

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR MARKET SIGNAGE

In my capacity as a Farmers' Market Advisor, I have the privilege of visiting many markets throughout the state. I have seen amazing products available for sale, spoken with vendors about their products and their successes at the markets, and have visited with many market managers (if I am able pull them away from all their customers!). When planning to visit a particular market, I follow a road map to get to the town, and hope that I will find it with ease. Many markets are easy to find; to find other markets I have needed to ask directions. Through these experiences, I realized how important directional signage is to the success (or possible failure) of a particular farmers' market. As many market coordinators and volunteers will be considering new signage for this coming season, below are some examples of good signs some market organizers have made to help draw customers to their market (photos included on attached sheet).

The St. Johnsbury Farmers' Market is located off the beaten path; in a parking lot, situated approximately 75 yards off the main road, behind another parking lot in the downtown area. When approaching the city on Route 2, I couldn't miss the large white sign with black lettering saying, "Farmers' Market Ahead" and a large arrow pointing in the direction I needed to go to find the market. Soon, I came upon another large sign like the first one directing me (with a big arrow) to turn right. As I drove down a hill, a third large sign pointed to the right (photos # 1 and #2), looking off in that direction, I could see the colorful market tents and umbrellas across a parking lot (photo # 3). These directional signs led me to the market. They made it easy for me to find it. And I believe these signs have made an out of the way market location very successful and easy to find for residents and tourists. When visiting with the manager, I learned they have 10 directional signs that are put up and taken down every market day, posted at strategic locations at all main arteries going into the city. In my opinion, these signs are a vital component for the success of this market. These signs are quite heavy and do not blow down in the wind, and they work well along city streets. Photo # 4 is a directional sign for the (Caledonia) Danville Farmers' Market (one market organization that sets up in two towns on different days of the week) pointing toward the Danville Market on the back half of the Town Green.

The Hinesburg Farmers' Market, in a more rural setting, has made inexpensive (and simple) directional signage from painted plywood boards screwed onto 1" x 1" stakes. They are strategically placed at all intersections leading into the town. To use signs such as these, you would need access to ground to pound the signs into each week. The sign in front of the market (painted on both sides), also of plywood and hanging from a metal frame is pounded into the ground (all signs are removed after market day is over). (Please see photos # 5 and #6)

Photos #8 and #9 show two more signs erected at the market site. Lunenburg Farmers' Market designed a large sign, built on an iron frame with a "T" base to keep it from blowing down, and includes flower boxes attached to the frame for additional enhancement. In the winter, the sign is hauled away in a truck and stored in a vendor's barn. The Town of Derby has allowed their market to erect a permanent sign at the location of the market. Notice how easy it is to see and read. Below the main sign, the Derby Farmers' Market has smaller signs hanging off it stating the day(s) and hours and this year will have small signs advertising products offered at the market.

Some market managers or coordinators have expressed concerns that their town officials do not allow signage for their farmers' markets. This is unfortunate. And for these coordinators, I would encourage you to speak with your town representatives, zoning board, and/or Selectboard about reconsidering. In 2009, the Vermont Farmers' Market Association worked with the legislature and advocated for a law exempting Farmers' Markets from the State Signage law under certain conditions. This bill was passed, and is attached below. This means that the state now allows any farmers' market to have directional signage subject to the approval of the local town. Some town officials, if they realize there is a sign exemption for directional signage on the day of the market, may reconsider.

If you plan to make or purchase new signs this year, consider using these guidelines gleaned from my market visits:

SIGN MATERIALS:

- Plywood A-Frames painted, hinged. Need to be at least 3 ½ to 4 ft high.
- Advantage: Usually don't blow over, last a long time, and can be made fairly inexpensively if volunteers make them.
Disadvantage: usually heavier than the plastic ones, need to be repainted/touched up to look nice over the years.
- Plastic A-Frames (ones made by company called "Signicade size 4' x 2' are great)... available at many sign stores. A bit pricey if the store does the graphics for the posters that go on the A-Frame. Advantage: they are nearly indestructible and the posters can be replaced (or you could make your own posters on thin plywood and screw onto the frame yourself). Disadvantage: Requires higher up front investment.

- Vinyl Banners: Ones that go across a road/street are great advertizing but not all towns allow them and they can be expensive to have made and usually you must pay the town to have them put up and taken down. Check before you purchase one. At market locations, they only work if stretched tightly (otherwise they flop in the wind) and preferably NOT put parallel to the road if being used for a directional-type sign. Can be great at the entrance to the market, or for market manager's tent, etc.
- Metal "Real Estate-type" signs: Generally these are too small to catch a motorist's eye as they are driving by and they blow over easily in the wind, and are easily damaged or stolen. Some larger, more sturdy ones are available, but they must be cared for properly or they will have a short life span.
- Plastic Signs made from a 1/8" to 1/4" plastic board, (must be purchased from a sign company) with your market's information printed on it: These signs will need a wooden frame made and screwed around the sides of the sign (on the back of the plastic) to make them rigid. Advantage: Very lightweight and can be bungee-corded to trees, or posts; are reasonably inexpensive, and last a long time if cared for. Disadvantages: need pole to something solid to be attached to or will blow away. Smaller ones (like Hinesburg's) can also be used for signs (on a stake) and hammered into the ground every week.
- "Sail-type Banners"(Usually multicolored and tall and stick in the ground and flap in the wind). These are not the best way to draw customers to your market. If there is wording on them, it is too hard to read.

SIGN COLORS:

- Bright Yellow background with BOLD Black, Green or Red lettering.
- White Background with BOLD Black, Green or Dark Blue Lettering

KEEP THE DIRECTIONAL SIGNS SIMPLE. Saying "FARMERS' MARKET, the day, time, and directional information is all that is needed.

If you have further questions concerning signs and what might work best for your market, please contact me. I hope this information will help draw many more customers to your market this season.

Susan Johnson
 NOFA-VT Farmers' Market Advisor
 802-482-2507
suejohnson@gmavt.net

AMENDED VERMONT SIGN LAWS FOR FARMERS' MARKETS

Vermont Statutes on line: Title 10, Chapter 21, section 494, numbers (12), (15), (17))

§ 494. Exempt Signs

The following signs are exempt from the requirements of this chapter except as indicated in section 495 of this title:

(12) Directional signs, subject to regulations adopted by the Federal Highway Administration with a total surface area not to exceed six square feet providing directions to places of business offering for sale agricultural products harvested or produced on the premises where the sale is taking place, or to farmers' markets that are members of the Vermont farmers market association selling Vermont agricultural products.

15) Municipal informational and guidance signs. A municipality may provide alternative signs of a guidance or informational nature and creative design to assist persons in reaching destinations that are transportation centers, geographic districts, historic monuments and significant or unique educational, recreational or cultural landmarks, including farmers markets that are members of the Vermont Farmers Market Association selling Vermont agricultural products, provided that such destinations are not private, for-profit enterprises. A proposal to provide alternative signs shall contain color, shape and sign placement requirements that shall be of a uniform nature within the municipality. The surface area of alternative signs shall not exceed 12 square feet, and the height of such signs shall not exceed 12 feet in height. The proposal shall be approved by the municipal planning commission for submission to and adoption by the local legislative body. Alternative signs shall be responsive to the particular needs of the municipality and to the values expressed in this chapter. These proposals shall be subject to and consistent with any plan duly adopted pursuant to chapter 117 of Title 24, shall be enforced under the provisions of 24 V.S.A. §§ 4444 and 4445 and may emphasize each municipality's special characteristics. No fees shall be assessed against a municipality that provides signs under this section and, upon issuance of permits under section 1111 of Title 19, such signs may be placed in any public right-of-way other than interstates. This section shall take effect upon the travel information council securing permission for alternative municipal signs in accordance with section 1029 of Title 23.

(17) Within a downtown district designated under the provisions of 24 V.S.A. chapter 76A, municipal information and guidance signs. A municipality may erect alternative signs to provide guidance or information to assist persons in reaching destinations that are transportation centers, geographic districts, and significant or unique educational, recreational, historic or cultural landmarks, including farmers' markets that are members of the Vermont Farmers' Market Association selling Vermont agricultural products. A proposal to provide alternative signs shall contain color, shape and sign placement requirements that shall be uniform within the municipality. The surface area of alternative signs shall not exceed 12 square feet, and the highest point of such signs shall not exceed 12 feet above the ground, road surface or sidewalk. The proposal shall be approved by the municipal planning commission for submission to and adoption by the local legislative body. The sign proposal then shall be submitted to the travel information council for final approval. Denial may be based only on safety considerations. Reasons for denial shall be stated in writing. Alternative signs shall be responsive to the particular needs of the municipality and to the values expressed in this chapter. These proposals shall be subject to and consistent with any municipal plan duly adopted pursuant to chapter 117 of Title 24, shall be enforced under the provisions of 24 V.S.A. §§ 4444 and 4445 and may emphasize each municipality's special characteristics. No fees shall be assessed against a municipality that provides signs under this section and upon issuance of permits under section 1111 of Title 19, such signs may be placed in any public right-of-way other than an interstate highway. Notwithstanding subdivision 495(a)(7) or any other provision of this title or of section 1029 of Title 23, alternative signs permitted under this subsection shall not be required to comply with any nationally recognized standard.

Making the Most of Your Market Signage



#1: Large sign visible from road.



#2: Large sign (3'x4') makes market easy to find.



#3: Market is tucked back from the street across a parking lot; good signage is a must!



#4: Consistent signage at the partner market in Danville.



#5: Sign uses a sturdy stake to secure into the ground.



#6: Effective, inexpensive sign using bright colors and clear lettering.



#7: Another simple A-frame sign made of plywood. Colorful, clear, and informative.



#8: Semi-permanent sign. Taken inside during the winter



#9: Permanent sign. Strong and visible.