

BC Association of Farmers' Markets
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Ensuring product transparency: Toolkit for BC Farmers' Markets



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The Toolkit

BC farmers' markets have experienced exponential growth over the past 5 years. Increasing from 100 markets in 2009 to 145+ markets in 2019. This growth has been great for BC farmers and consumers, but it also comes with **a greater responsibility on farmers' market organizers to ensure the authenticity of products being sold through the farmers' market.**

Consumers have many choices of where to purchase local food. A recent Market

Research Plan and Market Strategy conducted by Farm Food Drink has shown that trust is a key factor in why consumers choose to shop at farmers' markets. The belief that they are purchasing products that were made, baked, grown or raised by the producer in BC is a definitive and deciding factor in consumers' choice of where to spend their money. Therefore, ensuring the authenticity and transparency of products being sold at member BC farmers' markets is of significant importance.

This toolkit is divided into three areas:

- A. Prevention
- B. Monitoring and Maintaining
- C. Addressing Issues at Market

A resource list and links to examples are provided throughout. The goal of this toolkit is to assist farmers' market managers and organizations with practical resources and strategies to ensure product transparency at BC farmers' markets.

BC Association of Farmers' Markets Bylaws and Policy

The BCAFM provides criteria for a “farmers’ market” and its policy on reselling. The definitions below and used within this toolkit are taken directly from the **BCAFM Bylaws** (December 13, 2017) and **BCAFM Farmers’ Market Membership Policy** (November 3, 2018):

Farmers’ Market Definition

“Farmers’ Market” means a market located in British Columbia comprised exclusively (100%) of vendors who grow, make, bake, raise or wild harvest the products they sell, all of which products must be grown or processed in British Columbia, and which prioritize primary producers/farmers and food, all in accordance with such criteria as may be established by the Board from time to time;

Farmers’ Market Criteria

A “Farmers’ Market” must:

- prioritize and include BC primary producer vendors
- have a majority of vendors (ie; 51%) in the following categories combined, present on a typical market day:
 - o primary producers
 - o processed/prepared food
 - o ready to eat food
- have at least 4 vendors present on any market day
- operate for 2 or more hours per day, for a minimum of 4 occasions in a year

100% Grow, Raise, Wild Harvest, Bake, Make

A farmers’ market is comprised exclusively (100%) of vendors who grow, make, bake, raise or wild harvest the products they sell. The reselling of products at BCAFM member farmers’ markets is not allowed.

The full policy and bylaws can be found [here](#) on the BCAFM website.



Credit: BC Farmers' Market Trail
& Jordan Dyck

Strategies for product transparency at BC Farmers' Markets

A. Prevention

By having clear definitions, providing vendors with good information ahead of time and requesting key information during the application process, you will pro-actively prevent many issues related to product transparency.

When considering product transparency, one of the most critical situations to combat is reselling.

1. Develop clear rules and policies to pro-actively define what vendors can and can't sell in regard to product transparency.

Address Reselling

Detail and communicate the BC Association of Farmers' Markets policies, and by extension your policies related to reselling.

Consider Vendor Collectives and Co-Operatives

BC Farmers' Markets policy does allow for more than one vendor's product to be sold under one space, if they are a vendor collective. Therefore, your market may choose to allow vendor collectives and co-operatives.

[See section About Vendor Collective and Vendor Co-Operative]

2. Create clear vendor guidelines and rules

Communication is key. Be clear in your expectations of vendors through clear guidelines and rules to detail that reselling is not permitted.

Reselling

Clearly outline how your market defines 'reselling'. Also, describe the policy your farmers market will follow if there is evidence or suspicion of reselling at the market.

For example the Vancouver Farmers Market [vendor handbook](#) defines reselling as:

*“Reselling: Buying either from another producer or wholesaler and then reselling.
Reselling is not permitted at VFM markets.”*

Vendor Collectives or Co-Operatives

1. Detail if you allow vendor collectives or vendor co-operatives. This could be done through your farmers' market policy, a distinct Vendor Collective and Co-operatives Policy, or elsewhere.
2. Stipulate how products and collective/co-operative members products must be labeled.
3. Review current vendors on a continual basis to make sure they are complying with your policies.
4. Remind vendors to review your policies mid-season, highlighting important rules and regulations, including reselling.



3. Create a vendor application form that supports product transparency

Use the vendor application form to gather as much information as possible.

Ask for information such as:

- The exact location / address of the farm
- The size of the farm
- Is it on leased or owned land?
- Are there multiple sites?

Ask about reselling

You can also ask if they resell products, which is an **opportunity in your application process to define reselling** and to state that it is not permitted.

List of products

Collect product information such as a list of all products they are planning to sell at the market.

Separate application form and/or process

If you allow **vendor co-operatives** or **vendor collectives**, each member of the collective/co-operative should have their own separate application form and/or process.

B. Monitoring and Maintaining

The market is underway, and you've taken steps to communicate policies and regulations to the vendors, and you've approved their applications. You still need to have structures to **ensure your vendors are maintaining product integrity**.

1. Do farm and site visits

By visiting the farm or vendor, you are able to assess if what they sell at the market is supported by what you observe at their location.

Although vendor or farm visits can be very time consuming and costly, they are an important way to learn more about your vendors and farmers, get some good photos, and allow market managers the opportunity to see first hand the products that are grown, raised, made or baked on the farm or premises.

Initial Farm/Site Visit

As a new vendor/farmer joins your market, you are encouraged to visit their location. In doing so, you are able to align what they included on their application with what they have in production. An initial farm/site visit is a great opportunity to build a relationship with the vendor and take photos/videos, collect stories that you can use in promoting them and your farmers market during the season. Your notes and photos will be useful if questions arise about products at their vendor stall.



Credit: Colleen Donovan

Inspection Farm/Site Visit

Based on a complaint or suspicion the vendor is selling product they did not make, bake or grow, you may need to conduct a site visit.

Be sure to come prepared:

- Have a list of the products the vendor has listed on their application form, and ask to be shown each item on the list. Products that are not seen on the farm should be disallowed for sale, and further investigated.

Find a Farm Visit Checklist template in the Resources & Tools section of this toolkit.

2. Hire an agrologist

Agrologists are trained professionals who have the skills to assess what products can be grown in a farming area, what various products look like at various stages of growth, and what products are most likely to be produced from an area of land.

You may choose to hire an agrologist to join you or do farm inspections. An agrologist may be able to visit your market to review the farm products the vendors have at the market.

Talk to other market managers in your area, and consider hiring an agrologist to visit farms that the markets have in common. This is a cost saving method to access a professional and knowledgeable opinion.

If you are not sure where to find an agrologist to hire, you can find one using the BC Institute of Agrologists directory at www.bcia.com/about-bcia/find-an-agrologist.

3. Build trust through signage at vendor booths

On one hand, it is good marketing and promotions for a vendor to have signs at their booth. Labeling products is a best practice for vendors to convey a lot of information about the product such as the variety, taste and price. On the other hand, good signage is crucial to building trust with market shoppers.

If a vendor stall is a collective or co-operative stall, identifying which farm provided which items supports transparency.

Signage requirements

We recommend you provide detailed requirements for signage used by vendors selling through collectives and co-operatives. Have a guideline in your vendor guidelines outlining important signage and labelling information, such as acceptable size and other suggested information.



Governmental regulations

In addition to signage that supports product transparency, there are other signage and **labelling requirements of various government bodies** (for example, labeling of organics, Canadian Food Inspection Agency, and Health Canada).

Example: Coquitlam Farmers Market signage guidelines

- All vendors must have a sign identifying their business name and location. Often market patrons look for the vendor they bought product from a previous visit.
- Vendors should have their signs displayed before the market opens to the public. Failure to have a sign will result in a warning.
- Signs should not be smaller than 24" wide and 8" high.
- All products must be clearly priced. Prices must either be affixed to individual items or may be listed on a large sign or board. Prepared foods for home use or to eat on site must have their ingredients clearly attached or displayed.
- Signage naming products as organic, biodynamic or first, second or third year transitional: must support these designations with prominently displayed certification documents at the front of your stall.

Example: Vancouver Farmers Market signage requirement

- Vendors are required to display a sign (visible from at least 20 feet away) bearing their business name and location. Banners that span the width of the awning and are attached overhead on the valance are preferred as they increase vendor visibility to shoppers.



Credit: BC Farmers' Market Trail
& Jordan Dyck

C. Addressing Issues at Market

A vendor at your market or a customer may contact your farmers market and tell you a vendor is reselling or otherwise not being transparent about their product. It is necessary to have a process to accept and investigate these accusations that is clear, transparent and respectful of everyone involved.

Complaints from Vendors

Clearly outline the process for handling any vendor complaints at market. Outline who should be contacted, what information is required, who will review the complaint, how the response will be sent to the vendor, and what the vendor can do if they would like to appeal the decision.

Example: The Haney Farmers Market's process

Challenges may be made for suspected misrepresentation of product by a vendor. A challenge must be submitted in writing along with a \$25 fee before any action will be taken. Physical and/or verbal evidence must be supplied along with names of witnesses. This challenge must be made on the day, or within two days, that the violation is observed. The vendor of the challenged product will receive a written notice from the Farmers Market Board and will be asked to respond, in writing, by the next market day. A committee comprising the Executive Director, Market Manager, Vendor Representative and two members of the Board of Directors will be responsible for ruling on the challenge in a timely manner. Challenge forms are available from the Market Manager or Vendor Representative.

If the ruling is negative to the vendor, the vendor may appeal. Appeals must be made in writing and include a clear and specific description of the complaint challenge, and be sent to the executive director, market manager, vendor representative and the board of directors, as well as any other persons involved in the matter.

Complaints from Customers

Similar to complaints from vendors, clearly outline the process for handling any customer complaints at market. Outline who should be contacted (most probably the Market Manager), what information is required, who will review the complaint, how the response will be sent to the vendor, and what the vendor can do if they would like to appeal the decision.

Mediators

A mediator could be appointed if the matter cannot be resolved in a timely manner. Not sure who to hire as a mediator? Mediate BC is a not-for-profit organization funded by the Government of BC and the Law Foundation that protects the public by managing the province's designated roster of mediators and med-arb practitioners. You can learn more at www.mediatebc.com where they also have a directory of conflict resolution practitioners.

Important to consider

- Ensure the complaint process is transparent and follows a clear process.
- A vendor caught reselling may alter their practices, in order to remain at the market.

Talk to other Farmers' Market Managers

When an issue arises about a vendor's product, refer to the community network of farmers' market managers to assist with information gathering. It is extremely important that issues be handled discreetly to avoid the perception of spreading rumors or untrue information. The purpose of talking with other market managers should be to find out what products they see the vendor selling at their market, if they have received a similar complaint, and work together to do a site visit and discuss the issue with the vendor.

Conclusion

Trust is essential for a farmers' market to be successful. Transparency of products is a key factor in building this trust. Farmers' market managers have several tools and strategies available to create systems that proactively ensure transparency, add to the integrity of the market, and add to the professionalism of the market. Vendors and customers become more loyal because the system supports vendors who are playing by the rules, and provides consumers with confidence in the products they are purchasing.

* Special thanks to Tabitha McLoughlin for co-creating this tool kit with the BCAFM, and Vancity who have contributed to this project.



For additional information and questions following the reading of this tool kit, communicate with the BC Association of Farmers' Markets and visit BCFarmersMarket.org for more tools and resources.

About Vendor Collective and Vendor Cooperative

Farmers Markets may choose to allow a group of vendors to collectively market their products at the same stall. This is a group of vendors who have each applied to the market, have been vetted by the manager, and are collectively working to market their products at one booth. Vendor selling arrangements like this include vendor collectives (informal structure) or vendor co-operatives (formal structure), and some markets may refer to this as a “farm friend” program.

The above arrangements differ from reselling. Reselling is when one vendor purchases product from another producer, wholesaler or retailer and then resells it at the market. In a collective marketing arrangement, there is no purchasing and reselling of product, but rather collective marketing and selling of multiple vendors’ products.



Credit: BC Farmers' Market Trail &
Thomas Nowaczynski

Vendor collective and cooperative selling arrangements may be allowed at the discretion of the individual Member Farmers' Market, provided that:

“The cooperative, collective or association is comprised 100% of vendors who meet the following definition:

“Vendor” means a Person or Organization located in British Columbia that makes, bakes, grows, raises or wild harvests the products it sells at a Farmers' Market operated by a Farmers' Market Member, all of which products must be grown or processed in British Columbia; and all vendors adhere to the 100% Grow, Raise, Wild Harvest, Bake, Make policy described above, and the vendor cooperative, collective or association clearly indicate who its members are, through display signage at the farmers' market. Each vendor in a vendor cooperative, collective/association is not required to attend on the day of a farmers' market. “

BCAFM Bylaws (1.1 (bb))

Why consider vendor collectives or co-operatives?

Vendor collectives or cooperatives are a form of farmers working together to bring their product to a market. There are many advantages to farmers organizing themselves in this manner: **It reduces the workload on each individual farm, allows for a more diverse product offering at markets, and increase the viability of each farm.**

How should collectives and co-operatives be defined by farmers' markets?

Find more information on BCAFMs [Farmers Marketing Collectives and Cooperatives – A Farmers Market Manager Guide](#)

How can vendors form “collectives or co-operatives”?

Read BCAFMs [Guide to Starting a Farmers Marketing Cooperative](#)

Things to think about when creating a Vendor Collective or Vendor Co-operative policy

- **Create a form** to capture the information needed for all vendors involved. The form should clearly state which products are from which vendor.
- **Signage** at the vendor booth should clearly state which products are provided by each vendor
- The set-up of the **booth should visually delineate** between the vendor members.

Also to consider:

- How many members can a collective/co-op have?
- Each member vendor must sign a document stating they understand the primary vendor is representing their product at the farmers market on their behalf.
- Does each member have to pay a membership fee? Does each member individually have to apply to the market, and have they all been approved as a vendor?
- The main vendor cannot be purchasing product from the “other member vendors”, rather they are selling it on behalf of the other member(s).

Resources & Tools

1. Bylaws of the BCAFM

View PDF [here](#)

2. BCAFM Membership Policy

View PDF [here](#)

3. Declaration of Farming Practices – Haney Farmers Market

View PDF [here](#)

4. Planning a Farm Visit Checklist

View PDF [here](#)

5. Guide to Starting a Farmers Marketing Cooperative

View PDF [here](#)

6. Market Manager Guide to Farmer Marketing Cooperatives and Collectives

View PDF [here](#)

7. Vancouver Farmers Market Vendor Handbook

View PDF [here](#)

8. Sample Vendor Application Forms

View Kamloops Farmers' Market Vendor Application form [here](#)

View Vancouver Farmers' Market Vendor Collective / Cooperative Application Form [here](#)

9. BC Institute of Agrologists directory

View page [here](#)

10. Mediate BC

View page [here](#)