



Cooking Demonstrations:

Providing the Perfect Ingredients to Season Your Farmers' Market

The focus is on fresh, nutritious, locally-raised food!

Discover how a Chef at Market program educates shoppers and boosts sales.

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Old Town Farmers' Market's "Chef at Market" Program

In its four years, this program has matured into a weekly event capped off with an annual Iron Chef Cook-Off. Learn how demos operate in Wichita from equipment and storage to sponsorships.

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Cooking demonstrations are a sure bet to increase attendance, excitement and most importantly sales at farmers' markets.

Cooking from scratch has become less common—some might go as far as to say it's almost a lost art. While shoppers may snatch-up locally raised tomatoes and fruit, chances are they will skip kohlrabi, beets, bok choy and other less common items. Perhaps it's because they have never tasted them; maybe they are unsure how to prepare these products. Either way, cooking demonstrations offer shoppers opportunities to taste fantastic seasonal produce and market products prepared before their eyes.

Demonstrations, especially those by local chefs, also grab the attention of the local press. Media coverage is proven to be much more effective than advertising and your market may find that diverting part of your ad budget into a chef at market program may be a worthwhile investment.

Inside this publication you'll learn what it takes to launch a demonstration program, get tips on how to keep things running smoothly on the big day and garner ideas for promoting your market's new venture.



Farmers Markets are about Fresh, Nutritious, Local Food

Although the trend may be slowly changing, we live in a society that has lost a good deal of its food skills. The Chef's Table is a great way to reintroduce people to the simple pleasures of preparing seasonal foods grown within miles of their family's dinner table. It is exciting for them to realize that it doesn't take hours to prepare "food from scratch". Once they taste the difference between truly fresh foods and those they have been purchasing from the grocery store, they frequently change their habits and become market regulars.

Education is the key to stimulating interest in local foods. This is effectively accomplished by your market providing these "mini cooking classes. Joe Stumpe, the *Wichita Eagle* Food Editor, sums it up well when he says:

"I think the chef at the market is one of the best features of the farmers market. I had a great time being one this year. Even though we were doing pretty simple recipes -- grilling steaks, making pasta and salads -- my helpers and I were inundated with questions about the techniques and ingredients we were using.

That makes me believe these demonstrations are really useful." *Joe Stumpe, Food Editor, Wichita Eagle*

The Chef's Table is the Old Town Farmers' Market's crown jewel. In response to periodic surveys taken, the food demonstrations are always listed as the favorite element of the market and one of the main reasons people

come to the Old Town Market. A recent survey asked the question, "Have you purchased something new to you as a result of the chef's demonstration?" One hundred percent of respondents answered affirmatively.

Hosting a chef at the market event is a valuable tool to capture customers and increase your growers' sales.

The cooking demonstration provides a place for your customers to gather to learn about the selection and preparation of seasonal produce. More and more farmers' markets are forming around the country providing an opportunity to teach a consumer base, many of whom have become dependent on processed foods, a whole new way of eating.

As more people become aware of the nutritional, taste and sustainable values of purchasing local foods, the farmers' market provides an excellent venue to teach its customers how to creatively use seasonal produce. Hosting a cooking demonstration, such as a "Chef at the Market", brings chefs, growers and urban dwellers together to enjoy the taste of the region which results in increased sales for the market vendors.



Final presentation of 2007 OTFM Iron Chef Competition dishes

Old Town Farmers' Market's "Chef at Market" Program

The customers at the Old Town Farmers' Market in Wichita have enjoyed a "Chef at Market" since 2003. The manager's philosophy is to make the demonstration as easy as possible for the chefs who usually work their longest and hardest hours on the weekend. The demonstration starts at 9:00 a.m. and lasts no longer than an hour. This allows the chef to give her presentation and return to the restaurant to begin preparations for the day's business.

The market manager coordinates closely with the chef to anticipate her needs for the demonstration. Some chefs like to have their ingredients the day before so that they can be prepped in advance while others may come with a blank slate, shop the market and plan their dishes on the spot.

The chefs who present at the Old Town Market do it voluntarily. Most have been using local products for some time and are anxious to share the taste experience with the market's customers. In return, the Chef's Table becomes a valuable marketing tool for their restaurant. They are allowed to distribute menus and other promotional materials from the table as well as the information booth on the day they demonstrate.

The local newspaper publishes the market's activities for the day which includes the chef and the restaurant represented as does the market's e-bulletin which is distributed to several hundred people each week.

The Wichita Farmers' Market Vendors Association which manages the Old Town Market owns a 4'x10' enclosed utility trailer in which all market supplies are stored and transported. The market employs a Chief Operating Manager (COM), a Saturday Manager and an Assistant Manager. The COM is responsible for storing the trailer and getting it to and from the market. All of the managers work together to set up and tear down the market sponsored booths – Information, Chef's, and Music. If you have a strong volunteer base, you could establish a schedule for a set up and tear down crew as well as a knowledgeable "foodie" to assist the chef.

At the Old Town Market initial Chef's Table equipment was purchased with money generated by stall fees. If you are fortunate to have restaurant supply or kitchenware stores in your area, you may enlist their support by offering them the opportunity to donate supplies or sell them at a discount. Your market could also create a Chef's Table sponsorship as the Old Town Market did in 2007. In exchange for sponsorship, a banner was displayed at the Chef's Table each week. In addition to encouraging the market, the sponsoring business' name is in front of hundreds of people each Saturday for the length of the season. Keep an open mind when pursuing sponsors – you may be surprised who is willing to support your market!



Getting Started

When planning the logistics of incorporating cooking demonstrations into your market, evaluate the assets you have in your community. If your community is more rurally based with few restaurants, the market may decide to host an event once a month. In larger communities with greater access to local chefs and cooking professionals, a weekly demonstration is more easily accomplished.

The first step to recruiting chefs is checking with your vendors to see if they currently sell to restaurants. If so, begin by approaching the chefs of those establishments. These chefs already have an appreciation and understanding of the value of your market's offerings. They are usually more than willing to promote the market and its growers. The chefs, in return, are able to showcase their restaurants through their appearances and often acquire new customers seeking to support eateries that employ sustainable practices – such as purchasing local foods.

You will also want to visit the restaurants closest to your market's site. Invite the chefs to share their food knowledge with your market customers. As a result of participating in a cooking demonstration, many chefs come to realize the superior quality and taste of the market's fresh produce and begin incorporating market products into their menu planning.

When scheduling your demos, don't limit yourself to restaurant chefs. Cooking class instructors, caterers, home chefs, and extension agents are often willing to share their food knowledge with your customers.

Check with your vendors to see who is willing to donate product for the chef's use. Most vendors are more than happy to participate in the event by contributing. The chef or assistant always directs customers to the participating vendors. In an effort to be equitable, the chefs select from as many booths as practical. When a more expensive item is included in the presentation, such as a meat product or any item over two to three dollars, the market purchases that ingredient from the vendor.

It is important that you follow the guidelines for food safety that are available from your local health department. Be sure to get a copy of the food ordinances and read them very carefully, being certain you understand them fully. Many of the food codes are written for full time food service establishments and may not be applicable to a one hour demonstration. You may want to meet with the health inspector for the area in which your market is located to be sure you are in compliance with all applicable rules. Don't be discouraged if the inspector tries to stop you before you get started. Work together to see how you can allow the sampling while at the same time insuring the safety of the food for your customers.



Pat Randleas, Old Town Farmers' Market's COO, takes the mic during the annual Iron Chef Competition



The Demonstration

It is preferable to have an assistant available for your chef as he prepares for the demonstration. Have your chef arrive fifteen to twenty minutes early. This allows time for him to “shop the market” for his ingredients and for you to inventory what will be needed, what you have, and what you may need to retrieve before starting. If there is a nearby restaurant, establishing a friendly relationship with them can be invaluable if you need to borrow any cookware or ingredients that have been forgotten.

Once everything is gathered and ready to go, use your speaker system to welcome your market’s guests and introduce your chef and the restaurant represented. Then it is time to turn the microphone over to the chef. As he starts to describe what he is preparing, he will draw more and more observers to the booth.

Chefs have varying levels of comfort conducting a demonstration. For those who may struggle, the assistant can help him out by asking various questions about the products he is using, cooking methods, etc. The demonstration is a mini cooking class and attendees are there to learn something new. Always encourage questions from the audience.

After the seasonal dish is prepared, it is time for the best part – tasting. The chef may relax, answer questions and receive accolades while his assistant plates the samples.

Promoting the Chef’s Table

In addition to promoting your demonstrations in all materials produced by the market such as your flyers, website, and posters, the chef’s demonstrations provide editorial material for a variety of media outlets.

The food editor of your local newspaper is a great place to start promoting your program. The *Wichita Eagle*’s food editor has participated in a number of events at the market including being a guest chef and one of three judges in the annual Iron Chef Competition.

Additionally, your local showcase of seasonal foods can be of interest to garden writers, health and wellness publications, food based radio programs and community based television programs. Keep in mind, these outlets are always looking for a story – you can provide them with “something to talk about”!! After all, eating good food is exciting to nearly everyone. You can gain access to these outlets by personally contacting them to inform them of what you are doing at market and why.

Distribute press releases regularly to all media with your schedule of chefs or other special events planned. You need to become a cheerleader for local food production in your role as market manager.

SUMMER SCHEDULE

JULY 7	CHEF: Mary Wright, owner of Old Mill Tasty Shop Music: Romero Project
JULY 14	Chef: Adam Courtney, reigning Iron Chef Champ Music: Steven Lancer Helms
JULY 21	CHILLIN' AT MARKET CHEF: Jeremy Wade, Executive Chef at Uptown Bistro Music: Jazz Friends
JULY 28	CHEF: Terry Johnson, Palomino Grill Music: Trevor Stewart
AUG 4	CHEF: Andrew Terrones, Bella Luna Music: Wayne & Arthetta Long
AUG 11	CHEF: Market Managers Paula, Kristin, Pat Music: Music Matt Walsh
AUG 18	4TH ANNUAL IRON CHEF COMPETITION CHEF: Four of Wichita's top chefs Music: MHZ Jazz Trio

CHILLIN' AT MARKET
July 21 we'll be chillin' at market with iced cold watermelon wedges, seed spitting contests, and some good grillin' with Chef Jeremy Wade. Join us for some good fun, food and music. The Old Town Farmers' Market is a great place to spend a Saturday morning.

4TH ANNUAL IRON CHEF COMPETITION
Join us August 18 for our 4th Annual Iron Chef Competition, sponsored by the Spice Merchant, where Chef Adam Courtney will be defending his title. Four of Wichita's top chefs will be using a "secret ingredient" and products from the market as they accept this culinary challenge. Their creations will be rated by a panel of esteemed judges. You won't want to miss the display of talent on this special day. Sign up for our "Front Porch E Bulletin" for the chef announcements.
www.oldtownfarmersmarket.com

2007 Old Town Farmers' Market brochure highlighting the chef series

The Basic Set-Up

The OTFM supplies as many of the necessities for the cooking demos as storage allows. If your market does not have onsite storage facilities or a trailer, planning for transporting equipment will be necessary.

To create a demonstration area which comfortable for both the chef and its customers, the Old Town Farmers' Market uses two 10x10 canopies. The first is used for the cooking/sampling space and provides room for three tables and a cook top. One table is used for the actual demonstration and presentation, one as a prep station, and the last for the sound system, miscellaneous supplies and hand washing station. The second canopy is erected for the comfort of the customers, providing sun and rain protection as they enjoy the demonstration.

Market Chef's Table supplies include:

- Two 10' by 10' pop-up canopies
- Three tables
- Speaker system with remote microphone
- Tablecloths
- Two-burner propane cooktop
- Sanitizing bucket with sanitizing tablets
- Handwashing Station: water container, catch bucket, soap, and paper towels (*see Hand Washing Station, at right*)
- Fire extinguisher
- First aid kit
- Good-quality cutting board that can be sanitized
- Serving utensils
- Netted cover for food
- Food handlers' gloves
- Plates, napkins, plastic ware for samples
- Salt and pepper

The chef brings:

- own cutting utensils
- needed pots or pans
- any ingredients not available at the market such as cooking oil, spices, etc...

Hand Washing Station

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment requires the following minimum Hand Washing Station Set-Up for any farmers' market event that includes sampling:

- 5-Gallon Cooler modified with a free-flow spigot
- Catch basin for waste-water
- Liquid soap
- Paper Towels
- Adequate supply of warm water
- Trash receptacle

To modify a standard 5-gallon cooler:

- Unscrew the original push-button spigot
- Install a free-flow replacement spigot available for bottled water coolers. These are commonly available at natural foods stores and cost \$5-\$8.



photo courtesy of Kentucky Department of Agriculture

Sanitizing Station

The following Sanitizing Station Set-Up is recommended for any farmers' market event that includes sampling:

- 3 basins
- Liquid soap
- Sanitizing tablets or unscented bleach
- Paper Towels
- Adequate supply of warm water

The first basin holds warm, soapy water for washing. The second basin contains clean rinse water. And the third holds sanitizing solution (1 capful bleach per gallon water). Soak utensils in sanitizing solution for 60 seconds and air dry.

If you are only using a few utensils, you may chose to bring a number of the utensils in a zip lock bag marked as "CLEAN" and bring with you another zip lock bag marked "DIRTY". That way if you drop or soil a utensil a clean one is available and the dirty one can be easily distinguished and isolated.



photo courtesy of Kentucky Department of Agriculture



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The Kansas Rural Center is a private, nonprofit organization that promotes the long-term health of the land and its people through education, research and advocacy. The Kansas Rural Center cultivates grassroots support for public policies that encourage family farming and stewardship of the soil and water. The Rural Center is committed to economically viable, environmentally sound, and socially sustainable rural culture. For more information, contact the Kansas Rural Center at P.O. Box 133, Whiting, Kansas 66552 or (785) 873-3431.

