

Thinking About Becoming A Producer On A Best In Dorset Farmers Market?

1. Let's define farmers' markets. What we really mean is local producers' markets – not necessarily food, but mostly. Not all producers are farmers and we are not entirely based in the countryside.
2. Producer. Quite simply you have to make or grow it yourself, or make some major alteration to something to make it uniquely yours. I smoke a cheddar cheese which I do not make. Olives are marinaded by the 'producer' and coffee is roasted and ground.

There are a few other exceptions which we deal with individually. You will know that if you make cakes or jam then it is unlikely that you produce flour, sugar or fruit, and certainly not oranges for marmalade.

3. Local. In an ideal world the old market charter radius of $6\frac{2}{3}$ miles, that is the distance a man could lead his mule to market, sell his wares, end up in the pub and then stagger home again in a day would be wonderful. The world, as you may have noticed, isn't ideal and we say about 50 miles radius (remember we are close to the coast so a lot of that is sea) is about right, but if there is something unique, say ostrich or wild boar which is not available in that area then we will accept from further a field. When it comes to cakes and preserves then the situation alters somewhat. Cattle feed can, but often doesn't, come from within a short distance of the farm, and similarly flour, dried fruit and other ingredients don't either. We have had people glibly saying that their ingredients are local because they come from their local Tesco. We'd like you to try a little harder – eggs, butter, apples, and a lot of fruit can be sourced locally, ideally from the other producers on the market.
4. The local authority. I will say here, and again, all these people are there to help, not to stop you doing things. Despite what people think cheese doesn't have to be made with pasteurised milk, provided you do things correctly all will be well. So don't believe what you are told by the landlord of the Mucky Duck, or Mrs Miggins who managed to kill half of the local town with her pies. You will need a Food Hygiene Certificate and the local authority will point you in the right direction, some even run the courses themselves – it's only a day. Your kitchen or other premises must be inspected (and approved) by your local Environmental Health Officer. Do not be frightened by these people, they are there to help and a domestic kitchen will often be quite adequate (without the cat). EHO's just do not want the public to get sick through consuming your product, it's embarrassing to them and not good for your business, the other producers businesses, or ours either. Likewise, Trading Standards will help you with labels. If you are selling direct to the public then labelling standards are different than if you are wholesaling to shops. Requirements will sometimes vary according to the particular authority's interpretation – grin and bear it, the only alternative is to get the law tested in court, and you may lose.
5. There is a big area of presentation and branding. Your product, whatever it is, should be displayed to the best advantage, and so should you. Everyone appreciates that beef comes from the farm, but manure on the boots doesn't cut it, and an apron that was used yesterday when the cakes were baked isn't going to look good either. By all means if you want to wear a mob cap and a full apron, or a smock, red spotted neckerchief and old felt hat, and chew a straw be my guest, but smartly turned out, and warmly dressed (it does get cold at markets) is better.

Your product needs to be properly wrapped, chilled if necessary, and look as though it is going to be really good to eat. In the early days of farmers' markets someone said that the public don't want slick packaging. Wrong. The public are pretty sophisticated (i.e. they

expect pretty labels) in this area and your labels need to be good. Trading outside it is as well to have them waterproof, so if you are printing your own (not difficult) buy a laser printer, colour too. We can advise you on this further if you need. We have seen professionally done labels that were so boring you could fall asleep, labels with the main information in different sizes or fonts – if they're all pies keep it the same, and the cakes can be different but all the same.

6. We provide the venue, an umbrella (with a central post) which is 3 metres by 2.4 metres (10x8 in feet) to provide cover, and we have electricity in most places (at extra cost) and all appliances must have a Portable Appliance Test (PAT TEST). We also do a lot of advertising, particularly roadside signage. In rain and sun we will do our best to protect you, either with gutters to join the umbrellas together, or using additional umbrellas for shade.
7. You provide tables and any other display material that you require. You need to have some sort of sign or banner to say who you are.
8. You will also need insurance. Public liability (£2 million), Employers liability and Product liability. You can get these from many sources, but the best we have found is the National Federation of Market Traders (NFMT) who include all in their membership fee of about £100 a year.
9. Come and visit us on a market and talk to us, there is no substitute for seeing what goes on!
10. Even after all that there is no guarantee that there will be room for you at a market. Whilst we are in favour of free markets, with the public making their choice of who they buy from, we are essentially Keynesian in that we know that government – in this case us – has to step in to make sure that markets do not become distorted.