

# Farmers' Markets in Tribal Communities: Starting Up & Sustaining Success



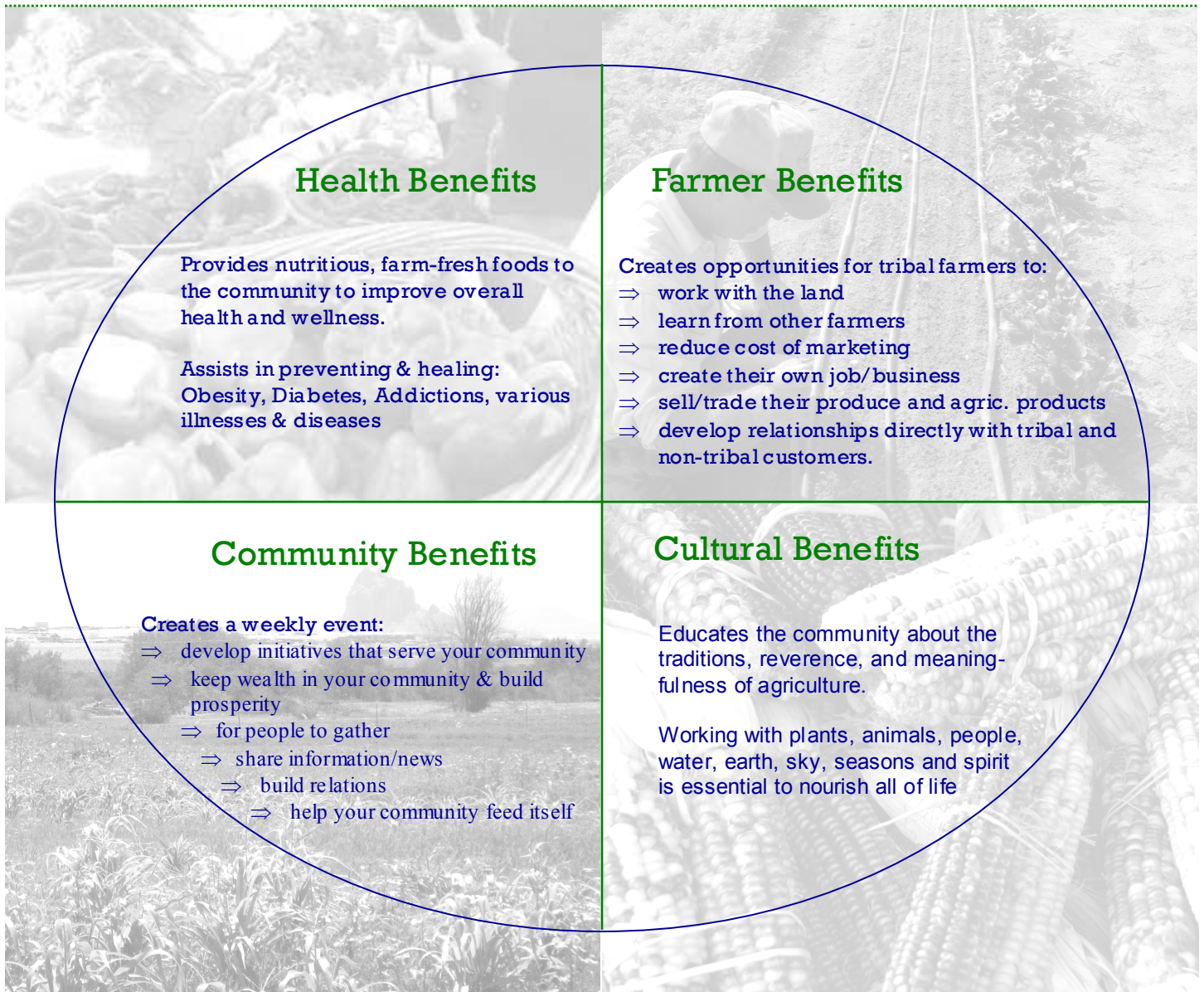
People love farmers' markets, but not every community is able to support a farmers' market for a variety of reasons. Local interest is a must. Farmer participation is a must. Bringing the two together is an art.

This manual is a product of stories told and lessons learned from tribal market managers in New Mexico (and AZ). This project was made possible with the generous support of Projects for Public Spaces and the USDA Risk Management Program and commitments from Farm to Table and the NM Farmers Marketing Association.

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# Why start a Farmers' Market in Your Community?



## **Other Benefits:**

Local farmers' markets bring decision-making back home to your community. Farmers and Community decide:

- ⇒ What to grow.
- ⇒ What to eat.
- ⇒ What jobs, businesses, and activities you want to create.
- ⇒ How to use your community's water, land and other resources.
- ⇒ How to preserve and build upon cultural traditions.



# Step 1: Finding Farmers

## Tips for Recruiting Farmers

- Contact one-on-one for best results
- Visit neighboring farmers' markets
- Visit neighbors who farm or garden
- Talk to county extension services
- Talk to your tribal department that manages water & land resources
- Call your state department of agriculture
- Visit with your tribal department of agriculture representative
- Visit with your Grazing Association representatives
- Post "Farmers & Gardeners Wanted" signs with market details



## Developing Farmers

Like other rural communities, tribal communities have "lost" farmers and farmland over the past two generations. You may need to address this loss by teaming up with tribal and non-tribal departments, agencies and organizations to help your community become "farmer-friendly" again.

Challenges range from irrigation systems lying in disrepair, to lack of tractors & implements and hand tools; from broken fence lines for livestock to too many fence lines checker boarding historic cattle and sheep drives, absence of dependable labor, lack of accessible markets to sell to, families needing off-farm income to support themselves, convenience foods having replaced traditional foods, droughts and flooding taking their toll on crops and infrastructure over the years.

Farmers markets can make a difference by being a place where farmers can earn an income and share knowledge and resources. Farmers' Markets can also be a place where community members gather and learn how to support farming and gardening as valuable cultural activities once again.

If your community does not have enough farmers to support a market...

- 1) consider joining the closest farmers' market
- 2) consider the 2-5 years it will take to "develop and train" new farmers for a market

AND/OR

- 3) Decide if you have enough "outside" farmers you can successfully recruit to begin your market.

## Got Farmers?

- ⇒ How many?
- ⇒ Are they growing produce and products that customers want to buy?
- ⇒ When will that produce be available?
- ⇒ How much produce will be available, weekly? For the season?
- ⇒ Are farmers interested in participating at your farmers' market?

# Step 2: Details, details, details

## Rules and Regulations

Develop basic rules and guidelines for market participation, especially for processed foods and food handling. Work with your tribal Environment/Food Safety Department. Help vendors understand and come into compliance with the rules/regulations. Most markets require that farmers can only sell what they have grown or gathered. Some markets prioritize tribal farmer participation. Some markets recruit farmers from a 200mile radius. Rules should be general enough to allow your market to grow, but defined enough to prevent your market from turning into a flea market, re-sellers' produce stand, or craft show.

Create a "Farmer Welcome Packet" which includes your market's "Rules and Regulations," a "Vendor Application," and market dates, times and contact information.

## Location, Days, Times, Start Date

### Considerations for Location:

High visibility, near community activities, easy to find, can section off parking area from vendor stalls, availability of water & electricity, safe from traffic, restrooms or portable toilets available, free or subsidized rent, have lease agreement for whole season, shade structures or allow temporary canopies and umbrellas on market days.

### Considerations for Days and Times:

When do people shop for groceries? After work? On weekends? Pick one day out of the week, bracket a time frame, up to 4 hours....and BE THERE, weekly! Customers and farmers depend on consistency. Be there early to set up tents, signs, parking and to greet your farmers as they arrive. Close on-time to concentrate your market's activity and to honor your time and your farmers' time. Customers are creatures of habit, train them by being consistent with opening and closing times.



## Got People Power?

- ⇒ Do *you* have the time, energy, and commitment to find answers to the above questions?
- ⇒ Do you have commitment and support *from a person or team* to work on these answers?
- ⇒ Can people commit for a month? A season?

## Make a Plan!

- ⇒ Create a timeline, goals, and steps 1, 2, 3...
- ⇒ *Who* will do *What*?
- ⇒ Create a "Farmer Recruitment Plan"
- ⇒ Create a "Customer Relations Plan"
- ⇒ Create a budget
- ⇒ What will be the *structure* of your organization?
- ⇒ Secure a market site
- ⇒ Check with your tribe for "food safety" regulations
- ⇒ Make friends with helpful people, tribal departments and organizations to accomplish the above items
- ⇒ *Keep track of your success*  
Write it down, document, document.

### Considerations for Start and End Dates:

These dates depend on your growing region, climate, and crops. Some markets open in April/May because farmers have salad mix and greens available or farmers grow in greenhouses. Most markets open by June with a variety of fruits and vegetables. Some markets open in July/August because their farmers grow traditional crops that are only ready to harvest in late summer.

End dates generally follow the frost dates in your area. Usually by October and November, most markets are closed or have only "storable crops" available like: winter squash, dried corn & chiles, roots, cabbages, and "canned" or dried items. Your farmers will be your best informants for determining start and end dates for your market.



## Step 3: Attracting Customers

Create sandwich board signs for the roadside during market hours. Create a festive appearance with banners, colors, music, by greeting customers, etc. Develop flyers to post at local businesses and clinics. Bring flyers to community meetings and school functions to hand out to your neighbors and co-workers. Seek “free” publicity as interviews or public service announcements at your local radio station, by inviting the local paper to your opening day or to do a story on some of your farmers. Host special events at your market, monthly, like a squash growing contest, livestock day, books for kids, chile cook-off, melon eating contest, etc to create free press releases and to keep the newspaper and radio station covering your market’s activities.

Spend time talking to business owners, public healthcare workers, Head Start and public school workers and parents, religious groups, chapter houses and community groups. Regular contact helps groups refer people to your market. The more often you stay in touch with groups like these, the more likely they may become involved with actively promoting your market, sponsoring special events, creating health, nutrition and cooking classes around your market, donating volunteer time, donating equipment, underwriting your market manager, writing your market into their newsletters, and helping to grow your market over time by word of mouth.

Healthcare workers have been particularly helpful as partners, especially since farm fresh produce is seen as “good medicine” to prevent or cure diabetes, morbid obesity, heart disease and other ailments that are devastating Native American communities at increasing rates. Many federal nutrition programs have farmers’ market components like vouchers for Women Infants and Children, Electronic Benefit Transfer (Food Stamps), and the Senior Nutrition Program which offer clients ways to spend their benefits on food at a farmers’ market. Nutrition and Wellness programs through Indian Health Services clinics and USDA programs may also have educational materials that promote fresh fruits and vegetables to the public. These materials and programs are great ways to educate your customers with the tools available through the healthcare community.

### Got Customers?

- Who are they? What are their food shopping habits?
- Why would they come to your market?
- What produce and products do they want and need?
- How will you “get them to your market?” (Promotion)
- How will you “keep them coming” to your market?

### Statewide and Regional Resources

The *NM Farmers Marketing Association* offers capacity building grants annually and is invaluable with helping you plan the growth and sustainability of your market. They offer an annual conference in February to help markets address these issues. Call 1.888.983.4400 or [www.farmersmarketsnm.org](http://www.farmersmarketsnm.org)

*NM Department of Agriculture* offers \$1,000-\$5,000 grants through their Specialty Crop Grant program. Applications are due mid-May each year. Contact 575.646.4929

The *Southwest Marketing Network* offers marketing resources for farmers and ranchers and hosts an annual conference and regional workshops on marketing and organizational development. See [www.swmarketingnetwork.org](http://www.swmarketingnetwork.org) for more information..



### National Resources

See USDA’s website [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov) for information regarding these grants: Farmers Market Promotion Program, Community Food Projects, and Risk Management Education.

You can get marketing technical assistance for farmers and farmers markets at :

- ⇒ The Wallace Center [www.wallacecenter.org](http://www.wallacecenter.org)
- ⇒ <http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/marketgardening.html> “Market Gardening: A start up guide” ATTRA: 1.800.346.9140
- ⇒ USDA Market Services Branch: 202.720.8317 or <http://apps.ams.usda.gov/FarmersMarkets/>

## Step 4: Sustaining your Market



Start up costs are usually around \$1,000. This includes, signage, flyers, pop-up canopy, tables, chairs, cash box, office supplies, parking signs/cones/tape and opening a checking account. The expenses begin to add up if you have to rent your location or portable toilets or pay for utilities like, a cell phone, water and electricity. And the greatest expense is also your best investment...paying a market manager to oversee the promotion and operations of your market.

### Creating Resources

Some markets are a program of an existing agency or non-profit, like Shiprock Extension Services for the Shiprock market or Red Willow Educational Center for Taos Pueblo's market. Markets will need to become "an entity" (registered as a business or non profit or association) or find a fiscal sponsor who can apply for grants or receive donations on the market's behalf. Once a market becomes well established, over 2-3 years, you may also offset some of your expenses by charging vendors a modest fee per market day or annual membership due. Some markets also sell T-shirts, hats, bags, aprons, jackets, baskets, etc that promote the market and generate income. Some markets run a concession stand of beverages and hand held foods to generate income. Markets must be careful to offer items that do not compete with the sales of their farmer vendors. Some markets conduct weekly raffles to generate interest and income.

Start looking for resources locally. See if your tribal government has a department that would be interested in being your fiscal sponsor. Your tribal extension services, county extension services or land grant college might help you apply for grants or know of funding sources. Local businesses like hardware stores, feed & tack stores, banks, grocery stores, landscape & nurseries and large chain stores might be able to "sponsor" your market for \$100-\$1,000 per season. Even large chain stores sometimes have "community days" where they donate a percentage of their day's sales to a local cause. Some chain stores make monthly donations to local causes. And get to know your local non-profits and family foundations. They may also become resources for funding and technical assistance.

### Track your success

How many farmers participated per market? How many customers came per market? How much money did customers spend on average? What type of products sold best? What products are not selling well? What promotional events were most successful? Did farmers sell out early or take home inventory? Record keeping helps you and farmers make decisions that will improve your market over time. Knowing your numbers also becomes necessary when you apply for grants.



This report was produced by **Farm to Table**.  
For more information, contact us at (505) 473-1004 or  
3900 Paseo del Sol, Santa Fe NM 87507  
[www.farmtotablenm.org](http://www.farmtotablenm.org)

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