

FRESHFARM Farmers Market Application Review Procedures

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Statement of Intent

1.

FRESHFARM is a non-profit that promotes sustainable agriculture and works to improve food access and equity in the Mid-Atlantic Region. FRESHFARM emphasizes the direct connection between local food choices and the quality and health of our environment and daily lives. To that end, FRESHFARM will operate farmers markets that reflect the interests and needs of the farmers, food producers and communities which they serve. FRESHFARM is committed to fair and transparent decision making for farmers market applications; to controlling for the negative effects of our unconscious biases; and to prioritizing diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racist practices in our work.

2. Overview

The FRESHFARM Markets team is responsible for reviewing farmer and producer applications to each of its farmers markets. This document offers an overview of our application process including the eligibility, expectations, and step by step review process from application submission to final decision. The review process includes identification and posting of the market needs, review and evaluation of the application, panel selection, pre-review panel procedures, panel meeting, and post-review process.

We will conduct an annual review process, analyzing and refining the evaluation criteria framework in order to continue to support our mission and serve our communities and stakeholders.

3. Who's Eligible?

3.1.1. Farmer

For the purposes of FRESHFARM markets, a farmer is a vendor who grows, raises, harvests and or produces raw agricultural products for sale at market. Of the products sold at market, 100% of raw agricultural products must be grown on the applicant's farm. In the case of value added items or prepared foods, the majority of those ingredients are expected to be grown on the applicant's farm as well.

3.1.2. Producer

Any other vendor who does not meet the definition of a "Farmer" is considered a "Producer." Producers must sell items that prominently feature local agricultural ingredients (i.e fruits, vegetables, meat, eggs, dairy, grains, etc.) sourced from Mid-Atlantic farms. Producers selling value-added food products, concessions, or crafts of any kind must demonstrate to FRESHFARM that they are sourcing as many ingredients from Mid-Atlantic farmers as is feasible. Food products are given preference over non-edible items such as crafts. FRESHFARM strongly prefers that at least 75% of the products available should feature local agricultural ingredients.

3.2. Producer-Only Policy

To be eligible for consideration all businesses must exclusively sell products that they have grown or produced. Absolutely NO resales or third-party sales are allowed. Such sales will be grounds for immediate suspension and/or expulsion from the market. Contract growing agreements with other farms or lease arrangements in exchange for product do NOT qualify a business as producer-only. Products produced must be grown or made by employees on the applicant's payroll. Equipment, pesticides, fertilizers, etc necessary for growing and production must have been purchased or rented by the applying business.

Alternative business and organizational structures, such as co-ops, that provide products for sale at market from multiple farms and or farmers will be considered based on their ability to fill product gaps at market, and by the means that the applying business exists to increase access and equity.

3.3. Local Requirement

FRESHFARM works to support local agriculture and improve the quality of life in Washington, D.C., Maryland and Virginia. Participation in the farmers markets is only for regional farmers/producers from the Mid-Atlantic Region including Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, and Washington, DC. Applicants will only be considered eligible if located within a 200-mile radius of the market to which they have applied.

3.4. Ineligibility

Applicants that do not meet the producer-only and local requirements will be considered ineligible for FRESHFARM markets. Additionally, farmers/producers seeking to return that have a history of violations of FRESHFARM's rules, regulations, payment schedules, and/or anti-discrimination and harassment policies may be declared ineligible for consideration. Such decisions will be delivered to the farmer/producer in writing and signed by FRESHFARM's Executive Director. Mid-season infractions are similarly subject to immediate response including suspension or expulsion.

4. Accountability and Goals

4.1. Accountability for Decision Making

FRESHFARM is a non-profit that promotes sustainable agriculture and works to improve food access and equity in the Mid-Atlantic Region. FRESHFARM emphasizes the direct connection between local food choices and the quality and health of our environment and daily lives. To that end, FRESHFARM will operate farmers markets that reflect the interests and needs of the farmers, food producers and communities which they serve. FRESHFARM is committed to fair and transparent decision making for farmers market applications; to controlling for the negative effects of our unconscious biases; and to prioritizing diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racist practices in our work.

4.1.1. To Applicants

- FRESHFARM will seek to evaluate applications with its mission to support local and sustainable agriculture in mind.
- FRESHFARM will seek to evaluate applications with the needs of each market in mind.
- FRESHFARM will seek to evaluate applications with the needs of the community in mind.
- FRESHFARM will seek to evaluate applications on the basis of equity.
- FRESHFARM will review and approve applications by committee.
- FRESHFARM will seek to evaluate applicants based on how well they score in the criteria defined and outlined in this document.
- FRESHFARM will provide a written response to all applications whether it be for approval, denial, waitlist, or request for more information.
- FRESHFARM will provide a summarized application score to each applicant.
- FRESHFARM will provide additional feedback about market decisions upon request.
- FRESHFARM will evaluate and consider changes to the application process based on feedback from applicants.

4.1.2. To the Community

- FRESHFARM will actively seek and consider feedback from the community about its markets.
- FRESHFARM will consider changes to the evaluation process based on insight from the community.
- FRESHFARM will engage and work with the communities surrounding each market to help identify product needs and opportunities.

- FRESHFARM will maintain public facing rules, regulations, and application evaluation standards.

4.1.3. To the Stewards (Board, Program Director(s))

- FRESHFARM will evaluate applications in accordance with the organization's mission.
- FRESHFARM stakeholders understand that decisions are made in the spirit of strengthening the organization's commitment to sustainable agriculture and equity in the region.

4.1.4. To the Fiduciary and Dependents (Board, Staff)

- FRESHFARM will make decisions based on sustaining the financial health of the organization and its markets.

4.1.5. To the Market Team

- FRESHFARM will evaluate the application process based on feedback from the market team.
- FRESHFARM will consider changes to the process based on insight from the market team.
- FRESHFARM will consider insights from the market team regarding the individual needs of a market.

5. Application Process

5.1. Submissions

5.1.1. Standard Application

Interested candidates must submit an application to be accepted into market. Applications must be completed in their entirety and applicants must agree to adhere to FRESHFARM's market rules and regulations. Incomplete applications will not be considered.

Upon request, FRESHFARM will provide a paper application to applicants who are unable to complete the online application. Applicants may email markets@ffm.org or call 202-362-8889 to request a paper application. Applicants may also request a paper application in person by coordinating with an onsite market manager.

5.1.2. Supplemental Materials

Applicants are encouraged to submit supplemental documents or referrals in support of their admission to a market for any number of reasons that they feel are relevant. For example, if hardships or other extenuating circumstances led to gaps in attendance in a previous season, applicants are encouraged to submit a written explanation explaining the situation.

5.2. Evaluation Criteria

FRESHFARM will evaluate each applicant, resulting in a graded score. That score will be based on the average across applicable criteria ratings. The criteria used to evaluate applications are intended to encourage critical and nuanced thinking about each applicant, and provide a basis upon which to more carefully and thoughtfully compare potential farmers/producers, as well as a structured method for sharing feedback to applicants regarding ways to strengthen their application. Not all parts of the evaluation criteria carry the same weight, they are weighted according to the alignment

and importance of each criteria to our mission.

Please note that some of the criteria are graded on a 1-10 scale (1 being the lowest, 10 the highest), while others are qualities an applicant either has or does not have, for example is a veteran owned business, or a founding farmer or producer at a market. Additionally, some of the criteria are specific to the market applied to while other criteria are more general (for example, 'fills product gap' is specific to the market for which there is an application, while 'quality of product' is general. Finally, some of the criteria are specific to farmers (farming practices), while others are specific to prepared food producers (local sourcing). In section 5.3.1 the scoring is explained in greater detail.

FRESHFARM gives additional consideration to binary characteristics that are not given a score 1-10. Those are listed immediately below and followed by the scored criteria.

- Farmer: FRESHFARM's priority is to provide regional farmers with direct market opportunities for their products.
- Historically marginalized populations that self identify as:
 - BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, Person/People of Color) owned businesses
 - Veteran owned businesses
 - First Generation farmer owned businesses
 - LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual Plus) owned businesses
 - Immigrant and or refugee owned businesses
- Social impact: Applicants with a charitable mission or equivalent social impact program(s) will be granted additional consideration.
- Founding Farmer or Producer: Unique to each market, any farmer or producer who participated in the market in its first season, started with the market and is still there today.
- Returning Farmer or Producer: Businesses that have been at the market in the previous year or years and have established relationships with their peers and customers.

5.2.1. Standing with FRESHFARM (Scored 1-10)

Reviewers will evaluate the applicant's history as a FRESHFARM farmer/producer. Relevant data to consider includes but is not limited to applicant's market fee reporting and payment schedules; market attendance; treatment of customers and staff; and historical compliance with FRESHFARM rules and regulations.

5.2.2. Local Sourcing (Scored 1-10)

Preference is given to producers who purchase directly from regional farmers although purchasing from local aggregators, co-ops, etc is permitted and encouraged if the former is unattainable. If you do not or are not currently able to source local ingredients, please let us know why. We may accept some applicants on the condition that they commit to meeting our standards on an agreed upon timetable.

5.2.3. Fills Product Gap at Market (1-10)

A product gap is defined as a product identified to be desirable and is unavailable or in short supply at the market. Product gaps are identified based on feedback from market managers, senior staff, and the community. Additional consideration will be given to applicants that are able to fill multiple

identified product gaps.

5.2.4. Capacity (Scored 1-10)

Candidates should be able to meet expected customer demand every week at the market. Ability to commit to the entire market season is preferred. Reviewers should take note of the dates requested by the applicant. If commitment to the full season is unclear FRESHFARM will follow up with the applicant. Given the thin-to-nil profit margins associated with winter growing, crop planning, and staffing, reviewers are instructed to grade farmers more leniently for year-round markets. In particular the following criteria are considered in our evaluation of capacity:

- Diversity of Product Offering
- Ability to meet demand throughout a market day (i.e. routinely has product available until the end or close to the end of a market - does not run out early)
- Appropriately staffed
- Appropriately equipped (tents, tables, display)

5.2.5. Quality of Product (Scored 1-10)

FRESHFARM reserves the right to sample products as part of the application process. All products sold at FRESHFARM markets must meet the health department food safety requirements for the state/city/county that the applicant is producing/vending in.

5.2.6. Alignment with Mission (Scored 1-10)

- Farming practices
 - FRESHFARM favors farmers who cultivate the land or raise livestock using sustainable, environmentally conscious, and humane practices. Applicants are required to explain their farming operation and self-describe the ways in which their farming practices align with the mission of FRESHFARM. Reviewers bring a unique perspective to what constitutes sustainable and are requested to make note of what factors led to the score assigned. Examples of practices and certifications include but are not limited to: USDA Organic, Certified Naturally Grown, Certified Humane, FACT, describe your own.
- Promotion of food access and equity (i.e fair labor practices, diversity and inclusion, community engagement)
- All applicants that sell eligible products are required to accept WIC and SFMNP checks.
- All applicants that sell eligible products are required to accept federal food benefits and incentive programs as operated by FRESHFARM at all markets.

5.2.7. Distance to the Market (max 200 miles) (Scored 1-10)

While all applicants are expected to meet the local requirement, evaluators are encouraged to take into consideration whether or not the business is based in the same state, county, or neighborhood as the market. Exceptions to the 200 mile rule can be made on a case by case basis. In particular the following criteria are considered in our evaluation of distance to market.

- Proximity of the business to the market.
- For farmers, ability to accept state specific supplemental food assistance checks and coupons.

- Existing relationships with the community surrounding the market.
- Existing relationships with farmers and producers approved to sell at the market.

5.2.8. Strong Marketing (Scored 1-10)

1. Market presence
 - Clear, current and informative signage
 - All product prices clearly listed
 - Approachable and organized display
 - Values and provides excellent customer service
2. Online Presence
 - Has an updated website
 - Has a newsletter
 - Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, etc
 - One or more of those platforms has an engaged following
 - Offers online orders

5.2.9. Assessment of Business Need (Scored 1-10)

Answers to the following questions will help us to determine the reliance of your business on the farmers' markets as a retail outlet:

- How vital are markets to the success or existence of the business?
- What percentage of your business's revenue is generated from market sales?
- Outside of farmers markets, how and where do you sell your products?
- Any statement of need, and/or supplemental documents are helpful.

5.3. Instructions for Applicants: New and Returning Farmers/Producers

5.3.1. Returning Applicants

1. Farmers

After successful completion of first year probationary term, farmers are eligible to apply for a conditional 3 year acceptance to corresponding markets. A 3 year term is meant to help accommodate farm growing plans (crops, livestock, etc)

Once approved for 3 years, the following terms apply:

- Good standing with FRESHFARM must be maintained season to season.
- Subject to annual review
- Annual applications should still be submitted
- Annual applications should highlight any change in operation or product offering.
- Annual applications should include updated insurance, business and other relevant documentation.
- A site visit is required before approval and renewal of any subsequent 3-year

applications.

2. Producers

Producers are approved to sell at FRESHFARM markets on an annual basis and must submit a new application each market season.

- Good standing with FRESHFARM must be maintained season to season.
- Applications should highlight any change in operation or product offering.
- Applications should include updated insurance, business and other relevant documentation.
- Must demonstrate continued commitment to FRESHFARM's mission and work towards increasing sourcing from local farms.

5.3.2. New Applicants

All new accepted applicants start on a one season probationary term.

- New farm applicants will be eligible for multi-year approval upon successful completion of one market season with FRESHFARM.
- All new applicants provided conditional approval to sell at FRESHFARM markets will be visited by FRESHFARM staff (site visit).

6. Evaluation of Applications

As outlined in detail below, the evaluation process begins with an eligibility screening based on the criteria previously listed, then moves on to a panel review, before finally coming to the final roundtable review.

6.1. Reviewer Selection

6.1.1. Diversity in the Evaluation Process

FRESHFARM will provide all applicants review by a series of evaluation panels. FRESHFARM aims to organize panels of at least two reviewers from diverse backgrounds with varied personal and professional experience. Each decision reached will be made collectively and not solely by one individual, with each reviewer utilizing FRESHFARM's evaluation criteria to grade each applicant's alignment with FRESHFARM's mission, product quality and sourcing standards, and other factors for success in the farmers market.

6.1.2. Conflict of Interest

Reviewers are to declare any conflicts of interest they may have when reviewing applications. Potential conflicts include, but are not limited to: applications submitted by a former employer, family member, friend or roommate; having a financial interest in the applicant; any other conflict declared by the reviewer or applicant.

6.2. Evaluation Steps

6.3. Eligibility Screening Panel

All applications will undergo an initial assessment to determine if they meet FRESHFARM's minimum standards and eligibility. Eligibility screenings can be carried out by any member of the

Markets team but applications must be deemed ineligible/low threshold by at least two (2) team members to be screened out. Screeners should make note of what led to the decision to keep on record and to share with applicants who were deemed ineligible. Applications screened out will be notified in writing. If a candidate feels the decision was made in error or any unique characteristics were not fully considered, candidates should document their case and submit an appeal.

6.4. Evaluation Panel

The FRESHFARM Evaluation Panel consists of members of Senior Market Management, to include members of the Market Operations, Farmer and Producer Engagement, Community Engagement and Program Management teams, and select Market Managers that hold diverse experience related to farmers market management, local food systems, and food business development. Non-market related FRESHFARM staff with appropriate experience may also be involved with the evaluation process as able / requested.

6.4.1. Criteria Scoring

Evaluators score applications with each criterion (listed above) given a score on a scale from 1 (poor) - 10 (excellent). Reviewers are expected to assign a score based on fit for the category and asked to assign a score against a reasonable expectation for a market farmer/producer and not in comparison to other current applicants:

- 1-3 points, applicant fails to satisfy this criteria in its entirety or meets the bare minimum requirement
- 4-7 points, applicant is average for a typical candidate
- 8-10 points, applicant stands out or goes above and beyond FRESHFARM's expectations

6.4.2. Overall Score

When criteria scoring has been completed, an overall score is calculated by averaging scores across criteria

6.4.3. Selection for Candidates for the Final Review Roundtable Panel

Once grading has been completed each reviewer selects a subset of applicants to move on to the Final Review Roundtable. To make a decision on who to move forward, each reviewer is instructed to consider the applicant's binary characteristics, overall score, the needs of the market applied for, any inspection team's notes, supplemental materials and other factors left up to the discretion of the reviewer.

- Reviewers should note what factors most impacted their decision to move an applicant forward.
- There is no mandate to bring forward a minimum or maximum number of final candidates; however, FRESHFARM aims to consider 3-5 finalists per market space available.

6.4.4. Final Review Roundtable Panel

Each reviewer will bring their list of finalists to a roundtable of the Panel. The panel is expected to make acceptance decisions by consensus whenever possible.

6.5. Additional considerations and Further Follow-Up

6.5.1. Minimum Threshold

Space is limited at many of FRESHFARM's markets and returning farmers/producers are given some preference as outlined above. Panelists are instructed not to accept an applicant solely for the purpose of filling an available market spot. Applicants should meet the high standards and mission goals that FRESHFARM has established.

6.6. Market Referrals

During review, panelists may determine that the applicant scores highly but either does not fill an identified market need or available market spaces were allocated to other eligible businesses that fit market need or deemed a stronger fit for this particular market. In these cases, panelists may refer applicants to the review panel of another market where the panelists think the applicant would be a good fit. In such cases the standard application review procedures would apply.

6.7. Insufficient Information and Consideration Waivers

Should the application not provide enough information to merit a score or the criteria is not relevant the reviewer may disregard that criteria from the overall score, but flag that criteria for the Senior Market Team for additional evaluation. Reviewers may also choose to waive scoring for certain criteria based on supplemental material submitted with the application (see below).

6.8. Site Visits

Every applicant new to FRESHFARM's network must undergo a site visit before final consideration can take place. These inspections are to ensure that the information provided is correct and producer-only standards are met. Site visits are involved processes and reviewers are instructed to only refer applicants that stand out during the grading process. Additionally, farmers re-applying for 3-year approval require a site visit, despite having been inspected previously. If significant changes are made to the operation or a farmer or producer is hoping to add a new product, they will need to submit the product for approval and the Senior Team will determine if another site visit is required. If a producer has not been inspected in 3 or more years they will be flagged for a site visit, and the senior team can determine if a site visit is necessary.

6.9. Final Decision Communication

6.9.1. Declines

Applicants will receive notice regarding any change in the status of their application. Applicants will receive feedback on the review process. See section 6.2 for details.

6.9.2. Acceptances

Applicants will receive notice regarding any change in the status of their application. A welcome letter with market specific details will be sent as the opening day draws near.

6.9.3. Conditional Acceptances

Applicants may be accepted on a conditional basis if verification procedures have not been completed in the event that their application is strong in all other aspects. These items will need to be completed and provided prior to any actual attendance of the market.

Conditional acceptance can be offered to a potential farmer/producer if they are missing any of these requirements:

- COI, Business License, etc
- Pending site visit and inspection
- Application fee payment
- Outstanding fee payment
- Submission of sourcing documentation

The listed items will need to be completed and accounted for no later than 14 days prior to the start of market. Failing to meet all the requirements by the appointed time can result in a rejection.

Meeting the requirements in the conditional acceptance period will qualify the farmer/producer for full acceptance to market.

7. Post Evaluation

After each review is completed, a summary of the evaluation will be generated. If an applicant is interested in additional feedback, a summary can be provided on request. Records will be kept on file for 3 years. Additionally, if a candidate disagrees with an evaluation, they can always make an appeal to the score if not always to the market.

7.1. Evaluation Summary

The evaluation summaries will have the application and supplemental materials attached. The evaluation summaries will briefly describe the applicant based on:

- Product type
- Listed criteria
- Standout mentions based on review including information from supplemental documentation
- Recommendation for next steps

7.2. Feedback for Applicants

Applicants will receive notice regarding any change in the status of their application with their averaged final score and a summary of the criteria evaluation.

Applicants will be able to seek additional feedback regarding any decision.

7.3. Record Retention

Applications, supplemental documents, and scoring forms, will be retained for 3 years.

7.4. Appeals

7.4.1. Screening

If you believe you were flagged ineligible in error, you can appeal that determination by sending an email to markets@ffm.org. Please note, it may be too late to change some decisions for the market season but we can still make corrections to an application's score for current and future reference and review.

7.4.2. Evaluation

If you believe your evaluation scores to be wrong or in some way misinformed, you can appeal that determination by sending an email to markets@ffm.org. Please note, it may be too late to change some decisions for the market season but we can still make corrections to the application's score for current and future reference and review.