

Getting the best from organic fruit and vegetables: Retailing and presenting fresh produce

This factsheet is one in a series to help horticultural businesses improve the quality of their produce. The others deal with the growing crop and post harvest management. A great fruit and vegetable display is vibrant, bountiful and makes grocery shopping a pleasure, whether at a market, a farm shop or an independent retailer/ green grocer. The produce on show needs to be in prime condition, presented well and arrive home looking fresh and alive.

Start with quality produce

Make sure you have quality produce to work with in the first place:

- If you are receiving produce from other suppliers, **check the temperature records** and don't sign delivery notes unless you are happy with its condition. You might wish to check its temperature on arrival.
- Once you have received it **move produce to chilled storage as soon as possible**. Apply moisture with sprayer as necessary and cover all leafy crops and brassicas with clean plastic bags/damp towels.
- Reject produce that isn't fresh, poorly graded or badly packaged. Once you take title to inferior produce, the losses will be yours alone.
- Daily deliveries are best to ensure a steady supply of fresh product

Look good

Most food purchases are made on impulse and are driven by appearance, so the way your offer looks has a massive influence on your sales.

- **Eye level is buy level.** Don't go lower than 18"¹ above ground or above 5'10"
- **Allow enough time to build your display.** It needs to be robust enough to see the day out, and it is difficult to alter it once customers arrive.
- **Use a consistent, logical layout.** For example arrange crops in family groups with roots at one end through to salads at the other.
- **Use contrasting colours** to break up big blocks of green or brown. You can do this with the produce itself, for example by putting leeks between onions and carrots, or with the display materials, for instance by putting a purple lining under cucumbers.
- **Use clean and uniform display boxes and baskets.** If you can, keep the produce in its original box to save time, avoid bruising and show off the grower's logo/ identity.

¹ This is an environmental health regulation

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- **Use a container size appropriate to volume and turn over.** For example, ginger is small volume and low turnover so goes in small baskets. The opposite is true of onions and potatoes.
- Once you have finished stand back and **look at it with a customer's eye** from several different angles.
- Put out your signs and have a cup of tea!

Keep looking good

Having set up a fresh and vibrant looking display, you need to keep it that way throughout the day. Obsessive attention to moisture and temperature and zero tolerance of substandard product are the keys to success:

- Use **insulation or window blinds** to keep the shop/ building cool, rather than refrigerated display units. The latter may heat up their surroundings.
- **Monitor the stand regularly** and systematically and keep it well stocked. Strike a balance between having volumes to create an impression of bounty and ensuring the turnover rate high enough to keep everything on display looking fresh
- **Rotate replenishment** so that, for example, new supplies always go under the last of the previous batch.
- **Use your mister liberally**, particularly on warmer days and keep a spare sprayer in the fridge.
- **Remove or trim anything that is not in top condition**, such as rust on leeks, broccoli with open florets, yellow leaves on brassicas etc. Remove all debris from box; broken carrots won't sell!
- **Remove any undersize items** such as onions under 40mm and put in free box.

Clear pricing and labelling

- Prices must represent **value for money**. Check market prices online at mysupermarket.com or visit your local supermarket.
- **Organic premiums** vary but 15-20% above conventional is often achievable.
- **Be flexible.** Vary prices above and below the target margins depending on the rate of turnover. Customers check the price of some lines (such as new season crops) more than others, so be competitive on these to ensure rapid turnover and volume throughput. Prices of very perishable produce with short shelf-life need to be monitored to ensure it is sold quickly.
- Label each line in **English and Welsh**, showing the **grower's name** and county for the UK and **country of origin** for any non-UK product.
- By law, weighed goods must show **price per kilogramme**. However, many people still think in pounds (lb), so show both.
- **Make any reductions in good time.** If customers don't react within 30mins, keep reducing it until it goes. Everything has a price!
- **Be clear** about what can be reduced, what can go in the free box and what goes in the compost bin.

Smiley happy people

The way you and your staff present yourselves is just as important as how your produce looks:

- **Clean aprons or standard clothing/** uniforms present an air of professionalism
- Always look **cheerful and approachable** (not always easy, we know!)
- Well **trained knowledgeable and motivated people** Positive, engaging salespeople are a huge asset to any business. Their tasks are physically and mentally demanding, so reward them accordingly. Paying **a little more in wages nearly always pays off** through increased sales.

At the end of the day.....

- **Clean down** everything ready for fresh start next day, leaving notes and fresh signs as required.
- **Review produce** scheduled to arrive the following day and note which sales need to be speeded up or eked out.
- **Record wastage** - less than 0.5% is quite achievable.

Further reading

"The New Organic Grower", marketing chapter. Elliot Coleman. Chelsea Green Publishing 1983

[www.unicorn-grocery.co.uk/grow-a-grocery/Veg Storage and Presentation.pdf](http://www.unicorn-grocery.co.uk/grow-a-grocery/Veg%20Storage%20and%20Presentation.pdf)

<http://nwrec.hort.oregonstate.edu/vegindex.html>

www.glebelandsmarketgarden.co.uk/vegselling.html

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