before you start setting up your display. Consider the best way to display your products. Do some research on successful methods for setting up displays. Visit successful direct marketing operations, farmers' markets and similar operations to study their techniques.

You will learn display techniques from any business, regardless of whether or not its product is comparable to yours. Start taking notes. Ask yourself the following questions: Is this an attractive display? Am I drawn to it? Do I want to buy more products than what I originally came for after viewing the display? Is it easy for me to move around? Do I want to come back again? How do I feel while visiting this establishment? The answers to these questions will help you develop your own display area.



Product placement

The purpose of product placement is to arrange your products in a way that immediately entices shoppers. The method you use will be unique to the products you are offering.

One placement scheme is to arrange the display around power and impulse items. A power item is a product that initially attracts customers and may be featured in advertising. Sweet corn, strawberries and apples are all examples of power items. An impulse item is a product that a customer purchases spontaneously after seeing the item displayed. Gift packs, honey and apple peelers are examples of impulse items. Although customers do not actually plan to buy impulse items, they can significantly improve sales.

Display heights and widths

Customers thrive on convenience, easy access and selection. They need a clear view of the display. Products that are placed lower than knee-level or above eye-level are less visible and less likely to be sold. Keep in mind that the majority of customers are in the 5'4" to 6'2" height range. Adapting your display to the customer's line of vision is vital to successful marketing.

Tables or counters that are 36" to 40" high are convenient for most customers. This height is also convenient for restocking. The product needs to be within easy arm's reach.

Avoid displaying products on the floor or ground, especially food. Floor or ground level may be dusty and attract insects, and in most cases, isn't the most conducive spot for sales. There are some exceptions to that rule. For examples, pumpkins look very attractive on the ground and are at the perfect level for those individuals most interested in them—kids. Bedding plants may be displayed near the feet or at ground level. However, for most products the knee-to-eye level provides the greatest interest for customers.

The display width as well as height is important to the customer. The shelves should be no deeper than 2 feet from front to back. If you are the height of most people, consider what you can reach with ease. Step shelves are attractive and add to the display appearance, but are neither as convenient for shopping nor easy to restock. It is essential for the display to be convenient for both the customer and the seller.

If you operate a permanent roadside market or an on-farm store, keep the aisles at least 5 feet wide. Take carts or baskets, wheelchairs and/or strollers into consideration. Aisle width should allow for two-way traffic. This will make the shopping experience less stressful for all, especially those with children or people in wheelchairs and walkers. Having enough room will also encourage people to spend more time looking around.

Display equipment

Wondering what items you could use to make your display more attractive? The variety is endless. It includes tables, shelves, benches with sloping tops, bulk bins, barrels, baskets, wheelbarrows and carts. Placing the produce in smaller baskets or boxes helps the customer envision a realistic purchase amount. A mix of packaged and bulk items has visual appeal. The heights and widths previously mentioned should always be considered; you can use empty wooden containers or other supports beneath the product to give the display a fuller look without overstocking or bruising.



It is important to show that you've taken special care to maintain your product's quality. The display should be designed so as to protect and maintain the product's quality. Consider picked sweet corn or strawberries that sit out in the hot sun. Strawberries lose moisture about 10 times as fast at 70°F as they do at 33°F. About 50% of the sugar in sweet corn is lost in a single day if it is displayed at 70°F, while corn cooled to 33°F loses only 5% of its sugar. You want to maintain the look of quality and freshness for all your products. There's nothing worse than coming to a farm stand that looks attractive from a distance, but as you get closer you see the lettuce wilting. Consider bringing coolers with ice if you are selling at the farmers' markets to keep your products cool. Your customers will appreciate the extra effort you make to provide them with a superior product that remains fresh.

Another placement method is to distribute power items throughout your sales area to lead customers to impulse items. This method is more appropriate for roadside stands and on-farm stores. Taking the lead from other businesses, such as grocery stores, you can display impulse items near checkouts and power items at the front of the stand so that customers will make a commitment to buy something as soon as they walk in. Some direct marketers believe that if power items are not placed in a prominent spot, it discourages shoppers from venturing beyond the front door.



Displaying produce in containers can also enhance a display. There are many types of display containers available including wooden baskets, craft paper bags, plastic and mesh bags. Display containers should protect the product from being bruised and be easy to transport.

Many containers make produce look more attractive. You can add the farm name and logo as a reminder of where it was purchased. Prepackaging may also encourage customers to buy larger quantities. One of the major disadvantages to prepackaging is cost. Containers are expensive. Additionally, many consumers like to inspect produce for defects before purchasing, and this is more difficult when items are prepackaged.

If you are selling a product such as meat, you may find that sales will increase if you use vacuum-sealed clear plastic packaging instead of butcher paper so that people can view your products. The extra expense may well be worth it if boosts sales.

Signage

Clear and concise signs describing and showing the prices of your products are just as important as the aesthetic display. Set out plenty of printed materials that describe your farm for customers. A large sign with the farm's name and location also helps promote name recognition and make that connection between you and the customer.

Appeal to the senses

We don't often think about the ways our senses of sight, taste, feel, smell and hearing offer marketing opportunities. People use their **eyes** to select and make a decision to purchase an item. Poor or so-so visual displays will discourage buyers or keep them looking elsewhere. Direct marketing research confirms the importance of high quality products to customers. The quality and visual display of your product can convince a person to become a buyer.

Color has psychological appeal to customers. Fruits and vegetables, bedding plants, herbs, honey, maple syrup and many other products all have attractive hues that will draw customers. Alternating colors will assist in the appeal to the customer. Light also affects the appearance of product color. Fluorescent lighting, rather than incandescent bulbs, makes colors look more natural.

The **taste** of fresh products is an attraction for customers. Letting people sample your product is a very effective selling tactic. People are often more willing to spend extra money on a product after they have had the opportunity to taste it. (Check with your farm market manager to see if tasting of your product is allowed)

EMERGING AGRICULTURAL MARKETS

Potential customers should be invited to carefully **touch** or **feel** products. Once people handle the product, you increase your marketing opportunity. (Be careful with this one, as too much touching can damage some delicate products. Consider a special selection of “touchable” products so that your primary display is not damaged by overzealous handling).

Enticing **smells** are a powerful attraction. The aroma of fresh products has been known to bolster sales. Consider opening a melon or slicing a pear to allow the fragrance and color to seduce shoppers.

Last but definitely not least: The way you communicate with your customer (**hearing**) is key to the sale. Keep in mind that you, as the seller, are part of the overall attraction and appearance of the display. What customers see and hear from you can make or break a sale. As an example, at a farmers’ market, there was a man who came every week with his daughters to sell his products. In the gentlest terms possible, the man was a grumpy guy. He was grumpy with his

daughters and grumpy with the customers. His display wasn’t extraordinary, but he did an average job of making his products look appealing to the customers. He came to the farmers’ market all year and never made any money. The following year, he hired two people to sell his product at the farmers’ market. He made money the second year, as his helpers had a positive attitude and interacted well with their customers. It’s important to remember that even the most beautiful display can’t replace the need for good customer service skills.



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