



INSTITUTE FOR AGRICULTURE AND TRADE POLICY

Managing Small Urban Farmers Markets

A handbook for mini farmers market
managers

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Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy

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Overview

While some Minneapolis neighborhoods enjoy a bountiful supply of healthy foods, others do not. Mini farmers markets help address this challenge by bringing fresh, locally grown foods into Minneapolis neighborhoods.

In 2006, the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) began working with neighborhood-based organizations to launch a set of small farmers markets throughout Minneapolis. Mini Markets are farmers markets that have five or fewer vendors and sell locally grown food, fresh produce and home processed foods.

The markets are hosted and managed by local community organizations and are located at community centers, senior housing facilities, churches, and on busy street corners. Mini farmers markets help increase access to healthy foods, foster a sense of community, provide sales opportunities for small farmers, connect people with the farmers who grow their food, and link low-income residents with farmers markets that accept food assistance.

Prior to the mini farmers market initiative, even the smallest farmers markets had to go through a costly and complex licensing process with the City of Minneapolis to start their market. In response, IATP worked with the City of Minneapolis to develop a simplified process and a less complex licensing requirement.

The license process for this special market category has significantly reduced the time and expense of establishing small farmers markets, enabling community centers and neighborhood organizations to host a market on their own property.



Brian Coyle mini farmers market

Since the inception of the project in 2006, IATP has provided training, technical assistance, promotional support, evaluation and other services to our network of mini farmers markets. In 2012, IATP transitioned leadership of the mini farmers market network to four community organizations

that will serve as network coordinators: Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches, Kingfield Farmers Market, West Broadway Business and Area Coalition, and the Northeast Minneapolis Farmers Market.

Network coordinators will act as the liaisons between the markets and the City of Minneapolis, provide an "umbrella" service with the State Department of Agriculture so that interested markets can accept Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) coupons, help with technical assistance and troubleshooting throughout the market season, and foster communication among market managers. Each existing market has been assigned to one of the four network coordinators and coordinators may elect to support any new markets at their own discretion.

This manual provides market managers with a guide for establishing and managing their mini farmers market, and we hope that it will inform stakeholders in other communities about the particulars of running very small markets. The manual outlines the process for obtaining a license, scheduling the market, finding vendors, becoming FMNP authorized, promoting the market and understanding vendor responsibilities. Network coordinators can also connect managers with additional resources and materials for running a market successfully.

Manager responsibilities

The market manager is responsible for planning, development, promotion and day-to-day operation of their market. Managers can use the following as a basic plan to starting up a market. More information about each component is provided later in this manual.

- Connect with the network coordinator assigned to your market.
- Select a site that has the community buy-in, has the customer traffic to support a market and complies with city regulations.
- Complete and submit the City of Minneapolis Public Market License application.
- Secure Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) authorization for the market and provide information about FMNP vendors to network coordinator. (Participation in FMNP is not required, but is highly recommended as a strategy for expanding access to healthy foods among lower income populations).

- Create a packet that contains the key materials for vendors.
- Recruit vendors, have vendors complete the forms in the vendor packet and maintain communications with the vendors who will sell at your market.
- Create a basic marketing plan and promote the market to the surrounding community.
- Commit to being at the market each week.
- Comply with all city and state regulations.

Tip: Managing a market, even a small one, takes time. A market's success is often closely correlated with the effort that the manager makes before and during the market season. Make sure you have ample hours during the spring and summer months to plan for, organize and promote your market.

Scheduling a location and time for the market

The location and time of a market should reflect circumstances and aspirations in your community and be chosen to maximize accessibility and visibility of the market to neighborhood residents and other potential patrons. Consider the following when identifying potential sites:

- Choose a high-traffic area and a highly visible site.
- Ensure walk-ability, easy parking or accessibility via public transportation.



Fifth Street mini farmers market

- Choose start and end dates for the market that reflect when local product is reliably available, typically from the beginning of July through Labor Day in Minneapolis.
- Schedule markets for a two- to three-hour period, one day per week, taking into account other activities in the neighborhood that might help or hinder people from shopping at the market. You can expand your market hours if needed as your market becomes more established. Many mini markets operate in the late afternoon, providing vendors with another opportunity to sell product after other markets that are open early in the day, and reaching neighborhood residents while coming home from work, school, etc.
- Please note: If you decide to change the location of your market after you have received a license, you will need to reapply for a City of Minneapolis market license, as the new site must go through a city zoning and health review.

Tip: Locating your market on a busy street corner (ideally with public transit service) will help to draw in customers from the surrounding neighborhood.

City licensing

Mini farmers markets as described in this guide are specific to the City of Minneapolis. Market hosts in other municipalities should contact their own licensing departments to determine options and regulatory requirements for starting a farmers market.

The City of Minneapolis allows a mini farmers markets to have:

- a maximum of five vendors. At least one must be an agricultural producer;
- a maximum of one food distributor of fresh fruits and vegetables (local produce or non-local produce that is not available from the agricultural producers); and
- a maximum of one home processor selling foods intended for off-site consumption.

City ordinance (Title 10, Chapter 201) provides the exact language defining the mini farmers markets, provides definitions for all the distinct vendor types and contains detailed information about the requirements of a farmers market manager and market site.

Mini farmers markets are licensed and regulated by the City of Minneapolis. License and renewal fees will apply. For updated fee information, please call (612) 673-3000 and ask for the city's business licensing department.

The market manager (with the assistance of their network coordinator) must fill out and submit a City of Minneapolis mini market license application along with supporting documents and fees. The application includes two parts:

- An application to Environmental Health (overseeing food safety and cleanliness)
- An application to Zoning and Planning (overseeing site appropriateness and neighborhood impact)

City staff will review the application (which can take up to six weeks) and approve the mini market license if the information in the application is accurate and meets City requirements. Once the license is received, the mini market may operate on the dates listed on the application.

City of Minneapolis personnel will inspect mini markets throughout the market season to ensure that health codes are being followed.

Tip: Make sure to leave ample time to complete the city application! Starting your preparations in February can help ensure a smooth start to your market season.

FMNP and WIC

The Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) is a federal program enabling participants in the Women Infants and Children (WIC) and Nutrition Assistance Program for Seniors (NAPS) food assistance programs to purchase fruits and vegetables at farmers markets. WIC and NAPS recipients in certain counties receive \$20 in FMNP coupons per summer that can be spent with vendors at authorized farmers markets. Vendors at these markets can also accept WIC Fruit and Vegetable Vouchers (FVVVs).

Because individual mini farmers markets are too small to accept FMNP (the state requires that a market have at least five FMNP vendors to be authorized on their own), network coordinators are charged with obtaining the needed authorization from the State Department of Agriculture. By grouping together several small markets, the network coordinators meet the five vendor threshold and provide umbrella authorization for the mini markets. Authorized vendors at the markets can then accept FMNP coupons and WIC FVVVs. The ability to accept FMNP coupons is a key strategy for improving food access among lower income residents. Keep in mind that:

- Vendors, market managers and network coordinators must attend the (free) state FMNP training that is held each spring.
- FMNP-authorized vendors can only accept FMNP and WIC FVVVs at FMNP-authorized markets.
- Managers are responsible for sending vendor information to their network coordinators and for ensuring there is at least one FMNP vendor present during all market hours.
- Network Coordinators are responsible for sending vendor information to the State.
- Vendors are responsible for complying with all of the rules for accepting FMNP and WIC FVVVs.



Walker Place mini farmers market

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture occasionally visits the markets to ensure compliance with the FMNP rules. If a vendor is found violating any of the guidelines they will be cited by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture for non-compliance and network coordinators will receive notification of the citations. In such cases, the vendor will have to attend the FMNP training the following year to become reauthorized.

Tip: Help your FMNP vendors be successful. Remind them to show their FMNP signage at all times and to clearly post the price of all products for sale. Network Coordinators have price cards for vendors who need them.

Recruiting vendors

The market manager is responsible for finding and coordinating the vendors who will sell at their mini farmers market. There are many ways to recruit vendors, such as:

- Calling farmers and organizations listed in the Minnesota Grown directory
- Contacting local agriculture organizations and farming groups to broadcast the opportunity to sell at your market (Minnesota Food Association, Farmers Legal Action Group, etc.)
- Talking to vendors at other farmers markets

Keep in mind that it is important to have an appropriate number of vendors given the volume of sales at your market (i.e., enough to offer a wide variety of products, but not too many vendors for the sales volume your market will generate). Vendors are more likely to attend the market reliably if they are making reliable revenues. Most existing markets have two to three vendors. Ask prospective vendors if they are FMNP-certified to make sure that you have one to two certified vendors. You may also want to have an additional two to three vendors as back-ups in case your farmers become unable to participate during the course of the season.



Camden mini farmers market

At the beginning of the season, develop a relationship with your vendors and establish guidelines for contact in case a farmer cannot attend the market on a given day or a market needs to be cancelled due to severe weather or other factors. Have them fill out and return the vendor packet. A vendor packet template can be obtained from your network coordinator. Managers should make the packet specific to their market, but it must contain the following:

- Mini market application form
- Minnesota Department of Revenue ST19 tax form
- City of Minneapolis vendor form

Tip: Create a market with a variety of different products. This will increase business for individual vendors and be more appealing to customers. We've found that cut flowers, sweet corn and fruit, for instance, can be a big draw with shoppers.

Promotions

One of the main jobs of the market manager is to promote the Mini Market, engage shoppers and engage your community. There are many ways to draw customers to your market. Here are some possibilities to consider:

- Create a basic marketing plan that spreads the word about the market in a variety of ways.
- Distribute flyers throughout neighborhood and refresh them often.
- Ask nearby businesses, libraries and housing facilities if they can advertise the market to their customers and tenants.
- Submit short articles or ads to your neighborhood or organizational newsletter, newspaper or website.
- Promote your market at neighborhood events such as street festivals or block parties.
- Encourage nearby restaurants to buy from the mini market.
- Consider a collaboration with nearby schools, churches or other community institutions to increase community awareness and participation in your market.
- Advertise at local WIC clinics.
- Apply for small grants to raise funds that would allow you to provide incentives (like cloth shopping bags or market t-shirts) for attending the market
- Draw passers by in with striking visuals like signs, flags and balloons.
- If customers can use FMNP or EBT benefits at your market, make sure to make that option known in your community.

IATP developed a logo that can be used for free by all mini markets to assist with their promotions. A digital copy of the logo is available from the network coordinators. It can easily be used for fliers, postcards, price cards, t-shirts and other applications.

Tip: For very small markets (1–2 vendors), encourage vendors to set up two tents over their display tables to create more visual impact from the street. Brightly colored sandwich boards and low-cost yard signs can also be very effective.

Vendor responsibilities

The heart of every market, vendors are responsible for the following:

- Fill out and turn in the forms from Mini Market Vendor Packet.
- Commit to selling weekly for the whole market season.
- Be authorized to accept Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) coupons (not necessary, but encouraged).
- Bring tables, tents, and all other materials needed to sell at the market.
- Contact your mini market manager in advance if they unable to attend a market.
- Provide proof of liability insurance (if required by the market).
- Comply with city and state health regulations
- And make tasty, healthy foods available to the community!

Minneapolis mini market network coordinators

- West Broadway Business and Area Coalition, www.westbroadway.org, (612) 353-5178: North Minneapolis mini markets
- Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches/Minnesota Food Share, www.mnfoodshare.gmcc.org, (612) 276-1530: South and Southeast Minneapolis mini markets
- Kingfield Farmers Market, www.kingfieldfarmersmarket.org, (612) 207-7893: South Minneapolis mini markets
- Northeast Minneapolis Farmers Market, www.mfma.org, info@mfma.org: Northeast Minneapolis mini markets