How to Get a Product on Grocery Store Shelves

When you create a grocery product, the first place to sell it may be at a local farmer's market or fair. When your product is a farmer's market success, you'll need to get it on grocery store shelves to expand your customer base. You can find out about grocery stores where your customers are likely to shop through market research.

**Step 1:** Research stores that may be a good fit for you. It may be worth trying small independent stores first, which are more lenient in terms of product liability, packaging and price flexibility. Go to the stores on your list and see what else they have in stock. How much are competitors’ prices? Please keep in mind that the shelf price is probably twice the price that the farmer received after adding on distribution and store mark-ups. Contact the stores where you think your product would be a good fit to inquire about what insurances you need to work with them. Some of the stores may have these details listed on their websites.

**Step 2:** Contact your insurance agent to purchase products liability insurance. Products liability insurance protects your company from liability that may arise if a customer is injured by your product. Retail buyers require proof of insurance before they agree to purchase your product.

**Step 3:** Join GS1 US to obtain a Uniform Product Code manufacturer's number for your product. UPC symbols appear as bar codes on product labels, and help to track sales and inventory throughout the retail supply chain. All large grocery stores, and most small stores, require a UPC on products they sell. Get your barcodes here: [https://www.gs1us.org/upcs-barcodes-prefixes/get-started-guide](https://www.gs1us.org/upcs-barcodes-prefixes/get-started-guide)

**Step 4:** Create a blog or a website for your business. Use photos and brief descriptions to tell the story of your farm, the products and services you offer and what makes your product different from competitors’. Highlight any important buyers, press or awards your business has received. Include pictures of your products and information about ingredients, nutrition facts and available sizes if applicable. Upload photographs or videos demonstrating how to use the product. Include information about your ordering process for wholesale buyers.

**Step 5:** Create a one-page printable document that describe your products, sizes and prices. This document (see [Product & Price Sheet Template](#)) should include a high-quality (color, if possible) photo of each of your products, shelf life, sizes and quantities per case and prices per unit or case. The document should also include instructions on how to place an order and what, if any, minimum orders are required or additional delivery costs are not included in the price.

**Step 6:** Call managers of grocery stores in your area that you think would be a good fit for your products. Ask managers for appointments to visit and sample your product. Bring your product samples and your Produce & Price Sheet. Some grocery stores have set times when they meet with local vendors. Some independent grocery stores post information about open calls for vendors on their websites. We recommend you start with local, independent stores, since most
chain stores require a proven and demonstrated sales history elsewhere before considering to stock your product.

**Step 7:** Visit websites of large chain grocery stores to find out if they have vendor programs for small businesses. Look for contact information for a vendor relations manager, or a senior buyer to ask for directions about how to send samples and marketing materials. Prepare to travel to meet with buyers in person to talk about your product. Practice your sales pitch to convince buyers that their customers will want your product. In general, you need to show buyers that your product sold successfully in local grocery stores in order to get picked up by a large chains.

**Step 8:** Follow-up. Do not expect the store to call you back! A couple of days after the meeting, follow-up with them by email or phone. If they tell you they are not interested, ask for more information – is it the product, the packaging, the price? Offer to do an in-store demonstration to prove how popular the product will be.

**Step 9:** If you are having a hard time getting stores to take a chance on your product, consider attending trade shows or hiring a food broker. Trade shows can be expensive but offer exposure to a wide range of retailers looking for new products. Make sure you pick the right shows to attend. Know which stores and buyers you are ultimately looking to sell to and what trade shows they attend.

Food brokers are also called independent manufacturer’s representatives and they get paid only when they make a sale, generally a fee of 5 to 15 percent of the transaction. They have relationships with regional buyers at different retailers in specific industries. If you think you need help with sales, but do not have the funding or time to train your own sales staff, consider hiring a food broker. Make sure to choose one wisely – a broker that is familiar with your product niche and with a proven track record.

**Step 10:** Once you get on the store shelves, you need to make sure your product sells. Offer to do a monthly product demonstration at the store. This will boost sales as well as give you more valuable market research from customers as they taste and purchase your product. Call your buyer once per quarter to see how things are going. When you are in the store, clean up and keep an eye on your shelf space. No one likes dusty jars. Stop by the store and shine the tops of your jars with a microfiber cloth, straighten your facings, and pull product forward. This attention to detail helps you sell more product. Plus, going into the store lets you know if you need to deliver more product. That means you’ll have clean shelves and fully-stocked product.