STEP 1: Do Your Research!
There are a variety of resources for Market managers and market start-up in the State of Iowa. You may not need all of these right away, but you will need them at some point in your market planning journey.
- Local Food Safety & Inspection Information
- Iowa Market Manager Handbook courtesy of Northeast Iowa and Iowa Valley RC&Ds
- Iowa Farmers’ Market Association
- Iowa Department of Ag. & Land Stewardship
- National Farmers’ Market Coalition

STEP 2: Understand Existing Markets
Observe other nearby markets and consider whether your community has capacity to support another – what can you offer that is new or different (times, location, vendors, etc.)?

STEP 3: Organizational Structure
Determine how your market will be structured and who will be in charge of decision making. Examples of market organizational structures include: a nonprofit with a board of directors, a paid staff market manager, or a volunteer committee.

STEP 4: Get to Know the Vendors
Attend markets in and around your community and engage with local foods stakeholders to gauge their capacity and willingness to participate. Farmers, chefs, artists/crafters, and community organizations can all provide valuable input.

STEP 5: Define Your Audience
Who are you hoping to attract with your market? How you will reach your potential vendors and shoppers – social media, local newspaper, posters & flyers, etc.

STEP 6: Review Potential Locations
Some zoning or city codes may present obstacles to large public gatherings or certain types of food or livestock. Have a couple of ideas about where you’d like to hold a market and find out if it allowed. Should your market be indoors or outdoors? Do you have an emergency weather plan? What will the flow of vehicle and foot traffic look like? How will you manage lines?
Step 7: Create a Budget
There can be a lot of hidden costs in running a farmers’ market. Budgeting ahead of time will ensure your market is sustainable.

Potential Expenses
- Permit and application fees
- Liability insurance
- Venue rental/usage fees
- Porta-potties
- Waste receptacles/removal
- Printing (flyers, signage, vendor paperwork)
- Advertising
- General onsite supplies (cleaning, tables/chairs, first aid, etc.)
- Parking meter bags
- Street barricades
- Website hosting
- Branding/design
- Staff stipends
- Performer stipends
- Market merchandise (bags, t-shirts, etc.)

Potential Revenue
- Vendor booth fees
- Food or beverage sales
- Merchandise sales
- Sponsorships/Advertisers
- In-kind donations
- Volunteer labor

Step 8: Make Decisions About Market Operations
Building relationships with local foods stakeholders and clear expectations for everyone involved are key aspects of running a smooth market. Create a concise document that includes market rules and guidelines such as:
- Product quality & acceptance criteria
- Vendor & shopper code of conduct
- Your definition of “local” (a radius of 10 miles? 100 miles?)
- Attendance policy
- Inclement weather plan
- Conflict resolution procedures
- Product diversity standards or duplication limits
- Interactive programming or educational partnership opportunities
- Promotion & marketing plan
# Sample Market Planning Timeline

| 9-12 MONTHS | Research other markets, target audiences, and community needs  
|             | Network with & recruit potential vendors  
|             | Research city & county ordinances, codes, and application requirements |
| 6-9 MONTHS  | Determine ideal location and take steps to reserve, rent, or apply to occupy it  
|             | Determine organizational structure and branding  
|             | Begin fundraising and soliciting partners  
|             | Finalize market rules and product standards |
| 3-6 MONTHS  | Finish any legal paperwork, insurance, etc. needed to operate market  
|             | Begin market promotion  
|             | Continue vendor recruitment |
| 1-3 MONTHS  | Create setup & teardown timelines and task lists  
|             | Recruit volunteers  
|             | Ensure vendors’ inspections, permits, and state applications are filed  
|             | Increase market promotion  
|             | Host a vendor meeting |
| WEEK BEFORE OPENING | Print all onsite signage  
|                     | Collect vendor payments  
|                     | Create market map  
|                     | Communicate final details to vendors, volunteers, media outlets, and partners  
|                     | Recognize any sponsors  
|                     | Host your first market! |
| ONGOING | Keep records (attendance, vendors, finances, etc.)  
|         | Continue to promote  
|         | Evaluate and measure successes/room for improvement |