



**PROFILE OF MIRIAM HAAS FOR
WOMEN IN BUSINESS PROFILE ISSUE
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Briefly describe your business and what your company offers:

Community Markets organizes twenty community-based farmers markets in Westchester County, Rockland County and New York City. We are dedicated to providing sustainable foods and artisanal products that are grown or produced locally. I define "local" as close enough for the grower or producer to drive to the market and go home on the same day. We provide communities a venue where they can market and meet their neighbors. We're recreating the old village green.

How did you get started?

My husband calls me an 'Accidental Entrepreneur.' In 1990, I organized an organic food co-op for fifteen neighborhood mothers. Distributing boxes of produce from an unheated barn lost its charm after a year, so I asked the Village of Ossining if I could start a farmers market in a municipal parking lot. Three months later, the Ossining Farmers Market opened with just two farmers. I painted the first banner by hand. By 1996, I was getting calls from villages that wanted to start their own farmers markets.

Did you face any difficulty establishing yourself in your field?

Running a Farmers Market is a lot like running for political office – you spend a lot of time managing perceptions and striking compromises. Sometimes you have to be diplomatic. Other times you have to put your foot down.

Was anyone a role model for you or an influence as a business leader?

My husband and business partner, Jon Zeltzman, showed me how to draw up a budget and balance the books. Bob Lewis, from the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, taught me how to organize a farmers market and connected me with key people.

What makes your company unique?

Our vendors go through an extensive vetting process. We sample all products. We make site visits to farms and kitchens to make sure standard food safety procedures are followed. If a vendor can't maintain our standards we drop them from the market.

What would you advise young women entering the job market today?

Follow you passion, but educate yourself. It's not enough to learn how to make food. You need to learn how to market it. A lot of small businesses don't set aside money for product development, packaging and marketing. There's opportunity there for women who appreciate that running a small business is different than working in the corporate field.

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