



DIRECT MARKETING STRATEGIES

FARM STANDS

“Farm Stand” refers to any retail operation on your property. Most commonly these are unstaffed stands with a variety of your products available for customers to purchase using a self-pay method. Farm stands can be a great way to move products without committing a whole day, like you might with a farmers market. They can also help you reach an increased audience since farm stands tend to have more flexible hours than many other direct marketing options and can help move products with minimal effort after the initial installation.

EQUIPMENT CONSIDERATIONS

For a farm stand to be successful, there is some basic equipment and management practices you’ll need to employ.

Location

To build a farm stand on your property, you’ll need an accessible location near parking that you feel comfortable having customers in. Something right off the road or at the entrance to your farm will be the most visible and prevent customers from having to walk through your farm in potentially dangerous areas. You’ll also want to consider how or where you’ll run power to the stand if you plan to include refrigerators, fans, or need electricity for any sales equipment.

Structure

You’ll need to design and build a structure. Some stands are more like walk-in sheds, where others are covered with open shelves. You’ll want to make sure you have enough room to accommodate and attractively display everything you’d like to sell all season (the winter squash season will look different than early spring with its many greens). You’ll need refrigeration to keep your products fresh, and abundant shelving for the products that do not need refrigeration.

Payment Collection Method

Have a locked dropbox for cash payments. Make sure everything is clearly labeled so customers have no questions about how much they owe you. Fewer and fewer people carry cash these days, so consider including an online payment method like Venmo. This can also help prevent having “I-Owe-You” ending up in your dropbox. Include instructions on how to use the stand and post your payment policies. “Payment due at time of purchase” can suffice. Plan to clear your dropbox daily to make sure there’s room for customers to use it, and to prevent theft.

BEFORE INSTALLING

If you want to explore having a farm stand on your property, you’ll need to look into the legal parameters of doing so in your city or county. Make sure you are aware of your property’s zoning ordinances, what permits you may need, and any restrictions on putting a sign up on your property.

Zoning & Permits

Check with your local zoning authority to ensure you can have a retail farm stand on your property and fill out the appropriate applications, if needed. You will need a sellers permit to make sales if you do not already have one. Reselling products from other farms or ranches in your stand may require additional permits. Always call to inquire about how any changes to your operation may affect your status.

Signage

You’ll want signage to attract customers to your stand, communicate your hours, and identify your operation. You will need to check with the Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) before erecting

any signs on your property, however. The ITD regulates the use of signs near roadways. You'll need to apply for a permit to erect a sign. The application asks for an approved building permit to erect a sign, a signature of a local zoning authority declaring it is within your zoning ordinance, the property owner's signature of approval, as well as a site plan for where you want to put up the sign.

MANAGING THE STAND

Once your stand is installed and ready to go, you must make a plan for on-going farm stand management.

Packaging

A farm stand requires more packaging than almost any other method of direct marketing. You may want to consider wrapping greens or other perishables in plastic bags so that they last longer, as well as prepackaging reasonable amounts of by-weight products. Always make sure the attractiveness of the display is top of mind when choosing packaging materials. If you're selling plant starts or high quantities of any product, consider providing cardboard boxes or other options for customers to carry them.

Be up front about your expectations of having any packaging returned. Some packaging, such as used paperboard baskets, may be inappropriate for reuse due to the potential for contamination and unwanted food safety risks. If you do request the return of reusable packaging, such as plastic start containers, plan on a return rate of 80% or less. Providing a labeled, distinct place to return packaging materials away from your farm stand sales area will help encourage customers to return materials while keeping your fresh products clean and your farm stand neat.

Product Freshness

You will have to check on your stand often, likely multiple times a day. You'll want to restock, being mindful to pull the oldest products to the front. Check for anything that's past its prime and com-

post or discard it. Keep good records of the age of your products, especially for dairy or meat products, and rotate products out accordingly. Be mindful of the temperatures inside your fridge as well as the ambient nighttime temps and keep temperature logs. If you have an open-air stand, you may have to haul products displayed outside your fridge inside during the spring and fall to prevent freezing.

Product Variety

Consider partnering with other farmers to provide a variety of products. The more variety available, the more likely customers are to make the journey to your stand. Pair up with a vegetable, egg, or dairy producer to compliment the products you offer. Consider baked goods, value added products, local artisan products, or crafted goods as well.

RELATED FACT SHEETS IN OTHER CHAPTERS:

- 1.4 Registering with Government Entities
- 2.1 Taxes
- 5.1 Creating a Food-Safe Environment
- 5.6 Produce Safety Rule

