Facilitating a School Market

Vonda Richardson, Extension Marketing Specialist

There exists a valuable opportunity in serving local school districts with fresh agricultural products. The challenge in tapping this potential market is to develop a plan to approach these local customers. One has to put himself in the position of the prospective customer – food service directors. It has been determined that the following attributes and business practices have to be conveyed:

- Professionalism
- Purpose and Seriousness
- Accountability and Commitment

Many school food service directors already have established suppliers, and have to be comfortable working with a newly developed idea for purchasing fresh fruit and vegetables.

**STRATEGIES FOR FARMERS**

1. Determine the area you desire to serve.

2. Research the school districts in this area.
   - Number of schools
   - District enrollment
   - Food service director

3. Call the Food service director and make an appointment.

4. LISTEN

5. Use you local farm advantage
   - fresh product
   - cultural preference of students in the area
   - fostering harmony between school children and local farmers; helping the local economy

6. Become familiar with grading and packaging requirements.

7. Approach institutions with the appropriate size and scale. Consider if marketing cooperatively is an advantage.

8. Be aware of food safety issues.

9. Find a market niche with products unavailable through existing vendors.

10. Market products requiring minimal preparation for food service.

11. Develop good working relationship.
Survey Questions for Farmers

1. Are you currently supplying produce to the schools in your area?

   If you answered "yes" in question 1:
   - What products and in what quantities are you selling to schools?
   - Are you a DOD vendor?
   - How did you become involved in selling to schools?
   - Is this marketing effort economically viable from your perspective?
   - Do you sell to other institutions (prisons, hospitals, etc.)
   - Are there policies at the school, district, local, state, or federal level that support or undermine selling to schools?

2. Is there excess capacity on your farm that you could plant specifically for a farm-to-school market?

3. Do you have the capacity to do additional processing to make your product acceptable for sale to your local school district?

4. Do you currently have extra product that you would sell to your local school district?

5. Are you a member of a cooperative or other organized group?

6. Do you have the capacity to deliver products to individual schools or a central receiving location?

7. Do you do value-added processing?

Transportation and Delivery

8. Who will deliver products to schools? How?

9. How often can deliveries be made?

10. Can products be picked up from your farm and delivered the same day? Within a few days? Or week?

11. Are deliveries made to a central receiving location or to individual schools?

Supply

12. How many schools can you supply?

13. Are you able to consistently meet demand (weekly, monthly, etc.)?

14. What quantities of products can you sell to schools? How often?

15. Are you able to supply products to schools for the entire school year or seasonal?

16. Are there other farmers in the area with whom you would be willing to work?

Pricing

17. How is the price for your product determined?

18. Are you selling at or below market prices? Wholesale price? Retail price?

19. Are you making enough profit to withstand delays in payment (15-30 days or more)?

Other Support

20. Are you part of a group that has helped organize this marketing effort? Is there support for you?

April 2004