

Session Summary " Good Grub Let's Eat " Doug Hennigar

It seems that most Farm Markets start from very modest beginnings. Many started selling surplus fruit or vegetables from a picnic table or off the back of a ½ ton truck by the side of the road. After a period of time it became apparent that fresh locally grown products were becoming popular with a growing customer base. Eating closer to the farm is now one of the strongest consumer buying movements in North America.

Our Farm Market started 56 years ago selling our own fruit, vegetables and eggs. Over the years we have added other food products to satisfy the customers desire to eat closer to the farm. We have added a bakery that produces a full assortment of bakery goods. Bakery sales can become over 20% of the Farm Market business. The smell of baking bread really sets the mood in purchasing other products throughout the Market.

We value add as much as possible. We make 50,000 litres of sweet apple cider from apples that aren't quite good enough for fresh consumption. Apple cider donuts are also very popular. Buying fruit at our Market is a really experience. We grow over 70 varieties of apples and create real excitement around their different flavors , uses , and nutritional characteristics. We educate our customers that our fruit is produced using less than 50% of the pesticides used in conventional production.

Our peaches are very special. Over 20 years ago we pioneered the world's first portable peach orchard. This process ensures a consistent crop of high quality tree- ripen peaches each year. We build up a marketing system that plays to this uniqueness and mark up the price accordingly.

Farmers consistently score high in "trust" in the eyes of the public. So take advantage of the opportunity . Whatever products you sell give consistent quality but also try to make the buying process an "experience" Make the atmosphere special and they will be back and also tell others.

Sampling as many products as possible can greatly increase sales and makes it possible to up-sell value added products such as salads dressings and fruit toppings. The sampling of jams and jellies really adds to the experience of shopping at a farm market.

Try to become a destination. Each market should develop a signature product. For us ice cream cones.....LARGE ice cream cones, at least 32 different choices has brought many first time customers to our Market. To-day we sell over 100,000 cones annually!

Over the years we have developed a picnic park and nature trail. Goats, rabbits , ducks, peacocks and turtles are also on display for entertainment and feeding. It seems that whenever people are in the outdoors they want to eat. We added our Country Cookhouse to satisfy their hunger.

Whatever you do in Direct Farm Marketing be known for your differences and not your similarities.

