Top 10 Attributes of
The Best Farmers' Markets[1]

A farmers' market is an organized group of farmers who offer fresh, local farm products at a specified location at schedule times. Farmers' markets are growing in number and size around the country. Why? Because the public is seeking fresh, local food from farmers they know and can interact with (know your farmer, know your food!)

Farmers benefit from increased income from direct sales, promotion of their farm and an expanding customer base. Farmers' markets are great business incubators for small farms and promote the importance of agriculture in the community. The economy can benefit from the increased traffic in the area, related activities during market times and keeping profits in the local economy.

There are good farmers markets and ones that could use a lot of improvement. But, what makes a Great Farmers' Market? Many would argue which are the best attributes, but after working with many farmers' markets in Ohio and visiting markets throughout the country, I have come up with a list of what makes "The Best" farmers markets. These markets:

1. Have a **marketing plan** and advertising schedule by month. This includes a website dedicated to the market and products offers. The plan includes social media like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and others. The plan includes highlights of vendors and products which will attract business to the market.
2. **Inspect vendors to verify** they are producing what they are selling at the market. And, in cases where a local crop is not available, they are honest and upfront about the product belonging to another farm. Vendor farmers should list where the product was grown and why it's not local. This fosters confidence with the consumers to ensure they are getting locally produced foods.
3. Are **serious about a market manager** and have given the manager the authority to uphold the rules and regulations of the group.
4. **Do not skirt the rules** of the county or state. Instead, they work cooperatively to advocate for rules which support the sales and profitability of locally grown foods.
5. Involve the community through **activities and events**. They give back to the community through inviting fundraising activities or donating their excess produce to the local food bank.
6. Require **signage for vendors' booths and the products** they sell. A farm name starts the building of a brand. It distinguishes one farm from another. It tells a local story. Product information increase sales. If the market is busy, it is difficult to talk to every customer about every product. Signage tells your story for you, and provides a good return on investment. And, to project the proper image, the group will have a basic dress code for vendors with plain shirts and jeans or apparel with logos.
7. Provide **workshops for vendors** or work with other local agencies like Extension to provide educational workshops to improve vendors' booths, growing information and more.
8. Have **hours ALL Year**. Re-establishing a customer base each spring can be time consuming and expensive. (If not possible, embrace and keep social media year-round. Promote local foods.)
9. Complete a **vendor gap analysis** regularly to ensure a proper mix of vendors to meet customers' needs. Maple syrup producers are not located in every county. Fresh flowers are not grown year round. But, there could be a farm vendor who would be willing to grow that product and sell at your market. Be sure to have a complete array of products by tracking products offered.
10. **Make it fun** for vendors and customers. It's too easy to get caught up on the tiny, insignificant negative parts of any group or activity. Do everything you can to keep things fun – and your market will have a good, long life!

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