



Asap's

**Farmers Market  
Tour Guide**



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### About ASAP

ASAP (Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project) has been a national leader in the local food movement for more than a decade. ASAP's mission is to help local farms thrive, link farmers to markets and supporters, and build healthy communities through connections to local food. The organization's work

includes a broad array of planning, communication, grassroots organizing, research, and advocacy in order to generate awareness and increase consumer demand for local food and farms, develop the regional capacity to support local farms, expand the availability of locally grown food, and foster systemic change in agriculture and the food system.

Find more information at [www.asapconnections.org](http://www.asapconnections.org).

# Introduction

Farmers markets are more than just a place to get local seasonal produce. They are also a place where you can meet the farmers that grow your food and be part of a community event. A farmers market provides you with opportunities to learn about what grows in your area, discover new fruits and vegetables you may be unfamiliar with, find recipes and cooking tips, and engage with the community.



While many people enjoy frequenting their local farmers market, it is common for people within the community to not know where the closest farmers market is, when it is open, and how to shop at it. And while all the bustling excitement of a market is one of its many draws, new shoppers may find the environment at the farmers market to be unfamiliar and possibly overwhelming.

ASAP's Farmers Market Tour Guide was created to help you introduce people to your farmers market, share best practices in shopping, and help shoppers to feel comfortable at the market so that they can become regulars. Whether you are a market employee or volunteer, local organization, or a community group, you will find useful tips and tools to organize and lead a successful market tour.

## Why do a farmers market tour?



Just as each community is different, each farmers market within a community is different. By offering tours of your market, you have the opportunity to be a friendly face that can explain how to shop at the market and answer new customers' questions. Market tours allow you to highlight the vendors at the market and let people know about special events taking place at the market.

In helping people to become familiar with the workings of a market, they will not only be more likely to become regular customers, but also to help spread the word about the market!



# Steps in planning your farmers market tour

## Step 1

**If you are not the manager of a farmers market, choose the market you would like to give a tour.**

It is best to choose a market that you are familiar with and where you are comfortable shopping. Your tour participants will benefit from your “insider” knowledge of a market. If you are in the Appalachian Grown™ region, use ASAP’s online Local Food Guide to find your nearest market. If you are not in the Appalachian Grown region, you can find your nearest farmers market through the Farmers Market Coalition, your local Cooperative Extension office or USDA sites. See the resources section for website information.

If there are multiple markets that you are familiar with in your community, consider the tour participants you are hoping for when determining at which market to conduct a tour. This is discussed further in Step 4.

## Step 2

**Contact the farmers market manager.**

If you are not the manager at the market you would like to tour, it is important to involve the manager in the tour planning process. Markets differ in how they are operated. While one market may have a single manager, another may have multiple managers or a volunteer just for market day. If you are not able to find contact information for the manager, you may want to look for him/her at the market. She/he will likely be busy on market day so briefly explain who you are and that you are interested in promoting the market through providing a tour. Ask for their contact information and when the best time would be to contact them and talk about doing a tour.



### Step 3

## Questions to ask the market manager:

Once you have an opportunity to speak with the manager, the following questions may help you to plan a successful tour.

### ***What forms of payment are accepted at the market?***

Markets can differ in what payment options are available to shoppers. Cash payments made to individual vendors are typical, however, using debit, credit, or EBT (food stamp) cards can differ from market to market. Ask the manager if shoppers can pay with anything other than cash, and if so, how does the process work?



For example, at some markets you can use a debit/credit card to purchase \$5 tokens that work like cash with all the vendors. EBT tokens in \$1 increments can also be purchased at some markets.

### ***What time of day is best to do a tour?***

Choose a time that is not too early for most people, but when there will still be plenty of produce available.

### ***What time in the season is best to do a tour? When would a tour best highlight what the farmers are growing?***



Different regions will have different growing seasons and therefore offer different variety and abundance throughout the year. Consider planning your tour when vendors have a wide variety of items and larger quantities to sell, allowing you to show the tour participants a better representation of what the market has to offer.

For example, an April tour may showcase just greens, lettuces, and root vegetables, while a May tour may have a wider variety of produce including asparagus, strawberries, greens, lettuces, roots, mushrooms, and peas.

Also, if the market is not open year round, offering a tour earlier in the season allows people to become established customers before the market closes or moves indoors for the winter. An October market may be beautiful and full of wonderful produce, but if the market closes in November, people may get in the routine of shopping at market just before the market closes or moves for the season.

***Are there any special events happening at the market?***

If there are special events happening that may be of interest to tour participants, try to coordinate your tour with the event. For example, planning a tour for a healthy lifestyles group on a day that a chef will be doing a cooking demonstration at the market. If your audience is families, you could plan the tour on a day when the market will be offering kids activities.



***Would the market manager like to lead or co lead the tour with you?***

The market manager is likely to be the expert on the market. If she is interested and available, invite her to lead or co lead the tour with you.

***Is the market open rain or shine and will you conduct your tour rain or shine?***

Most outdoor markets are open rain or shine. When planning what weather conditions (if any) would cause you to cancel the tour, consider that if you were to cancel the tour, you would need a way to notify people who were planning on coming to the market for the tour.

## **Step 4 Identify tour participants**

If you do not already know who your ideal market tour audience is, work with the market manager to determine what group(s) of people would likely be interested in a tour and could be potential new customers.

**Things to consider when choosing your tour participants:**

Where is the market located?

What time is it open?

What forms of payment are accepted at the market?

Is the market accessible by public transit?

Here are a few examples of how these questions can guide your decision in who to offer tours:

Is the market open in the late afternoon or early evening and located close to a school where families will be picking up their children? **You could offer tours to families.**

Does the market accept EBT? Is it located near a housing development with low income residents? **You could offer tours to the residents.**

Is it located near a hospital? **You could offer tours to hospital employees.**

Are there special interest groups such as cooking, healthy lifestyle, or gardening groups that meet in your community and would be interested in a tour?



## Step 5

### Advertise your tour

Once you have identified the audience you would like to invite on a tour, consider how you will invite them.

People like to see a familiar face when they are in a new environment. If possible, invite people face to face. Some ideas for how to invite people:

Is there an already scheduled meeting that you could attend, do a short introduction to the market, and then invite people to meet you for a tour? PTO meetings, garden clubs, healthy lifestyle clubs, athletic clubs, and staff meetings at businesses and organizations are a few ideas.

Offer a cooking class or demonstration using produce from the market. Provide a recipe for what you make and invite people to meet you at the market for a tour and to shop for ingredients.

If a face to face invitation is not an option, is there a newsletter you could advertise in or are you able to hand out and post fliers somewhere?

### Suggestions for your invitation:

**Determine your ideal tour group size.** Too many people touring the market could be problematic depending on the layout of the market. Include language in the invitation that indicates a maximum number of tour participants.

**Consider how you will have people sign up for the tour.** Confirming participants in advance is an important part of the process so that you can plan your tour logistics accordingly.

**Give people something to take with them** as a reminder of the tour, such as a flier.

In your tour advertisement, **mention the market name, location, tour time, and provide a map of the market** that indicates where you will meet them.

**Be recognizable!** If you are inviting them face to face, let them know what to look for on the day of the tour. "I will be wearing this same t-shirt with

#### Asheville City Market Tours

Public Works Building parking lot  
161 South Charlotte Street  
Asheville, NC 28801

Meet at the barricade on the west side of the parking lot.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Asheville Public Works Building

**Buncombe County Farmers Markets that accept EBT/credit/debit**

Asheville City Market  
French Broad Food Co-op Wednesday Tailgate Market  
River Arts District Farmers Market  
North Asheville Tailgate Market  
West Asheville Tailgate Market

**EBT • credit • debit  
PAYMENTS WELCOME**

Questions? Contact Jessica Sparks-Mussulin  
jessica@asapconnections.org  
(828) 236-1282

Sample market tour invitation

this peapod logo on it and I will be holding a container of cherries for you to sample.” It may seem like an insignificant detail, but for some people, going into a new environment can be intimidating. The quicker they can find a friendly face that they know, the quicker they can become comfortable being at the market.

If you were not able to invite participants face to face, ***on the day of the tour hold a large sign that says, “Market Tour Starts Here!”*** so that people can find you.



## Step 6 Visit the market

Prior to your tour, and as close to your tour date as possible, visit the market. Take note of what is in season.

Do you see something you don't recognize? Ask the farmer/vendor about the product so that you can answer questions about it. Odds are good that if you don't recognize it, someone on your tour won't as well.

Are restrooms available? If so, make sure you know where they are.

Is there ample parking? If not, keep that in mind the day of the tour. You may want to allow a few extra minutes for tour participants to assemble if finding a parking spot is likely to be time consuming.

What is the layout of the market? On the day of the tour you want to try to avoid blocking vendor booths and interfering with their sales. Are there spots where the whole tour group can stop to ask you questions and have discussions? Depending on the size of your group, it may require some logistics planning with the market manager to not block aisles and vendor booths.



# It's tour day!

## Assemble your group

Consider having something from the market available for participants to taste as they assemble for the tour. Depending on the number of participants, a pint of cherry tomatoes or bunch of grapes may be enough for everyone to have a sample.




## Tour time!

As mentioned earlier, each market will be laid out differently and require different logistics of moving a group through the market without blocking vendors booths and disrupting sales. A small group in a market with wide aisles may allow you all to walk through the market together while pausing at each vendor and pointing out what they offer. A large group and/or narrow aisles may mean that you walk a short distance and then stop as a group (out of the flow of pedestrian traffic) to discuss what you just walked past.

The amount of time a tour takes can vary greatly depending on the size of the market and the number of questions your tour participants ask. Depending on the weather and the physical ability of your tour participants, plan to have your tour last no more than 30 minutes.

## Things to highlight and discussion starters for your tour

An ideal tour group will be engaged and ask lots of questions. However, in case they do not have many questions, be prepared with discussion starters.

-  Explain to participants what their payment options are at the market.
  - What are payment options at the market? Options may include cash, debit, credit, EBT, WIC vouchers, and/or SFMNP vouchers
  - How do you use the various payment methods at the market?
  - Be sure to point out where customers can find the market manager (or an information table), get tokens (if applicable), and where the nearest ATM is.
  - Are there any incentive programs around using EBT cards or any other payment options?
-  Point out different produce and ask the participants how they like to prepare it. For example: Are those beets? Did you know you can eat the beet greens? Does anyone have a good recipe for beet greens?
-  For each vendor that you pass, try to give a brief description of what they sell and highlight something they are selling that day. Try your best to give all vendors fair time in the spotlight.

- ✓ If they aren't busy with a customer, ask farmers if they have a fun fact about their farm or how their farm got its name.
- ✓ Ask participants if there is anything in particular they are hoping to see at market that day.
- ✓ If the market manager is not leading the tour, see if they are available during the tour to introduce themselves and welcome the tour participants.
- ✓ Inform them of any special events that take place at the market.

## **End-of-tour surveys**

Is there any information that would be helpful for the market manager or vendors to know? If so, an end-of-tour survey may be beneficial.

If you choose to do a survey, consider your intended tour audience and determine what languages you will want to have your survey in. It is best to keep your survey short (1-2 questions) and to the point, again, collecting only information that would be helpful to the market.

Depending on the information you want to collect, doing a short paper survey at the market is likely to be easier than collecting participants' email addresses and sending an electronic follow up survey.

### **After the tour**

Be prepared to stay and answer questions and continue walking around the market if participants are shopping so that you can answer any questions that they have and help them find items that they are looking for.

## **Ideas to encourage tour participation**

- ✓ On the day of the scheduled tour, host a free special event such as a cooking demonstration or kids activities.
- ✓ Offer a market token or gift card for tour participants to use to purchase something at the market.
- ✓ Raffle off a cookbook that highlights local food grown in your area.
- ✓ Raffle off a product you purchased from a vendor.



# Farmers market tours as nutrition education



Farmers market tours are a wonderful opportunity to have conversations about fresh local food. Often times tour participants will ask questions about growing practices, affordability, and food preparation and storage. One of the benefits of shopping at a farmers market is you often have the best resource to answer all these questions right in front of you - the farmers!

Common topics that come up during tours are listed below. It is important to know your tour audience well enough to be able to offer answers to their questions that encourage them to engage in shopping at the market, rather than cause them to lose interest in shopping there.

## ***Is the food at the market organic? Do the farmers grow GMO crops?***

Some markets require certain growing practices to be followed in order for a vendor to sell at the market, however, many do not. For questions about growing

practices, rather than give your opinion, encourage shoppers to ask the farmers questions about their growing practices. By asking the farmer directly, shoppers can learn a lot about a farm. For example, a farm may practice organic growing methods but not be a certified organic farm due to the cost of getting certified. Therefore, they cannot advertise that they are an organic farm.

## ***Why should I shop at the farmers market? Isn't this same food available at the grocery store?***

By shopping at a farmers market you get to know who grew your food and where, so you reconnect with it, and your community. You can put a face and a farm with local food. You'll learn about the seasons and weather through their effect on crops, and you'll learn about the work of farming from your discussions with the grower. When you buy directly from the farmer more of your money goes back to the farm. And if you shop at a farmers market or subscribe to a CSA, you'll meet your neighbors and participate in a community event.



When produce is shipped hundreds or thousands of miles, it loses crispness, flavor, and nutrients on the way. Foods grown to be shipped may be picked before they ripen and treated with more chemicals. Local foods haven't traveled so far and are fresher. If you're buying at a farmers market, the produce has often been picked that morning.

And while some of the same products may be available at the grocery store, there are often more varieties (and more flavorful varieties) available at the farmers market. Tomatoes are a great example of a food found in both places but that often is very different. The ones found in the grocery store are often grown for their ability to hold up well during long transportation time from the field to the grocery store, whereas tomatoes found at a farmers market are often grown for their flavor.

### ***How do I cook with this?***

Farmers often have the best ideas for what to do with the food that they have grown. If you see another customer purchasing a product that you are unfamiliar with, ask them what they do with it. Most people love to share their favorite recipes!

It is also good to be familiar with one or two cookbooks that feature food grown in your area that you can refer people to.

### ***How do I store this? How long will it last?***

Again, the farmer that grew it is your best resource for information about their crops. You can also direct people to [fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org](http://fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org) for comprehensive information on how to store fruits and vegetables.

### **Most importantly**

Have fun! Farmers markets are wonderful spaces that highlight hard working individuals and unique foods and businesses found in our communities. When people see you having fun at the market and getting excited about what is offered there that day, they will get excited as well! After all, the goal of a farmers market tour is to make your farmers market a comfortable and accessible place for people to visit and shop!

