

# *Getting Top Dollar For What You Sell at Farmers' Markets*

## ***Offer something special.***

The key to getting higher-than-supermarket prices is to offer something special — such as freshness, higher quality or uniqueness in variety — that customers can't buy in the supermarket, then communicate this quality difference to your customers!

## ***Stress quality and uniqueness.***

Perhaps your sweet corn is raised without chemicals or spray, for example, or you grow unique varieties like "Wonderful," "Sweet Sue" or "Gold Cup." The fact that people are coming to the farmers' markets means that they're looking for a reason not to go to the supermarket, so give it to them!

"Best ideas for getting top prices at the market? Signs on tables that say 'FARM FRESH' or 'PICKED LAST NIGHT' Folks are usually willing to pay a little more for fresh."

— Diane Green, Greentree Naturals Farm, Sandpoint, ID

"You just can't get cheaper than the supermarkets. You can't compete on prices, so consumer trust becomes all important. Consumers are looking for fewer pesticides, for example. It's expensive to get certified organic in New York, so the growers bring photos to market to show customers their growing methods."

— Jane Desotelle, Mgr., Adirondack FM Co-op, NY

## ***Guarantee satisfaction.***

Guarantee that your crop is better than what customers will find in the supermarket: "I guarantee each melon I sell, and if you don't like it, you can bring it back!"

As Ronald Smolowitz, Coonamessett Farm, East Falmouth, MA, says: "If products are not top quality, toss it; take only your best to the market. I give my customers my best quality products, and those cus-

tomers are there no matter what my prices are, and they bring their friends and relatives. They tell me: 'I know your berries are really good; I don't find any mold in them. So I keep buying from you even though I know your prices are higher.'"

## ***Use small-unit pricing***

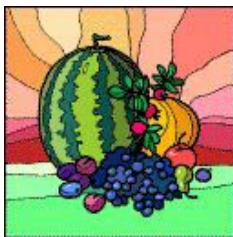
For expensive specialty items, price in small units. Instead of \$5 a pound, make it \$3 a half-pound or even \$2 a quarter pound! Smaller-unit pricing makes it easier for the customer to buy and try out a new or expensive product. Similarly, try selling expensive items like strawberries, blueberries and raspberries by the pint rather than the quart. Snow peas, for example, may be as high as \$4 per pound. This will make customers reluctant to buy. It is better to offer such items in more manageable units, such as a quarter pound for \$1. Customers will pay more for two individual pints than they will for one quart.

The strawberries Smolowitz sells at the markets are prepackaged in pints, not quarts, and raspberries likewise come in a one-half pint size rather than pints. "People tend to buy in smaller quantities," Smolowitz says. "We get a lot of retired couples or single households and people don't can as much as they used to."

When an item isn't selling well in bulk, repackage it into quart boxes. Visually, a quart box looks like a lot. Little tomatoes amidst a bunch of big tomatoes won't sell, but little tomatoes in a quart box sell well.

## ***Sell smaller packages for more.***

Diane Green, Greentree Naturals Farm, in Sandpoint, Idaho, explains this strategy: "If I ask \$2.50 for a pint of raspberries, people think I'm nuts and refuse to buy at that price when they can buy them for a \$1.00 at the next stand. I package them in 1/2 pint containers, and sell them for \$1.25 and sell out EVERY TIME. I have no idea why a smaller package for more



money will sell better, but it works!"

Price hard-to-find items above the market. Do this for unusual products or where competition is less intense, especially where there are quality differences. Even when yields are great, maintain your price. You will not stimulate additional purchases with a lower price. People will only buy what they need.

### ***Give samples.***

Let customers taste your quality! Cut slices: "Here, try one!" Especially with a new or unusual product, give out educational literature or recipes to show how to use it.

### ***"Showcase" your product with great merchandising.***

Why do you think expensive jewelry is back-dropped by velvet or other fancy fabric? Make dynamic displays using attractive packaging. Market manager Dana Plummer of the Downtown Waterloo Farmers' Market in Iowa says, "Consumers will pay twice as much if they're at a good-looking stall that's pleasing to the eye, where samples are provided, and where the vendors are customer-friendly."

### ***Provide service.***

This is what customers don't get in the supermarkets or "big box" stores. Be friendly with customers; ask your market to provide carry-out service for large purchases or for seniors; provide nutrition information and storage tips; and suggest ways to use the product (recipes, etc.) to increase demand.

### ***Maintain your base pricing.***

Try not to lower your prices even when your competitors are dropping theirs. If competing farmers drop prices, keep your original price even late in season,



but give something extra. As one grower said: "If special sales and lower prices are appropriate due to overabundance of supply or promotional activities, we find that retaining the base price and then adding extra value is much better than simply getting a lower price. For example, when corn is over-supplied and other farmers are down around \$2.75 per dozen, we keep our base price of 35¢ an ear, 6 ears for \$2.00, and \$3.75 per dozen. To attract the customer we offer 6 for \$2.00 and then get a 7th ear free, or buy a dozen at \$3.75 and get 2 ears free. We find people often buy a dozen at \$3.75 to get two free. We get 27¢ per ear and keep our base price for future marketing. Our competition gets 23¢ an ear and will have difficulty raising the price in the future should the corn supply change. Again, quality is critical."

### ***Raising prices.***

Finally, if and when you do make upward price adjustments, make them as little as needed rather than all at once.

Excerpted with permission from "The New Farmers Market: Farm-Fresh Ideas for Producers, Managers & Communities," by Vance Corum, Marcie Rosenzweig, and Eric Gibson. To order, send \$24.95 + \$4.50 shipping to: "QP Distribution," 22260 "C" St., Winfield, KS 67156. Credit card orders call 888-281-5170. California residents add \$1.75 tax. 8 X 10, 272 pps.