



Marshfield Farmers Market Case Study

A Friendly Virtual Food Hub Software Solution

Who: Marshfield Farmers Market, Marshfield, Massachusetts

Size: 30 to 35 vendors.

Type: Weekly local food farmers market. Went online only during Covid-19 shutdowns. Now have re-opened their in-person market but has continued with their virtual, pre-order and pick-up system by customer request in addition to in-person market sales.

The Problem: The Marshfield Farmers Market switched to a virtual ordering and pick-up system during the Covid-19 pandemic but struggled with difficult to use and expensive virtual farmers market software solutions. As the market has reopened for in-person sales, many customers have stuck with the 'no touch' online ordering and pick up system. The market needed a simple, user-friendly, cost effective virtual farmers market software app that supported continued online pre-orders in conjunction with their in-person venue.

Results:

- A 50% to 75%-time savings for market management.
- Happy vendors. They applauded the switch!
- Time saving single check out resulting in pleased customers.

Favorite Parts:

- Vendor are featured first, not products or product prices.
- Intuitive to use for vendors and customers.
- Easy reporting system for vendors and market managers.
- Vendors still control all their sales and interactions with their customers.
- Fulfillment reports have a label printing feature, makes organizing orders easy.
- Credit card fees are split between many vendors, saving money.
- Incredibly responsive customer service.

"It's been an amazing experience working with Food4All. I had worked with two other software companies, one was a non-starter, nothing happened. The other took weeks or months to get even a small change. With Food4All it's been a breath of fresh air, they're so responsive. Same day, sometimes same hour, responses. Food4All gets an A++ for service," — Lorrie Dahlen, Marshfield Farmers Market Manager



Finding the Right Local Food Marketplace Software Fit for Their Market

They may not be the biggest farmers market around, but the Marshfield Farmers Market in Massachusetts has always been known as the “friendly” market, for vendors and customers alike. So, when the Covid-19 pandemic hit and the 15-year-old Marshfield market went to an online marketplace to serve the community and help the vendors survive when all other markets closed. And they needed farm marketplace software that was as friendly and easy-going as they were.

After struggling with confusing programs with poor customer support, no options for SNAP customers and hidden costs, the Marshfield Farmers Market switched to Food4All and later Food4All HUB. They were one of the first markets in the country to beta test the Food4All HUB, a free farm marketplace software solution developed specifically to support online farmers markets, food hubs and cooperatives.

“Food4All has a very friendly approach, which fits in with us because we're actually known as a friendly market,” says Lorrie Dahlen, Marshfield market manager. Now instead of making multiple online orders, customers make just one order, and pay once, for the whole marketplace and all the vendors participating.

[Food4All HUB](#) builds on the success of the original Food4All platform, giving direct market farmers, food artisans and local food entrepreneurs the ability to create their own, online virtual farm store free of charge. Food4All leverages geolocation tagging technology, when potential customers search for local food to purchase online, nearby Food4All farm and food stores selling local products automatically pop up in their search results.

Food4All HUB allows regional Food4All stores to collaborate and create a virtual market just like they do in a real farmers market or food hub — only online. Already existing farmers markets now have an easy way to create a virtual marketplace, and food hubs can make ordering easy for wholesale buyers. Individual food entrepreneurs can collaborate with their neighbors to create a regional virtual marketplace and capture more sales.

Food4All HUB captures the growing consumer trend of ordering groceries online.

“Three in five U.S. consumers now buy their groceries online” — US Online Grocery Survey 2021: Post-Surge Prospects, May 2021 survey



Virtual Farmers Market Software that Makes a Manager’s Job Easy

Dahlen estimates that Food4All HUB will save her 50% to 75% of the time she had been spending on managing the virtual marketplace.

“My job just got so much easier. This is slick,” Dahlen says.

With previous virtual farmers marketplace software Dahlen was constantly on the phone trying to reach unresponsive software customer support to fix glitches and clear up confusions affecting both customers and vendors. Since they switched to Food4All HUB, the only questions she gets have nothing to do with the app. That means she can spend time running the market. They’ve gone back to hosting an in-person market but still offer the virtual market as well — versus figuring out software.

And the Marshfield Farmers Market vendors? They’re so happy with the new system they’ve been applauding the switch, Dahlen says.

A Virtual Food Hub App that Puts Vendors First

One of their favorite features in Food4All HUB is it highlights farmers by their individual story, not by product or price, Dahlen says.

This means their market customers experience the virtual Marshfield Farmers Market like they do in person, by building relationships with the farmers, food artisans and other vendors participating in the online marketplace rather than shopping by price.

“Other software programs, you're looking at a comparison of all the eggs as opposed to showing a farmer and telling their story,” Dahlen says. **“Food4All builds customer to vendor relationships**, while still allowing customers look at all the other vendors. But it doesn't do a side by side comparison, it doesn't pit vendors against each other.”

And because each vendor participating in the marketplace still controls their own individual store, they have access to who’s buying their product even when those sales come via a marketplace.

“With most of these other food hub systems vendors are blind to who the customer is, you’re not developing a relationship. You can’t contact them directly and say, hey I’ve got a sale coming up,” Dahlen says. “Being able to maintain that relationship is huge.”



A Local Food Marketplace Software That's Easy to Use with Farmer-Focused Features

Ease of use is incredibly important for busy vendors and market managers. Food4All HUB scores high on all accounts and is intuitive for vendors and customers to use, Dahlen says.

For vendors, they only have to manage one account — rather than numerous — that features their individual store. And, **they can join as many Food4All marketplaces as they wish**. In the Marshfield Farmers Market, some of their vendors only participate in the virtual marketplace once a month. It's a simple matter for them to turn their availability to the marketplace on, or off, Dahlen says.

Dahlen can also choose to grow their virtual marketplace, by sending invites to Food4All vendors within their region that may want to join their virtual market. Vendors that sell retail and wholesale can offer either option, encouraging restaurant sales.

Dahlen also appreciates the ability to print labels right from the Food4All fulfillment reports. Vendors can print and stick customer names and products on bags as they fill orders, making consolidating products at the marketplace pick-up site much easier. Food4All HUB allows vendors to designate delivery options, whether that's pickup at the farm, at a consolidated location or if delivery is provided.

An unexpected bonus is that credit card fees are reduced to individual vendors when customers order through the marketplace, Dahlen says. Because customers place just one order (rather than ordering individual with multiple vendors) that means the credit card fee is split amongst many vendors rather than just one.

A++ Customer Service

The icing on the cake has been the customer service experience from Food4All HUB designers, Dahlen says, especially after being frustrated with competing software programs.

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For more information on Food4All's free hub solution, visit <https://www.food4all.com/food-hub-solution> or send us an email at support@food4all.com. We'll get right back to you!