



FOOD  
BUSINESS  
GUIDE

# Guide to Food Markets in Ireland



Growing the success of Irish food & horticulture

**Bord Bia**  
Irish Food Board



[www.bordbia.ie](http://www.bordbia.ie)



# Guide to Food Markets in Ireland

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## Contents

Foreword by Aidan Cotter, CEO, Bord Bia	1
Introduction	3
Overview of the food market structure in Ireland	9
What makes a good food market?	19
How do I sell in a food market?	27
How do I set up a food market?	43
What is the future for Irish food markets?	69
Appendix – methodology	75

Five support templates, available to download from the Bord Bia website, will help maximise the usefulness of this guide. They include:

- Sample food market application form
- Sample rules and regulations of a food market
- Branding and marketing plan for a food market
- Business plan for a food market
- Contact list/resource guide of appropriate supports

These can be accessed at [www.bordbiavantage.ie](http://www.bordbiavantage.ie)

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## Foreword



Irish consumers have always placed great importance on sourcing food locally and recent research indicates that seven out of 10 adults consider buying local produce to be important when they are shopping for food. In addition, 82% of Irish consumers are now aware of the term ‘food miles’ and the implications distance has on the food we purchase. It is encouraging then, though perhaps not surprising, that 79% of consumers believe that local production results in higher-quality food products (*Bord Bia, Periscope 2013*).

Food markets provide a unique forum for food suppliers to interact directly with their end customers. In doing so, they are in a position to provide assurances on provenance, traceability and sustainability that are extremely attractive to many consumers.

Bord Bia recognises the value food markets can play as a route to market for many dedicated and committed Irish food producers. They are important to those for whom smaller-scale artisan food production is a passion and those who recognise in food markets a testing ground for ideas that may ultimately be scaled up. They are sources of entrepreneurship and social exchange, and they are funds in which local traditions and diversity can be replenished and renewed. Notably, too, they provide valuable income for producers and keep wealth circulating in local economies.

Following detailed research in 2013, Bord Bia is delighted to introduce the updated *Guide to Food Markets in Ireland*. In addition to characterising the changing food market models in Ireland, the guide provides practical advice to stall holders and market managers on how to set up and manage markets, as well as assessing future trends for the sector.

Food markets have the potential to be the backbone of our local food systems, and integral parts of our economy and identity. The development of thriving food markets requires the investment of time and energy, but the rewards for the broader community, whether rural or urban, are considerable.

The findings of this guide points clearly to the opportunity for food markets to develop into integral components of Irish communities, delivering commercial viability that will reward producers and ensure rewarding experiences for consumers.

I would like to thank all those who contributed to the creation of this guide and trust it will provide some useful insights, guidance and inspiration as we work towards a vibrant and prosperous future for food markets across Ireland.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Aidan Cotter', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**Aidan Cotter**  
CEO, BORD BIA

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## Introduction

In 2009, Bord Bia and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine published a *Voluntary Code of Good Practice for Farmers Markets*. This important document was followed, in 2013, by further research on food markets undertaken by Bord Bia, with the goal of providing new insights of benefit to the sector as it matured and developed.

This new *Guide to Food Markets in Ireland* seeks to build on this and other research conducted by Bord Bia and others in food markets both in Ireland and internationally, with a view to meeting two objectives:

- To gain a sense of the diversity and change being seen in the food market model in Ireland.
- To provide best-practice guidelines for stallholders and market managers with regard to setting up and managing food markets.

In the development of the guide, the needs of consumers, stallholders and market managers were actively considered and the end document is positioned as a potential catalyst for positive change as the evolution in the food market model continues.

### Audience

The guide is broadly aimed all those involved in the management of markets and those who sell directly to consumers, among them:

- Market managers
- Entrepreneurs looking to set up a market
- Stallholders and producers
- State agencies and local government
- Start-up food businesses seeking a direct route to market
- Stakeholders with an interest in food markets

(An overview of the methodology can be found in Appendix 1).

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## Overview of Ireland's food markets

Bord Bia research has identified over 150 food markets in Ireland, with considerably more diversity than might initially have been expected. They include community markets, farmers markets, lunch-time markets, weekend city markets, co-operatives and country markets. They largely share the same common aim, which is to allow producers to sell their (usually local) produce directly to consumers in a traditional market environment.

Traditionally, Irish food markets emerged at the heart of communities and shared a common purpose in terms of providing a support and outlet for local food businesses. Although this sense of connection with community remains important, producers in more modern models of the food market are not necessarily from the local area itself, but participate because they have something to offer that will be valued by consumers locally and which they are either producing themselves or sourcing directly from another region.

### Research to date

In updating the *Guide for Food Markets*, Bord Bia has taken the opportunity to expand on the research it carried out in its study 'Exploring Attitudes to Farmers Markets 2010', which looked at farmers markets from the critical consumer perspective, and to assess the impact of the *Voluntary Code of Good Practice for Farmers Markets 2009*, which sought to provide a practical underpinning for moves to standardise practices in food markets across the country. It also availed of the most recent research carried out by Bord Bia in this area, 'Attitudes to Farmers Markets Among Organisers 2013'.

Although undertaken with different purposes, the research found commonality in the view that food markets are effectively at a crossroads in Ireland and that those that will survive will have to place a greater emphasis on points of differentiation, such as the quality of their fresh food, and meet consumer expectations in terms of their presentation. It also found that the definition of traditional farmers markets is too narrow to describe the

evolution of food markets now taking place in Ireland. It identified particular threats to the vibrancy of food markets, notably in a tendency to expand into non-food offerings or to reduce their frequency in communities, all with the potential to lead to a market's demise. There was recognition that the core offering of food markets, such as fresh meat, dairy and vegetable stalls, should be protected as an anchor offering. Where, in contrast, hot meal offerings were allowed to dominate, the research found the primary producer character of a market tended to get lost and its overall value as a food market eroded.

Culturally, the research found important divisions between urban and rural markets, often linked to convenience, accessibility and catchment areas. The high footfall achieved by urban food markets was often directly linked to accessibility, and identified as the reason why many are thriving. In contrast, less easily accessed rural food markets are, in some cases, in decline.

## Consumer trends

In 2013, two Bord Bia Periscope reports, 'The Irish Consumer: Attitudes to Eating & Cooking' and 'Irish Consumers and their Food' concurred in the finding that local foods are trusted by consumers, with 'local' having become a byword for quality and transparency to many. In all, 79% of Irish consumers believe that food produced locally is of a higher quality, while 77% are more confident in the safety of food produced in their local area. The reports also found that local food benefitted from the increased demand for traceability among consumers: local food, by implication, already satisfies the need for country and/or region of origin labelling that is important to many consumers.

Price sensitivity remains an issue in purchasing decisions and the reports confirmed what many have observed on an anecdotal evidence, namely that Irish consumers have a highly discerning approach to what constitutes good value and are increasingly shopping around as a result.

This research also highlighted a strengthening aspiration towards healthy eating, with consumers actively seeking out these options in food markets, in the belief that these are the natural home of real and 'authentic' foods and eating experiences.

Taken together, these research findings suggest real opportunities for food markets to capitalise up, albeit with significant challenges and perception issues that need to be overcome.

## Challenges

Drawing from this research and other findings that emerged through stakeholder interviews, there is broad consensus on the range of challenges facing Irish food markets. They include:

- Ongoing emphasis on price among consumers. There is a perception by some that food markets are more expensive than conventional retailing.
- The charges for a pitch.
- The issue of inclement weather that comes with outdoor markets. Strong winds and stormy conditions are not only off-putting for consumers but create health and safety issues with regard to stalls, gazebos, canopies and umbrellas.
- A need for effective management structures to address facility requirements and to ensure health and safety standards are consistently high.
- A need for greater support and understanding from some local government bodies.
- A lack of training opportunities for stallholders and market managers to address both operational standards and market management skills.
- A fall-off in volunteerism that has particularly affected stallholder managed markets, i.e., self-managed markets.



## Opportunities

Nevertheless, despite these challenges, interviewees pointed to considerable opportunities for the sector:

- A greater interest in, and receptiveness to, locally sourced foods among consumers. There is a higher level of awareness among consumers on the value of provenance and an individual product's story, whether regarding artisan products from Ireland or abroad.
- There is a strong link in the consumer mindset between market produce and a healthier lifestyle.
- There is a growing appeal in sourcing food through small and local artisan producers, and enjoyment of the more creative presentation of food found at food markets.
- In urban areas, there is growing interest in high quality 'street food'.
- Increasingly, consumers value the ability to engage in a direct dialogue with the person who grew or made their food products.
- Consumers take pleasure in the 'theatre' of food, in particular watching it being prepared or cooked in the food market environment.
- Food markets can play an important role as incubators for start-up food companies, allowing them to trial products at a relatively low cost.
- Strong food markets open up opportunities for community projects that can involve local/urban growers and bring economic, educational and recreational benefits.

These opportunities are seen as positive indicators of the very real potential for food markets, so long as market managers and stallholders are willing to take the actions necessary to address the challenges highlighted.



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Healthy • Fresh • Local



Petersen's Market  
Healthy • Fresh • Local


carrots  
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SECTION

# 1

## Overview of the food market structure



As already noted, there is surprising diversity in terms of different tiers of markets and market models already existing or emerging in Ireland. In order to support and develop a food market, it is important that market managers first be able to identify their own market model and understand its particular dynamics. In addressing this, this section can be seen as assisting prospective stallholders better match their product offering with the ethos of the markets they wish to be part of.

**SECTION 1**

## OVERVIEW OF THE FOOD MARKET STRUCTURE

Food markets have many forms, definitions, classifications and names in Ireland. With the largely unstructured growth of the sector in Ireland, it is not surprising that the terms 'food market' and 'farmers' market' have become blurred and interchangeable. Food markets may also be referred to as:

- Country Markets
- Co-ops
- Daily city lunchtime markets
- Weekend city markets
- Weekday rural markets

**Market models and supports**

The term 'farmers' market' is often seen as an umbrella term for any food market that features primary and secondary food producers. A more strict definition would see it apply to markets where only farmers sell their produce, thereby positioning it as one of a number of distinct emerging market tiers in Ireland, each with its own point of difference and distinct consumer proposition.

With a clearer understanding of the different models operating in Ireland, it becomes easier to address the different supports and requirements needed by them.

**Traditional farmers markets**

These markets only sell farm-grown and added-value products within a strict local radius, e.g. 30km. The grower/producer sells directly to the consumer. Examples of traditional farmers' market models include rural Ireland farmers markets and Country Markets Ltd (the latter a private company in operation since 1947, with a dedicated focus on home-produced food and crafts). Their characteristics are set out on Table 1.

**Table 1: Characteristics of traditional farmers markets**

<b>Type of market</b>	<b>Rural Ireland farmers' markets</b>	<b>Country Markets Ltd.</b>
Days and times	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Same day each week</li> <li>• Often seasonal if outdoor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Same morning each week</li> </ul>
Location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public land in town centre</li> <li>• May be indoor or outdoor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indoors</li> <li>• Community-based locations in town centre</li> </ul>
Number of stalls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3-15</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Varies by location</li> </ul>
Products sold	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Typically food only</li> <li>• May be some local craft, but amount is strictly limited</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Predominantly food but craft is encouraged</li> </ul>
Sourcing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local/Irish</li> <li>• Often distance radius applies e.g. 30km</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strict 20-30km local radius</li> </ul>
Promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Varies</li> <li>• Most have website/ Facebook page</li> <li>• Signage depends on policy of local council</li> <li>• Some markets have music and other entertainment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Central website</li> <li>• National flyer</li> <li>• Markets responsible for own local publicity</li> <li>• Family events, e.g. cookery demonstrations</li> </ul>
Application process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applications handled at local level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applications handled at local level</li> </ul>
Management structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Committee of stallholders</li> <li>• One stallholder may act as manager</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Head office with elected national chairperson</li> <li>• Regional representatives</li> <li>• Committee of producers for each market</li> </ul>
Fees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual charge of €20 and weekly charge of €7-€15</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Membership fee of €25</li> <li>• Annual renewal of €20</li> <li>• Nominal weekly levy to cover costs of hall</li> </ul>

## SECTION 1 OVERVIEW OF THE FOOD MARKET STRUCTURE

### Farmers' markets

These have a similar ethos to the traditional markets described in Table 1 but have a wider tolerance on the geographical radius, potentially allowing producers from anywhere on the island of Ireland to trade once they are primary or secondary producers. Table 2 outlines the characteristics of farmers' markets in large market towns.

**Table 2: Characteristics of farmers markets**

<b>Type of market</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rural Ireland farmers' markets</li> </ul>
Days open	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One day a week</li> </ul>
Location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May be on private land, e.g. beside shopping centre</li> <li>• Others are on public land, usually in the centre of town or in town parks</li> </ul>
Products sold	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Usually food only</li> </ul>
Sourcing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geographical radius may not be as strict as with traditional farmers markets</li> </ul>
Promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PR and social media</li> <li>• High-profile stallholders who drive PR</li> </ul>
Application process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most larger markets have a formal application form</li> </ul>
Management structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Run privately or by local council</li> <li>• One overall manager who is not a shareholder</li> </ul>
Fees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vary by location and are typically €30-€40 per day</li> </ul>

## Food markets

These include farmers and producers using locally sourced produce, or produce sourced from abroad (for products that are not available in Ireland, e.g. oranges, olives). The grower/producer sells directly to the consumer. One type of food market – the cooperative – is outlined in Table 3.

**Table 3: Characteristics of co-operative markets**

<b>Type of market</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-op</li> </ul>
Days open	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Several days each week</li> </ul>
Products sold	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food from farmers and secondary producers</li> <li>Wholefoods bought in bulk from wholesalers</li> <li>Small percentage of non-food, e.g. craft</li> <li>Generally no meat or meat products</li> </ul>
Sourcing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Locally sourced produce from farmers and producers</li> <li>Produce sourced abroad that is not available in Ireland</li> <li>Strong sense of social responsibility</li> </ul>
Application process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Producers must become members of the co-op</li> </ul>
Management structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Producers and customers are members</li> <li>Committee elected by members</li> <li>Non-producer manager in larger co-ops</li> </ul>
Fees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual €15 membership, plus initial purchase of a €1 share</li> </ul>

## SECTION 1 OVERVIEW OF THE FOOD MARKET STRUCTURE

### International food markets

These markets may encompass all of the above and, additionally, resellers, i.e., stallholders who purchase food products from others and sell them on. In these markets, some (but not necessarily all) stallholders will be selling products sourced from or produced by a third party

Increasingly, larger urban and indoor markets feature a greater variety of international food through resellers who are sourcing directly from producers abroad

This approach to sourcing makes good economic sense in city markets and in large towns, where potential customers of different nationalities may be looking for foods that reflect their ethnicities. It also, of course, reflects the more open and experimental approach to food that is part of modern urban culture. In Irish food markets, international elements may include food from Africa, the Americas, Scandinavia, Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean.

Characteristics of various examples of this model are outlined in Table 4.

**Table 4: Characteristics of international food markets**

Type of market	Urban city centre	Urban suburb	Tourist market
Location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Centre of urban areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parks or private grounds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Centre of towns, street markets</li> </ul>
Number of stalls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often over 50</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May be 50 or more</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Varies by location</li> </ul>
Products sold	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food prioritised</li> <li>• Craft element</li> <li>• Lots of 'food for later' stalls</li> <li>• Some 'food for now'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Up to 30% is 'food for now'</li> <li>• Crafts are limited</li> <li>• Competition is encouraged</li> <li>• One year contracts</li> <li>• Mandatory attendance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Winter: mostly 'food for later', limited 'food for now', some non-food e.g. tools, fishing tackle</li> <li>• Summer: Increase in non-food for tourists</li> <li>• Generally no restriction on competing stalls</li> </ul>



**Table 4: Characteristics of international food markets**

Sourcing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strict geographical radius may apply</li> <li>• Secondary products must be made by producer</li> <li>• 'Food for now' must be sourced locally</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stallholders must typically produce food themselves or know the farmers who grow it if produce is non-Irish</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally no policy on local producers</li> <li>• Most year-round producers are local</li> </ul>
Promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Website/Facebook page</li> <li>• Online reviews</li> <li>• PR/media mentions</li> <li>• Entertainment, e.g. busking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Centrally run marketing, PR and events</li> <li>• Social media</li> <li>• Signage on local roads</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mostly carried out by stallholders themselves</li> <li>• Stallholders arrange events and entertainment</li> </ul>
Application Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strict application process</li> <li>• Application form with criteria to be completed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strict application process</li> <li>• Stallholders must sign up to rules</li> <li>• Ingredient lists are vetted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally no comprehensive application process</li> <li>• Reserve pitch the day before</li> </ul>
Management Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Varies by location. Usually managed by site owner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May be council-owned with one manager or privately run by site owners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stall-holder committee</li> <li>• Decisions made between council and market managers</li> </ul>
Fees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Valid insurance required and fees apply</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Valid insurance required and fees apply</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nominal fee the morning of the market</li> <li>• Valid insurance required</li> </ul>

## SECTION 1 OVERVIEW OF THE FOOD MARKET STRUCTURE

## Emerging/new market models

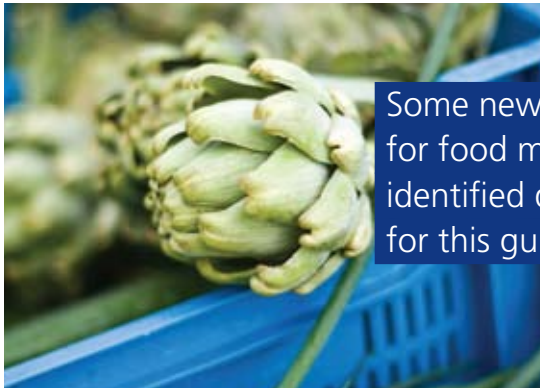
Some new and emerging models for food markets in Ireland were identified during the research for this guide. The main characteristics of these markets are outlined in Tables 5, while Table 6 identifies the characteristics of online markets and food trucks/street food, which have also become popular consumer outlets for local or artisan foods.

**Table 5: Characteristics of new and emerging market models**

Urban lunch-time pop up	Mobile market	Collective markets
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally between 10 and 15 stalls</li> <li>• Normally on private land</li> <li>• Attract office workers, young mothers and tourists</li> <li>• Same location on same day each week</li> <li>• Focus on 'food for now' – wide variety of hot food stalls</li> <li>• Less emphasis on locally sourced ingredients</li> <li>• Markets provide seating or use public seating</li> <li>• Entertainment important</li> <li>• Generally owner-managed</li> <li>• Online promotion by managers and stallholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operate internationally and within Ireland</li> <li>• Market moves out of permanent location and visits other towns and cities for one day/weekend</li> <li>• Often run in conjunction with food festivals</li> <li>• Seen as important marketing tool for markets</li> <li>• Usually features a representative sample across a broad range of food sectors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Newer model in Ireland</li> <li>• One stallholder/staff member sells food from several producers from a particular region</li> <li>• Eliminates the need for producers themselves to sell directly at a market</li> <li>• Stallholder managing the stall generally charges fellow producers a margin for each product sold, similar to retail model</li> <li>• Producers visit the stall and taste product on one day per week</li> <li>• Needs strong marketing and consumer education</li> </ul>

**Table 6: Characteristics of online and food truck / street food models**

Online markets	Food trucks /street food
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Artisan, non-perishable food increasingly sold on websites representing a region or country</li> <li>• Generally include crafts as well as food</li> <li>• Targeted at the domestic and export markets</li> <li>• Early stage of evolution in Ireland</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Street food is most common in US and Britain</li> <li>• Growing trend in Ireland</li> <li>• Street food stalls are emerging as a regular part of markets</li> <li>• Food trucks often situated on perimeter of indoor markets</li> <li>• Tend to be charged more than regular stalls</li> </ul>



Some new and emerging models for food markets in Ireland were identified during the research for this guide



The background image shows a food market stall. In the foreground, there are several rows of small green glass bottles with gold-colored caps. To the right, there are boxes of fresh produce, including what appears to be raspberries and other fruits. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting an outdoor market setting.

SECTION

# 2

## What makes a good food market?

Food markets have a strong natural appeal to consumers who are looking for local and artisan foods and who favour the more traditional shopping experience it offers. Modern consumers do, however, have high expectations in terms of their food purchasing experiences, and both managers of food markets and stallholders need to be mindful of the fact that creating an environment that attracts consumers means addressing those needs. International research, along with interviews conducted for this guide, point to 10 key characteristics of a successful food market.

**SECTION 2** WHAT MAKES A GOOD FOOD MARKET?**1. Community vision**

Markets thrive when they are at the centre of their community, and the mission and ethos of a market should reflect the natural inter-dependence that exists between a community and its food market. Ties with the community can be strengthened in simple but effective ways, for example by creating an opportunity to highlight or support a local charity, or by introducing 'pop up' community stalls whereby new, locally-sourced food offerings are introduced to the market. This approach can also help keep a market vibrant, and give important support to start-up businesses and local causes. A communal stall may have a variety of purposes, for example, making it easy for local growers and food makers to sell their garden/allotment produce and seasonal foods. In support of this principle, the rent for such a stall would generally be lower. Many Irish consumers are now, more than ever, keen to give practical and economic support to their local communities, and there is a clear opportunity for food markets to facilitate this.

The *Voluntary Code of Good Practice for Farmers' Markets* provides a great deal of useful advice for food markets that need to refresh or rebuild their vision. Those who aspire to operate a food market where best practice is standard can view it as a blueprint for progress.

**2. Great location**

A central, busy location is hugely important for a successful food market and food market managers should lay considerable emphasis on choosing a site that lends itself to easy footfall. With a good location, however, comes the need for support in terms of transport, parking, pedestrian access and traffic management. Convenient access to shelter if and when weather conditions turn inclement is another important consideration for both traders and customers. Finally, it is also important to consider the cleanliness and general attractiveness of the chosen market site. Does the location naturally compliment the quality of the food market offering, or does it create barriers in the consumer's mind?

### 3. Access to good facilities

It is a given that the site chosen should be convenient for parking and close to public transport facilities. Unloading and loading times should be well organised to make things easier for stallholders and there needs to be hand-washing and toilet facilities on site for both customers and stallholders. The provision of hot water and facilities to wash utensils and dishes is also necessary. Markets that provide hot food stalls need to ensure sufficient seating is available for customers and that the areas are kept clean and appealing.

### 4. Stallholder fit

The reputation of a market depends on the quality of its stalls, and stallholders need to be passionate about selling the highest-quality food. Stallholders also need to be aware of the importance of their 'brand personality', which, in a food market, is largely a combination of the quality of the product itself and the personality of the stallholder. Good customer service will always add to the perceived value of the food being sold and, as part of their overall quality control, market managers should implement monitoring, mentoring and training where required, with a focus on introducing new stallholders to best practice in terms of display techniques, branding, food hygiene and customer service.

### 5. Broad offering

By and large, a good food market centres on locally produced, locally grown and locally reared produce. Some Irish food market managers interviewed believed that at least 80% of produce in a market should be Irish and favoured restrictions on the percentage of non-food offerings such as crafts (which they also believe should be locally produced or directly sourced). A broad and thoughtful offering may require some management intervention, but is important so as to enable the consumer to shop across all key food categories to the greatest extent possible. In general, it is recommended that resellers not be permitted, other than those who offer foods with clear provenance, e.g. continental cheeses, etc. In these cases, traders should be sourcing products directly, and know the farmers and the region from where their produce comes. Organic and gluten-free produce must be verifiable at

**SECTION 2** WHAT MAKES A GOOD FOOD MARKET?

the point of sale. It is also recommended there be a limit on convenience food stalls (except in markets that are dedicated lunch-time destinations) so as to prevent the market from becoming essentially a food court. Some thought should also be given to ensuring the offering suits the day of the week. For example:

- Friday is pension day and many rural markets hold their markets on this day, recognising that 30% of their customers are pensioners.
- Saturday is the main shopping day of the week and there is almost a saturation of food markets in some urban areas to capitalise on this. The focus tends to be more 'food for later' and grocery shopping rather than on 'food for now' on this day.
- Sunday, in contrast, is a 'grazing' day, when there is a predominance of 'food for now' at markets and fewer primary producers.

**6. Good value**

It is hugely important that the consumer feels they are getting value for money – and while that doesn't necessarily mean low prices, it does require that they be competitive. It is important to balance the price of the product with its USP (unique selling proposition) and important, therefore, to highlight what is different about the product. Consumers attending markets do expect primary produce, in particular, to be cheaper than in other retail formats, as they have the perception that buying directly from the producer is cutting out the 'middleman'. Clear pricing and labelling of origin are also important for all stallholders and for all products. A consumer who is unclear on what they will be charged for a purchase may be a customer lost.



## 7. Entertainment and marketing

Consumers, very often, expect food markets to be an 'experience' and a programme of events and entertainment designed to augment this should suit the demographic, the day of the week and the season, for example, family events at the weekend, traditional Irish events during summer months for tourists, etc. Professional marketing plans should be drawn up for the food market. As well as the overall promotion of the market by the management team, stallholders should be encouraged to be creative in terms of promoting their own stalls and entertaining their customers.

## 8. Local authority backup

Support from the local authority is crucial for the long-term sustainability of a food market due to its reliance on:

- Parking
- Traffic management
- Signage
- Waste disposal
- Permits and licences

It is important to engage with local authorities in a constructive way from the beginning, to ensure the requirements of the food market are understood. This may involve educating the local authority on the economic and social attractiveness of a vibrant community food market. Some of the information presented in this guide may be useful in this regard.

**SECTION 2** WHAT MAKES A GOOD FOOD MARKET?**9. Economic feasibility**

Markets typically take at least three years to become established and so need continual investment during this time, whether from the local authorities who provide facilities for them or the companies who run them. Ultimately, the goal is for food markets to be at the very least self-sustaining, if not profitable, for those who run them.

**10. Strong management structure**

In addition to having a community vision, markets need to have a sense of their own purpose. A written charter, outlining the rules of their market that all stallholders must adhere to, can be hugely important in this regard. Getting the founding statement right is often critical to a market's later success and the robustness of its management structure. The charter should broadly assert the following principles:

- All stallholders should hold adequate public and product liability insurance.
- A substantial proportion of the food sold at the market should be sourced from local/ artisan producers from the county or adjoining counties (and certainly from Ireland).
- The market should endeavour to offer a variety of produce in season.
- The market will be registered with the local Environmental Health Officer and ensure compliance with legal requirements for pricing, food labelling and waste disposal.
- Annual attendance at regular food safety courses should be mandatory for stallholders.
- The market will appoint a market manager (or a nominated stallholder) who will be present on market day in order to oversee efficient set-up and departure, ensuring the site is left in a reasonable condition. The market manager will also be the point of contact with members of the public on the day.

- A trading calendar will be created, with markets held weekly in a particular location for at least eight months of the year. Markets are generally held on one day per week.
- A written selection system for allocation of stalls will be established that is fair and equitable
- A transparent system of fees for all stallholders will be ensured, with any additional fees, e.g. service charges, clearly set out. The market manager should keep a record of the turnover of each stall and the number of visitors each week. Consideration should be given to capping the average stall rental charge at, for example, 10% of the average turnover of the market per stallholder.
- Mandatory attendance of all stallholders will be expected, with clear guidelines for contingency plans/notice of period of absence.
- Clear guidance on times for set up, trading and breaking down of stalls should be provided.

A strong management structure will have a clear line of responsibility, regardless of whether the market is local authority owned, community run or privately owned. The market should be managed and overseen by either a committee or a manager who will have overall responsibility for its running. Regardless of this structure, the management team and stallholders should meet a minimum of four times per year to discuss issues affecting the market. At least one of these meetings should focus on long-term issues and future planning, for example, around location and facilities, etc. Members of the local authority should be invited to attend this meeting.

Food market managers are also the business' marketing managers and play a key role in increasing brand awareness of the market. Market managers also play an important role in terms of maintaining good relations between stallholders and act as a point of contact to both stallholders and customers.

In overseeing the various activities on behalf of the stallholders, the ethos of 'fairness' should prevail in all decision making.





SECTION

# 3

## How do I sell in a food market?

This section sets out key information for those rearing, growing or producing food and who sell or wish to sell at a market

**SECTION 3** HOW DO I SELL IN A FOOD MARKET?

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## Getting started at a market

### Hygiene standards and training

Food safety is an integral part of any food business and requires ongoing attention from a stallholder and market management perspective. A full overview of the relevant regulations can be found on the FSAI website [www.fsai.ie](http://www.fsai.ie). Some points to bear in mind:

- Standards need to be strictly monitored and enforced at all times. This watchfulness extends to delivery vehicles and storage arrangements, as well as to stalls and producers' premises.
- Access to hand-washing facilities is essential for stallholders.
- Cash-handling procedures need to be factored into food safety protocols.
- HACCP is the minimum legal requirement that must be met by stallholders and there may be other requirements set out by the Environmental Health Officer (EHO). All stallholders and their staff should have adequate training in HACCP and food hygiene.
- Producer registration with their EHO prior to starting their business is also required (depending on the food produced, registration with other agencies, such as the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine may be necessary. See [www.fsai.ie](http://www.fsai.ie) for further information).

## Insurance cover

- In order to sell products in any public arena, a vendor must have adequate public and product liability insurance. A good source of insurance for market stallholders is one of the market support groups (see the Contact List and Resource Guide download on Bord Bia's website). All traders must carry their own public and product liability insurance to a value of not less than €6.5 million respectively. Public liability insurance must specifically indemnify the owner/manager of the market.
- All traders must also carry employer's liability of €13 million.
- A copy of relevant insurance policies is usually required with application forms.

## Know your customer

Markets take time to become established and can evolve over time. Conducting research so as to develop an in-depth understanding of your consumers' tastes and preferences is extremely important in terms of planning for the future of the market. Stallholders should also learn as much as possible about their consumers and their demographics, tastes and preferences, so as to identify opportunities for products that are not already sold at the market. A great deal of useful information can be found on the Bord Bia website ([www.bordbia.ie](http://www.bordbia.ie)), including research and updates on shopper behaviour, eating habits and industry trends.

## Choosing a market

It is important to choose a farmers' market suited to your type of produce or product. Visit markets you are interested in selling at and talk to other stallholders. Find out who the market manager is and arrange to meet them. From the anecdotal evidence of other stallholders and your own observations on the customers at the market, it should become clear whether your product is right for them and for the market. Talk to the market manager about the application policy and requirements. If you are new to the food business, or if you're unsure as to the long-term potential, ask for a community or pop-up stall, which allows you to test the market before signing up permanently.

**SECTION 3**      HOW DO I SELL IN A FOOD MARKET?**Pricing**

Include all costs in your selling price. Follow this link for a standard pricing model for food and drink products on the Bord Bia Vantage website [www.bordbiavantage.ie](http://www.bordbiavantage.ie)

**Tax/Value Added Tax (VAT)**

You will need to discuss the implications of tax and VAT with your financial adviser, who will set out the necessary guidelines for you.

**Marketing material**

Even the smallest business will require marketing material to help promote the product and producer story to the consumer. The tools used will vary but can include:

- Website
- Social media, e.g. Facebook, YouTube, Twitter etc.
- Leaflet/flyer
- Business cards
- Recipe leaflets



## Equipment

For the majority of markets, you will have to supply your own equipment. This can include:

- Table (covered) or serve-over stand
- Canopy (branded is preferable)
- Hand-washing facilities
- Cleaning and waste disposal equipment
- Billboard for specials/pricing
- Display stands
- Weighing scales (if applicable)
- Chilled storage (if applicable) – check the FSAI guidelines for temperature control ([www.fsai.ie](http://www.fsai.ie))



For the majority of markets,  
you will have to supply your own  
equipment

**SECTION 3** HOW DO I SELL IN A FOOD MARKET?

## What to sell

### Market research

As with any other business, prospective stallholders should carry out research on the chosen market to see what, if any, gaps there are in the available product range.

Bord Bia has a library of research that can provide a supply of reports on product categories. Remember, quality and freshness are key components of your product, and taste may well be your unique selling point. Consider blind-tasting your products against competing products with target consumers to get their feedback.

### Packaging, branding and labelling

The role of good packaging is threefold: it should protect the integrity of the product; it should make access to it easy and safe; and it should do justice to the foodstuff aesthetically. Ensure that your packaging represents the quality of the product within it and that it is appropriate for a food market environment. Take time to look at all the packaging types that are available in the marketplace, ensuring that you choose the correct one.



Ensure that your packaging represents the quality of the product within it and that it is appropriate for a food market environment

All pre-packaged products should be labelled according to the most up-to-date FSAI legislation. See [www.fsai.ie](http://www.fsai.ie) for further details. Even if you do not have to label your products, i.e., if they are sold loose, it is advisable to display the ingredients list of each product and everyone manning the stall should have a good knowledge of the ingredients, allergens and origins of the ingredients contained in the products. It is also advisable to mark the use by date and storage instructions on the products, e.g. 'keep refrigerated', or to advise your customers about this when selling loose food. Food labelling legislation is enforced by your local EHO and EHOs regularly visit all markets in Ireland.

Identify the USP for your product, as this is the foundation for your brand, and display it on your packaging and labelling. Examples of USPs are:

- Sourcing: are your ingredients wild and foraged, reared or grown on your own farm?
- Superior taste: does your product taste better than competing products?
- Authenticity: are you using traditional, family recipes and ingredients?
- Health benefits: are your products 'free from', identified as 'superfoods', etc.?
- Freshness: have your fruit/vegetables been harvested in the last 24 hours?
- Provenance: is there any special story relating to who makes the product or the area the product is from?

## Shelf life

If you have a product that has a short shelf life, you need to be acutely aware of the rotation process so that you can keep the product moving and avoid the problem of stock going out-of-date.

It is essential that you verify the use by date on your product by running the relevant shelf life trials in a laboratory. See the FSAI website [www.fsai.ie](http://www.fsai.ie) for further details on shelf life.

**SECTION 3** HOW DO I SELL IN A FOOD MARKET?

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## How to sell

### Displays

- Stalls should be branded with the company name, suitable brand logo and contact details. If the stall is large, clear signage may be useful to indicate where to pay.
- It is important for each stall holder to emphasise the unique selling propositions of their products, through signage on the stalls, displays of awards and labelling on products as well as how you describe your product to customers.
- Photos on display of the stallholder with the farmers who supply the ingredients, or the stallholder producing product, can help to enhance communication and confirm the local nature of your foods. Work with a good photographer to ensure the quality of these images matches the quality of your product.
- Through great product display, stallholders can excite customers by creating a 'wow factor'.

***Simple tools that can assist this process include:***

- *Maximising contrasting product colours in display layout.*
- *Creating volume displays to signal abundance.*
- *Displaying product on open display where feasible and safe.*
- *Using pedestals, cake stands, etc., to create a sense of depth and differing height levels.*

## Pricing

Clear product prices reassure customers and remove any unease about potential cost.

- Prices should be mandatorily displayed at all times.
- Setting unit prices for products normally sold by weight can sometimes attract more customers, as there is clearer price transparency.
- Good value is the relationship between price and quality. Communicating why your product is superior to others can help you tip the balance in your favour.
- Many consumers like buying directly from producers, as they perceive there are no 'middlemen'. This sometimes raises an expectation that products should be cheaper than the equivalent in a shop. It's important to communicate what's special about your produce, so price is not the only consideration in a consumer's mind.
- Routine price surveys should be conducted by stallholders to ensure their range remains competitive when compared to products of equivalent quality sold through other retail channels.
- Stallholders should also ensure that all costs are covered by their selling price so their business model is not undermined.
- The focus should be on setting a 'fair price' – fair for the producer and fair for the consumer.
- Given the increased emphasis on consumers seeking value for money, stallholders are encouraged to promote their products through special offers. Seasonal product abundance can often offer the perfect opportunity to deliver value.
- Stallholders should consider sandwich-board signage or blackboards with specials of the day. These match the traditional feel of a food market and are very effective in attracting a consumer's eye.

**SECTION 3** HOW DO I SELL IN A FOOD MARKET?**Ingredients lists**

- FSAI regulations stipulate that all pre-packaged food should carry ingredients and allergen lists regardless of whether or not the product is sold in retail or at markets. All stallholders should know the origin of the food they are selling and the full ingredient list if the product is processed, whether this is displayed or not.

Periodically, stallholders should stand at the consumer side of the stall and make honest observations from a consumer perspective.



Stallholders should stand at the consumer side of the stall and make honest observations from a consumer perspective

## Tastings

Tastings are a proven tool to drive sales and should be encouraged. They have to be managed carefully from a cost perspective but are an integral part of any market and sales process. Engaging in conversation with customers at the time of tasting is a vital part of the process. Using product name tags on tasting plates can also enhance the process. All tasting stock should be inspected regularly and strict criteria put in place for temperature controls, etc.

## Lighting

Outside daylight hours, during the winter and for indoor markets, stalls should be brightly (but not garishly) lit. This may require specific lighting at stall level as well as for the overall market space.

## Customer service

Great customer service can help stallholders and market managers differentiate their offer from conventional retail channels. While most customer service is common sense, correct and consistent delivery is critical. Some simple tips include:

- Proactively engage with people passing your stall.
- Always offer a greeting and farewell.
- Provide useful information like recipes and cookery tips. Printed handouts can help.
- When it's raining, put an extra canopy at the front of the stall to keep your customers dry.
- Ensure there is enough change in the float to cope with unexpected large notes.
- Where the opportunity exists, use customers' names.

**SECTION 3**      HOW DO I SELL IN A FOOD MARKET?

- Obviously great service is delivered through great staff. This has implications on the calibre of personnel working on the stall and the training they receive. Twice yearly training should be provided for stallholders on customer service.
- You can also deliver silent service through good signage, explaining your product story and photos of the production process.
- Some markets now use a mystery shopper system to benchmark ongoing customer service levels. Avail of this service if it is offered to you and see all feedback as constructive.

**Theatre of food**

Good food is as much spectacle as flavour, and the sense of theatre in seeing food being prepared and cooked is relished by many consumers at food markets. If some element of production at the stall is possible for your product, it may help you differentiate from others around you. Things to consider:

- Can you make the product at your stall? Are there elements of the production process which could be left to complete at the market, e.g. decorating a cake?
- Will aromas of fresh product attract more customers?
- Is there a way to bring the experience as close as possible to the customer, e.g. at the front of your stall? Can you face the customer while producing?
- Is there a way to enhance the work you are doing, e.g. wearing a headpiece microphone and chatting through the production process as you cook?



## Stimulate the senses

It isn't just what customers see at the market that is important – it is also what they smell, hear and taste that adds to the atmosphere. Having good banter between stallholders and demonstrating camaraderie can add to the pleasure of shopping in a market. Brightly coloured stalls add to the vibrancy, and canopy colours and bunting all help with this. Using contrasting product colours will also increase the sense of visual flair. Rows of fruits and vegetables merchandised correctly can be extremely impressive. Fresh food cooking at a food market will attract a passing crowd thanks to the irresistible aroma of good food.



It isn't just what customers see at the market that is important – it is also what they smell, hear and taste that adds to the atmosphere



FRUIT  
KING

21


SOUTH COAST



SECTION

# 4

## How do I set up a food market?



This section sets out key information for individuals looking to start up their own market or those currently involved in managing markets. You'll find practical advice on the processes and systems required to offer a world-class operation.



**SECTION 4** HOW DO I SET UP A FOOD MARKET?

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## How to set up and run a market

The key criteria for running a good food market revolve around the following:

- Choose the venue carefully (undertaking location analysis) with footfall in mind. The closer to a high footfall area the better.
- Thorough consumer research in advance of setup, and ongoing research during trading are essential.
- Links to local authorities and other agencies to support the market are important.
- Good management structures will be needed from the beginning (see section on market management structures on page 24).
- A good working committee will act as a strong backbone to the evolving food market (see page 24).

### Location

Location will always be a critical factor. Some key considerations include:

- **Footfall:** Passing trade is very important for a market, particularly in the initial days before it is well established. A number of the food markets studied to inform this guide found success in busier locations such as main streets after struggling to build up customer bases in their original locations. If a main street or square is not possible, consider shopping centres or busy parks.

Consideration should be given to the positive spin-off effects a vibrant market could have on the town centre. However, markets have found success at the edges of towns also. Footfall, as ever, is vital to decision making.

- **Facilities:** Both the producers and customers at a market will benefit

from the facilities provided by a good location. Requirements for parking, toilets, electricity, running water, lighting and security should all be taken into account.

- **Business plan:** Setting up a market and managing it on an on-going basis is like running any other retail business. It will require a strong feasibility study and business plan to maximise its chances of success.
- **Indoor/outdoor:** An outdoor location is often preferred by customers as it is, in theory at least, more atmospheric. However, an indoor market has many advantages, making year-round operation easier. Some outdoor locations are particularly exposed to the wind, which is generally considered a bigger problem than rain. If a market is usually held outdoors, it is worth exploring an option to relocate indoors in particularly bad weather.
- **Space:** It is important to ensure that there is space for the number of stalls as well as for entertainment, such as music and demonstrations.
- **Purpose of market:** A lunch-time 'food for now' market should be accessible to a large throughput of workers who can visit easily during their lunch break. A weekend market may benefit from a more laid-back location, such as a park where shoppers can eat and relax.



Choose the venue carefully (undertaking location analysis) with footfall in mind. The closer to a high footfall area the better

**SECTION 4** HOW DO I SET UP A FOOD MARKET?**Reaching out to the community**

It is important to involve the local residents, students, workers and job seekers, from the outset and to establish lines of communication with them. Work with the relevant authorities to encourage those interested in the food industry to see your food market as a platform where they can test their food business ideas.

Regular 'love your market' months or fortnights, involving market tours, meetings with existing stallholders, places at pop-up and community stalls, and work experience with current stallholders all contribute towards this.

**Sustainability**

A food market offers a great venue from which to promote sustainability in the wider community. It should also be best in class in implementing policies of sustainability throughout the market grounds, e.g. in food composting, recycling and water harvesting where possible.



A food market offers a great venue from which to promote sustainability in the wider community

## Charges for stall holders

Charges can vary considerably and will be guided by the market ownership and ethos. Examples include:

- Co-ops tend to charge stallholders a rental charge of approximately 10% of turnover.
- Other markets charge a flat rental fee for each day, regardless of turnover.
- An additional service charge for those stallholders who require utilities, e.g. washing facilities, electricity (charged per socket) and gas, is becoming more common.
- Some markets re-charge all service charges so that the rental fee covers salaries and contributions to the council, these include:
  - *Waste disposal*
  - *Electricity*
  - *Cleaning*
  - *Security*
  - *Hand-washing facilities*
  - *Storage*
- Council-owned and managed markets tend to charge a lower stall rental as they see the economic benefits that the market brings to the area.
- Some markets charge a higher rental for hot food stalls.

**SECTION 4** HOW DO I SET UP A FOOD MARKET?**Market regulations**

High-quality and consistent stallholder attendance is essential for the success of markets. To ensure this, some regulations and criteria should be written down and enforced. Areas to consider include the following:

- **Attendance** Most successful markets require that stallholders attend every market or, if there is a good reason why they can't attend, that they provide adequate notice and find a replacement. This ensures that customers are treated to a well-populated market on a consistent basis and the products they have enjoyed in the past are available regularly. With most markets there is a mandatory attendance rule (some markets allow traders four weeks leave per year but even this can frustrate customers, so holiday staffing may be considered as an alternative).
- **Displays** Stallholders should be expected to have an attractive display, with a well-kept stall. The management team should approve all signage and displays.
- **Ingredients lists** It is recommended that stallholders display their ingredients list and have a good knowledge of all the ingredients, including potential allergens, contained in their products.
- **Price lists** Prices for products should be on display at all times.
- **Customer service** All stallholders should be expected to display excellent customer service through knowledgeable, passionate and helpful staff.
- **Common rules** While the majority of rules will be developed specifically for the individual market, there are a number of common rules:
  - *Strict no smoking policy by any stallholders or staff members in the vicinity of the market (many markets take a tough line on this).*
  - *Mandatory attendance during market hours.*
  - *Compliance with user clause (traders must only sell products that are registered with the market).*



## Contracts

Some markets require stallholders to sign a contract agreeing to the market regulations, which helps to enforce standards. It is recommended to offer short-term contracts to new stallholders, e.g. 90 to 120 days in order to test their fit with the market on a trial basis.

## Producer selection process

The selection process should include detailed application forms (see download on Bord Bia website [www.bordbia.ie](http://www.bordbia.ie)) completed by prospective stallholders and face-to-face interviews involving food experts or members of the management team with culinary experience. Other considerations that may be helpful include:

- Farm visits should be considered for farm-produced products, depending on resources.
- Many markets now request a simple business plan as an indicator as to whether the stallholder has assessed their business idea.
- Ideally, all production premises/kitchens should be visited but in practice only the larger permanent markets have the resources necessary to do this.
- There is, on average, a 60% turnover of stalls in the first three years, so it is important to attract those stallholders that fit with the ethos of the market and deliver what the customer wants.
- The management team should be aware of current consumer and retail trends when selecting producers.

**SECTION 4** HOW DO I SET UP A FOOD MARKET?

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## What to sell

### Product range

The product range is a critical success factor for any market and will depend on the mission and vision of the market. Some food markets focus exclusively on food and fresh produce, while others allow some space for crafts or similar. Products being sold at dedicated farmers' markets are generally limited to those that have been grown, reared, caught or processed by the stallholder. For processed goods, a high proportion of locally-sourced ingredients is generally encouraged.

The starting point in deciding the range of stallholders is research on what consumers in the local community want to purchase. Do they want a market strictly dedicated to local food or are they happy with resellers? Do they prefer to buy food ingredients and cook from scratch or are they more interested in 'food for now'? Establishing these facts from potential consumers should be the central foundation for any market. A typical market mix might include:

- Fresh meat
- Poultry
- Fresh fish and shellfish
- Fruit and vegetables
- Fresh eggs
- Seasonal
- Bread bakery
- Confectionary bakery
- Cheese

- 
- Dairy
  - Preserves – honey, jams, marmalades, chutneys, syrups
  - Cereals and dried fruits
  - Confectionery
  - International food
  - Hot food and 'food for now'
  - Hot beverage
  - Cold beverage
  - Delicatessen, e.g. cooked meats, cheeses
  - Mediterranean, e.g. olives, sun-blush tomatoes
  - Dietary intolerance, e.g. wheat-free, gluten-free
  - Craft beers (although generally absent from Irish markets)
  - Speciality products that differ from products available in the retail sector  
e.g. unpasteurised milk
  - Horticulture (flowers and plants)

In deciding the mix, market managers need to ensure new stallholders are encouraged and that the selection process does not discriminate against new innovative products.

**SECTION 4**    HOW DO I SET UP A FOOD MARKET?**Market dynamics**

Research conducted by the Project for Public Spaces (PPS) in the US suggests that the following mix criteria work well in creating a dynamic food market environment:

- Internal competition (builds quality, variety and keeps prices reasonable)
- Owner-operated (customers like dealing with the boss)
- Choice (people love to comparison shop)
- Different price and quality levels (serving multiple tastes and income levels)
- Right stallholders (stallholders who love markets as a way of life)
- Innovators (new products that keep the customer engaged)
- Local (consumer demand for local products is growing)
- Balance (classic merchandise balanced with something of the new)
- Clarity (stall-by-stall specialisation works best)
- Turnover (eliminating things that don't work) e.g. through regular reviews of stallholders to check they still fit with the market and customer needs

## Number of stalls

From research into Irish food markets and a review of international best practice, the following patterns emerge with regard to the typical mix of stalls. This should be treated as broadly indicative only, as local consumer demographics will determine the correct mix. The suggested mix of stalls per category is set out in the following table:

Fresh meat and poultry	9%
Bread, bakery	10%
Confectionery, bakery	5%
Seafood, inc. sushi	6%
Cheese	6%
Fruit and vegetables, inc. dried	9%
Dairy, e.g. yoghurts, etc	3%
International food	10%
Food for now	5%
Hot beverage (e.g. Cafes)	5%
Cold beverage (e.g. Juice Bars)	3%
Delicatessen, inc. charcuterie	3%
Mediterranean	3%
Dietary intolerance	3%
Larder, e.g. preserves, chutneys, sauces	5%
Vegetarian	3%
Alcohol	2%
Pop-up stands for seasonal produce	8%

**SECTION 4** HOW DO I SET UP A FOOD MARKET?**Days of the week**

As noted earlier, many market managers are of the view that the day of the week a market is held dictates the product offering and range. Saturday and weekdays are the shopping days when ingredients and primary produce are most in demand. Sunday, in contrast, is a 'grazing' day, and identified as a leisure shopping/family day by market managers where treats and indulgence feature more. There is, of course, some top-up shopping done on a Sunday, e.g. organic vegetables and meat, but the majority of customers come to eat at the market, hence a higher propensity for hot food and convenience stalls. It is also worth noting that many country markets have a historically-established market day, which may have originated in the town's fair day.

**Role of resellers**

If the market has more of an international food focus, then it usually includes resellers. The products sold by resellers must complement the products of both the farmers and producers at the market.

Several markets limit resellers to those with a direct link to the international producers. Many market managers interviewed cautioned against large amounts of resellers with no provenance stories. Best practice for resellers includes:

- Direct links between stallholder and producer
- Photos of the producer on display
- Signage telling the provenance story
- Well-informed sellers who know the facts

## Embracing seasonality

Seasonality is to be celebrated and should be embraced by every market. Several food markets and traditional farmers markets allow pop-up stalls for seasonal produce and organise promotional activity around this. Examples include:

- Using signage to educate the consumer about the various food seasons.
- Producing recipe leaflets to promote the use of seasonal products.
- Increasing the amount of product tasting of these products at the relevant time.
- Encouraging other stallholders to create products based on a seasonal ingredient, e.g. a baker using in-season Irish apples to make an apple pie and promoting the provenance of the apple as part of the story.

There should be sufficient space for farmers to directly set up pop-up stalls for seasonal produce, e.g. berries during late spring/summer, apples in winter, or community stalls for start-ups to test the market for their products, preferably at a reduced or zero rent. This exists in some markets in Ireland but not all.



Seasonality is to be celebrated and should be embraced by every market

**SECTION 4** HOW DO I SET UP A FOOD MARKET?**The role of clusters**

Clustering is the process of gathering stalls with similar products into one section of the market. Traditionally, clusters have been a feature of continental European markets, but this has not been the case in Britain and Ireland. Clusters make the decision-making process easier for the consumer as this is how they are used to shopping in a retail environment. Research has shown that this approach is what customers favour (e.g. Bolton Market Consumer Research) and larger markets in Ireland are moving in this direction. Smaller markets (under 15 stalls), particularly those run by committees of stallholders, argue the small number of stalls does not readily facilitate this approach.

**Clustering hot food**

As well as trying to get the balance right between 'food for now' and 'food for later', established markets are starting to cluster hot foods into one area to avoid queues congesting the stalls of primary producers and for ease of access to electricity, etc.



Clustering is the process of gathering stalls with similar products into one section of the market



## The role of competition

According to an economic analysis by Farmers' Markets America, a good product mix, as well as competition within each product category, is essential for consumer satisfaction and so for the success of a market. A customer will be more likely to return if the market provides more than one source for the goods they are buying. Protectionism, in contrast, will stunt the growth of a market.

Other competitive considerations include:

- Some market managers bring in directly competing stalls if they find that any one stallholder's products are too expensive and out of line with the general marketplace.
- Research shows that markets managed by stallholders themselves do not allow competing stalls to join the market in order to protect their own businesses. This may be in the interest of the individual stallholder, but it is not necessarily in the interest of the wider market or consumer and can lead to overly inflated prices and a lack of variety.
- Several seasoned market managers are of the opinion that this behaviour of stifling competition also stifles the growth of the market and leads to the food market remaining small.

**SECTION 4** HOW DO I SET UP A FOOD MARKET?**Competing with retail**

It is important to provide the product mix that enables customers to do a broad weekly shop. Some markets are rethinking their strategy in terms of import substitution for products that are out of season in Ireland at particular times of the year, e.g. strawberries, and for products that simply do not grow in Ireland, e.g. citrus fruits. Making a decision to allow imported product to be sold is a serious one for any market and may compromise the market's integrity with consumers. This is especially true if the market's positioning rests on a local food ethos.

Some market managers do not allow stallholders into the market if they also have a retail premises in the local area as they feel this is unfair to artisan producers and could dilute the identity of the market as a food market rather than a retail market. Others have had positive experiences with this approach.

**Gaps in the market**

When a stallholder leaves or the market has been expanded, a gap analysis should be carried out to establish

- What products are needed in the market that are not currently provided, i.e., where is the gap?
- What new products are available in the wider localities that are unique?
- Where is the greatest consumer need and demand?
- What value will new stalls add to the overall market?

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## Market management structures

### Market management structures

In addition to there being different approaches to food markets in Ireland, there are also different market structures in terms of how they operate. The market organiser must choose the appropriate approach, taking into consideration the ownership, location, market model and the level of local authority support that may already be in place:

- **Council-owned, with a single market manager** This is prevalent in Dublin and, increasingly, in large rural towns.
- **Council-owned, with the day-to-day running of the market outsourced to a management company** Predominantly in city urban markets, e.g., the English Market in Cork.
- **Committee-run** These tend to be smaller village and town farmers markets but are dependent on a culture of volunteerism (which is largely in decline around the country). They tend to be small (max. 10 to 15 stalls). Typically, the committee is structured as follows:
  - *A chairperson, treasurer, secretary and promotional officer*
  - *A wider committee with other stallholders involved*
  - *Typically, the committee changes every three years, as it can take time for each new committee member to establish their role*

Structure is critical to the committee-run model and those advocating it should consider the following:

- *Meeting dates scheduled in advance*
- *Agendas circulated before meetings*

**SECTION 4** HOW DO I SET UP A FOOD MARKET?

- *Minutes should be taken at all meetings*
- *Owners/champions should be allocated to all tasks*
- *Meetings should be controlled to a reasonable timeframe (e.g. 90 minutes)*
- *Meeting frequency should suit the task load (typically once each month during peak trading periods)*
- **Owner-managed** Privately owned and managed, e.g. Mahon Point
- **Trustee run** As an example, the Milk Market in Limerick is run by a management trustee consisting of:
  - *Nine city councillors*
  - *Nine county councillors*
  - *Nine members of Limerick Chamber of Commerce*
  - *There is also one overall market manager and a traders' association representative*

**Selecting a market manager**

- Market managers need to have the ability to be both effective market managers and also dedicated marketing manager. Ideally, the market manager should have a farming, food business or stallholder background, depending on the ethos of the market or, at the very least, a strong understanding of these areas. (In Union Market, Washington DC, the market manager is an ex-front of house restaurant manager, whose experience is seen as a major asset to the running of the market).
- Market managers should be able to assist with and be familiar with all key health and safety issues, e.g. checking safety equipment, fire procedures, etc. The manager will also need to have a strong working knowledge of food safety regulations.

- In order to succeed with the task in hand, the manager will need to have strong people and organisational skills.
- The manager will also need to have a passion for great food, the artisan philosophy and innovative displays. As many of the stallholders will be start-up or micro businesses, the market manager will need to have a strong knowledge of food business topics, offering a mentoring and advice role to many stallholders.

### **Traders' association**

A traders' or stallholders' association is usually present in larger markets where a market manager is in place. One of the traders is usually the chair of this group and liaises with the manager on a weekly basis on any operational issues. Some key points worth taking on board with regard to the successful running of traders' associations include:

- Minimum monthly meetings should be mandatory for all stallholders or representatives as the market grows (some markets meet weekly). At least two meetings with all stallholders attending per annum would be essential.
- Traders should be consulted about any major decisions, but the management team must be in a position to make final decisions.

**SECTION 4** HOW DO I SET UP A FOOD MARKET?

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## Promoting a market

### Promoting on a budget

The PPS offers some excellent practical advice for marketing a food market in a way that builds on its natural advantages as a focal point of the community. Firstly, it suggests taking advantage of the food market's potential as a public space by running events and product demonstrations (which customers greatly enjoy). Secondly, it recommends harnessing the PR power of a food market in creative ways, for example by issuing a press release to local media (everything from radio stations to food bloggers) when your market opens, re-opens, expands or has something exciting to shout about.

It's important to think about how the market's image will be communicated in these scenarios, and it may be worth investing in a logo, in a distinctive look for your food stalls and in brain-storming about what your food market 'stands for' and what place it holds in the community (is it the biggest/most popular in your county or your province?). Whatever your messages are, keep them clear, compelling and consistent.

As a part of the community, creating partnerships with potential champions should come naturally to a food market. Consider what you can do to reach out to other groups with overlapping missions and seize the opportunity for passive education (e.g., creating links with agriculture, health and community groups).

Avoid any overtly political messaging, unless it is directly linked to your market ethos, and even then be highly selective: the best food markets prosper when they have a strong recreational element to them.

Engaging with local charities is also a great way of building on the market's place in the community, as is building linkages with civic leaders, who should be fully aware of your market's social and economic value.

## Some practical promotional activities include:

### Paid for

- Local newspaper and radio advertising.
- Door-to-door flyers.
- Online mobile phone number database to be used as a communication channel to customers
- Appropriate street and road signage.
- Mobile billboards, banners and street-side 'sandwich boards'.
- High quality website and search engine optimisation.
- Use of QR codes.
- The creation of apps with cookery and other relevant info.
- Some of the larger markets produce a customer magazine and/or one for stallholders. These are usually bi-monthly and celebrate the seasons as well as new products and producers.
- Recipe cards to be handed out at the market. Some markets like Bolton in the UK conduct a market walk for groups based on the content of market recipe/fact sheets.

### Free

- Online email database.
- Social media tools like Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest (The Borough Market in London found that a high proportion of their regular customers accessed information on the market via their mobile phones).
- YouTube.

**SECTION 4**      HOW DO I SET UP A FOOD MARKET?

- Teaming up with transition year classes to set up micro businesses at the market.
- Giving artisan producer or farmers market education talks at schools.
- Hosting charity events at the market.
- Stallholders giving talks to local groups.
- An online market cookbook with local recipes and ingredients.

**'In market' activity**

- A permanent busking pitch (ideally with pre-screened buskers).
- Cookery classes/demos with local guest chefs (managed for crowd control).
- Farm animal showcase (with appropriate animal welfare supports and hand-washing facilities).
- Children's competitions and fun events.
- Hosting visiting displays and events.
- Competitions for local allotment growers for best fruit and veg.



## Public Relations (PR)

Many markets have a small budget for promoting the market and use PR as an effective promotional tool, often more effective than advertising. The secret to attracting PR is to present market information in a way that will make it interesting and dynamic for the target audience. Some examples:

- Promoting the market to tourists by working with journalists to place articles in in-flight and visitor magazines.
- Targeting local papers, etc. with articles.
- Creating general awareness of the market and issuing press releases to journalists as well as The Guild of Irish Food Writers, which can often result in additional coverage.
- Encouraging stallholders to do their own PR campaign yields results for many markets, e.g. recipes on the radio, in magazines and local newspapers, their own food blogs, etc.
- Creating a specific PR event at the market can often generate good media interest, e.g. cookery demonstrations with well-known chefs or stallholders. Master Chef type events are often popular, work well and attract media attention.
- Many of the national TV and radio magazine shows will often welcome suggestions from a regional market about a suggested slot and innovative content.

## Signage

Market managers interviewed for this guide spoke of the need for good local signage both at the market itself and at the entrance to urban areas on the days of the market. This is also critical in the lead up to re-opening a market after a seasonal shutdown.

**SECTION 4** HOW DO I SET UP A FOOD MARKET?**Lighting**

Presentation is hugely important and products must look fresh and vibrant to attract consumers. Having lighting available at stall level, particularly during the winter months is vital, as a warm and welcoming look can make all the difference in terms of attracting customers.

**Market layout**

Like all retail models, markets need to think about layout and customer flow. Stalls with the strongest presentation values should be favoured for positioning at main entrances to the market to get immediate impact from consumers.

**Engage in community projects**

Market managers and stallholders often visit local schools and educate students about healthy eating, food supply chains, how to grow your own food and to encourage market visits. By reaching out to children, it's possible to effectively communicate with parents on the values of shopping in a food market.



Like all retail models, markets need to think about layout and customer flow

## Events

Many interviewees consulted in the preparation of this guide described entertainment events as a major tool in terms of driving business to their markets and adding a sense of occasion to them, so that the market is viewed as more than a functional shopping destination. Several markets bring local musicians on board for market day and some observed that good, live music can double the time that customers spend at the market.

## Market tours

Market tours are as relevant for the local community as for tourists. Tours of the market, introductions to the stallholders, and overviews of what is sold at the market are all great ways of engaging the local community when a market first opens.

Tourists do not always purchase ingredients at markets, but do shop for hot food, confectionary and larder-type products. Market tours can be an effective promotional tool for this group.

Some tour operators charge a commission to markets in order to have the market on their tour path, but not all do. If tourists are a target group for a market, tour operators should be approached to make them aware of the market.

That said, some market managers caution against becoming a routine tourist stopping-off point, particular in the high season. Arriving at the wrong time, tourists may congest a market without delivering any significant returns. In addition, a large tourist throughput may lead to an over emphasis of 'food for now' stalls, making the market of less value to local shoppers seeking fresh produce. The key is to get the balance right in terms of numbers and timing.

**SECTION 4** HOW DO I SET UP A FOOD MARKET?**Ten tips for refreshing an existing food market**

Markets, like most retail concepts, can tire and lose their edge. These simple steps can help re-energise a faded food market:

1. Review the location: Is the market in a location where footfall is good?
2. Improve the product range: Can the consumer move through all major categories to complete a full shop?
3. Listen to customers though focus groups and interviews: When has the market management last talked to consumers to seek their views?
4. Promote the market more energetically: Is use of social media and traditional marketing strong?
5. Review the branding of stalls: Have all stalls got producer logos, photographs and other information about the production process?
6. Improve customer service of stallholders: Is customer service training being conducted?



Listen to customers though  
focus-groups and interviews

7. Forge new community links: Are monthly community events taking place?
8. Identify and embrace new consumer trends: Are the market management and stallholders reviewing the latest Bord Bia consumer trends and reacting to the insights?
9. Visit similar markets at home and abroad for new ideas: Are market visits organised annually?
10. Assess the market's relevance and ensure that the relationship between market management and stallholders is re-energised in order to ensure one strategic direction for all. Review stalls:
  - *Are they still adding to the market?*
  - *Do they offer what the customer wants?*



A woman with short brown hair, wearing a red jacket, is gesturing with her right hand towards the left. She is standing in front of a market stall with a white metal frame. The background is slightly blurred, showing other market stalls and people. The overall scene is bright and colorful, suggesting an outdoor market setting.

SECTION

# 5

## What is the future for Irish food markets?

The research undertaken for this guide paints a broadly positive picture of a food markets culture in Ireland that is growing, diversifying and evolving.

**SECTION 5**      WHAT IS THE FUTURE FOR IRISH FOOD MARKETS?

Consumers are investing time and money in more authentic food and shopping experiences, while broader cultural trends support the potential for a vibrant food market culture in Ireland. However, it is important to recognise the very real sense in which the sector can be said to be at a crossroads: concerted steps will need to be taken to ensure that food markets develop in a way that supports the relationship between the consumer and the primary producer. An alternative scenario, whereby food markets develop mainly in larger urban areas to meet the 'grazing' needs of consumers through hot food offerings and serviced by traders who are primarily resellers, would in many respects represent an opportunity missed.

Drawing from the data and anecdotal information shared in the research process, it is possible to speak with some confidence on both positive future trends and areas where action will be needed.

It is evident, firstly, that much greater thought regarding infrastructure and support services needs to be given if the growth of food markets in Ireland is to be facilitated in the future. Consumers are looking for an alternative to supermarket shopping, but they are not willing to compromise on many of the conveniences that supermarket shopping offers them. Markets can take advantage of this by differentiating themselves from retailers through producers who offer highly individual, high-quality products. However, design and presentation will play a key role in this, and both food market manager and stallholders will need to think strategically about how their market can respond effectively to what consumers want. In essence, if they are to offer an alternative to supermarkets, they must also be prepared to learn from them. One area where clear action will be needed is in the provision of physical shelter so as to make the experience of the market, for both stallholders and customers, a comfortable one. This will become more important as the weather in Ireland shows greater unpredictability and extremes. Markets cannot afford to shut down or be unpleasant to shop in when the weather turns inclement.



At a consumer level, food markets will continue to benefit from greater awareness among consumer on the attractions of local food. As the appeal of local provenance grows, this will offer even more opportunities for primary producers, creating a 'virtuous cycle' in terms of the range of products on offer. Food stuffs that can assert (and stand over) natural or organic status, those with health benefits, e.g. 'free from', and those that offer products that are acknowledged as 'superfoods', will have an increased edge and opportunity.

Food markets can also be the conduits of a range of valuable community services. Box schemes, which provide the direct home delivery of local grown produce, are showing signs of growth. The Dublin Food Co-op and the Fresh from West Cork are two examples of growers who provide a home-delivery service of produce to consumers and who find demand is growing. Building on word of mouth, these services can become integral and enriching elements of local food culture, providing a route to market that creates direct, long-term relationships between producers and consumers.

In addition to supporting tradition, markets can also be incubators of innovation. The food market as a breeding ground for young and vibrant start-ups is an exciting opportunity and market managers should actively encourage food entrepreneurs to see food markets as relatively low-risk ways of testing out new ideas. Community stalls at markets, which can be rented at a reduced rate to start-up food companies, will enable new entrants to get involved in food production to the benefit of the food producer, market and community.

In urban environments in particular, the prevalence of food trucks and street food culture will follow models from the UK and US. However, to fully realise their ability to influence market trends and to grow significantly, they will require infrastructural support from local authorities.

**SECTION 5**      WHAT IS THE FUTURE FOR IRISH FOOD MARKETS?

Although consumers are generally perceived to be willing to pay more for an 'authentic' experience, food markets need to recognise that value for money is still a priority for consumers. In the primary produce category, particular meat, fish, fruit and vegetables, there is a perception that food markets should be as competitive, if not more so, than supermarkets. This will put primary producers under pressure to deliver their products at lower prices.

It is clear that customers' interest in attending markets is growing. However, food market managers would do well to recognise that adding a sense of entertainment to this experience will be important in attracting and building a loyal customer base. Some may observe a dichotomy in this and the previous point – on the one hand, food markets will be expected to be as competitive as the highly competitive supermarket sector, particularly in the area of primary produce. On the other, they are expected to provide a social and cultural outlet. This may be a challenging square to circle.

Food markets build on tradition but they should not be seen as a 'throw back' to the past. The use of social media by both market managers and stallholders, for example, will continue to grow in importance, and will play a key role in raising the brand awareness of the markets and stallholders themselves.

Market managers will also be required to invest some thought into how they can protect and build their brand. As part of this, there will be an increasing drive to 'food only' markets due to a growing perception that the presence of non-food offerings can lower the standard of a market if not managed carefully. As against that, high-quality, locally-produced art and crafts will continue to play a role in some rural and seasonal markets, but only so long as it is not at the expense of the primary food offering.

Getting the balance right between 'food for now' and 'food for later', particularly for weekday and Saturday markets, is perhaps one of the most pressing and underestimated challenges, that food markets face as they build their long-term identity as resources for the Irish consumer. Ensuring the place of primary artisan food producers as anchor tenants is important if strong local appeal is to be maintained in food markets.

That said, it is well to recognise that food markets serve diverse audiences and, in the urban markets in particular, an increased focus on international food and hot food offering can make more sense, particularly on selected days.

Food markets are about connecting consumers to quality local food produce, but they require constant focus if they are to deliver what the customer wants. Those that do not put resources into re-energising their proposition and improving their structures will struggle to find new consumers and face decline.

The experience communicated by progressive markets in Ireland is that those who are adapting to satisfy consumer needs are betting ensuring their growth and the commercial viability of their stallholders into the future.

Food markets, as noted already, are at a crossroads and this current period of time is critical to how they will develop. While overall market numbers can be expected to remain static during the years 2014 and 2015, if the correct actions are taken, food markets numbers have the potential to grow significantly by the end of the decade, making this an exciting time for the sector, but a time too for watchfulness and foresight.



Food markets numbers have the potential to grow significantly by the end of the decade





SECTION

6

# Appendix 1 Methodology

**SECTION 6**      APPENDIX 1 METHODOLOGY**We wish to thank the following for their contribution:**

- Aines Chocolates
- Altrincham Market, Greater Manchester
- Ann Marie, Tipperary Kitchen
- Athboy Stables Farmers' Market
- Ballyvaughan Farmers Market
- Birr Farmers' Market
- Bolton Market, England
- Borough Market, London
- Brendan O'Mahony, Real Olive Company
- Cate McCarthy, The Cookie Jar
- Catriona Lenihan, Kinvara Farmers Market
- Country Markets Ltd.
- David Curran, Fethard Country Market
- David Lennon, Daves Pizza
- Dublin Food Co-op
- English Market
- Ferdia Chocolates
- Fiona Falconer, Wild About
- Fresh From West Cork

- Galway Market
- Geraud Markets Liverpool Limited, England
- Green Markets, New York
- Helen Gee, G's Jams
- Henry Hegarty, Wokabout
- Irish Village Markets
- James Burke & Associates
- Jenny McNally, McNally Family Farm Organic Produce
- Jim Ryan, Ryan's Butchers
- Kilruddery Market
- Kinvara Farmers Market
- La Boqueria Market, Barcelona, Spain
- Leadenhall Market, London
- Lewis Arrington, Kerala Kitchen
- Longford Farmers Market
- Mahon Point and Douglas Court Farmers Markets, Cork
- Mary Glynn, Tralee Farmers Market
- MAST (Markets Alive Support Team)
- Maureen Roche, Ballyvaughan Farmers Market
- Middleton Farmers Market

**SECTION 6**

## APPENDIX 1 METHODOLOGY

- Milk Market, Limerick
- NE Kerry Farmers Markets
- Olvi Oils
- Partridges Market, London
- Paul Kavo, ex-Little Marrakesh
- Paul Tatterson, Mangos Burgers
- People's Park and Red Stables Markets, Dublin
- Queen Victoria Markets, Melbourne, Australia
- St. George's Market, Belfast
- St. Lawrence Market, Toronto, Canada
- Stockton Market, New Jersey, USA
- Stroud Farmers Market, Gloucestershire
- Tomas Poil, Man of Aran Fudge
- Torverhallerne Market, Copenhagen
- The Real Food Market, London
- Union Market, Washington D.C., USA
- Union Square Green Market, New York City, USA



**The research also involved a review of Bord Bia research including:**

- Attitude to Farmers' Markets Among Organisers 2013
- Consumer Life Style Trends 2013
- Exploring Attitudes to Farmers' Markets 2010
- Periscope reports on Irish consumer
- Voluntary Code of Good Practice for Farmers' Markets 2009 – 2010

**Other materials used were:**

- House of Commons Report in 2009 entitled 'Market Failure – can the traditional market survive'
- National Market Traders Federation (NMTF) website
- Review of Project for Public Spaces research including <http://www.pps.org/reference/reference-categories/markets-articles/>
- World Union of Wholesale Markets (WUWM) website

Whilst every care has been taken to assure the accuracy of the content of this document, Bord Bia does not warrant the accuracy, completeness, legality or reliability of the material.



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