



Farmers Markets - When is Enough, Enough & Who is Overseeing their Growth?

In 1989, there were 60 farmers markets in California, today there are over 500. Unfortunately, during roughly that same time the number of farms in California and the number of acres farmed decreased. Still, it seems like every community is demanding their very own farmers market. We're not surprised. Customers love you and your products. You're in high demand and short supply!

This surge highlights the success of farmers markets and the growing public demand for fresh local food. It's the ultimate win-win relationship; the family farm is successful and the eater is healthy and happy. The problem is that the number of small family farms is not increasing at the same rate of consumer demand. This means the farmer is now in a position of power when it comes to deciding which markets to attend and it's more important than ever that farmers make smart business decisions.

AIM's goal is to create the most successful farmers markets for you to market your product. WE NEED YOUR HELP because your success is primary to the success of this industry as a whole. When a farmer sets up booths at competing markets on the same day, same hours, within minutes of one another both markets suffer. AIM has noticed that this scenario splits your customer base and your sales, over-extends your business, and threatens the success of all markets. We'd like to encourage you the farmer, food purveyor, or artisan to ask the following questions before starting a new market:

- Does the market compete directly with a market I attend?
- What is the cost-benefit of joining this market? Will this new market increase my bottom line or am I doubling my costs while splitting my sales between two markets?
- How is the market promoted? How does the market advertise? On site signs and visibility?
- Is the organization that is managing the market truly a non-profit with 501(c) IRS status? (Note: there are many organizations that are "California Not-for-Profit Mutual Benefit Corporations" who have not taken the important next step of filing with the IRS for their non-profit 501(c) status.)

AIM's primary goal is to support regional small family farms by facilitating excellent farmers markets. We thank you for your continued support of our organization and look forward to growing together as the local food movement thrives. We invite you to visit our website to explore what's new at AIM including our monthly e-newsletter, Eat Local 101, special events, educational advertising campaigns, and helpful resources for you to better manage your business (Markets/Applications/Grow Your Business).

Evaluating New Market Opportunities

AIM Board & Staff is very careful when exploring a possible new market. In fact we've turned down over 30 market opportunities over the past few years. More recently, we've been receiving nearly a request a week for a new market. Because we're looking for truly excellent market opportunities for our members, there are a number of different factors we consider, including:

- Is this community truly in need of a farmers market, or is it already being served?
- Is there room to grow, accessible public transportation & ample parking?
- Is there strong community support among potential shoppers and the host organization?

Agricultural Institute of Marin believes in "quality over quantity" when it comes to running farmers markets. Since 2005, AIM's focus has been on growing its existing farmers markets into the most productive markets for our members. During that same time the organization closed two less viable markets, and more recently opened two markets after careful consideration.

In June 2009, AIM opened the Stonestown Farmers Market in response to tremendous demand from numerous neighborhoods on the West side of San Francisco for a destination market capable of serving the West side at large. The Stonestown Farmers Market was recently named the Best Family Oriented Farmers Market in SF by SF Weekly.

In May 2010, AIM opened the Marin City Farmers Market. AIM had considered a number of sites in Southern Marin and believed that, of all those communities requesting a farmers market, Marin City demonstrated the greatest need for access to fresh food and that the Gateway Shopping Center offered the best location for a vibrant farmers market capable of serving all of Southern Marin. In its first year, the market will run June through September. During this four-month trial period, AIM and its community partners will evaluate the viability of the market and its success at meeting our shared goals.

Evaluating new market opportunities is perhaps one of the most difficult elements of our business, both for the farmer and the organizations that run farmers markets. We continue to believe in quality over quantity, and are committed taking into consideration the needs of all parties, especially our farmers. Ultimately, our goal is your success.