

OPTIMIZING PRODUCT MIX

EVALUATING THE ITEMS YOU BRING TO MARKET



MIX IT UP! WHAT CAN YOU OFFER?

For Allie and Thomas of Burrowing Owl Bakery, product mix meant variations of a single product. They started their stand by offering four or five varieties of tarts at each Iowa City market. Their repertoire grew to include twenty. "Simplicity is the best way to help a customer make a decision. It's also a smart strategy for the vendor," says Allie. "We wanted to focus on one thing and do it well. For us, that was tarts. We were known for tarts and within that category, we were able to diversify. At each market, we made sure to have both savory and sweet. Over time, we experimented with a lot of different combinations, but we were careful to keep the favorites."

“WE DIVERSIFIED THE FLAVORS WE OFFERED AND AFTER EIGHT YEARS HAVE CULTIVATED A DYNAMIC MIX. WE HAVE BOTH CONSISTENCY AND EXCITING SEASONALITY.”

- ALLIE GNADE & THOMAS AGRAN

The small Things that have a BIG Impact

Product diversity is a good thing, but be thoughtful about the items that you put time into producing. Optimizing your product list is an ongoing, repetitive process and takes time to hone. At the end of each season, go back to your list—consider adding new items or modifying those that didn't make money.

Here's where to start:

- Seek products that fold in well with your current operation.
- Add products that can be arranged or packaged together (e.g. salsa ingredients).
- Match your mix and amount of product you bring to the market to the need—especially for peak sale times like holidays. For example, customers may buy extra vegetables around July 4th to prepare a dish for their barbecue.
- Having the first or last of a product for the season brings customers to your stand and increases the likelihood of them buying their other items from you.
- Display your niche items prominently and use them to build rapport with your customers.



Find the Right Mix for YOU

Product mix for you might mean diversity within a niche. Instead of regular carrots, you grow purple, yellow, or red carrots. Maybe you offer pressed carrot juice or a baked good that incorporates carrots. The goal is to expand your product mix in a way that makes your stand more competitive without overextending your resources. Consider efficiency, creativity, profit margin, and the realities of your customers' shopping habits.

A FARMER'S PERSPECTIVE ON FINDING THE RIGHT PRODUCT MIX

WHY A BIG VARIETY
OF PRODUCT YIELDS LARGER SALES

Dairy

JOSIE ROZUM
DAN & DEBBIE'S CREAMERY

Cheese Curds, Milk, Ice Cream: "Our farmers market products are geared towards items that customers can easily carry and consume on-site. We offer convenient grab-and-go sizes at the market because dairy is temperature-sensitive and a gallon of milk or half-gallon of ice cream doesn't sell well at big markets where people tend to walk around for a couple of hours. The pint-sized milk and single servings of ice cream are also an inexpensive way for customers to try different flavors. The chocolate milk is a great option for kids eating their breakfast at the market. We offer five varieties of our signature cheese curds, two flavors of milk, and five flavors (up from three last year) of ice cream."



Produce

ERIK SESSIONS
PATCHWORK GREEN FARM

200 Vegetable Varieties: "I think it's very important to have a wide array of products available just like a good produce section at a grocery store. Customers come back week after week for favorites but often delight in and purchase the well-presented surprises. Our market tables are full of a wide assortment of vegetables, herbs, and flowers from June through November. We keep popular items like lettuces on the table at every market through variety selection and succession planting, and customers know they can almost always find their favorites at our stand. We also plant for the seasons. Shoppers find peas in June, beans in July, tomatoes in August, winter squash in September, and Brussels sprouts in October. Many vegetable crops also make for a healthier crop rotation in the field and we can spread the annual risks—like weather and pests—out among crops. And, simply, it's more interesting to grow a wide variety of crops."

Livestock

MELISSA DOTY
DOTY ANGUS CATTLE CO.

Beef Sticks, Jerky, Steaks, Roasts, and Ground Beef: "We use the farmers market as an opportunity to talk to customers about doing more quarters, halves, and wholes. I feel like it's the least expensive way for us to advertise. People want to see who you are. It gives us a way to get in front of that customer. They can ask us questions, try a small amount to decide if they like it, and then get a large quantity. At farmers markets, we do samples of beef sticks, beef jerky, and all-beef hot dogs—and that gets people to our stand where they realize we have steaks, roasts, and ground beef as well."



Cut Flowers

ERIC AND ANNE FRANZENBURG
PHEASANT RUN FARM

70 Varieties of Flowers: "We got into cut flowers because we saw an opening in the market and an opportunity to fill that niche. We also grow tomatoes, peppers, and cucumbers, but those mostly go to the grocery stores. We don't bring those to the market because we aren't interested in competing against all the other vendors with that produce. Our cut flowers are marketed to florists, weddings and special events, and farmers markets—farmers markets making up about half of our cut flower sales. We sell primarily cut stems, but bouquets as well. Depending on the market, one gets sold more than the other—it depends on the clientele. We learned over time that the customers at one market prefer cut stems, and customers at another prefer bouquets. We try new things, and if they don't work we'll try something else. Farmers markets are a part of our diversified marketing approach."

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