



Hot products: Fresh and Value-Added.

Over the past five years, Eric has had an unusual hobby, asking dozens of growers or market managers: “What are the hottest fresh products being sold in your market?”

Fresh products

“Tree- or vine-ripened is the reason people come to the markets.”

“Fresh-from-the-farm, in-season, mainstay fruits and vegetables.”

“Whatever is in season! From rhubarb in the spring to cauliflower in the fall.”

“The strongest items consistently are ‘early’... sweet corn, cuc’s, zucchini, tomatoes, peppers and melons.”

“Staples are still the big item here. Specialties are just starting to emerge. Our market traditionally serves older customers — it’s really a ‘beans and ‘taters’ audience.”

Specialty items not found in supermarkets.

“Anything unusual sells here.”

“We offer eight different varieties of cherries here, not just a Bing!”

“Growing different varieties of sweet and hot peppers is a great niche, since they are an important ingredient in salsa, an expanding product line.”

Heirloom varieties

“‘Old’ is ‘in.’ Old fashioned, heirloom varieties of roses, for example, like your grandmother grew. We have one grower who grows over 80 varieties of roses, with their names all on labels. We have other rose growers in the market, but there’s always people in line for hers. Most of the other roses are bred for long stems and visual appearance, not smell. The old heirlooms look fantastic, and they also smell great.”

— Mark Sheridan, Mgr., Santa Barbara FM, CA

“Some of the specialty organic heirloom varieties are showing up in the Austin and Dallas-Fort Worth areas.”

“Some of the old apple varieties, like Winesap, Arkansas Black or Northern Spy that you won’t find in the supermarkets.”

Salad mix

“The mesclun craze just doesn’t seem to bottom out. The more farmers are getting into it, the more customers, and each farmer seems to have a different mix with each one tasting different.”

“One interesting variation on mesclun mixes is a farmer here selling mixed bunches of vegetables, rainbow mixes of radishes or chiodga beets.”

“Due to the competition, we give our mixes names and we offer different ‘flavors’ with different ingredients.”

“My salad mix has large leaves instead of baby leaves and I can sell my product for 50 percent cheaper. I found a niche of people willing to pay \$3 a pound for salad mix instead of \$6 a pound.”

“We sell head lettuce with roots on (washed) as ‘live.’”

Herbs

Herbs are a great farmers’ market niche item, and also lend themselves to great value-added items like herbal vinegars.

Ethnic

“It’s a combination of more ethnic buyers coming to the market and other people liking the ethnic foods.”

Organic items

“There’s a trend toward organic here (New York) at the markets. People are still shopping primarily for price on the East Coast, though, and only a certain percentage of people will pay extra for organics.”

“The consumers are more educated now. People are starting to take care of themselves a lot better and they’re searching for organic.”

Fresh flowers

“There’s a lot of competition in the market for flowers. You have to stay ahead of the competition. This means reading a lot of flower and gardening magazines

and being a member of the Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers.”

Also mentioned:

Products for canning, vegetable seedlings, bedding plants, maple syrup, nuts, baby vegetables and greenhouse tomatoes.

“We sell compost, which we make from leaves and grass clippings (green waste) from the city of Boulder, and sell it in 40-pound bags at the market to home gardeners. Another good draw is our tomato plants. We grow 20 different varieties, which are purchased by home gardeners to plant themselves. With each plant, we hand out an information sheet on how to grow tomatoes.”

—John Ellis, Farmer John’s, Boulder, CO

Value-added products

Here are some comments we heard about value-added products at farmers’ markets:

“Garlic sells for \$1 a bunch, but sell it with dried herb flowers and two cayenne peppers and it sells for \$10 a bunch!”

“Make your product attractive! Dress up your product by tying it with ribbon, or bundling different items together! If you are selling items in jars, cover the lid with a small circle of fabric, etc.”

“Value-added is little more work out on the farm but gets premium prices. A few years ago you could bring sunflowers and sell them, but now they have to be put in with other flowers in an

arrangement. You can’t just bring things, put them on the table and expect them to sell. It takes a better job of presentation.”

“The market for dehydrated vegetables is really taking off! The ‘country kitchen’ look is really in. The key is to use down-home, pretty packaging.”

“Items for fast preparation. People are uneducated in cooking and in prepping food or produce.”

“Value-added takes us away from the concept of fresh and direct! We have to differentiate as much as possible from grocery stores.”

Here are some of the many value-added items growers are selling in farmers’ markets:

- ≤ Baby food (organic)
- ≤ Bakery items, including bread, cookies, scones, fruit cobblers, apple dumplings, fruit pies
- ≤ Baskets, including fruit baskets
- ≤ Canned items, including roasted garlic, vegetables
- ≤ Corn shocks
- ≤ Crafts
- ≤ Dog biscuits (vegetarian)
- ≤ Dried fruit, including exotic dried fruit like dried persimmons, fruit squares
- ≤ Dried vegetables, including tomatoes
- ≤ Flowers, including cut flower arrangements, dried flowers
- ≤ Garlic braids
- ≤ Gourds
- ≤ Greenhouse items
- ≤ Herbal products, including braids, crafts, lotions, balms, soaps, oils, teas, bath herbs, dried

herbs, lip gloss, salve, massage oils

- ≤ Hickory chips
- ≤ Honey, including flavored
- ≤ Jams, jellies and preserves, including low- or no-sugar, cactus apple, fig jam jelly, pomegranate jelly, rhubarb preserves
- ≤ Juices, including fresh, exotic juices like pomegranate
- ≤ Lettuce, mixed 6-pack as veggie starts
- ≤ Marinated fruits and vegetables and syrups (wild cherry)
- ≤ Molasses
- ≤ Nursery stock
- ≤ Nuts, salted and flavored
- ≤ Oil, including jojoba, olive, organic
- ≤ Pastas
- ≤ Pepper braids
- ≤ Pesto, all kinds
- ≤ Pickled vegetables
- ≤ Popcorn
- ≤ Posole (corn soaked in lime and dried) from colored corn
- ≤ Potpourri
- ≤ Prepared foods, including bagels, pizza relish, onion rhubarb salsa, including tomato, salsa verde mix with tomatilloes, onion, garlic, chilies, cilantro
- ≤ Soaps, generally handmade
- ≤ Spices
- ≤ “Squirrel corn” (field corn put in packages with a feeder stand)
- ≤ Vinegar, including gourmet, with fancy labeling and special ingredients like meyer lemons, habanero peppers, berries or edible flowers. ✦