



Cooperative Extension Programs

20 Tips for Successful Marketing

Vonda Richardson, Extension Marketing Specialist

1. LOOK FOR IDEAS FOR POSSIBLE THINGS TO GROW

- Check with current or potential buyers (specialty distributors, restaurants, customers at farmers' markets, retail produce managers).
- Don't get swept away by every new possibility that comes along.
- Take each new idea and **EVALUATE** how each alternative matches your skills, preferences, and resources.

2. MATCH THE FARM VENTURE TO THE RISK YOU CAN HANDLE

- **START SMALL**, and test your ability to grow and market new products before you scale up.
- Starting small also helps assure you'll produce a quality product, allowing you to protect yourself so that you don't get knocked out if your experiment fails.
- Set aside a certain percentage of your acreage or gross income each year to experiment with new products.
- Focus initially on producing a few selected specialties, and **ESTABLISH A REPUTATION FOR QUALITY**.

3. SELL BEFORE YOU SOW

- **DON'T PLANT BEFORE YOU KNOW WHO YOUR CUSTOMERS WILL BE.**
- Match your sales volume to the market.
- **PLAN AHEAD** and anticipate what you can sell to your outlets.
- There is nothing worse than producing a crop, only to find that you can't sell it.
- Market analysis not only helps determine if your prospective enterprise can be profitable, but also determines how you will promote and market your product.

4. DIVERSIFY YOUR ENTERPRISES AND YOUR MARKETS

- **DON'T PUT ALL YOUR EGGS IN ONE BASKET.**
- If weather, pests, or a collapsed market wipe out one crop, you've got others to depend on.
- Another advantage of diversity is that once you've established connections with buyers, increasing the variety you offer them is a good way to increase overall volume they will accept from you.
- There is a tradeoff: you may have to learn new production technologies, buy new equipment, and develop new markets.
- Diversifying markets sometimes can be simpler and more lucrative than diversifying production.
- Adding a farmers market to your marketing mix, going organic, or developing value-added products are some examples.

5. TRANSLATE TREND INTO PROFITS

- **LOOK FOR NICHE MARKETS** through trends as health and nutrition, smaller packages, more diverse and higher quality foods, quality and convenience, ethnic foods, foods for weight-conscious consumers as well as consumers concerned about food safety.
- Other trends include the demand for fresh, in-season, local produce as well as organic produce and cut flowers.

6. SPECIALTY CROPS

- **CONSIDER HIGH-VALUE CROPS**, plants that wholesalers may have overlooked because they require special handling.

7. SPECIALTY MARKETING

- The secret of high-value, specialty marketing is to **KNOW AHEAD OF TIME WHAT YOUR MARKET IS**, and where it is going.
- **BE PREPARED TO CHANGE** with the seasons. Too many producers just go by what sold last year but most specialty buyers are constantly looking for something new.
- In case your high-end markets don't take all your premium produce, develop secondary outlets for your crops such as canning, processing, or selling at lower-end markets.

8. GROW AND MARKET FOR QUALITY

- Some customers will pay the price you name for the quality they can't get elsewhere.
- **Freshness:** keep your products on the vine or tree as long as possible, then get them to the consumer as soon as possible after harvest.
- **Variety:** comb through specialty seed catalogs, searching for varieties that boast of excellence in flavor.
- **DON'T JEOPARDIZE YOUR TOP-PAYING MARKETS BY MIXING YOUR PREMIUM PRODUCTS WITH LESSER-GRADE PRODUCTS-** develop secondary outlets for your number two's and three's. Not everything you produce is marketable to high-end market.
- Produce 10% more than what you plan to market.

9. DON'T COMPETE WITH EVERYONE ELSE

- Look for ways to differentiate your product, not only by what you grow, but how you grow it, what you do with it (added value or processed products) or how you package or market the product.
- Some other ways to differentiate your products include a service, such as home delivery or pre-washing.

10. KNOW YOUR CUSTOMERS

- The annals of **BUSINESS FAILURES** are filled with businesses that attempted to market **WHAT THEY THOUGHT WOULD SELL, INSTEAD OF FINDING OUT FIRST WHAT WILL SELL.**
- Get to know your customers or buyers, why they purchase what they do, and what else they may like to purchase. Make it a habit to survey your customers. Ask for feedback.
- Send buyers new product samples and ask for feedback.
- Use small focus groups to gain insights on your new products.
- Use low-cost advertisements as a test promotion.

11. AIM FOR A YEAR-ROUND SUPPLY

- Extend your harvest by planting different varieties with different harvest dates.
- Steady production stretched over a long growing season provides regular work, evens out cash flow, captures early and late season prices, and provides consistency of supply for the buyers.

12. LOOK FOR HIGH-RETURN MARKETING OUTLETS

- Many smaller growers choose direct marketing in order to increase revenue by cutting out the middlemen.
- Direct marketing is most likely to be successful for seasonal items or relatively high-value products (value-added or processed products).

13. MARKET COOPERATIVELY

- ***THERE IS STRENGTH IN NUMBERS.***
- Marketing associations or cooperatives exist to help market and promote growers' products.

14. VALUE-ADDED (PROCESSED PRODUCTS)

- Produce that may be worth cents per pound as a fresh market product may be worth dollars per pound as a processed product.
- Value added products create additional products for you to sell, enable you to market less than perfect produce as processed products, provide a source for year-round sales, and generate off-season work.
- Start small and build a solid local base before attempting to sell to larger or more distant markets.

15. EDUCATE THE CONSUMER

- The more people know about your product and what went into growing it and how to use it, the more they are willing to pay a premium price.

16. PRICING FOR QUALITY

- Offer a unique, high-quality product that customers can't get elsewhere.
- Emphasize freshness, quality and uniqueness rather than cheap food.
- Package expensive items in smaller units.
- Price competitively for common items, but slightly above the market for unusual or hard to find items where competition is less intense.
- Give samples in order to show quality.
- If and when you make upward price adjustments, make them in increments as needed rather than all at once.

17. INFORMATION RESOURCES

- To make sound marketing decisions, you need up-to-date, accurate and reliable information.

18. TAKE TIME TO RELAX AND HAVE FUN

- In the long run, you will actually work more effectively and profitably by not working seven days a week.

19. ALWAYS GIVE SOMETHING EXTRA

- Remember that word-of-mouth really takes off when you do something extraordinary. Customers expect the basics.

20. WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS, MAKE LEMONADE OUT OF LEMONS.

*Source: Excerpted from Sell What You Sow! The Grower's Guide To Successful Produce Marketing by Eric Gibson
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