

School farmers markets

Farmers markets in schools were pioneered by the Mid Wales Food and Land Trust. The overall aim of school farmers markets is to 'reconnect children to food and farming' in a local setting.

The idea of holding a mini farmers' market in the school hall after school on a Friday started at Aberhafesp County Primary School just outside Newtown in Powys. Teachers and parent governors, who were also farmers, interested the PTA in such an event.

The main precedent for school involvement in a commercial event is car boot sales – the difference is that the Farmers' Market involves the children and has a social dimension valued by the wider community. With growing awareness about local food and food miles this is also a timely initiative which enables people actually to buy direct from local producers on a regular basis. This is a good way to interest children in food so that they become 'foodwise' consumers.



The benefits can be summarized as:

For stallholders:

- An extra opportunity to sell
- An opportunity to meet customers and take orders
- Short duration – 3 hours
- Fee per table just £5 (a town based Farmers' Market typically charges around £20 per stall)
- Lively community setting – pleasant social contacts
- Warm school/community hall setting
- Tea/coffee available

For children:

- Excitement of being part of something 'grown up'
- Developing plans for what they will make and sell
- Satisfaction in having their knowledge admired and valued by parents
- Challenge of selling, handling cash, planning and data collection (consumer surveys)
- Experience of publicity – pupils even did a workshop presentation at a food conference.

For teachers:

- A route to address the national curriculum across a broad range of subjects: maths, art and design, English etc
- Links to healthy Schools and Eco-Schools and other initiatives
- An opportunity to develop work in the outdoor classroom and promote exercise through farm visits
- Links to PSE and careers awareness

For parents:

- Opportunity to buy direct from small local producers
- Convenient as they know the school and it is nearby
- Welcome opportunity to chat with others
- Can take fresh food e.g. meat straight home rather than leaving it in the car for hours
- Children are busy with their stall, activities, eating, drinking and socializing in a safe environment
- People tend to know one another – at least by sight.

For the teachers involved it is undoubtedly extra work but they do get a buzz from the children's response and the way in which the parents can see how they are helping their children.

The starting point was assisting the school to take all the pupils – both infants and juniors in these small rural schools – to visit local farms. The location of the farm, and sometimes the farming family (as pupil, governor or teacher) were already familiar. A half-day visit to the local farmers' market introduced the children to the marketing side of farming and the links with other businesses. Although mainly food, Farmer's Markets include plants, crafts and WI stalls.

The MWFLT Project co-ordinator meets the teachers, explains the format, helps to assess the venue and identifies the planning tasks. The co-ordinator may also attend school to lead discussion with the children about food, their farm visit, their experience of food, buying and selling and promotion. The young children involved initially find the 'brainstorming' format novel but soon relish it and ideas flow. The older junior children also find it refreshing to charge adults with tasks to take away and report back!

After a market the children again brainstorm in planning the next. Points which come out, or can be prompted, are: increasing average spend, the difference between perishable and non-perishable goods and discussions about problems experienced (selling out too early, having too much unsold, location of stall, competition with other stallholders).

The children naturally focus on information gaps and a survey is often devised and conducted by pupils at the next market. The information gained from both consumers and stall holders can be analysed and bar charts are often used on the computer. Then a discussion about what the figures tell us (and what they do not) ensues. Not surprisingly, natural entrepreneurial flair emerges. As they become familiar with the market the children choose their best roles – poster design, decorating the stall, handling and counting money, offering discounts on perishable goods – the list goes on. Some rotation of roles is logical as confidence develops and new tasks emerge. At a market the parents can observe their children in action from a distance and often find it a powerful and eye-opening experience!

Here is a planning checklist:

Venue - If the hall is not the school hall or not exclusively a school building then early and appropriate liaison with the relevant people is vital.

Timing - A Friday or mid-week is the preferred day as many office workers will leave early on a Friday and it is a natural shopping day. Markets avoid clashing with town Farmers' Markets and some are held on other days of the week.

The market is usually set up from 2.30pm and starts at 3pm so that some parents can shop before the children join in. When school ends at 3.30pm the children officially open the market with some songs/music/announcements/presentations and then the market is in full swing. There may be an influx of people after 4.30pm but by 5.30pm people are packing up and leaving. Stallholders are typically good at leaving things as they found it and not leaving rubbish!

Organization – you will need to think about:

- Number of stalls – space inside and outside (in summer, ice-cream and plants; in winter, plants and even Christmas trees)
- Tables for seating and refreshments – may be a separate room but this is often not ideal.
- Catering – typically the PTA, they retain the proceeds
- Collection of stall fees – these go typically to the School Council or the PTA
- Car parking
- Access – e.g. producers are told where there are steps to negotiate and allocated tables near power points if needed
- Allocation of stalls – usually on a first come first served basis but special requirements should be planned for to avoid acrimony or having to ask someone to move!
- Fire alarms – if there is cooking
- Publicity – local parish newsletters, Post office notice board school newsletter to parents, local papers, local radio, signage. Reports afterwards – getting a photographer along.

Liaison with local businesses – the need to be inclusive and avoid causing offence. Sometimes a parent will have a stall selling their hobby crafts e.g. handmade cards, plants. If the word is 'put out' widely and 'everyone knows about it' then anyone missed out will tend to be keen to join in at a later date rather than annoyed that somebody decided to leave them out! Often those with fruit or veg. may not be able to sell at winter or spring events but will appreciate being included for summer and autumn markets.

Food hygiene – those in business selling food are of course bound by the regulations and it is their responsibility to maintain proper storage and Food Hygiene certificates.

Finally, clearing up afterwards - Unless people agree who can stay behind it is often the teachers who get left with this task! It is only fair to agree this beforehand.

Producers value regularity and schools have tended to hold a market each term. The organization tends to be very easy once started as producers just turn up and set up. There is no reason why schools in a particular locality should not hold markets in rotation thus sharing the benefits.



For more information contact:

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