

Washington Farmer's Market 101

About: The Washington Farmers Market has been serving our community for the past **37 years**. We're proud that **our vendors make, bake, or grow** all the products that they sell. The Farmer's Market has become a **popular social event** every **Thursday evening in Central Park** throughout the summer with around **50 vendors, 2-3 food trucks, live music** and a **place to gather and meet** with friends and neighbors. Our Vendors vary from **produce, to baked goods, to craft items, to services (such as knife sharpening)**. We want to encourage the kids in our community to continue their reading over the summer, so have started our **Farm Fables program providing free books for the kids** every week, donated/sponsored by local citizens and businesses. Our staff is all Volunteers organizing our market under the umbrella of Main Street Washington.

Schedule and Fees: Our schedule runs from **May 14 to Oct 1 for 2026**. **Thursdays setup from 3-5, sales begin** with the ringing of the **bell about 5, and ends around 7:30** or whenever vendors sell out... **Weekly Fees for a space are \$5/week or \$10/week** if you need electric hookup. Fees can be paid annually or semi-annually if that works for you with a bit of a discount **\$90/yr or \$180/yr** with electricity. With annual payment you get a bit of a discount and you get a reserved space for the entire year.

Rules: One of the primary rules that applies to everything at the market is that the **product being sold must be grown or made by the vendor**; you can't sell for someone else or resell products. You can have **value-added products**, for instance, if you bought almonds from someone and then you smoke them and add your own spices, etc, they are considered value-added and you can sell them. The **state of Iowa** has some rules and regulations for all farmers' markets within our state, mostly **to ensure that food items purchased from the market can be relied on to be safe and sanitary practices are followed**. There are labeling requirements for baked and canned goods, and to be labelled ORGANIC one must have proof of certification. Certain products have to be pre-authorized by the state, such as meat or dairy products ..., so you need to do your homework and determine what is required before you are ready to sell at the market. Washington FM abides by and enforces the state rules, as well as having our own local rules. Our **Rules (2025) can be found on our website Mainstreetwashington.org/farmers-market** (2026 changes coming soon).

How do you become a vendor at the Washington Farmer's Market? The short answer is ***Show Up, Check In/Pay the Fee, Set Up, & Sell Your Product.***

APPROVED ITEMS (per Iowa Department of Inspection and Appeals & the State of Iowa Cottage Food Laws):

A. Fresh fruits and vegetables 1. Washed and stored in clean containers; displayed at least 6" off the ground.

B. Baked Goods (except soft pies and bakery products with custard or cream fillings)

1. Must be completely wrapped, covered, bagged, or boxed.

2. Must be labeled with: a. Name of product b. Quantity c. Ingredients label d. Name and address as well as phone # or email of person who made the item e. Label should also include the following statement: This product was produced at a residential property f. that is exempt from State Licensing & Inspections. g. Identification of Potential Allergens

UNAPPROVED ITEMS without proper pre-authorization A. Meat, meat products, fish, poultry B. Livestock or pets C. Dairy Products (examples: homemade butter, raw milk) D. Home canned low-acid fruits and vegetables E. Cider made from windfall/downfall apples

A person wanting to sell a product that is listed as unapproved should contact the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship at (515) 281-6588.

It is highly encouraged that all growers take the Farmers' Market Food Safety training. It's offered free at: www.safeproduce.cals.iastate.edu.

Online vendor form:

Pay online:



Hints: But to be a successful vendor and build a lasting clientele, one needs to do a bit of planning ahead, and have the best experience for yourself and the customers you serve. I've included some things to think about to make your first market experience a good one:

1. **Plan ahead** have a simple business plan – a sample handout providing some of the things you should think about. Also existing vendors have a wealth of information and real life experience and examples – ask for hints.
2. Before you can start a business, you need to come up with **something to sell!** Think about **a product that solves a problem, is a hot new trend, or just something you love to do.** Your product can be almost anything as long as you make it or grow it yourself (Food, games or services), but **most importantly, it should be something that people want to buy.** Sell something you're **passionate** about or care about **or believe in.** You should **do a little research, know your potential customers and their needs, know your competition** (*if 10 other vendors are already selling sourdough, you may want to pick a different product unless yours is that much better and distinct*).
3. **Price matters:** Setting the right prices for your products can get a little complicated. **Too high &** it might be more than people want to spend and you could end up selling less than you hoped, price **too low** , you might sell a lot, but not make much money! **Research the competition** and see what the best rates are likely to be. (*ex. Barbara's bouquets vs other flower vendors*) Ultimately, you'll need to do some homework to figure out **how much it costs to make your product** and how much you can sell it for, to make a profit. Once you've determined the best price, don't forget to **clearly display the prices for your customers.**
4. **First Impressions – a) Smile and interact** with your potential customers! (*Can't stress this enough*) Have you ever known a salesman to sit back in his chair and ignore his customer? If this doesn't come naturally for you, practice at home acknowledging your buyers with a greeting or question that draws them into your booth. Tell them what you're selling in just a few words and once you've got their attention, then go into more detail! It makes all the difference!
b) **Display should catch the customer's eye.** A bare table with a few products lying around may not yield the response you want. Display the items tastefully, usually on **tiered shelves** or so everything is easily

visible, **neatness and color, attractive packaging, colorful signs** showing your business name, your name, products sold with prices.

- c) **Packaging:** ex: imagine cupcakes in little boxes with a cute label with your logo- very appealing, as opposed to individual cupcakes covered in plastic wrap with icing dripping down the sides...
- d) Remember to **consider the weather**. What will you do if we get a quick **rain shower**? What about **windy days**? Your papers and small inventory may just blow away. In the **summer heat**, icings may melt.... **In the fall, hot cocoa** may sell better than lemonade...
- e) Get **practical ideas from those existing vendors** - it might pay to take the time to view the displays for existing vendors and figure out what you like, what ideas you might want to adapt for your display, and ask them questions (you'll find the vendors like to help each other)
- f) **Make your business stand out.** Chances are, no matter what you decide to offer, you'll face competition! If many people are selling the same thing at the market, why would customers choose your product over someone else's? You might provide extra value to your customer, make the buying experience memorable, or deliver your product in a unique way to differentiate your business from the rest!
- g) Consider **giving out small samples**, especially when someone looks interested, you might ask if they would like a free sample (mostly for food items). If someone gets a free taste of your product & they like it, you just may have won a customer!
- h) Long-term plan – **how to keep customers coming back week after week**? Customers may return for the same food items weekly, but not so much with crafts, jewelry... Even food can be enhanced with new flavors, **flavor of the month**, etc. **Variety** is good and keeps people returning to see what's new this week. **Hold a demo** of some sort, or a game to attract attention....

5. Have Fun!

Washington Farmers Market

Your Name: _____

Business Name: _____

Address: _____ City: _____

Phone #: _____ Email _____

Will you need electricity? Yes or No

Type of business, what will you be selling at your booth?

What is unique about your business? Why should I buy from you? What do you do best? Include anything you think may be appealing.

What's your story? How did you decide to get started in your business? What was your inspiration?

How often do you expect to sell at the market ? (just checking it out, seasonal, once a month, hope to be long term...)
