

Best Practices for Sampling at Farmers Markets



A Practical Guide for Farmers Market Vendors

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Front cover picture: 2012 Grand Opening at the Jackson County Farmers Market in Tyner, Kentucky. Courtesy of Sharon Spencer.

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Steamed cabbage sample at the 2012 Grand Opening of the Jackson County Farmers Market.

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2011 Regional Farm Market Sampling Survey

Our 2011 Regional Farm Market Sampling Survey was a web-based survey targeting on-farm retail market and community farm market visitors that had made at least one market visit during the last 12 months. The purpose of this survey was to provide insight into how farm market vendors may try to shape sampling experiences for shoppers at the farmers market. Our best practices checklist is based on 3,406 usable responses from market visitors conducted across eight states: Indiana, Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri, Ohio, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia. The survey explored farm market sampling experiences, barriers to sampling, characteristics of best sampling experiences, and post-sampling behavior. Data and analysis from the 2011 Regional Farm Market Sampling Survey are integrated throughout this guide to illustrate market patron perspectives on sampling that should prove useful to market vendors.

Best Practices for Sampling at Farmers Markets: A Practical Guide for Farmers Market Vendors is intended to be a functional handbook on food product sampling for farmers market vendors across the United States. We created this handbook, based largely on Kentucky perspectives, to assist farmers and farmers market managers in understanding the economic benefits and the best practices of providing samples to farmers market patrons. The guide is designed to promote our research findings in an easy-to-read and understandable format for practitioners.

We have presented this handbook in sections, highlighting within each section the significant, or “key,” findings that came out of our surveys. Sections are:

- Patron Perspectives
- Benefits of Sampling
- Sampling Venues
- Tips for Sampling Correctly
- Best Practices for Sampling
- Farmers Market Vendor FAQs

We have also compiled resources that we found to be helpful. We sincerely hope that readers will find this guide to be a useful resource and that it will stimulate economic growth for their businesses.



2011 Regional Farmers Market Survey Key Findings

- The primary reasons patrons sample food products is to determine if they like the taste and then to decide if they will buy the product.
- Visitors like to sample products even if they are already generally familiar with them—favorite fresh fruits, vegetables, and cheeses are the most popular.
- Sampling is widely experienced by farmers market patrons in other retail settings.
- Many visitors noted issues like: having no samples available at the farmers markets, crowded sampling areas, uncertain taste/ingredients, and food safety concerns as barriers to not sampling.
- Sampling is a highly experiential and interactive activity; friendliness of vendors was the top reason visitors tried a sample. Ease of accessing samples and presentation were also highly rated.
- Sampling was shown to have an immediate purchasing impact at the farmers market. Of our respondents clearly recalling a farmers market sampling event, 55% purchased the sampled product that day when they had not planned to do so. Another 17% of respondents that did not buy that day planned to buy the product in the future.
- Visitors noted that sampling significantly impacted their purchasing from the vendor (45%), recommending the product to a friend (38%), recommending the vendor to a friend (34%), and purchasing other products from the vendor (20%).
- Various consumer groups respond to sampling differently. Market visitors vary in their expectations of sampling depending on age, area of residence, and whether or not they brought kids to the market.

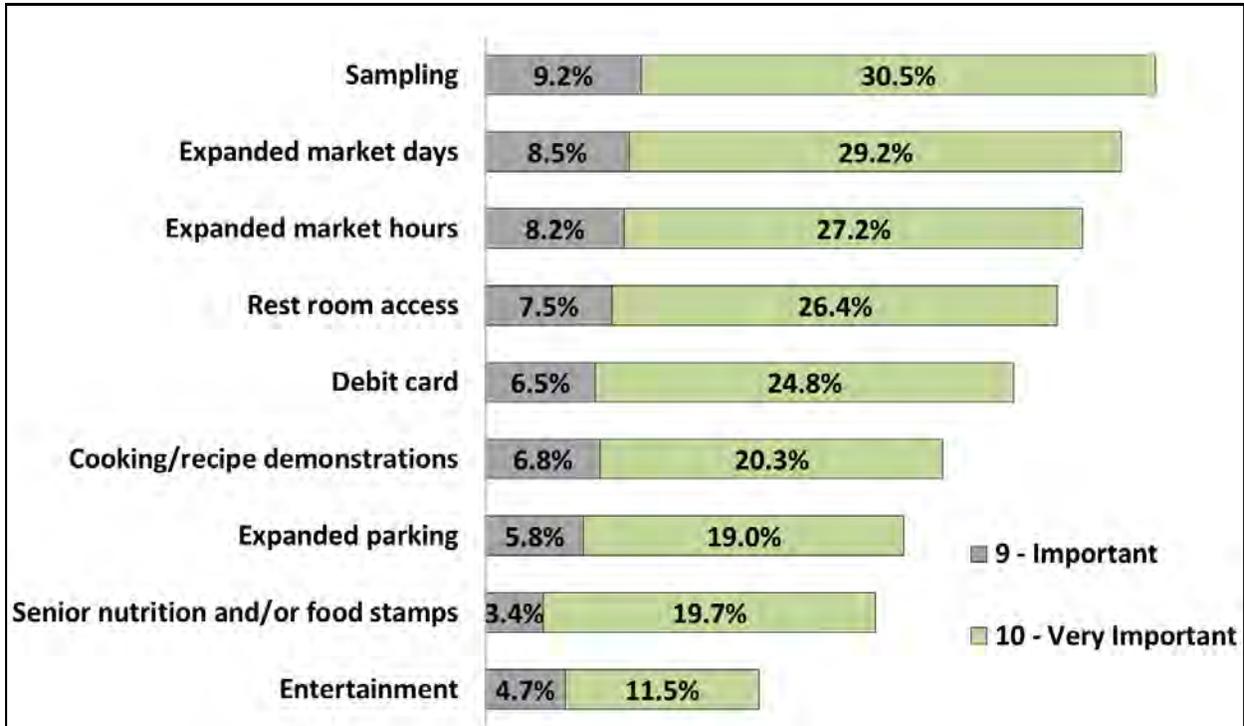




Why Sampling?

A consumer intercept survey conducted in 2009 by the University of Kentucky determined that farmers market shoppers are more interested in **product samples** than debit card acceptance or bathroom access at the market, as shown in Figure 1 (Woods, 2010). According to the Kentucky Department of Agriculture (KDA), Kentucky farmers markets are expected to report cumulative revenue of approximately \$12 million for 2012. With state legislation in place that provides provisions for home processing and product sampling at Kentucky markets, vendors have the unique opportunity of using sampling as a low-cost and high-yield marketing tool. However, many of Kentucky’s farmers market vendors are not currently offering food samples as part of their direct-marketing practices, even though it is an important part of differentiating their products. Given such significant consumer interest, the potential value of food sampling for farmers market vendors is undeniable. It is also important that strategies be economical and effective for new direct-to-consumer vendors who are operating on a modest marketing budget.

Figure 1. Services Most in Demand at Kentucky Farmers Markets



Note: Based on 302 patron intercepts in 11 different Kentucky Farm Markets, Summer 2009. Services rated on 1 = 'not important' to 10 = 'very important'

Table 1. Overall Impression of the Sampling Experience

Rate your sampling experience	
Excellent	56%
Good	40%
Fair	4%
Poor	1%

In the 2011 Regional Farm Market Sampling Survey we found that 56% of people who sampled products in the last 12 months had an excellent experience! In total, 96% of respondents had at least a good sampling experience at their farmers market. Sampling is noted to be an overwhelmingly positive experience for market patrons!

Note: N = 3,406.

Growth in Direct Markets

Direct marketing opportunities for local food entrepreneurs have increased in Kentucky over the past decade. Direct marketing implies marketing strategies where the producer sells products directly to the consumer. It has proven to be a popular way for small-to-medium sized farmers to increase farm revenue. For farmers, becoming the seller as well as the producer allows them to capture more of the retail food dollar. Few resources have been available for local food entrepreneurs to make well-informed marketing decisions, and many new entrepreneurs have had little experience in learning how to engage their local customers. The direct relationship between buyer and seller makes farmers markets particularly unique. Rather than establishing product perceptions via mass media branding, as with commercial products, it is the farmers market itself and the farmer-consumer relationships that determine consumer desire and satisfaction (Andreatta, 2002). Consumers who purchase products directly from the producer often seek an authentic connection with the producer and they are also drawn to high quality, fresh, and good-tasting products.



This report focuses on the direct marketing channel of farmers markets, where you as the producer have the opportunity to tell your customers exactly how great your product is. However, there are quite a few direct market opportunities that are growing in many parts of the United States.

Other Direct Marketing Opportunities to Consider:

- Agritourism
- Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)
- Farm to School
- Food Banks
- Grower Cooperatives
- Grocery Stores
- Pick-Your-Own
- Produce Auctions
- Restaurants (specifically restaurants serving local fare)
- Roadside Farm Markets or On-Farm Stands
- Terminal Markets



Screamin' Mimi's Salsa and Pepper Sauce are a Kentucky-produced product, but are shelved alongside competitive, nationally known brands. To get their name and product out there, Screamin' Mimi's does sampling events at grocery stores that carry their products.

In 2008, the University of Kentucky conducted its first Kentucky Food Consumer Panel (KFCP), which was designed to collect information about food purchasing and consumption from households across the Commonwealth, in an effort to provide resources to farmers and their communities that will assist in developing more localized food systems. This research provided invaluable insight into Kentucky's consumer preferences for attributes connected with their food products, their shopping and consumption behaviors, and what was eventually termed as "food culture." We have defined "food culture" to determine the familiarity with and interest in farmers markets, food preparation, specialty products, willingness to pay, health, agritourism, restaurants, and retail venues.

In the first KFCP survey, 34% of households reported "Taste Preference" as a significant barrier to consuming more fresh produce. However, 86% reported cooking fresh vegetables as a way to save money (Woods, 2008). It is also notable that 65% of panelists statewide are cooking at home more often and shopping fewer times per week to save on fuel costs (suggesting the probability that food behaviors become more home-based during hard economic times). The KFCP results also indicated that approximately 78% of Kentucky households had been to a farmers market in the past 12 months, with 52% reporting the capability to preserve or freeze-store their food. This increase in home preparation of food has provided farmers market vendors with an opportunity to increase revenues and grow their businesses.

All of the KFCP data collected further stimulated a long-deliberated question:

How, and to what extent, are consumer perceptions and behaviors impacted by offering samples?

A 2005 article in the *Journal of Marketing Research* stated that food sampling has the ability to “change a product’s image, generate word of mouth [marketing], or introduce a new product.” However, the researchers also acknowledged the practice as costly, making it necessary to more “effectively use sampling programs” (Nowlis, 2005). Upon determination that product sales could increase by five to 10 times after in-store sampling promotions (McGuiness, 1988), a subsequent study found that sales remained above base level for up to 12 weeks after the sampling occurred. The New Zealand researchers were able to determine that, in addition to increased sales for the sampled product, competing product sales fell around 10%. They also acknowledge that the “indirect benefit of in-store sampling is increasing product awareness” (Lawson, 1990). This conclusion suggests that sampling can impact brand loyalty, which is important for farmers market vendors who are competing against commercial retailers for market share.

In 2007, Kentucky legislation (HB 391) was passed, allowing food producers to manufacture and sell home-based and micro-processed foods at farmers markets. As vendors learned how to market and sell these new value-added items, many reported that sales would increase if sampling were allowed at the market. At the time, vendors were required to obtain temporary food handling permits from the county health department, which proved to be costly and complicated. As a result of vendor requests, state legislation was passed (2009) that allowed Kentucky food producers to offer food samples at the farmers markets without requiring the permits. Interest on behalf of the farmers was significant as more than 1,100 producers have since completed the KDA’s certification training. However, when the markets re-opened in 2009 many vendors were still not offering samples. Although the Kentucky Farmers’ Market Association (KFMA) provided resources necessary to abide by health department standards (a measure that ensured food safety and ethical practices), vendors were overwhelmed by the process.

Many vendors noted the major barriers to offering sampling included:

- Labor constraints at market booth
- Hassle of setting up certified sampling stations
- Limited booth space
- Uncertainty about the benefits of sampling



After the Master Tobacco Settlement, many of Kentucky’s tobacco farmers began small to medium scale food production. This, in combination with increased consumer interest in local and sustainable food products, raised Kentucky’s number of registered farmers markets from 91 in 2004 to 147 in 2012 (markets are registered with the Kentucky Department of Agriculture). Kentucky farmers market revenue is estimated to exceed \$12 million in 2012, representing more than 2,490 food producers and more than 20 non-produce product categories.

Figure 2. Market and Vendor Count

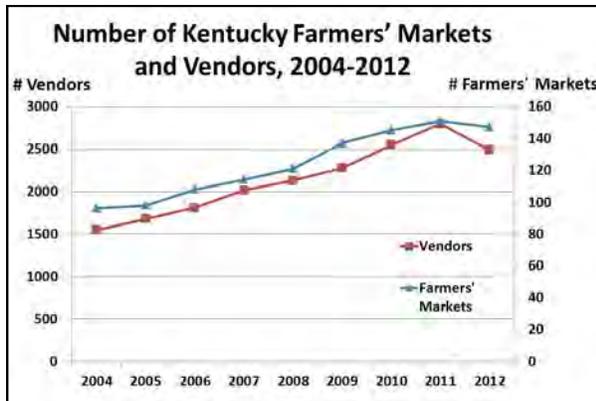
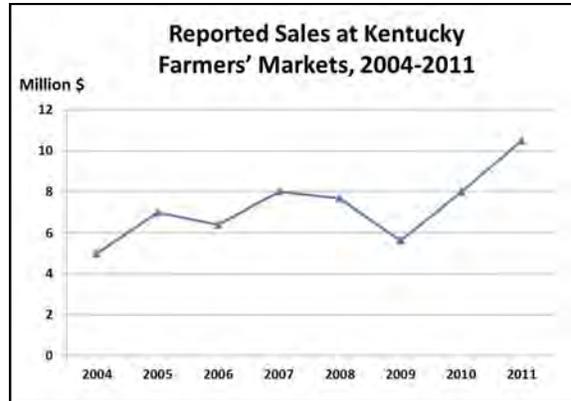


Figure 3. Reported Sales



Note: Data was provided by the Kentucky Department of Agriculture. Only markets that provide reports are included. While this includes the major markets, reported sales numbers are estimated. In 2011, approximately \$10.5 million in sales were reported; however, 31 of the 147 did not provide sales reports. Reported sales for 2012 will not be available until April 2013.

As Figures 2 and 3 above show, significant increases in the number of farmers markets across the state have increased the number of vendors by about 1,000 since 2004, which has driven up reported sales. Reported sales have doubled since 2009 and they are expected to continue growing. Table 2 below displays the 34 product categories that the Kentucky Department of Agriculture tracks. Farmers market managers at registered Kentucky Farmers’ Markets are asked to report what product categories are represented at their farmers markets throughout the season.

Table 2. Product Categories for Kentucky Farmers’ Market Vendors

Fresh Products	Dairy and Meat Products	Other Products	Processed Products
Vegetables	Eggs	Crafts	Baked Goods
Fruit	Cheese	Lotions	Candy
Herbs	Meat—Beef	Soaps	Wine
Cut Flowers	Meat—Pork	Candles	Ready to eat Meals
Mushrooms	Meat—Poultry	Wood Products	Wool Products
Honey	Meat—Lamb	Firewood	Pet Treats
Sorghum	Meat—Goat	Certified Organic	Live Animals
Nursery/greenhouse	Dairy	Christmas tree/wreath	Home processed goods
Hay (straw)	Seafood (fish, shrimp)		

What is Sampling?

In Kentucky, small samples of foods prepared at a farmers market for promotional and educational purposes may be offered free of charge to consumers without obtaining a temporary food service permit from a local health department. A sample is defined by the Kentucky Department for Public Health as “a food product promotion where only a bite-sized portion of a food (or foods) is offered free of charge to demonstrate its characteristics. A whole meal, individual hot dish or whole sandwich, is not recognized as a sample.” There are two broad categories that food samples fall into: (1) Raw or Unprocessed and (2) Cooked or Processed.



Raw or Unprocessed Food Sampling: Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

Raw or unprocessed products are generally fresh fruits and vegetables. Due to quality concerns, many fruit and vegetable samples which require cutting or slicing need to be done on-site immediately prior to consumption. All fruits and vegetables must be rinsed thoroughly in clean, potable water. Rinsing melons in a 200 parts per million chlorine solution prior to slicing is recommended. Fruit and vegetable sample servings must be protected from contamination at all times, including serving to the customer. When preparing samples ahead of time, wrap cut product samples in plastic wrap. Mechanical refrigeration is recommended. Any ice used for cooling must be continuously drained to avoid wrapped items soaking in melted ice water. Specific products to be careful with are melons and tomatoes; they must be stored at 41°F or below once cut. This is because these items have been associated with foodborne illness outbreaks in recent years.

Cooked or Processed Food Sampling: Meats and Value-Added Products

Cooked or processed products include items like: baked goods, jams, jellies, canned goods, meat samples, eggs, etc. All meats must come from inspected and approved sources. Vendors must be able to show proof of the approved source. Meat items may be served directly from a covered grill using sanitary methods, such as toothpicks or tissues. If foods are cooked and held, the meat must be held at 135°F or above. Foods must be protected from environmental contamination and insects at all times. Provide condiments in single service packets, unless the condiment is an item being offered as a sample as well. The best practice is to provide meats in pre-formed patties, or pre-cut portions not requiring on-site preparation.



Non-Food Product Sampling

Often, people want to try soaps, fragrances, and other cosmetic products before purchasing a whole bottle. It is also possible to use sampling events to simply promote your business and engage people in a conversation about the services you provide.

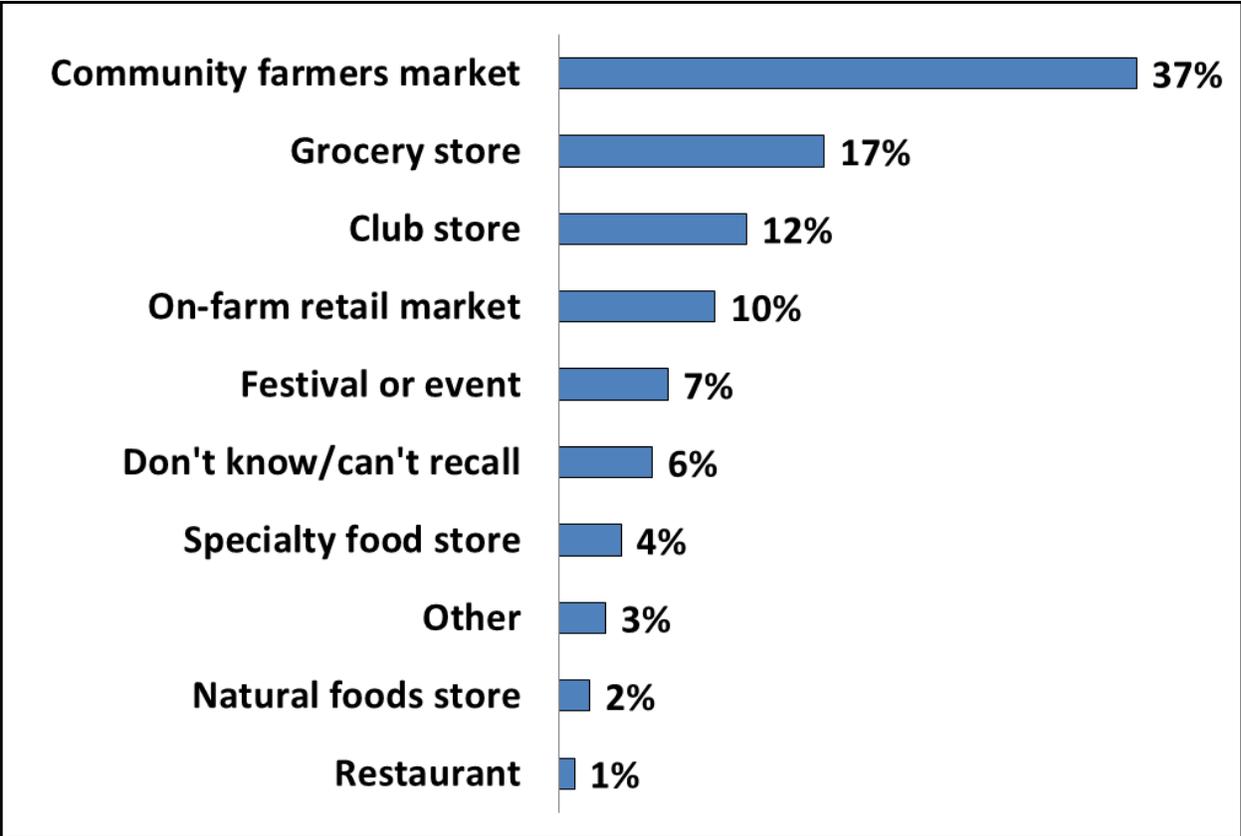
1. Patron Perspectives

“Best Ever” Sampling Event

The survey data set consisted of 3,406 responses from farm market patrons who had some previous food sampling experience somewhere. While not all participants had a previous sampling experience at a farmers market, all participants had some kind of prior food sampling experience. The most common location for the “best ever” sampling experience actually came from the community farmers market, suggesting that many of the market patrons had already had highly impactful sampling experiences at their markets. Others cited a variety of other locations for their “best ever” experiences, these results are shown in Figure 4.

Although we were specifically targeting farmers market patrons, our data shows that these same customers sampled food products at different venues. Later in this guide we discuss sampling food products at other venues—see section 3, “Sampling Venues.”

Figure 4. “Best Ever” Food Product Sampling Venues



Note: N = 3,406. The question asked, “Where did you sample the product?”

Most food consumers have become accustomed to sampling products at many various food retail Locations (Figure 4). Some experiences are positive – but some can be very unappealing. The 2011 Regional Farm Market Sampling Survey started with a series of questions related to farm market patron recall of their best sampling experience ever. The intention was to gain an understanding about where their best sampling experience took place and what characteristics of the experience made the event the “best ever.” How patrons characterize their “best ever” sampling experience helped us to create our Checklist of Best Practices. Table 3 below displays the factors that contributed to respondents classifying the sampling experience as their “best ever.”

The top factor shaping the “best ever” sampling experience was “unexpected great taste.” Consumers often remember previous experiences with favorite or similar products. But, in other cases, consumers lack experience with or awareness about the products being offered. Sampling is a great way showcase your products and also to connect consumers to the taste – an important feature of any food product. **Sampling is highly experiential.** Friendliness of the vendor, presentation and display of the samples, the atmosphere of the market, sampling with friends or family, and interaction with the vendor were all noted to have significant impact on the characterization of a sampling event as being the “best ever.” All of our results are displayed in Table 3 below. These are all factors largely under the control of the vendor. Sampling is an active, rather than passive, aspect of selling. Consumers respond favorably to an active vendor offering samples.



Table 3. Factors Affecting Patrons “Best Ever” Sampling Experiences

Rank	Sampling Attribute	Can't recall	No Impact	Some Impact	Significant Impact
1	Unexpected great taste	6%	6%	20%	67%
2	Friendliness of the vendor	7%	11%	30%	52%
3	Presentation of the samples and display	7%	13%	32%	48%
4	Overall atmosphere of the market	7%	16%	33%	44%
5	Sampling with friends/family	9%	25%	28%	39%
6	Interaction with the vendor	9%	21%	33%	38%
7	Discovery of new ways to prepare a product	11%	33%	25%	32%
8	Discovery of health benefits associated with a product	13%	39%	25%	24%
9	Cooking demonstration	14%	43%	21%	23%
10	Special festival event	14%	42%	21%	22%
11	Offer of other benefits (cash, coupon, gifts, etc)	17%	47%	18%	17%

Note: N = 3,406. The question asked, “What factors particularly contributed to this event being your best ever sampling event?”

1. Patron Perspectives, *continued*

At the Farmers Market

Why do patrons sample at the farmers market? Vendors should keep in mind that market visitors try samples for a variety of reasons. Table 4 highlights these results, including differences by age, urban patrons vs. rural patrons, and if patrons bring kids to the market or not. We hope this information helps determine how sampling can help farmers market vendors sell products.

Table 4. Why Patrons Like to Sample Food Products at the Farmers Market

Rank #	Sampling helps me to...	Age			Urban vs. Rural			Bring Kids to Market			Overall Average Rank*	
		Under 34	Over 34	t-test	Urban	Rural	t-test	No	Yes	t-test		
—average rank displayed—												
1	Decide if I like the taste of something	2.25	2.10	***	2.16	2.08	-	2.10	2.29	***	2.13	a
2	Decide if I will buy a product	2.69	2.35	***	2.43	2.41	-	2.40	2.55	**	2.42	b
3	Learn about new recipes or flavors	3.29	3.29	-	3.32	3.24	-	3.29	3.27	-	3.28	c
4	Have a fun activity or entertainment	3.85	4.31	***	4.14	4.32	***	4.24	4.04	***	4.20	d
5	Support a vendor	4.28	4.28	-	4.29	4.26	-	4.29	4.22	-	4.27	d
6	Interact with a vendor I don't know	4.65	4.68	-	4.66	4.69	-	4.69	4.62	-	4.67	e

Note: N = 3,406. Mean rankings are displayed here. Asterisks representing t-tests indicate significant differences: * = 0.1, ** = 0.05, and *** = 0.01. The question asked respondents to rank these six reasons that they perceive as most important (1) to least important (6) in sampling at the farmers market. Overall average ranked mean within a column, followed by the same letter are not significantly different (Tukey's test HSD P < 0.05).

Our most important overall observation is that farmers market patrons perceive sampling as a way to decide if they like the taste of something and to decide if they will buy the product. Some differences were observed in the relative ranking by various subgroups.

Overall rankings were essentially the same, but the following observations were discernible:

- **Age**—Older consumers placed **more** emphasis on liking the taste and whether to buy and **less** emphasis on entertainment.
- **Urban vs. Rural**—Patrons indicated their residence by city, suburb (urban) or small town, countryside, farm (rural). Urban placed **more** emphasis on entertainment.
- **Bring Kids to Market**—Patrons who bring kids to market placed **more** emphasis on entertainment and **less** on liking the taste and whether to buy.

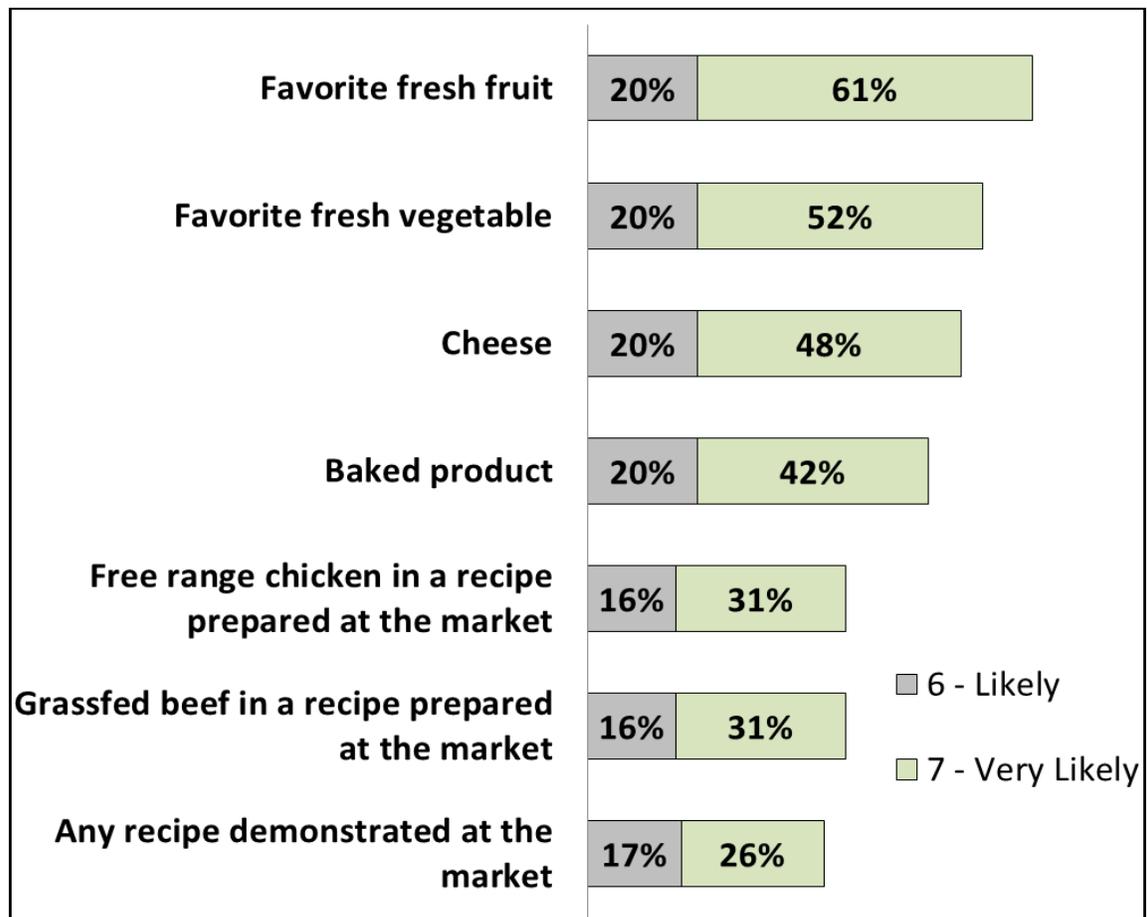
*In this report, we present some results with statistical tests to determine if there are meaningful differences between responses or groups. The t-test and Tukey's test are common statistical methods to measure such differences and are referenced for those that may be interested.

1. Patron Perspectives, *continued*

At the Farmers Market

The top 4 items that people are willing to sample are fresh fruit, fresh vegetables, cheeses, and baked products. It is interesting that traditional items are the top choices respondents chose as products they are “likely to sample.” This implies that “common” products are continually in demand.

Figure 5. General Food Products Patrons are Likely to Sample



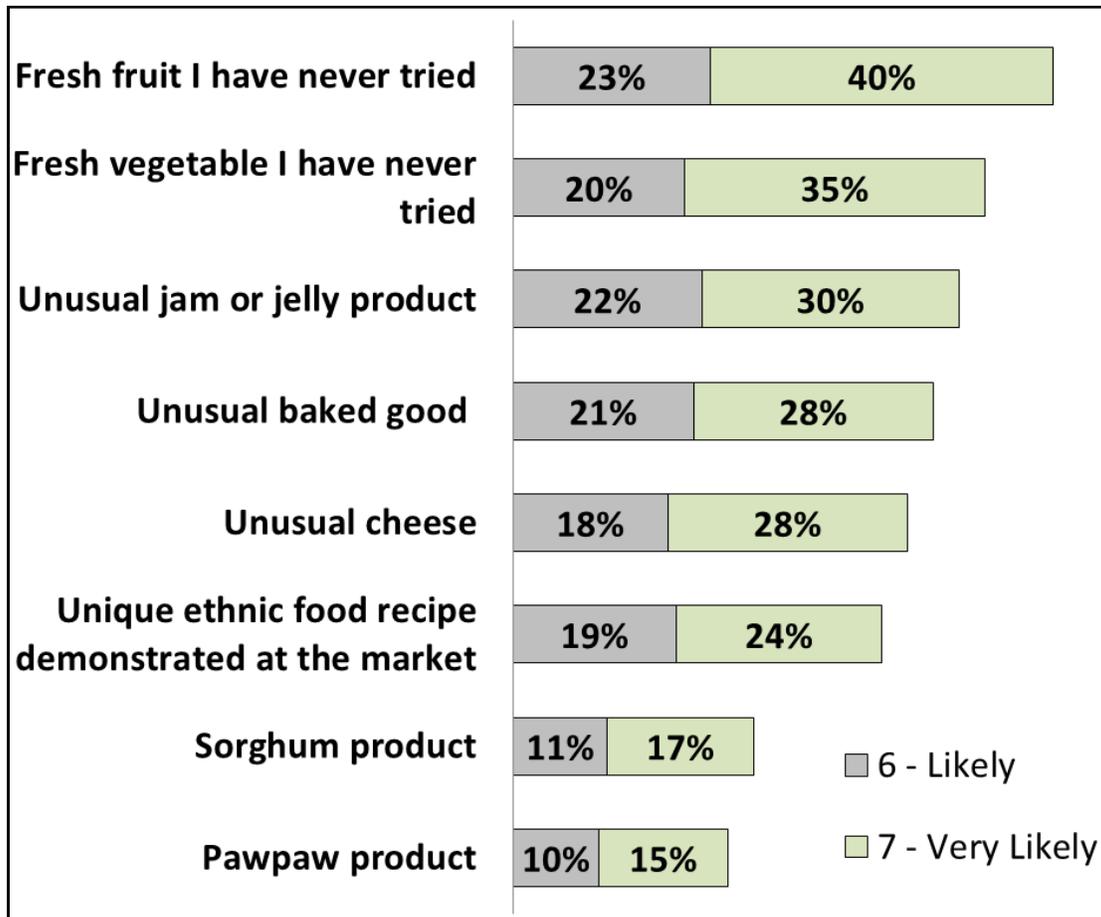
N = 3,406. Likelihood to sample these products rated on 1 = “Not at all likely,” to 7 = “Very likely.” Our question asked, “Which kinds of general products are you likely to sample if they were offered during your farm market visit?”

Less people are “very likely” to sample recipes demonstrated at the farmers market. This shows that people are still interested in trying prepared samples, but not as many people are likely to sample the prepared recipes. Many factors could affect this: ingredients that were used, food allergies, food safety concerns, not being hungry when they arrive to the market, etc.

Do not be afraid to try sampling recipes. See if it works for you!

Unusual items that people are willing to sample are again, fresh fruit, fresh vegetables, and unusual jam or jelly products. Lower percentages in Figure 6 for sorghum and pawpaw products could have to do with availability at local markets and customer exposure to such products. This may have affected the respondent’s ability to rank their likeliness to sample such products (Woods & Yang, 2012). As a vendor, still try sampling these products. You may have to market your products harder to teach people about them and the benefits they will receive from consuming those products.

Figure 6. Unusual Food Products Patrons are Likely to Sample



N = 3,406. Likelihood to sample these products rated on 1 = “Not at all likely” to 7 = “Very likely.” Our question asked, “Which kinds of unusual products are you likely to sample if they were offered during your farm market visit?”



Left: Sorghum syrup production at Kentucky State University. Right: Pawpaw fruit are usually harvested in September.

1. Patron Perspectives, *continued*

At the Farmers Market

What do patrons consider to be the most important barriers to sampling? It is important for vendors to understand the things patrons like, as well as the things they do not like about sampling at a farmers market. Tables 5—8 provide insight on the barriers that farmers market patrons have experienced and remembered. Respondents were encouraged to check all barriers that applied to them. For this set of questions, we used responses from 1,123 participants (about 33% of total) who indicated that they did NOT take a sample at the farmers market. We analyzed the barriers to see differences across demographics and attributes to help us gain an understanding of why certain barriers may be a significant factor for some groups of consumers. We hope this information will help vendors tailor sampling events to the demographics that are likely to be present at the farmers market.

Overall, the data indicates that the top 5 reasons people did not take a sample at the farmers market pertained to the unavailability of samples or the uncertainty of what the sample was. These five reasons were indicated as barriers by at least 25% of our respondents. It is very interesting that “no samples available” was noted as the most frequent barrier; 42.3% of our participants acknowledged this as the top reason for not sampling. A “crowded sampling area” came in as the second most frequently noted barrier. Uncertain taste, uncertain ingredients, and food safety concerns came in as the next three reasons people avoid samples.

Table 5. Patron Perceptions of Barriers to Sampling

Rank	Sampling Barriers	Overall Barrier Frequency	
#			
1	No samples available	42.3%	a
2	Crowded sampling area	35.9%	b
3	Uncertain of taste	27.6%	c
4	Uncertain ingredients	27.3%	c
5	Food safety concerns	26.2%	c
6	Not appearing healthy or nutritious	18.5%	d
7	Samples offered, but vendor ran out	15.4%	de
8	Cannot ingest ingredients-food allergy, diabetes, celiac disease, etc.	11.1%	ef
9	Not worth the price	11.0%	ef
10	Pressure from vendor-uncomfortable with confrontation	10.5%	efg
11	Didn't trust the vendor	8.2%	fgh
12	Others in my household would not like it	5.6%	gh
13	Product not likely to be safe for environment or ethically produced	5.5%	gh
14	Ingredients not grown or prepared to standards (organic, natural, kosher, halal, etc.)	3.9%	h

Note: N = 1,123. Overall barrier frequency within column, followed by the same letter are not significantly different (Tukey's test HSD $P < 0.05$). The question asked, “Check the reasons why you did NOT take a sample at the farmers market (check all that apply).”

The implications of these findings suggest that the most important thing vendors must do is make samples available more frequently. **Samples should be easy to access and experience.** Clear signage indicating what is being sampled and how it is prepared will also be useful. **One way to help people learn how your products are prepared is to use signage.** Sanitation is also vital.



Table 6. Differences in Age Groups about Barriers to Sampling

Rank #	Sampling Barriers	Age Group		
		Under 34	Over 34	t-test
1	No samples available	42.5%	42.3%	-
2	Crowded sampling area	36.4%	35.8%	-
3	Uncertain of taste	27.5%	27.6%	-
4	Uncertain ingredients	23.8%	27.0%	-
5	Food safety concerns	16.1%	29.2%	***
6	Not appearing healthy or nutritious	17.0%	18.9%	-
7	Samples offered, but vendor ran out	17.8%	17.4%	-
8	Cannot ingest ingredients-food allergy, diabetes, celiac disease, etc.	10.9%	11.1%	-
9	Not worth the price	8.0%	11.9%	*
10	Pressure from vendor-uncomfortable with confrontation	13.7%	9.7%	*
11	Didn't trust the vendor	9.7%	7.8%	-
12	Others in my household would not like it	6.8%	5.3%	-
13	Product not likely to be safe for environment or ethically produced	6.4%	5.2%	-
14	Ingredients not grown or prepared to standards (organic, natural, kosher, halal, etc.)	6.4%	3.1%	**

Note: N = 1,123. Asterisks representing t-tests indicate significant differences: * = 0.1, ** = 0.05, and *** = 0.01.

The major barriers to sampling were similar for both age groups. The biggest difference was in the greater level of concern expressed over food safety by older shoppers. Younger shoppers were slightly **more** concerned about pressure from vendors and ingredient standards and **less** concerned about the product's value for the price. This could have to do with the changing economy—food price inflation has risen by about 2.5% per year since 1990 (Leibtag, 2008).

It is notable that the majority of our respondents (876 of 1,123) fell into the “over 34” category.

We compared urban patrons vs. rural patrons to examine differences in their perceived barriers. Respondents indicated their residence by city, suburb (urban) or small town, countryside, or farm (rural). We thought different barriers may exist because rural farmers markets are different from urban farmers markets. Small rural markets often promote stronger consumer-vendor relationships, but this is largely because of farmers market size. Rural shoppers were more likely to note lack of available samples. Not surprisingly, urban shoppers were more concerned about crowded sampling areas.

Table 7. Differences Urban vs. Rural Patrons See as Barriers to Sampling

Rank #	Sampling Barriers	Urban vs. Rural		
		Urban	Rural	t-test
1	No samples available	40.3%	45.9%	*
2	Crowded sampling area	39.3%	30.0%	***
3	Uncertain of taste	28.2%	26.4%	-
4	Uncertain ingredients	26.8%	25.4%	-
5	Food safety concerns	25.2%	28.3%	-
6	Not appearing healthy or nutritious	19.4%	16.8%	-
7	Samples offered, but vendor ran out	16.1%	14.1%	-
8	Cannot ingest ingredients-food allergy, diabetes, celiac disease, etc.	12.6%	8.5%	**
9	Not worth the price	11.4%	10.5%	-
10	Pressure from vendor-uncomfortable with confrontation	10.6%	10.5%	-
11	Didn't trust the vendor	7.7%	9.2%	-
12	Others in my household would not like it	5.3%	6.3%	-
13	Product not likely to be safe for environment or ethically produced	5.8%	4.8%	-
14	Ingredients not grown or prepared to standards (organic, natural, kosher, halal, etc.)	3.6%	4.4%	-

Note: N = 1,123. Asterisks representing t-tests indicate significant differences: * = 0.1, ** = 0.05, and *** = 0.01.



We explored the sampling patrons that particularly enjoy bringing kids to the market. Many market visitors make this a family event and thus have somewhat different expectations related to sampling. Patrons who bring their kids to the farmers market are more tolerant of not having samples available—unless it is obvious that samples were offered but then ran out. They are much more concerned about samples offered with uncertain ingredients or products that are deemed less safe for the environment or unethically produced.

Table 8. Patrons That Bring Kids Find Different Barriers

Rank	Sampling Barriers	Bring Kids to Market		
		No	Yes	t-test
1	No samples available	43.3%	35.2%	*
2	Crowded sampling area	35.2%	41.0%	-
3	Uncertain of taste	27.7%	26.6%	-
4	Uncertain ingredients	25.2%	34.5%	**
5	Food safety concerns	29.5%	18.8%	-
6	Not appearing healthy or nutritious	26.3%	26.6%	-
7	Samples offered, but vendor ran out	14.7%	20.1%	*
8	Cannot ingest ingredients-food allergy, diabetes, celiac disease, etc.	11.2%	10.0%	-
9	Not worth the price	11.4%	8.6%	-
10	Pressure from vendor-uncomfortable with confrontation	10.5%	10.7%	-
11	Didn't trust the vendor	8.4%	7.1%	-
12	Others in my household would not like it	5.8%	4.3%	-
13	Product not likely to be safe for environment or ethically produced	5.0%	8.6%	*
14	Ingredients not grown or prepared to standards (organic, natural, kosher, halal, etc.)	4.1%	2.1%	-

Note: N = 1,123. Asterisks representing t-tests indicate significant differences: * = 0.1, ** = 0.05, and *** = 0.01.



1. Patron Perspectives, *continued*

At the Farmers Market

Characteristics of the Most Recent Farmers Market Sampling Event

During this set of questions, we asked respondents who were able to recall their most recent farm market sampling event to tell us about it. We wanted to explore the circumstances associated with sampling events that people could clearly remember and classify after the fact. There were 1,133 (33%) individuals able to clearly recall a specific sampling event at a farmers market. Their sampling experiences are evaluated in this section. Products sampled by these individuals are summarized in Table 9.

Table 9. Categories Most Often Sampled

Product Category	Frequency
Fresh fruit	28%
Dairy product	18%
Baked good	14%
Fresh vegetable	11%
Fruit or vegetable prepared in a recipe	10%
Prepared meat	5%
Beverage	3%
Meat prepared in a recipe	2%
Other	9%

Note: N = 1,133. Our question asked, “Help us classify the product -select the category most closely representing what you sampled.”



Table 10. Familiarity with Product Sampled

How would you classify your relationship to the product?	Frequency
Tried it (or something like it before), liked it	54%
Never tried it before, but wanted to try it (or something like it)	30%
Never tried it before, never heard of it before	13%
Tried it (or something like it) before, didn't like it	4%

Note: N = 1,133. The question asked, “How would you classify your relationship to the product?”

The study suggests that more than half of the patrons (54%) recalled their last sampling event where they tried something with which they were already familiar (Table 10). People seem particularly attracted to try something they already know and like. Another 43% of our respondents were venturing into unfamiliar territory—sampling something new and unusual. Typically vendors will have patrons trying samples that fall into each of these categories and need to be prepared to respond to a range of possible shopper experiences with the vendor’s product.

The degree of customer desire to sample products comes from their own experience and curiosity, availability and access to samples, sample presentation, and vendor friendliness. Table 11 shows our results based on the “significant impact” indicator—the indication that this action impacts how customers perceive food sampling at a farmers market. The patron perspectives revealed in this table illustrate that **it is important to make sure that your samples are presented nicely, easy to access, and the person offering samples is friendly.**

Table 11. Reasons People Tried a Sample

Rank	Reason to Try a Sample	Can't recall	No Impact	Some Impact	Significant Impact	
1	Friendliness of the vendor	1%	5%	19%	72%	a
2	Ease of accessing samples	2%	6%	19%	70%	a
3	Presentation of the samples and display	1%	7%	23%	67%	a
4	Curiosity about an unknown product	2%	12%	18%	54%	b
5	Familiarity with the product	3%	15%	25%	51%	b
6	Signage	5%	22%	28%	26%	c
7	Cooking demonstration	5%	21%	13%	23%	c
8	Recipe cards	6%	28%	14%	16%	d
9	Offer of other benefits (cash, coupon, gifts, etc)	6%	29%	10%	16%	d
10	Pressure from friends/family	7%	42%	9%	11%	d

Note: N = 1,133. Mean responses are compared for “significant impact.” Values followed by the same letter are not statistically different. (Tukey’s test HSD P < 0.05). For this question we wanted respondents to “rate the factors associated with this product to the best of your memory. What encouraged/impacted you to try the sample?” We asked respondents to rate each factor.



People want to try your products! Reasons concerning curiosity and familiarity in Table 11 reinforce the idea that consumers like to try both common and uncommon products. The study suggests that consumers are interested in sampling any food products and it also suggests that vendors will reap economic benefits from providing samples.

So for the vendor, sampling becomes an experiential part of marketing products. This fits alongside the notion that farmers market patrons are interested in the experience of connecting with producers and enjoying the social aspect of the farmers market. They are also often more concerned about how their food is produced, compared to other groups of Kentucky’s citizens.

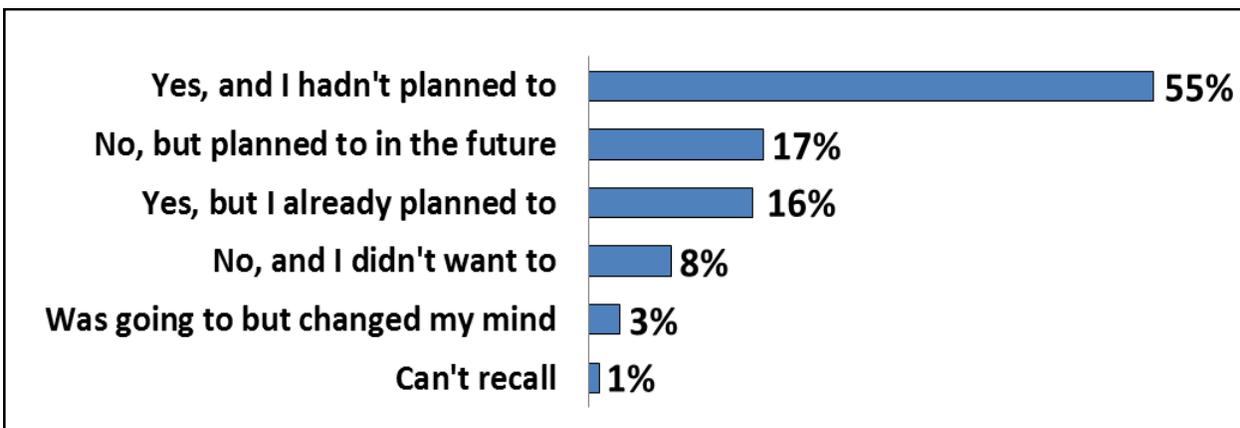
2. Benefits of Sampling

For the Farmers Market Vendor

Vendors need to see clear benefits to providing samples. This section examines the purchase and post-purchase responses of the individuals that could clearly recall their last sampling event at a farmers market.

The first response we explored was purchase behavior after trying the sample. More than half of the respondents (55%) purchased the product that they sampled that day and were not planning to (Figure 7). Overall, 72% of respondents recorded a positive implication for sales that day and in the future. Another 16% of the respondents noted that they were already planning to purchase the product. These types of shoppers may purchase anyway, but are provided with the additional value of the experience. It's difficult to confirm with this data, but they may possibly increase the amount of their intended purchase following a good sampling experience.

Figure 7. Frequency of Product Purchasing



Note: N = 1,132. The question simply asked, "Did you buy the product that day?"





Purchase responses to recent sampling experiences across age, shopper residence, and whether they shopped with kids showed some interesting results (Table 12). Impulse buying (purchased but hadn't planned to) was actually higher in shoppers over 34 and among those that brought kids to market. No difference was observed in response between urban and rural consumers. Younger, urban, and shoppers not bringing kids were more likely to express intent to buy in the future.

Table 12. Sampling Purchase Response by Age, Residence, and Kid Involvement

Rank #	Did you buy the sampled product?	Age			Urban vs. Rural			Bring Kids to Market			Overall Average Rank
		Under 34	Over 34	t-test	Urban	Rural	t-test	No	Yes	t-test	
—average rank displayed—											
1	Yes, and I hadn't planned to	0.48	0.56	*	0.54	0.54	-	0.50	0.58	***	0.55
2	No, but planned to in the future	0.22	0.15	**	0.18	0.14	**	0.20	0.14	***	0.17
3	Yes, but I already planned to	0.16	0.15	-	0.13	0.19	**	0.14	0.17	*	0.16
4	No, and I didn't want to	0.07	0.08	-	0.08	0.07	-	0.10	0.05	***	0.08
5	Was going to, but changed my mind	0.04	0.02	*	0.03	0.02	-	0.02	0.03	-	0.03

Note: N = 1,132. Mean rankings are displayed here. Asterisks representing t-tests indicate significant differences: * = 0.1, ** = 0.05, and *** = 0.01. The question asked respondents to classify their action response to sampling the product.

We also asked respondents to rank how they responded to different situations that may have occurred during their market visit. This information is very important for vendors to think about. Table 12 below ranks 10 post-sampling actions. The results suggest significant direct and indirect benefits for the vendors offering samples.

The most frequently noted response to sampling was “purchase the product from the vendor” (45% indicating “Yes, significantly” and 74% at least purchasing something). The benefits extend beyond the direct purchase response. Word-of-mouth promotion is critical in retail markets. Enthusiastic samplers buy product but also recommend the product and vendor to friends. They are likely to purchase additional products from the vendor. These top five actions showed at least 1 in 5 individuals noting a significant positive response. Not every sampler demonstrates the response vendors are looking for, but the fact that so many noted significant positive response both purchasing and recommending the product should encourage vendors to make samples available where possible.

Table 13. Most Frequently Identified Action Responses

Rank	Action Response	Don't Know	No	Yes, to a small extent	Yes, significantly
1	Purchase the product from the vendor	2%	24%	29%	45%
2	Recommend the product to a friend	2%	18%	42%	38%
3	Recommend the vendor to a friend	3%	23%	40%	34%
4	Visit the sample vendor at a later visit to the market	2%	36%	40%	22%
5	Purchase other products from the vendor	2%	39%	39%	20%
6	Increase your purchases at the market beyond what you initially intended before sampling	2%	39%	40%	19%
7	Try a new recipe at home	7%	50%	25%	18%
8	Visit the market more frequently	2%	45%	37%	16%
9	Buy more of this product from other stores in the future	5%	42%	38%	15%
10	Purchase complementary products from another vendor at the same market	5%	60%	26%	9%

Note: N = 1,133. Our question was posed as, “As a result of your sampling experience, did you...”

Loyalty is important to vendors. Vendors are looking to draw customers back, week after week, to purchase their products. From this data, sampling appears to accomplish the goals that vendors usually have for promoting repeat purchases. This goal of creating repeat purchasing also allows vendors to tell customers about their other products, and the familiarity gained from a sampling experience is very important in creating these direct marketing relationships.



3. Sampling Venues

Sampling at the Farmers Market

This guide was intended to help the farmers market vendor understand new ideas and ways to offer sample food products at their farmers market booth. However, it is important to remember that the farmers market is not the only venue available. Over the next few pages, we describe ideas for sampling at farmers markets and other venues. We also provide “Successful Samplers” stories to illustrate that sampling these products is possible. We hope these are helpful, encouraging, and provide insight into the creativity and inventiveness of Kentucky’s farmers and food producers.

Successful Samplers: Ayres Family Orchard

Larry Ayres, from Ayres Family Orchard in Owenton, Kentucky, provides samples of their jams and jellies, and sometimes whole apples. Linda Winkle prepares all of the products for Ayres Family Orchard and is a licensed Home-based Microprocessor. Larry says, “We wanted to share the good tasting jams and jellies that we preserve from our own harvests.” Samples are prepared before the farmers market in two ounce plastic cups with lids and kept cool. Linda is happy that people are able to taste the product and know what they are getting. They both say that sampling does help sell their products, especially since many people don’t come to the market thinking that they will buy a jar of jam.



Successful Samplers: Henkle’s Herbs and Heirlooms

Mark and Velvet Henkle have been sampling their products for 3 years at the Lexington Farmers’ Market. They sample homemade salsa from their freshly grown tomatoes, peppers, onions and herbs as well as Velvet’s chicken salad, which helps promote her catering business. The Henkles started sampling to help people learn different ways to use their products. They noticed that a lot of people didn’t realize how easy it was to make something delicious from their products. But after sampling, customers wanted to buy the homemade salsas. So, they became Home-Based Processors and now sell their products. Mark mentioned that processing their salsas helps them use tomatoes and peppers that would not be able to sell at the farmers market. Products that are misshapen, bruised, and off-size are not able to be sold for price premiums, so using them prevents them from throwing away those number-2 grade products. Velvet likes to serve the samples to customers, and they usually serve from a bigger bowl into small plastic cups.

Boone County Farmers Market—Agents’ program, “A Taste of the Market”

Individual vendors at the Boone County Farmers Market do not do much sampling due to the amount of time and extra help that is needed to ensure a good sampling event. Seeing this need, Family and Consumer Science Agent, Diane Mason, and Agriculture Technician and Farmers Market Manager, Coy Wilson, have created a program they call “A Taste of the Market.” Both have received their Certificate of Sampling from the Kentucky Department of Agriculture. Once a month they hold this program from 10 a.m. until 1 p.m. During each program, they gather products from member vendors and sample them at a central location in the market. They are able to talk to customers about the products and direct people to the booth where they will find those products. Member vendors really appreciate that the Extension staff are able to provide this service for them. It helps with product sales and reduces the workload of employees behind the counter.



Successful Samplers: Sweet Virginia’s Homemade Treats

Sweet Virginia’s Homemade Treats creates homemade jams, relishes, pickles, breads, pies, cakes, and other goodies. Located in Warsaw, Kentucky, they participate in the Boone County Farmers Market on Saturdays. They also grow much of what they process into canned goods. Virginia and Elsie Ewbank are certified samplers, but with all of their products to sell on market days, it is hard to provide customers with a good sampling experience. They really appreciate the Boone County Extension staff setting up a sampling space, and taking care of sampling. They have found that providing samples has helped their business, and they often see people who have tried something in the past, come back and try something different without sampling it first. Elsie says, “We are glad people can taste our products, because they are more expensive and people want to know they are getting something very good.” At other venues, primarily indoors, they will sample their jams, relishes, and herb rubs in two ounce sample cups with small spoons. They never sample baked goods because letting those goods sit out in the open air takes away from the intended flavors and textures.



Successful Samplers: Lakeview Farms

Lakeview Farm, located in Hebron, Kentucky produces and sells fresh produce at the Boone County Farmers Market. Their booth is filled with apples, blackberries, red and white potatoes, cucumbers, zucchini, squash, tomatoes, watermelons, and cantaloupes. They are not certified samplers, so they like that the Extension agents are able to provide that service for them. They have seen that often customers who sampled a product came by and bought it from them. Since the program began, they have provided apples and blackberries for sampling. Apple sales skyrocketed as a result of “A Taste of the Market.” Boone County Extension’s Diane Mason said, “That little boy just sampled the apple and ran right over to buy some!”



Successful Samplers: Catalpa Acres Farm

Stephanie and Scott Kimberlin of Catalpa Acres Farm in Walton, Kentucky produce all natural meats, cheeses, fresh produce, and canned goods. They often provide samples of cheese, sausage, and pickles to customers at the Boone County Farmers Market. Stephanie says that the Kentucky Department of Agriculture’s sampling certification program is, “quick, and easy, but I never did any sampling myself because it takes away from my ability to sell products. I need an extra person here to do the sampling. It is great that the Extension staff will do it once a month for us.” The “A Taste of the Market” program definitely sells products for the Kimberlins; it especially helps sell the products that are being sampled on a given day.

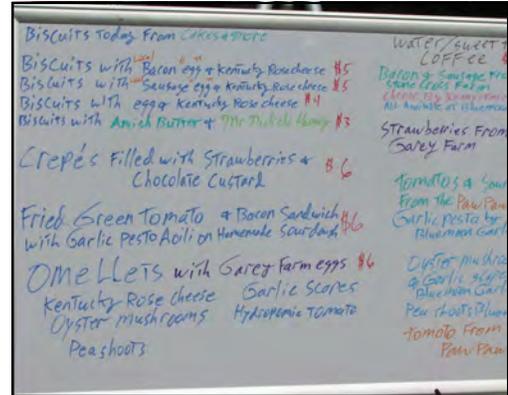


The **Farmers’ Fair** in Covington, Kentucky is an annual summer celebration of local food, farmers and sustainable living. The event is organized as a street fair, a farmers market, and a fundraiser, all focused on building relationships from the farm to the table. At a recent fair, more than 50 vendors were engaging customers, sampling products, and conducting cooking demonstrations.



Cooking Demonstrations and Partnerships with Chefs

Cooking demonstrations are often successful events at farmers markets, where a chef is invited to cook seasonal produce, meats and other products, and offer samples to market patrons. These events are often festive, and they provide an educational outlet for consumers to learn new ways to prepare products they can purchase right there at the farmers market. Featuring products, preparing them on site, and the aroma added to the farmers market will contribute to the experiential dimension of the farmers market and could support increased sales.



Above: Culinary Arts students from Sullivan University prepare food for experiential service-learning events at the Lexington Farmers' Market. Pairing their cooking skills with fresh produce from vendors, they offer samples or fully prepared meals. Right, above and below: Menu from a morning at a farmers market; producers are mentioned where their products are being used. This is a great way to create farmer and chef partnerships.



Successful Samplers: Green City Market Chef Tastings

Green City Market supports small family farms and promotes a healthier society through education and appreciation for local, fresh, sustainably-raised products. The market offers Chef Tastings from Chicago's finest chefs who support the market. Twice a week during the market season, these chefs demonstrate how to prepare meals using locally produced, seasonal ingredients from farmers market vendors.



3. Sampling Venues, *continued*

Sampling at Retail Stores

Lexington is home to a food consumer cooperative grocery store, the Good Foods Market and Café. It has been part of Lexington for 40 years now, and has changed forms and locations several times, but has always stayed true to providing good food from local farmers to the Lexington community. Once a month, they host a producer sampling event that draws many customers and fosters a community feel.

Sampling Saturday at the Good Foods Market and Café

Sampling Saturday began 3 years ago, and is a free event where customers are invited to meet the local producers and sample their unique products from 11am –2pm, the first Saturday of each month. The event is a great way for local producers to connect with customers and co-op



owners. Four to five producers participate in each Sampling Saturday; each is set up as close to their product on the shelves as possible. Marketing manager Danielle Dove says, “We absolutely know that sampling sells product. Our customers and owners love to sample new products and meet the folks who make them. Sampling Saturday is fun and a great way to showcase the local products we have.”

Successful Samplers: Screamin’ Mimi’s Hot Sauces

Screamin’ Mimi’s sauces will make you scream! They are hot and tangy, and will certainly wake up your taste buds. Donna Madden of Screamin’ Mimi’s has been producing hot salsas, and a variety of sauces, hot and not, for 25 years. She uses great-grandma’s recipe that has been with the family for at least four generations. She has wholesale accounts in 40 different states, and does quite a bit of retail business through her website. Donna does sampling events at the Good Foods Market and Café three to four times a year; she also participates in sampling events at Liquor Barns around Lexington, Kentucky. She said that, “sampling is fun for me, I like to show people my products and I hope they enjoy them as much as my family does.”





Successful Samplers: Berries on Bryan Station

Erik Walles and his son Grant have recently sold their and pickled okra to the Good Foods Market and Café. Pickled okra is an interesting product, and sampling gives customers the opportunity to try it before purchasing a whole jar of a product that they have never tried. Erik also views the sampling as a “great way to get my pickled okra product into people’s minds and it also lets people get to know me, the producer, and while I have a captive audience, I’ll tell them about all the health benefits of my okra.” Erik and Grant sold a good amount of product during their time at the Good Foods Market and Café. The pickled okra is also available at several restaurants surrounding Lexington.

Successful Samplers: Marlowe Granola

Sandra Marlowe has been making granola for her family since 1977. She began making the granola to satisfy her own requirements of tasty ingredients that are nutritious, low in sugar and fat, and contain no fillers. Since 2010, Sandra has been making the family recipe in a commercial kitchen, but she still uses the high quality, healthy ingredients that produce the outstanding “small-batch” granola. Sandra does sampling events, and usually provides customers with two sample cups: one full of granola, and one full of yogurt. This way, she explains, people can taste it the way they will probably consume it. The granola is available in two varieties, “fruit and nut,” and “no fruit and no nut.” It is sold at a few locations in Lexington, Kentucky, and through Marlowe Granola’s website.





Successful Samplers: Sanders and Company First Fresh Olive Oil

Bill Sanders was the first person customers met upon coming into the Good Foods Market and Café on Sampling Saturday. He asked every one of them, “Would you like to try my award-winning olive oil?” Pretty catchy, huh? Bill does demos all over the United States and he usually sets up a table with two olive oils. One is his, First Fresh Extra Virgin Olive Oil, prepared with California-grown olives, and the other is a competitive brand. He likes customers to be able to compare his fresh olive oil with other brands. Sanders knows that consumers will be able to taste the freshness of his olive oil by tasting it on bread, and just sampling it as a “fruit juice.” He provides recipes, meal ideas, and wine pairings on his website. He has been involved in the olive oil industry for many years; First Fresh was just launched in March 2012— Bill’s vision of providing affordable, fresh olive oil has finally come true.

Successful Samplers: Steve’s Ready to Dip Beer Cheeses

Steve’s Ready to Dip Beer Cheeses provides a wide variety of cheese dips and spreads, all from original recipes. Steve has been selling his dips and spreads since 2009, and he, and a few of his friends, often do sampling events in the Central Kentucky area. The cheese spreads are sold in Liquor Barns, at the Good Foods Market and Café, at several wineries in the region, and through the Kentucky Proud store online. Nancy Trevino is one of Steve’s samplers, and she mentioned that the location she is given to sample products in the store plays an important role in how much product she sells during a sampling event. Being right next to the cheese case is her favorite spot, because she is able to reach over and pick up any of the products and hand them straight to the customer. She said, “this way, they don’t forget to pick up the beer cheese when they get to that part of the store.” All of the cheeses are produced in the commercial kitchen at the Jessamine County Extension Office. Nancy said, “On average, we make at least 3 different dips each day. We make a lot of Wine Cheese Spread; it is our number 1 seller.” All eight spreads they produce are: Blackened Cajun Beer Cheese, Wine Cheese Spread, Fresh Garden Cheese Spread, Pimiento Cheese Dip, Salsa Cheese Spread, Kentucky Bourbon Beer Cheese, Smokey Bacon Spice Beer Cheese, and Jalapeno Beer Cheese.



3. Sampling Venues, *continued*

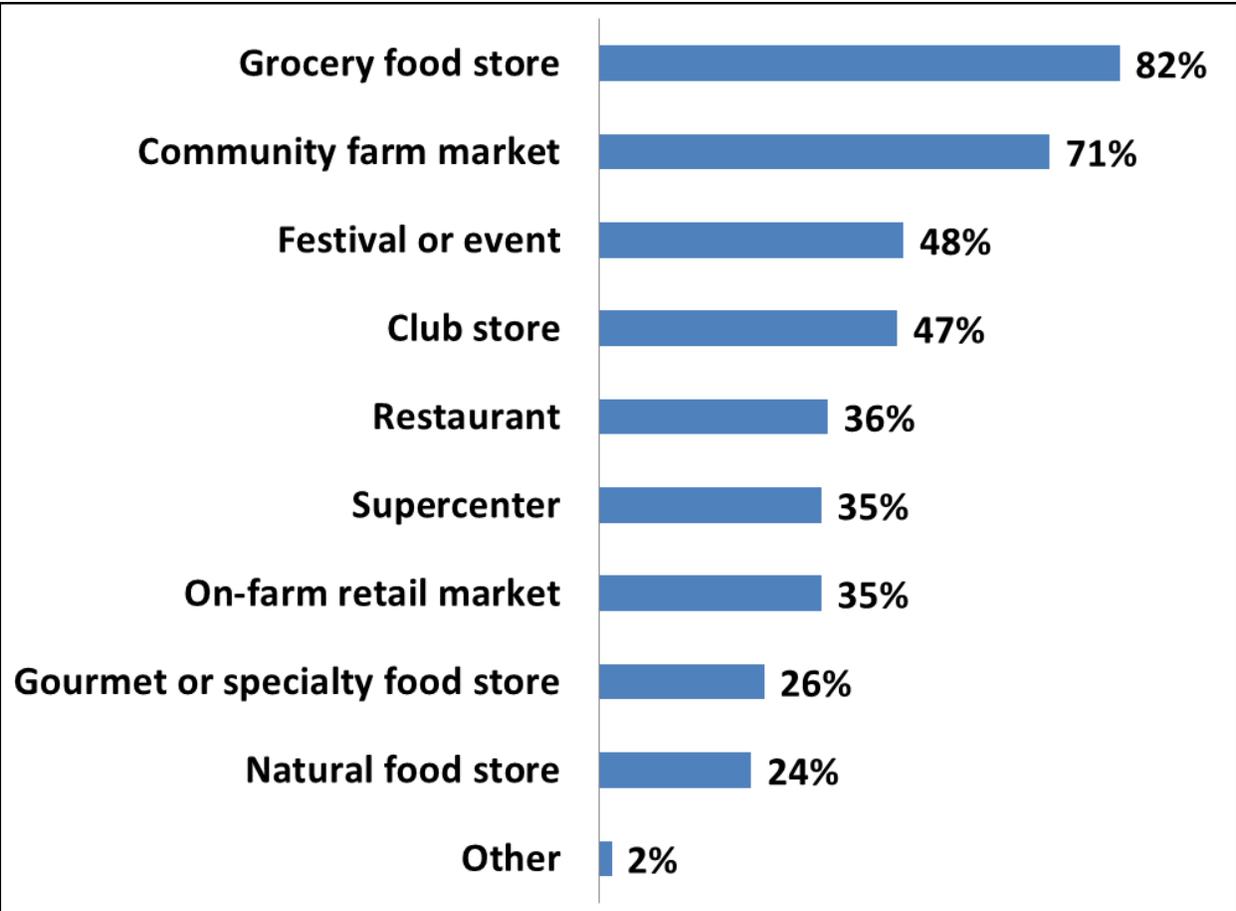
Sampling in Other Settings

Farmers many have opportunities to offer samples in a variety of other food retail venues. It’s clear from the respondents that they regularly encounter samples in these other places (Figure 8).

The widespread use of sampling as part of food marketing highlights the importance of making it available and doing it right at the farmers market.

We asked respondents to indicate all the places where they have sampled some kind of food product. It is interesting to see how many different places provide food samples to customers. Some other interesting places that respondents noted that they have sampled food products: museum, Pampered Chef party, wine tasting event, flea market, sidewalk vendor, bakery, roadside farm stand. While these are interesting venues, vendors need to be up to health and food code standards and have the correct type of insurance coverage.

Figure 8. Other Places Farmers Market Patrons Sampled Food Products



Note: N = 3,406. This question asked patrons to “indicate all the places where you have sampled some kind of food product within the last 12 months.” Patrons were encouraged to check all that apply.

3. Sampling Venues, *continued*

Sampling Non-Food Products

Non-Food Product Sampling is an opportunity for small businesses to reach out to clientele and market their products and services. Try sampling non-food products at farmers markets and retail stores.



Successful Samplers: The Butter Factory

Solanke Bomani does not sell a food product, but she loves to participate in Sampling Saturday events at the Good Foods Market and Café. She participates almost every month and has been doing so for 7 years. She knows that sampling sells her products, and she really enjoys meeting people and sharing her story and product information with customers. All of her products, body butters and body washes, are made by hand from a premium grade-A shea butter. She exclusively purchases the “best shea butter” in the world, from the Wuunisug Shea Butter Group in Tolon, Ghana. This exclusive relationship lets Solanke and her customers know that their money is going straight to the people that produce the shea butter; there is no middle person or organization that gets a portion of the money. Solanke will continue to attend sampling events and promote her product one hand wash at a time.



Successful Samplers: The Wholesome Chef

Entrepreneur and foodie Carolyn Gilles has created The Wholesome Chef, Lexington’s Premier Healthy Teaching Kitchen. It is a cooking school focusing on teaching the connections between food, health and improving your quality of life. Since her main goal is to get people excited about cooking classes and consuming local food products, during a sampling event she prepares a dish that is easy to create at the event, and easy to sample. She wants to be able to show people what she started with, the process she completed to make it, and finally, the product that people can sample. Carolyn said, “Sampling and tabling events help me tell people why they need me.” She hopes to do more events in the future and to continue promoting the classes she teaches to a group of healthy-minded people.

4. Tips for Sampling Correctly

Kentucky Guidelines

It is important to note that **the vendor offering samples assumes all liability**. Not only do you want to share the great taste of your products with customers, you also want to ensure that they are as safe as possible.

Sampling Certification

All vendors who offer samples in Kentucky must complete an application for a Sampling Certificate from the Kentucky Department of Agriculture. This certificate must be on display at the market when samples are being offered. All persons (producers, employees, family members, etc.) who will be offering samples must complete their own Sampling Application and have an approved Sampling Certificate with their name on it. There are two types of Sampling Certificates: Cooked or Processed, or All Samples. Food sampling guidelines and procedures information are included within the Kentucky Farmers' Market Manual, which is available from the Kentucky Department of Agriculture or the Kentucky Department of Public Health.



Insurance

There are two types of insurance purchased by farmers markets and/or farmers market vendors—overall liability (slip and fall) and product liability. Insurance is frequently a large expense. Markets and vendors are encouraged to fully understand the policy they are purchasing and shop around for the best coverage and rates. The kind of policy you should purchase and how much coverage you need should be discussed with an insurance professional. Below is a basic description of the two types.

Liability insurance covers the farmers market for accidents that may occur at the market during business hours, such as customer falls and injuries. These are also known as “slip and fall” policies. Because vendors themselves could get injured while at the market, markets may include a “hold harmless” clause as part of the market rules in which the vendors agree not to hold the market liable for injuries and damage that they might incur. This type of policy does not cover illness that may result from spoiled products.

Product liability policies cover the individual vendors for liability from the products they have sold. Producers who sell value-added products and do sampling events may want to purchase this type of insurance. Policy cost is usually based on gross sales. Most companies have a minimum policy that reflects higher gross sales than most farmers market vendors enjoy. Your farm policy may or may not cover you—check with your insurance professional. To help protect themselves from liability claims, value-added product producers should carefully follow the correct procedures and keep meticulous records on the steps and safety practices used in every batch of product they make.

4. Tips for Sampling Correctly, *continued*

Good Hygiene

Practice Good Personal Hygiene When Sampling

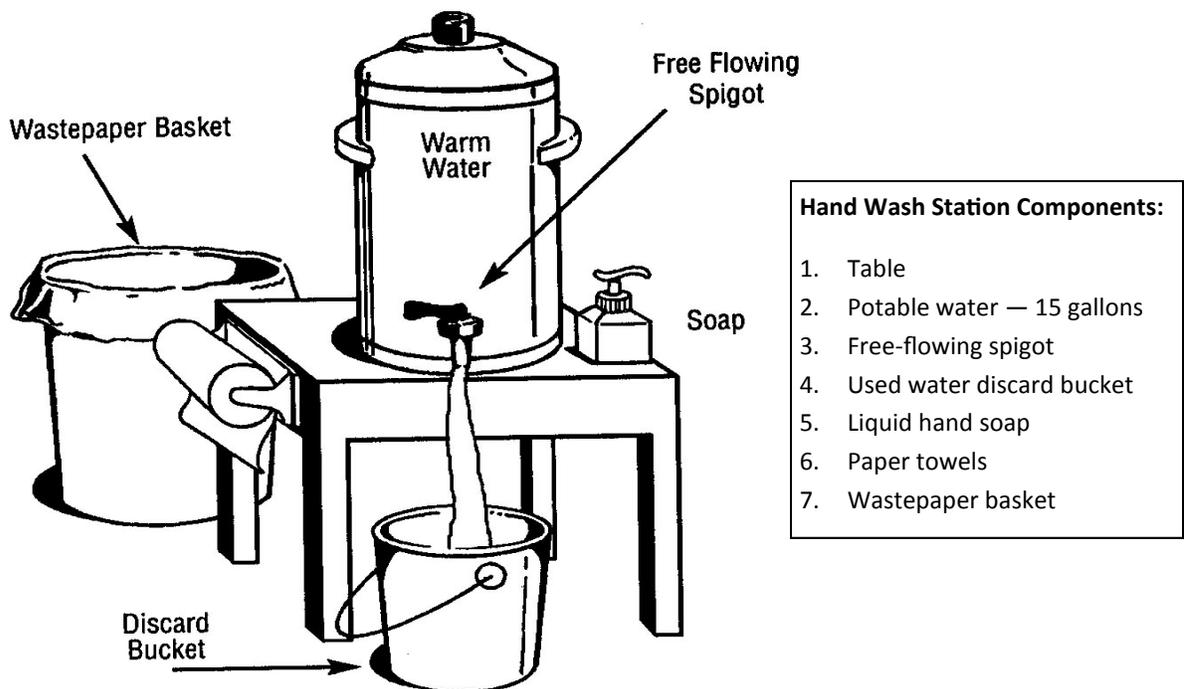
Hands must be washed properly and frequently when preparing and distributing food samples. Avoid bare hand contact with food samples. Food employees should have clean outer garments and wear effective hair restraints (ex., hair net or ball cap). All food must be stored at least six inches off of the ground. Keep garbage and trash containers covered, and empty them often. It is recommended that each vendor supplying samples provide a small garbage can for use by customers to discard the sampling containers or utensils. Also, ensure that food transportation is in clean and sanitary vehicles.

Wash Hands Properly

Hands must be washed after smoking, eating, drinking, using the restroom, handling money, or anytime contamination occurs. Using single service gloves does not substitute for hand washing. Also, when single service gloves are used, change the gloves often to prevent soiled gloves from cross-contaminating samples. Remember to wash your hands each time you change gloves, and never reuse gloves. To properly wash hands: Wet hands with potable warm water. Apply soap and work into a lather by briskly rubbing hands together. Rub hands together for 20 seconds; clean under the nails and between fingers. Rinse under free flowing water. Dry your hands with a disposable paper towel. Sanitizer is not a substitute for soap and water.

For more information on proper hygiene, please refer to the Kentucky Farmers' Market Manual.

Figure 9. Example of a Hand Wash Station





Successful Samplers: Hometown Creamery

Mark and Tracy Curtsinger of Hometown Creamery, located in Baghdad, Kentucky recently began making and selling homemade gourmet cheeses crafted on their farm. Their cheeses are made with Guernsey milk, which provides an extra special flavor and richness (they are the only cheese maker in the Commonwealth who uses Guernsey milk). Tracy often samples her spreadable cheeses, because they are easy to share. She prepares her samples by breaking a cracker into a sampling cup, and puts a dab of cheese on it. This way, customers get to experience the cheese the way they will probably be consuming it. Tracy started sampling because customers wondered what her fresh cheeses taste like. She has many of her own specialty cheese recipes, and wants customers to be able to try them before buying. She likes being able to provide samples and letting people try her products, because often the cheese names are unfamiliar, they have never tried spreadable cheese, and people view it as more costly. Sales have definitely increased since they began sampling about a year ago. Sampling lets people know that they have good products, and it has even encouraged customers to try different products. Tracy says, "It is hard to do though, when the market is in full swing and we both are dealing with customers. We almost need another person to be here, doing the sampling for us."



Tracy has a very good **hand wash station** and **three-compartment wash-rinse-sanitize station** set-up at her farmers market booth each time she does sampling.

Note: paper towels and the wastepaper basket were located on another table.

4. Tips for Sampling Correctly, *continued*

Necessary Materials and Equipment

Sampling correctly is VERY important!

On page 38, we covered the sampling guidelines for Kentucky Farmers' Market vendors. Even after reading over the guidelines, it is a good idea to consult your state Department of Agriculture and your County Health Department—just to make sure that you are providing samples correctly and you have the required insurance for this activity within your state. Your farmers market manager may have this information; it is a good idea to consult the manager before providing samples at the farmers market.



Here is a basic list of useful utensils and equipment necessary for providing samples at an event.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tent, if market is not under cover | <input type="checkbox"/> Trays for samples |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Potable water – at least 15 gallons | <input type="checkbox"/> Sanitary wipes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> An adequate supply of ice | <input type="checkbox"/> Paper towels (minimum of two rolls) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Two coolers to use to store ice | <input type="checkbox"/> Individual serving cups or plates |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hand wash station set-up | <input type="checkbox"/> Disposable forks/spoons |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hand soap | <input type="checkbox"/> Toothpicks |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Three-compartment wash, rinse, and sanitize station set-up | <input type="checkbox"/> Trash cans – one for you and one for samplers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dish soap | <input type="checkbox"/> Trash bags |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sanitizer tablets or unscented household bleach | <input type="checkbox"/> Plastic container with tight-fitting lid to protect utensils from contamination |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hair nets or caps | <input type="checkbox"/> Knives, large and paring size |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Food service gloves | <input type="checkbox"/> Tongs (several sets) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aprons and hats for servers | <input type="checkbox"/> Bowls (large) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grill, hot plate, skillet | <input type="checkbox"/> Spoons and Forks (large) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Extension cord | <input type="checkbox"/> Cutting boards |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Thermometer (high and low) | <input type="checkbox"/> Tape |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hot pads or pot holders | <input type="checkbox"/> Aluminum foil |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Two tables | <input type="checkbox"/> Plastic wrap |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Table cloths | <input type="checkbox"/> Copies of your recipes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Netted table tents | <input type="checkbox"/> Business cards to hand out |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Road or yard signs explaining the event |

4. Tips for Sampling Correctly, *continued*

Staffing

Throughout the process of interviewing vendors who provide samples across Kentucky, we found that many vendors simply do not have the time to provide samples while they are also trying to sell their products. Here are a few ideas of how to deal with the limited time and space during your farmers market.



Kentucky Champion Food Volunteers

The Kentucky Champion Food Volunteers (CFV) program provides continuing education in the areas of food safety, food science, food preparation, food preservation, and physical activity. The program intends to inspire people interested in food, cooking and nutrition to learn more and to share their knowledge of food and nutrition in their communities. Champion Food Volunteers are committed to promoting healthful dietary and physical activity decisions to help combat chronic disease and obesity. The CFV program provides 30 hours of training, plus 10 hours of experiential learning activities. Trainings are taught by county extension professionals and specialists. Certification is obtained by completing a minimum of 40 hours of approved volunteer service back to the community. Contact your local County Extension Office for more information.



Successful Samplers: Paducah Champion Food Volunteers

The McCracken County Cooperative Extension Office has a great relationship with the Paducah Farmers' Market. The Champion Food Volunteers set up a booth the first Saturday of each month, providing local food samples and featuring Kentucky Proud recipes. In July 2011, an estimated total of 250 patrons at the Paducah Farmers' Market consumed approximately 200 samples. The event was on a particularly hot day but the weather did not seem to negatively impact market attendance. The Paducah Champion Food Volunteers have been an active group for several years. Thirteen community members became new Champion Food Volunteers in early 2012.

Pooled Sampling

Pooled sampling is a testing practice that requires one or two people to operate a table with samples from several vendors at the market. The University of Kentucky held a Pooled-Sampling Project at the Owenton Farmers' Market in 2009. The focus was to find out how interested patrons of the farmers market are in samples, and how sampling impacts a patron's willingness to buy the sampled products. Post-sampling patron surveys three weeks later showed very high event recall and appeal for this kind of sampling format.



Fayette County 4-H Horticultural Entrepreneurship "Growbiz Kidz" program. Students learn to grow, harvest & sell basil!

Other Staffing Ideas

- 4-H or FFA students
- High School Clubs
- College Agriculture Clubs
- Culinary School students
- Summer Farm interns
- County Extension Agents
- Be creative—talk to your Farmers Market Manager, invite your friends to help you out and enjoy a day at the farmers market. Just remember they need to have their own Sampling Certificate before helping you.

A note about food allergies

There will be folks that visit your market that are highly allergic to nuts, milk products, glutes and other common ingredients. It is your responsibility to let those sampling your value-added products know what is in your samples, as well as if the product was in contact with allergens at some point. If you have processed your value-added products in a community or commercial kitchen that allows processing of nuts, dairy products or glutes be especially careful. Even if those products are not in your product, the dust from grinding or chopping may have come in contact with your other products. Remember you are responsible for any illness caused by your samples, so err on the side of caution at all times. Food safety signs, like those pictured at right are available at: www.safetysign.com/ or www.compliancesigns.com/



5. Best Practices for Sampling

Checklist of Best Practices

We have laid the Best Practices out in chronological order: sampling event preparation, sampling delivery, and follow-up after the sampling event. We hope this helps you to think through preparing yourself and your products for sampling.

Sampling Event Preparation

- I present a professional and clean appearance of myself and my products
- I have access to signage indicating that I am providing samples today
- I understand that signs can help draw people to my booth, improve product presentation, and can help build my product's identity
- I have food allergy warning signs, if applicable
- I understand the typical sampling packaging for my product(s) and have obtained all necessary materials
- I will prepare enough samples for approximately every person who stops by my booth on a regular market day
- I have presented my products in a way that I hope provides customers with easy access to samples
- I will have products available to sell on days I provide samples, and will showcase them on my table
- I have enough help (employees, volunteers, etc.) to provide samples during a busy market day
- I have taken the opportunity to define terms like "certified," "sustainable," and other phrases when I use those terms
- I have developed storage guidelines for my products that I make available for customers that may be new or unfamiliar to handling my farm's products
- I have educational materials (recipe cards, nutrition information) available to my customers
- I have acquired the proper utensils, materials and equipment to provide my customers with a safe sampling experience
- I have the proper hand washing station set-up and the wash-rinse-sanitize station set-up
- If selling meat, dairy, or processed products, I understand my legal regulations for sampling and labeling those products
- I am prepared to keep my sample products cold or hot
- I will store all of my food products at least six inches off of the ground
- I will try putting the product I'm sampling on sale during the time we are sampling
- I have thought about offering coupons, gift cards, or special offers during sampling events
- As a market vendor, I have the necessary product liability insurance coverage for my farm

Sampling Delivery

- I understand that growing relationships with my customers is just as critical as producing quality products
- I am prepared to engage customers by offering samples to each of them
- I am making the effort to connect personally with my customers to improve the conversation and business relationship
- I provide nutritional information, a list of ingredients, and health information when sampling
- I have prepared recipe cards or idea lists for customers to learn how to use my products
- I have simple, clear printed materials (like a brochure or website) that provide information about my product and how it is produced
- I will discuss the benefits of my product's quality, freshness, or locally grown attributes

Follow-up After the Sampling Event

- I have access to email, websites, social networking sites, and other communication channels to discuss products and availability
- I have thought about opportunities to create an event around sampling at different venues
- I have thought about working with other market vendors to do a pooled sampling event
- I have considered having a chef do a cooking demonstration using my products



6. Farmers Market Vendor FAQs

Frequently Asked Questions

1. *Why should I provide samples?*

Samples are a great way to increase consumer interest in your products and research suggests that providing samples at farmers markets does create economic benefits for the producer.

2. *How much will sampling cost me vs. the return in sales?*

Sampling costs are fairly direct: product for samples, sampling materials, required market wash stations, time/fees for sampling certificates, and staffing time to set up, deliver, and clean up samples. Benefits can be measured by resulting direct purchases, but also future purchases made by patrons who would otherwise NOT have purchased the product. There is some variation by product and customer, but our research suggests that over half the farm market patrons sampling purchased product when they hadn't planned on it after sampling. Further, they increased their intention to purchase from the vendor later and indicated significant referral activity for both the product and the vendor.

3. *What licenses do I need to have?*

In Kentucky, farmers market vendors must have an up-to-date Sampling Certificate from the Kentucky Department of Agriculture. It is also a good idea to have product liability insurance to cover you and your product.

4. *Where are good venues for sampling?*

Venues for food sampling that we asked survey participants about were: farmers markets, grocery stores, festivals, club stores, restaurants, supercenters, on-farm retail markets, specialty food stores, gourmet food stores, and natural food stores. Other interesting places that respondents noted were: museums, Pampered Chef parties, wine tastings, bakeries, and a number of other places. See page 35.

5. *I have several products I would like to sample. Is it a good idea to sample several at one time?*

It will depend upon how much of your help is able to provide samples during the market. If your samples are complementary products, try sampling them together. If you are thinking of sampling all 12 of your jam flavors one day, you might be overwhelmed, customers might be overwhelmed, and samples could easily get mixed up. In this case, try featuring 2-4 types of your jams at a time. This will give customers the opportunity to try all of them at some time, and might draw them back next week, just to try one kind they are interested in.

6. *My product needs to stay cold. How do I do that safely?*

Products that need to stay cold should be maintained at 41F or below. This can be done by supplying ice above and below it. Samples put into cups at home can be easily managed in a small cooler. Also, remember to monitor samples on the table, none should remain out for more than 30 minutes.

7. *Who else can provide samples if I am busy helping a customer?*

In Kentucky, all persons (producers, employees, family members, etc.) who will be offering samples must complete their own Sampling Application and have an approved Sampling Certificate.

8. How do I organize a pooled sampling event?

Start by talking to your farmers market manager; he/she might be able to help coordinate an event for your farmers market. Also, county Extension agents are able to provide samples and might be very interested in having a table at your farmers market to promote their services to the community. See page 28 for Boone County’s “A Taste of the Market” program, and page 52 for the University of Kentucky’s Pooled Sampling Project at the Owenton Farmers Market write-up.

9. What size should samples be?

Samples are a bite-sized portion of food which is offered to demonstrate its characteristics. Many vendors use 2 ounce plastic containers with lids to serve samples.

10. What kind of information should I provide with my samples?

Recipe cards and cooking tips, whole meal planning ideas, and nutritional information are often of interest to customers. Many people are becoming interested in production methods as well, so it may be a good idea to provide information about how your product was produced.

11. How do I deal with people who don’t like my product?

Thank them for trying your product and maybe ask what they don’t like about it. It could be useful feedback for you as a producer.

12. Should I sample every week?

A way to decide when to sample and how many customers to expect, is to keep track of “traffic” counts from previous market events. Also, take into consideration holiday weekends and county-wide events that may take business away from the market for a day.

13. Does pooled sampling have the same impact as individual vendor sampling?

Not necessarily. Research on pooled sampling projects suggests that some customers will not even approach the sampling table because it is too crowded or not all of the products are available to be sampled. Others reported that they liked the convenience of having everything at one table. Still other customers place a high value on interacting with vendors during sampling.



14. Should I offer recipe cards and cooking tips for my products?

Providing a take-home handout for customers is not only enticing, but it also provides you with a place to include your farm's name and contact information.

15. Can I cut fresh fruits and vegetables on-site?

Yes, but in addition to acquiring your Sampling Certification from the Kentucky Department of Agriculture, you must also go through their Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Training and receive your GAP Diploma. After going through the GAP Training, you will be certified for "All Samples." All fresh, raw produce must be washed and scrubbed off thoroughly under running potable water. Make sure the washed produce is packed in clean bags or containers to keep them clean until you arrive at the market. Knives used to cut up fresh fruits and vegetables must be frequently cleaned, and you must have an appropriate cutting board available.

16. Does my insurance cover any liability associated with sampling?

Talk to your insurance provider about this. Product liability insurance is a good thing to have as a farmers market vendor too.

The image displays four recipe cards from the Kentucky Proud program. Each card features a photograph of the ingredient on the left and text on the right. The cards are: 1. Watermelon Tomato Salad: Includes ingredients like seeded watermelon cubes, cubed tomatoes, salt, onion, and lettuce. It provides directions, yield, and nutritional analysis. 2. Kentucky Watermelon: Lists the season (July to September), nutrition facts, preparation (washing and chilling), selection criteria (shape, color, seeds), and storage instructions. 3. Spinach Slaw: Lists ingredients like chopped iceberg lettuce, red cabbage, green cabbage, spinach, mayonnaise, hummus, honey, garlic powder, salt, and pepper. It includes a four-step preparation process, yield, and nutritional analysis. 4. Kentucky Spinach: Lists the season (May-June and September-November), nutrition facts, preparation (washing and blanching), selection criteria (color, texture), and storage instructions. All cards include the 'Kentucky Proud' logo and a source URL: www.fruitsandveggiematter.gov.

Examples of recipe cards printed by the Kentucky Department of Agriculture for their Kentucky Proud marketing program. This project emphasizes cooking with Kentucky-grown fruits, vegetables, meats and dairy products to create healthy, nutritious and easy meals for Kentucky citizens. These recipe cards are available to registered Kentucky farmers market vendors and Kentucky Proud retailers to give away upon request.

Conclusions

We hope you have gained an idea of how you can reap economic benefits from sampling your food products at farmers markets and other venues. **Do not be afraid to try sampling.** Talk with your state Department of Agriculture or your County Health Department to make sure you are up to food code standards and have the proper certifications before sampling at your farmers market. Also, ask your customers what they think—they will determine if sampling works for you.

- Sampling gives you the ability to showcase your product the way that you know it is best—whether it is a fresh slice of an apple, the family-recipe sausage cooked in your special sauce, or cheese on a particular brand of crackers.
- Through sampling, you have the capacity to share your product in exactly the way that you love to prepare it and eat it.
- Sampling can be a vital part of any direct food marketing program. Our research has shown strong direct effects between sampling and purchasing in farm markets. The impact of sampling extends beyond the immediate point of sampling to future purchases and referrals. Sampling can be a major part of the experiential shopping farm market patrons appreciate. While there is a role for sampling in raising awareness of products with which visitors may not be familiar, market patrons like to sample products with which they are already familiar.
- Many farm market vendors have expressed uncertainty regarding the sampling impact. Additionally, some frustration over the regulatory compliance and staffing associated with offering a good sampling program has been noted. While it's important to take the appropriate regulatory and certification steps, these are not insurmountable.
- Sampling approaches should be developed with a view toward the target market. Urban markets are different from rural markets; shoppers with kids have different concerns; younger shoppers have different expectations regarding the sampling experience.
- Best practices will include commitment to a sanitary sampling environment, personal interaction with the vendor, accessible and interesting sampling display, clear signage, and enthusiasm for the product being sampled. There are many potential partners to help with sampling in a farmers market and a variety of approaches for making samples available – including collaborations with other vendors.
- Customers want to know what your products are, and how they were produced. Give them a chance to try it through sampling.



Appendix A

Resource List

ATTRA National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service (NSAIS), <https://attra.ncat.org/index.php>

The NSAIS strives to provide information available to anyone who needs it. They can direct you to resource guides online, or opportunities to order them by mail.

Crop Diversification & Biofuel Research & Education Center (CDBREC), <http://www.uky.edu/ag/CDBREC>

The University of Kentucky's CDBREC conducts research and provides information on a variety of new crops, production systems, and marketing systems that benefit new farmers and farmers who want to try new enterprises. Crop profiles, marketing profiles, weekly price reports, and online tools are available.

Farmers' Legal Action Group, Inc., <http://www.flaginc.org/topics/pubs/arts/FarmersMarket.pdf>

The Farmers' Legal Action Group is a nonprofit law center which provides legal services to family farmers and their communities. Their factsheet, "Understanding Farmers' Market Rules" is a comprehensive guide for any market, providing tips and ideas on how to help businesses run smoothly and be managed properly.

Farmers Market Coalition Resource Library, <http://www.farmersmarketcoalition.org/resources/>

The Farmers Market Coalition provides a database of resources for farmers, market managers, researchers and organizations that sponsor farmers markets. Categories include resources about marketing, food handling, insurance/liability, market operations, market rules, evaluations and many other topics.

Farmers Market Federation of New York, Food Safety Protocols,

<http://www.nyfarmersmarket.com/food-safety/protocols.html>

In collaboration with Cornell University Cooperative Extension programming, the Farmers Market Federation of New York has created recommendation protocols for food safety, specifically related to farmers. The "Food Safety Recommendations for Farmers Markets" document is available for download.

Farmers' Market Resources for Market Managers, http://www.mass.gov/agr/markets/farmersmarkets/resources_managers.htm

The Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources has prepared a comprehensive resource manual for Farmers' Market Managers. Information includes developing your farmers market, promoting, recruiting, and regulatory procedures, among other things.

Farmers Market Search Tool, <http://search.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets/default.aspx>

This directory provides public information about U.S. farmers market locations, directions, operating times, products and payment options. All information is provided voluntarily by market affiliates.

Food Industry MarketMaker, <http://national.marketmaker.uiuc.edu/>, <http://ky.marketmaker.uiuc.edu/>

MarketMaker is a national partnership of land grant institutions and State Departments of Agriculture dedicated to the development of a comprehensive interactive database of food industry marketing and business data. It is hosted and maintained by the University of Illinois and is guided by an advisory board made up of representatives from among participating partner states.

Food Systems Innovation Center, <http://www.uky.edu/fsic/>

The Food Systems Innovation Center at the University of Kentucky provides technical and business development services for Kentucky-based food enterprises.

Kentucky Department of Agriculture, <http://www.kyagr.com/marketing/farmmarket/>

The Kentucky Department of Agriculture provides trainings and resources to all Farmers' Markets across the Commonwealth. Every two years they issue an updated Farmers' Market Manual containing rules, regulations, guidelines, suggestions and other ideas for farmers' market vendors and managers.

Kentucky Farmers' Market Association, <http://www.kentuckyfarmersmarket.org/>

The Kentucky Farmers' Market Association is a network of farmers' market vendors and farmers' market managers from across the Commonwealth who join together to influence policy makers. The association also offers educational training opportunities tailored to member needs.

Kentucky Food Consumer Survey, University of Kentucky Department of Agricultural Economics, http://www.ca.uky.edu/cmsspubsclass/files/swilliamson/tim/pubs/2009-13_kyconsumer.pdf

The Kentucky Food Consumer Panel was designed to collect information about food purchasing and consumption from households across the state, in an effort to provide resources to farmers and their communities that will assist in developing more localized food systems. The impact could include strengthened economies, higher food quality, lower food costs, an increase in fresh produce consumption, overall health improvement, and a positive environmental impact.

Marketshare, <http://www.marketumbrella.org/marketshare/>

Marketshare is a free, online tool to help manage your market information and evaluate the economic impact of the farmers market in your community.

National Farmers Market Network,

<http://www.wallacecenter.org/our-work/past-initiatives/national-farmers-market-network/>

The Wallace Center has worked for many years in collaboration with other groups and individuals to develop resources for farmers and farmers market managers. All of their resources are available for download.

National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT), <http://www.ncat.org/index.php>

NCAT's mission is "helping people by championing small-scale, local, and sustainable solutions to reduce poverty, promote healthy communities, and protect natural resources." They provide information and access to appropriate technology for economically disadvantaged people.

USDA, AMS Farmers Market Consortium, <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/ams.fetchTemplateData.do?template=TemplateJ&navID=FarmersMarketConsortiumWholesaleAndFarmersMarkets&rightNav1=FarmersMarketConstortiumWholesaleAndFarmersMarkets&topNav=&leftNav=WholesaleandFarmersMarkets&page=WFMFarmersMarketConsortium&resultType=&acct=fmrdirmtk>

The Farmers Market Consortium is a collaboration of public and private sector groups who are dedicated to supporting the industry of farmers markets by sharing information about available funding sources, ongoing project updates, as well as technical resources.

USDA Farmers Markets and Local Food Marketing Website,

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/WholesaleandFarmersMarkets>

USDA AMS's Marketing Service Division programs are intended to "improve marketing opportunities for small and mid-sized producers through the combination of applied research, technical service, and grant support." Publications, presentations, news releases, grant funding programs, and other resources are available on this website.

Appendix B

University of Kentucky Sampling Research Projects

The Pooled-Sampling Project

Pooled sampling is a testing practice that requires one person to operate a table with samples from several vendors at the market. The Pooled-Sampling Project at the Owenton Farmers Market was to find out how interested patrons of the farmers market are in samples provided through a central sampling system, and how sampling impacts a patron's willingness to buy the sampled products. The document follows on the next page.

The Sweet Potato Sampling Survey

Food specific sampling is often used at large markets, where a pooled-sampling table may become crowded and confusing for the consumer. Large markets might try focusing on a specific product that is prepared using different styles or recipes. An example would be The Sweet Potato Sampling Survey at the Paducah Farmers' Market where sweet potatoes were served, in the form of chips, chili, and steamed. One finding from the study is that new patrons are more likely to return to the market as a result of cooking demonstrations and product sampling.

Plate it Up! Recipe Sampling

A recipe and sampling market study was completed in 2011 in a collaboration between the University of Kentucky and the Kentucky Department of Agriculture. Three recipes were explored that included asparagus, salsa, and apples/sweet potatoes. Recipes were distributed at selected markets in Kentucky along with samples during the periods when each of the products were in season. Market patrons sampling the products were given recipes and an intercept survey but were also surveyed again three weeks following the sampling event. The intercept survey collected information about their immediate perceptions of the product while the follow-up survey explored recall and a variety of post-sampling behaviors.

The key findings of the study include:

- about 25% of the samplers tried the recipe themselves at home within three weeks of trying it at the market
- about 60% planned on trying this recipe in the future
- about 70% would not have tried the recipe at home if they had not tried the sample at the market
- about 40% bought ingredients for the recipe from vendors at the market that day after sampling the product
- another 20% bought recipe ingredients at the market sometime during the next three weeks
- trying the sample was a greater factor than receiving the recipe card influencing ingredient purchase at the market for all three recipes



2009 Kentucky Farmers Market Research
The Pooled-Sampling Project
at The Owenton Farmers Market

Introduction

On September 4, 2009 a sampling experiment was conducted at the Owen County Farmers Market in Owenton, Kentucky. The focus of the experiment was to find out how interested patrons of the farmers market are in samples and how sampling impacts a patron's willingness to buy the sampled products. This information was gathered using a survey that was sent out to the participants two weeks after the sampling experiment took place.

The experiment was conducted to obtain data that would show vendors the demand for, and benefits of sampling. We had discovered that since the implementation of regulations regarding sampling at farmers markets by the Kentucky Department for Public Health and the Kentucky Department of Agriculture that the overwhelming majority of vendors, although legally certified to sample their products, were not providing samples to their patrons.

The purpose of the regulations is to help deter any unsafe sampling practices that could potentially contaminate food products. We discovered that the new sampling requirements had given vendors the feeling that they were restricted in their ability to sample due to the hassle of the regulations. A copy of the "Kentucky Department for Public Health policy regarding product sampling at KDA Farmers' Markets or Kentucky Farm Bureau Certified Roadside Stands" attained from the Kentucky Farmers' Market Association website states:

Any vendor engaged in product sampling shall at a minimum provide:

- An approved hand wash station. The station shall consist of a container of potable water of sufficient size to provide enough water for the entire sampling event, and be equipped with a free-flowing dispensing valve. The container should be raised off the ground to allow a catch basin under the spigot. The hand wash station shall also be equipped with hand soap and disposable paper towels.
- A means of protecting the samples from dust and other environmental contaminants;
- A means to prevent contamination by "double-dipping" (i.e., toothpicks, single portion containers, disposable utensils, etc.); and
- A method to minimize bare hand contact with the food such as through the use of deli tissue, toothpicks, gloves, disposable utensils, etc.

The regulations also state that vendors who reuse utensils and cutting boards are required to bring a minimum of three containers along with water, dish soap, bleach and a dish rack for air drying. It is not that the vendors at the farmers market are opposed to washing fruit and vegetables or sterile utensils but they have weighed out the pros and cons of sampling under the new regulation and decided that it is not worth the extra effort. Many of the vendors we talked to stated that they either did not have the extra room in their vehicle to carry the extra materials or that they feel it would require an additional person at the market to be able to offer samples effectively and legally.

With this in mind we set out to do some sampling of our own to get a first hand take of how patrons react when sampling is offered to them. We were able to get a great amount of cooperation from the vendors at the Owen County Farmers Market so we proceeded with their help.

Methodology

We set up a single table that was centrally located within the market to attract patrons to our table. Samples were provided by eight of the vendors as was the washing station, complete with washing basins, soap, paper towels, et cetera. Sampling items included three varieties of apples, two varieties of watermelon, pears, grapes, two kinds of jam, various breads including zucchini, Jewish apple cake and a variety of specialty soaps.



Patrons who sampled the products were asked to leave their information so that a survey could be sent to them two weeks after the survey took place. Patrons were free to sample any and all of the products on the table in exchange for their assistance in the survey. The experiment took place over a period of 4 hours wherein 37 patrons agreed to take part in the survey. Of those 37 patrons, 25 were actually able to respond to the survey for a 67.6% response rate.

We first looked at what products the patrons remembered tasting and what they had decided to purchase at the market. The overall response indicated that giving out samples was a very successful venture since over 50% of the products sampled were then purchased afterward.

Product	Sampled	Purchased	Purchased/ Sampled
Watermelon	4	3	75.0%
Jam	15	10	66.7%
Soap	7	4	57.1%
Apples	7	4	57.1%
Bread	11	5	45.5%
Grapes	7	3	42.9%
Jewish Apple Cake*	10	4	40.0%

* Sold Out

Watermelon had the best rate of purchase based on the number of times it was sampled, although it was sampled the least. This is not an unusual response since most people feel they know what basic fruits and vegetables taste like. Having two varieties to sample is a good idea so that patrons can taste the difference firsthand. Sampling is also a good strategy when you are selling a specialty item like the Niagara grape variety in this experiment. One of the responses we received declared, “The grapes had a “special” taste not found in store bought grapes. I would not have known that if I hadn't had a chance to sample them.”

Value added products generally sell very well when sampled because they offer different tastes than simply offering a raw fruit or vegetable. Jam is a good example of this as you can see it was sampled and purchased as a result more than any other product in the study. The Jewish apple cake would most likely have been ranked just as high as the jam but the samples were consumed before the end of the day and the vendor who supplied the samples sold out of their product early in the day.

When asked what the patrons liked about having an assortment of products to sample at one table every response was positive. Nine replied that they liked the convenience of having everything at one table to sample while seven stated that they were happy to be able to taste something before the purchase to see whether or not they liked the product.

When asked what the patrons did not like about having everything at one table seventeen responded that they did not see anything that they did not like about it. There were a couple of comments that explained that the table may have been too crowded with all of the possible samples and that there were too many people around the table at one time so questions could not be efficiently answered and not all of the products were able to be sampled. It was also reported that the table was set up in the sun for part of the time which caused some concern by a few patrons regarding the food. Unfortunately a tent was not something we had thought of ahead of time.

We were able to gain a lot of useful information about the types of people who participated and their opinion of sampling (data from 25 responses):

- 92% of those who responded to the survey replied that they were a resident of Owen County.
- The participants visited the market an average of 9 times in the same year. 75% stated that they have been to the market 4 or more times this year.

- 20 of the patrons stated that sampling changed their interest or perception of products for the better.
- 100% reported they like to have samples of products at other retail food places they visit.
- 52% reported that knowing that there are samples available at the market would change the frequency with which they would visit the market. Although this may seem low, keep in mind that 50% of those who responded report that they have gone to the market 10 or more times over the course of the year and that the Owen County Farmers Market only operates on Fridays. This means that half already show up nearly every week.

Supporting Research

In another survey conducted at farmers markets across the state, (Boone, Christian, Daviess, Fayette, Franklin, Hardin, Jefferson, McCracken, Pendleton, Pulaski and Warren Counties) patrons ranked sampling as the most important service provided at farmers markets. The demand for sampling outranked the demand for expanded market days, expanded market hours, rest room access, debit card, cooking/recipe demonstrations, expanded parking, senior nutrition and/or food stamps, and entertainment.

Conclusions

All the research we have done has shown that sampling increases the interest of patrons and creates dialog between vendor and customer about their products. Patrons become more acquainted with the vendor and their products and are more likely to make a purchase. It is not unreasonable to say that if there are two vendors at a specific market selling zucchini bread, the vendor who offers samples will have an advantage on zucchini bread sales. Even if a vendor sells only raw vegetables they can create a dish, offer samples and recipe cards, and show that this is what you can make with my vegetables. If sales do not go up after several attempts at sampling then vendors can say I tried it and sales did not increase as I had hoped. We believe they will.

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Appendix C

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