Making Connections with Universities & Colleges

Taking advantage of opportunities and potential partnerships

FARMERS’ MARKETS of Nova Scotia
Background

As a farmers’ market residing in a university town, or in close proximity to a college, your organizing team has an excellent opportunity to create partnerships or make connections with a nearby educational institution – whether it be with the professors, students or other university/college employees. Many universities and colleges offer programs that directly relate to a farmers’ market mission and mandate – nutrition and dietetics, culinary arts, community development, and agricultural studies are just a few that come to mind. Students registered in these programs must complete a wide range of assignment and projects, many of which may actually benefit your market (more on that below!).

Why make the connection?

Consider partnering with an academic department or an individual professor at the market’s nearest educational institution – your market can reap many benefits from this relationship:

• Reaching out to these institutions will familiarize students, professors and university/college employees with the market.
• This will likely draw them to your market venue, contributing to a long standing customer base.
• By promoting the market, either through academic programs or through the Students’ Union, you can attract student volunteers for your regular market hours or perhaps coordinators for a specific project or program your market is looking to take on.
• Many academic programs now require students to fulfill volunteer work or contribute to the community in some way – for example; St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish offers a ‘Service Learning’ option for many courses, which allows students to gain experience in their field of study by completing a project or donating their time to a community organization. These types of programs present a great opportunity for the market to build solid relationships with young people as well as benefit from volunteer services.
• In some cases, an existing (or future) market program can be managed, facilitated, or aided by university/college students. For example, the Wolfville Farmers’ Market offers the Kitchen Wizards program to young market goers – this program aims to bring forward important messages to children about what they eat by offering a positive and welcoming experience at the market with the intention that it will create a feeling of
belonging. The program gives children the purchasing power to choose local fresh fruit and vegetables and educates them about eating healthy and in-season all year around. As part of a Food Commodities course, Acadia University nutrition students prepare a food tasting demonstration to be presented to children at the market throughout the fall term – they are directly involved in the implementation of this program.

The Kitchen Wizards program benefits both the university and the Wolfville Farmers’ Market; the program covers relevant course material and gives students hands on experience in a community environment, while also benefiting the market itself as student contributions are volunteer, young children and families become more engaged in the market and a foundation is built for the market to evolve into a community food hub. For a closer look at this specific program, please see the following document: Sample Term Assignment – Kitchen Wizards at the Wolfville Farmers’ Market

Note: It has taken both time and effort (from both ends) to build and maintain the relationship between the Wolfville market and the Acadia nutrition program, as well as a personal friendship between the professor and the market manager in order to get the ball rolling. Therefore, we want to highlight the fact that this type of partnership will take time to establish, and requires that both the institution and the market are willing to invest the time required to ‘make it happen’.

How to get started:

In order to get the ball rolling in terms of building a relationship with a university or college, FMNS suggests the following:

1) Do a bit of research and find out the following: what kinds of secondary educational institutions are in your area? (are they reasonably close to the market?), what types of programs do they offer? (would any of their programs fit well with your market’s mission or values?) Is there a niche for this type of relationship at the institution?

2) Think about how best to contact the University/College and inquire about setting up a meeting with a department head, student union representative, etc. Depending on your intentions, you may prefer to reach out to the students directly via the students’ union as well as, or instead of, the head of an academic department. Your initial meeting will most likely consist of getting to know the university/college representative and gauging whether there is genuine interest to create a partnership with the market. Nonetheless, you should come prepared with a proposal, plan or brainstorm of some sort in order to emphasize why this partnership is valuable and how it could work.

3) Once you have gained interest from the university, look for ways to promote the market on campus. For example, contact a local graphic designer in order to create simple promotional pieces such as a market postcard/rackcard to include in university welcome
We suggest William Roberts as an excellent graphic designer, please contact him for availability.

William has been working as a freelance and contract graphic designer for over 3 years now. With his start in the Annapolis Valley, he has experience working with Farmers' Markets and small local businesses. Working with a diverse clientele, he has experience creating material for print and for online, including posters, handouts, calendars, brochures, logos, menus, postcards and stationery. A selection of his portfolio is available online at: www.facebook.com/williamrobertsdesigns Contact: wr.acadia@gmail.com or 902-680-6128

4) If you have decided to partner with an academic department, such as Nutrition & Dietetics - offered at St. Francis Xavier, Acadia & Mount St. Vincent - work with a department representative to determine whether the students’ involvement will be volunteer, and thus voluntary, or part of a mandatory course-based assignment. To truly build a strong presence within the department or university, work to incorporate the market into at least one aspect of the program for each year of study (freshmen, juniors, sophomores, seniors). For example, first year students could design a newsletter about market vendors as an assignment, juniors could provide tasting demonstrations at the market (see Kitchen Wizards, above) and so on. Even a class visit to the market or a farmers’ market tour can be a great starting point. The possibilities are endless!

Another bonus - based on experience between Acadia University and the Wolfville Farmers’ Market, many students will remain involved in the market, even after their assignments have been completed. Acadia nutrition students volunteer at market community suppers every week and coordinate other student volunteers.

Resources

Sample Term Assignment – Kitchen Wizards at the Wolfville Farmers’ Market: http://farmersmarketsnovascotia.ca/resource/