

# FARMER'S MARKET 101



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Grade A Gardens, Earlham, Iowa

# Our Back Story



“1st Generation farmers”

Started our farm in 2009 on just  $\frac{1}{4}$  acre and grew to 6 acres in Johnston. Whitney joined the farm in 2016. Jordan grew up working in produce and Whitney worked on farms all over to gain experience.

Previous ground was rented, wanted our own farm when we got married. Eventually found our current farm (SILT). Needed to be close to our market.

We now have 27 acres in Earlham, 8 acres in vegetable production, apple+chestnut orchard, prairies, 300 egg laying chickens, and a heifer cow.

We do a 100 member CSA, some restaurant wholesale, sell seed garlic, farm dinners, farm festivals and the DSM Farmer’s Market.



# Getting Started with Produce



Jordan started as a produce manager for Gateway Market

Learned a lot about displaying and selling produce, customer reactions, what sells well where, why, etc.

Developed relationships with growers all around central Iowa which sparked his interest in farming.

Planted his first garlic bulb in 2009.

# Getting Started at Market



We started with just a 10x10 ten, two tables on the side street of the DSM market

How to find a market?

How to apply for a market? Cost? Liability insurance?

Make sure the market makes sense for you- if full time is not an option, consider starting as an occasional vendor

Additional things you will need:

- Market Vehicle

- Tents

- Tables

- Signage

- Staff

- Display props (crates, quarts, bins, decor, etc)

# Market Today



New location, on main street of market, corner booth with two sides

30,000+ people walking by every weekend

New tent color, new color scheme

Expanded to 4 or 5 tables

Built custom crates to fit our quarts and pints and hold the produce

Setting Prices: we like to be on the “high side of fair”. We keep our pricing very simple and the same for everything on the booth. (ex. 1 bunch for \$4 or 3 for \$10)

# How We Display



We like to stack crates to give vertical appeal

Fill your quarts and pints!

“Stack it high and watch it fly”

Get rid of wilted bunches, keep it looking full, downsize as you go.

Why is nothing labeled?

Keep it shoppable, placement matters!

Do people have to “enter” your booth?

Use your tent to hang things too.

# Building a Brand



Does your produce look as good or better than the grocery store?

Bag with nice labels, clam shells, twist ties with your name and organic on them, etc

Dates on packaging is very helpful

Name on a menu at a restaurant helps people identify you at a market

Get known for something!





Keep bunches tight, take off yellow leaves

We do color coat our eggs...

Initial arrangement makes a difference

Fill up containers!















PRACTICAL  
FARMERS









# Post-Harvest Handling of Produce



Post-harvest handling is critical.

Everything we harvest gets taken out of field ASAP and dunked straight into our dunk tank or hosed off, wrapped up, and put into cooler. Remember to GET OUT THE FIELD HEAT!

We pack a lot of things in coolers to take to market, 11:45 at market on a hot day and greens are still cold, kale still crisp- for example.

Makes a difference because a lot of people may not go home right after purchasing produce, or know how to store things at home correctly.

# Market Morning Routine



Market starts at 7am

Arrive to market by 6am

Leave farm at 530

Start loading van at 5am

Wake up at 4am

Everything to sell is ready to go in the cooler the night before (try not to store produce in your vehicle the night before, as tempting as it may sound)

This is our old van (we did get a box truck last year). We use to do the entire booth out of this van.

Keeping your display manageable makes loading easy on yourself.

# Behind the Booth



Remember to Smile! :) Please and thank you

Keeping it tidy, some customers will notice your mess

Signs behind booth- Big Grade A Gardens sign helps customers know who you are and find you on social

Taking money- cash, check, paypal, venmo, IOUs

Counting money and being quick when there is a rush-having everything on the dollar helps with this.

Tell people if something isn't yours

“If you don't take care of the customer, someone else will”

Be your favorite bar or restaurant - Learn your customers name and wants!

# Cooperation v Competition



- Remember people shop various booths for various reasons
- Positive attitudes are noticed
- Recommend other growers if you are out of something
- Collaborate on pricing if needed (eggs, for example)
- Make market buddies

# Other Market Things



Do you have market staff?

Remember the “Monday Hangover” will come for you

How to handle burnout

How we keep track of sales

Right now we are cash, check, paypal or venmo (need to get CC but haven't done that yet)

Social media still is important. Having a website (useful for our market boxes)

Be nice to management!

# Unlimited Bag



Started this during our barn raising campaign and is sort of an alternative to a CSA.

\$1000 for the bag and customers can come to every market and fill the bag full with anything on the booth

10 bags available each season

Customers love this option, come every week, fill it up and go

*of Iowa*





Thank you  
PFI for  
having us!!

Questions?