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*Acreage Living is published monthly. Please share it with your acreage neighbors. Call your local ISU Extension Office for more information or contact an ISU Extension staff member listed below to suggest topics for future articles.*

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## Techniques to Improve Your Success at Farmers' Market

*By Andy Larson, ISU Extension Specialist in Small Farm Sustainability*

As you stroll through the local farmers' market on a summery Saturday morning, do you ever consider why you stop and shop at one vendor's booth, but walk by another without a second glance? It may have as much to do with the vendor as it does with you. Was the vendor you passed sitting and reading the newspaper? Do you know where the produce was grown? Was the produce dirty, shriveled from the sun, or uninteresting? Were other customers at the booth? A farmers' market vendor must do more than show up and open the tailgate. A farmers' market is a place where farmers must be *marketers*, creating an appealing, professional image for themselves and their farms, and providing consistent, high-quality products and service that satisfy customers.

## Presentation and Appearance

As a grower marketing directly to consumers, you need to make a good impression that will translate into a lasting positive image for your business. If possible, choose a bustling, centrally-located market that is populated by serious vendors. Proximity to your farm is a factor, but consider whether the extra sales made at a busier market will justify your time and additional expenses. Whichever market you choose, be familiar with the rules, keep the market manager happy, and have a presence there every week, preferably in the same slot. Customers appreciate consistency.

The public faces of your farm are your booth, produce, and salespeople. It's your brand and reputation. An attractive, legible sign should proclaim your farm name, logo, and location. People want to know where your produce is grown. Smaller signs should display a map and pictures of your farm, animals, tractor, kids... whatever will tell your story. Many

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customers want a relationship with “their farmer.” Such information and imagery will help the customer make that connection. Homemade signs are especially effective.

Use signs to show the production practices used to grow your produce. If your operation has a third-party certification such as Certified Organic or Certified Naturally Grown, declare this and be prepared to explain the certification in quick and simple terms. Explain why you do things the way you do, and label products with “unsprayed,” “heirloom variety,” or other attributes your customers might find valuable. Descriptors can be added to prominently-displayed pricing signs.

Your market stand should be clean and orderly, yet convey a sense of abundance and bounty. Some vendors use bushel baskets tilted toward the customer to appear overflowing. Produce should be continually replenished so containers always look full. As you near the end of the supply, keep placing your diminished inventory in smaller baskets to maintain the look of full containers so no customer feels like they

have to buy the “last one.” When selling in smaller units, continually rearrange and replenish tables so they always appear full and take down excess tables so the rest remain stocked.

Your produce ought to be handled to retain maximum quality and appeal, even after five hours on an asphalt parking lot on a hot summer day and a week in your customer’s refrigerator. The “shelf life” of your produce is impacted by the way it was harvested, cooled, packed, and stored on your farm (see Resources at the end of this article). Your farmers’ market stand should be shaded to protect produce, employees and customers from the elements, especially the hot summer sun. Stocks of temperature-sensitive produce should be kept in coolers which can be hidden nicely by long tablecloths on display tables.

### **Salespeople**

Salespeople in your booth affect your farm’s image as much as the produce they are selling. Choose the right people for the job. Employees should look professional, dressed in similar outfits preferably displaying your farm name and logo. They need to be personable, efficient, customer service-oriented, and knowledge-

able about your farm and its practices. Employees should always be standing and doing something even when business is slow, but they should never be too busy to engage a customer in a friendly, non-aggressive manner. Employees who work – and eat – on your farm, or are otherwise intimately familiar with the farm, will best be able to answer the detailed questions that customers ask, such as: What variety are these? What do they taste like? Were they ever sprayed? How would you cook them? Which are your favorite?



To be truly successful at a farmers’ market, it takes a lot of conscious thought, effort, and planning. Conscientious farmer-marketers can certainly make it worthwhile in terms of profitability, as well as relationship marketing. Next time, we’ll talk about salesmanship and merchandising techniques that can also improve your success at farmers markets. Happy planning!

Resources for post-harvest handling:

Postharvest Handling & Cooling of Fresh Fruits, Vegetables and Flowers for Small Farms – NC State

<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/post-index.html>

Postharvest Handling of Fruits and Vegetables – ATTRA

<http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/postharvest.html>

Produce Handling for Direct Marketing - MidWest Plan Service <http://www.mwps.org/index.cfm>



## Emerald Ash Borer: A Menace Not Needed In Iowa!

By Mark H. Shour, ISU Extension Entomologist

Iowa State University Extension has been on the lookout for the emerald ash borer, *Agrilus planipennis*. This exotic beetle from Asia infests **healthy** ash trees, as well as ones that are weak or dying.

Researchers have not identified ash trees resistant to emerald ash borer (EAB) attack. More than 25 million ash trees have died from EAB in the Midwest. Iowa has an estimated 55 million ash trees in rural forests and 20 million in urban settings.

### EAB Infested Areas

EAB has not yet been found in Iowa. The closest known infested site is Peru, Ill., approximately 85 miles east of Davenport. The epicenter of EAB is Detroit, Mich. where it is thought this beetle was brought in on infested wood crating. EAB has spread throughout Michigan, and to sites in Ill., Ind., Md., Mo. (extreme SE), Ohio, Pa., Wis. (just below Milwaukee), and W.Va. These areas are under federal quarantine to limit the movement of this destructive pest.

On their own, EAB adults can fly one to two miles. Long-distance expansion of this pest has unintentionally occurred by moving infested containerized ash trees and ash wood product, of which firewood is the major culprit.

### The Damage Done

Although adult EAB beetles feed on ash leaflets, it is the larval stage that kills trees. These creamy white, flattened larvae feed **just under the bark** in the nutrient-rich cambium tissues. As they feed, they produce winding tunnels that cut across the active xylem and phloem vessels, which carry water, minerals, and nutrients throughout the tree. The parts of the tree beyond an EAB-infestation slowly starve and die, usually within two to four years.



### 2008 Surveillance

ISU Extension canvassed Iowa during 2008 in collaboration with the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Iowa Department of Natural Resources Forestry, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service, and USDA Plant Protection Quarantine program. 1270 trees at 235 high risk sites (private and public campgrounds) were visually inspected for signs of EAB symptoms. 652 sticky traps were placed in ash tree canopies during adult EAB flight period; all traps were negative for this beetle. More than 400 sentinel trees were removed this fall and contractors

are in the process of removing the bark to look for signs of EAB.

### What You Can Do To Prepare

- Determine if you have ash trees. A picture key is available at <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/pages/tree/>
- Protect your trees from mechanical injuries (lawn mowers, trimmers, construction, and vehicle parking on root zone).
- KNOW the symptoms of EAB activity:
  - Thinning and dieback of branches
  - ‘Water sprouts’ on the trunk or main branches
  - D-shaped exit holes in the bark
  - Flattened white larvae found feeding under the bark and producing serpentine tunnels
  - Dark, metallic green beetles (1/2 inch long) on or near ash trees.
- REPORT suspect ash trees or beetles to ISU Extension Entomology (515) 294-1101 or the State Entomologist (515) 725-1470.
- Encourage governmental officials to make EAB preventive efforts a priority.
- Use only local firewood.
- Don’t apply a preventive insecticide treatment at this time.
- Learn more at <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/pme/EmeraldAshBorer.html>

## Blade? Loader? Blower? What's the best option for acreage snow removal?

by Mark Hanna, ISU Extension Ag Engineer

Snow removal on an acreage lane can be challenging, particularly during and after a big winter storm. Unless your pick-up has a blade, most equipment is tractor-mounted. Choosing equipment that's most effective for snow removal often depends on the size and type of tractor, or other unit powering the equipment.



Other things being equal, the reduced mechanical complexity of a blade is less costly than a blower. Blades are typically associated with units larger than a lawn-mower type tractor. Front-end loader equipment costs may be in-between those of blades and blowers although the cost of a loader is often shared by other uses.

Are there other needs for a small tractor (and perhaps front-end loader) such as tilling, planting, or livestock chores on the acreage? Access to an inexpensive older

tractor with a rollover protective structure (ROPS) allows the use of blade with an existing three-point hitch. A front-end loader may already be required for moving manure or feed for livestock. In addition, many acreage owners find a front-end loader saves back-breaking work with other tasks.

Downsides to using a larger tractor than needed for acreage operations include the initial cost and long-term maintenance. Acreage owners often have more than enough internal combustion engines to maintain. Adding an inexpensive older tractor can generate significant repair and maintenance costs (filters, tires, fluid changes, etc.). A tractor without ROPS should generate a 'red flag' for use, particularly on slick and uneven surfaces. If you have other uses for a larger tractor (e.g., 30 hp or greater) using a blade or loader is economical if you've got places to push the snow. Leaving a part of a snow pile on a right-of-way is hazardous for traffic. Blades are available as an attachment on the front of some loaders rather than mounting the blade on the rear of the tractor.

If acreage needs are smaller and mainly for lawn mowing and snow removal, a larger lawn-mower type tractor (around 20 hp) is often more economical even though a blower rather than a blade-attachment is needed for significant amounts of snow removal. The blower will more easily direct where snow is deposited than a blade.



Use safety in any snow removal operation.

- Consider tractor and vehicle stability on slick surfaces.
- Stop power to the blower and engine before attempting to clean the discharge.
- Maintain the engine so it can easily re-start after cleaning.
- Don't get under a hydraulically supported loader without mechanically blocking it first.

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... and justice for all

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