

## Marketing to Enhance Farm Viability



# Developing a Marketing Plan for Your Farm

Marketing is often misunderstood as paid advertising. While buying ads is certainly part of a marketing plan, it should not be the only thing you do to raise awareness about your farm. In fact, many small farms do not use paid advertisements at all and still market their farms quite a bit! For more information on paid advertising, see CISA's tip sheet Using Paid Advertising as Part of a Marketing Plan.

Marketing is a range of strategies and techniques designed to raise awareness of your farm and get more people to visit and/or purchase your products and services. Once you become aware of the breadth of marketing options, you will see the ways you are already marketing your farm and recognize new ways that you can spread the word. You are probably already marketing your business in many ways.

A marketing plan is like a road map. It shows you where you are and what you need to do to get where you want to go. "Creating a marketing plan does not guarantee success; it only reduces the chance of failure."<sup>1</sup>

**Your message is your guiding star for all your marketing and public relations work.**

Be sure to give yourself plenty of time—three to twelve months—to develop your marketing plan, tools and materials. Designing these materials is a good project for any "down" or off-season time in

your business. It may be a multi-year project for you to actually develop all of these marketing tools and then put a comprehensive marketing plan into place for your farm business. So let's get started!

## STEP 1 KNOW YOUR FARM'S IDENTITY AND MESSAGE

**What is the unique identity of your farm?**

**What message would you like to send to your customers?**

Ask these questions of yourself, your family, employees and customers. From these suggestions, brainstorm messages that attract attention, keep people's interest, build desire, and offer a call to action. Most of all, make the message and images positive.

The North Quabbin Garlic and Arts Festival in Orange, Massachusetts, defines itself as the "Festival That Stinks" ([www.garlicandarts.org](http://www.garlicandarts.org)). Deb Habib, Director of Seeds of

Solidarity Education Center, Inc. ([www.seedsofsolidarity.org](http://www.seedsofsolidarity.org)), and one of a group of twelve neighbors who organize the festival, offers this advice about marketing your event:

*"The Garlic & Arts Festival started out as a low/no budget event. As organizers, we had to be innovative about how to get the word out. I believe that word of mouth is the best way to market an event. Therefore, you must find something about your event or your farm that makes folks want to talk about it. In other words, you have to determine the personality of your event."*

*"We decided on the 'Festival that Stinks' as a message about the North Quabbin Garlic and Arts Festival. It's intriguing. It makes people laugh. What goes on at a festival that stinks? It gives people the idea that the personality of the festival is a little crazy, a little fun. Definitely out of the ordinary."*

A word of mouth marketing strategy seems to work for the North Quabbin Garlic and Arts Festival. In a random sample of Festival goers who were asked, "How did you hear of the Festival?" fifty percent answered, "a friend."

**Keep your message consistent.**

Your message is your guiding star for all your marketing and public relations work. It should not be the only thing you say—who wants to sound like a robot?—But it should be carefully woven into all that you do. A good graphic designer can create a logo that reflects your message. You can also use your message as a tag line on all your printed and web materials.

Randall's Farm and Greenhouse, in Ludlow, Massachusetts, happened upon their message accidentally. Their message "The Best Fresh" came into being when an advertising representative shortened a radio ad for television. At that moment, "The Best Fresh" message was born. "Our message is short and to the point," says Karen Randall, owner and President of Randall's Farm and Greenhouse. "It tells people exactly what we represent. People quote it back to me. The first time that happened, I knew we had a message people would remember!"

Examining the types of materials used to produce your marketing materials is also part of keeping your



<sup>1</sup> Kentucky Agri-Tourism Working Group, Issue White Paper: Establishment of an Agri-tourism Industry in Kentucky.



message consistent. Deb Habib recommends infusing the values of your event into your advertising and marketing. Since the North Quabbin Garlic and Arts Festival promotes renewable energy and environmentally sensitive design, it prints its materials on recycled

paper and does not use four color ink processing. "Your marketing materials don't have to be glossy to attract people," says Deb, "just catchy."

### Have a good spokesperson.

A consistent message needs a consistent messenger. Farmers might feel intimidated speaking to the public or to the press. The key to conveying your message effectively is to be authentic. Be who you are. Your delivery should be direct and honest.

Sometimes the hardest time farmers have delivering their positive message is when they are being asked about a problem on the farm or in the farming community. For example, farmers are often called upon to comment about the weather, especially if it is viewed as a threat to farm crops. Rather than commenting on how you might lose half your crop, causing you to think about selling the farm, why not consider another approach? Acknowledge that the weather has been challenging, but say,

*"We'll have berries this year—but they will be even more special and in demand because of the weather. Call ahead to find out when we are picking to be sure to get some fresh berries this year."*

Deb Habib recommends keeping an archive book with copies of any printed publicity about your farm. Her partner, Ricky Baruc, makes one out of a binder notebook and places news articles inside waterproof sleeves. They take the notebook to events and speaking engagements to let folks know what the buzz is on their farm business, Seeds of Solidarity Farm, and their non-profit, Seeds of Solidarity Education Center, Inc. Deb believes this promotes more word of mouth advertising for their business.



## STEP 2 KNOW YOUR PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

### Identify your products and services.

### Understand the features and benefits of your farm and your products.

Take time to sketch out the features and benefits of your products and services to gain a better understanding of what you have to offer customers. They will become the basis for your marketing strategy.

For example, features such as a rural location that's close to the central city can be seen as providing the benefits of rest and relaxation right in your own backyard, an oasis free from the hustle and bustle of city life, or unspoiled natural beauty perfect for a family day trip. A pick-your-own produce feature can provide the freshest produce, great flavor, and reminders of pleasant childhood memories.

## STEP 3 DEVELOP QUALITY MARKETING TOOLS

### These basic items should be in any farm's marketing tool kit—business cards, brochures, posters and flyers, postcards, and signs.

**Business cards and brochures** are relatively inexpensive and when done well can be effective. They should be in your truck, on your desk, in your stand. Don't be afraid to hand them out like candy!

Lilian Jackman, owner of Wilder Hill Gardens in Conway, Massachusetts ([www.wilderhillgardens.com](http://www.wilderhillgardens.com)) carries her brochure with her everywhere. "Everywhere I go, I'm asked for gardening advice," says Lilian.

*"I love talking with people about their gardens, and I found it challenging to try to give good information in response to people's questions while in line at the grocery store. Now, I give out my brochure and invite people to participate in one of the workshops I offer. The workshops give me an opportunity to answer questions more fully and to show people what I do."*





**Posters and flyers** are also inexpensive. They can be general posters about the farm or specific posters about an upcoming event. They can be very effective in your hometown, as most businesses will let you hang one in their window to advertise your festival or the fact that you have CSA shares available for the coming growing season.

**Postcards** can serve multiple purposes when used to market your business or event. Easy to design on

**Why not try a postcard offering 10% off their next farmstand visit?** your business computer, postcards can be printed onto cardstock paper and mailed out to everyone on your mailing list. Postcards left at various locations around town as an advertisement

folks can pick up and take home with them. They often end up on people's refrigerators as a reminder of an upcoming event!

The North Quabbin Garlic and Arts Festival organizers use postcards designed with black ink and high quality recycled paper. The postcard features the event's logo and simple but professional graphics. The entire postcard reflects the identity of the event. Ten thousand postcards are printed up and left "everywhere."

One way to encourage customers to hold onto their postcards is to give them a reason to keep the postcard and bring it to your farm. An offer of a free strawberry sundae or free head of garlic when the postcard is presented at the event or farm is sure to help folks remember your farm. Why not try a postcard offering 10% off their next farmstand visit?

Lilian Jackman uses postcards to spread the word about her Spring Dig sale. "Postcards are just the right size to hand out and not very costly and people will keep them to remember the details of the event. I carry them with me wherever I go."

**Good signs** are key not only to helping visitors find you but getting visitors in the first place. Post signs so that they are easily visible in both directions from the road. Participate in state farm sign programs to get travelers off the main road and toward your farm. Be sure to follow local ordinances regarding sign size and placement. Once you post a sign, you will have more than one new customer say "I've been driving by here for years and I had no idea you were here!"

The organizers of the North Quabbin Garlic and Arts Festival purchased signs made by a local signmaker.

The letters and numbers are removable so the dates can be changed from year to year, making the signs a very cost-effective investment.

Signs also include the labels you put on your products and even the sign on your delivery truck. Deb Habib believes that the signs painted on the Seeds of Solidarity Farm delivery truck are some of the most effective marketing tools they have. Karen Randall of Randall Farms considers good signage the most important piece of a marketing plan. "Your signage must be very good [in terms of directing people to your farm] and attractive," she says. "Your sign should make a statement about your farm and let people know what you produce." Labeling new products is key to getting people to buy them at Randall Farms. "I tell my employees 'Signs sell!' Signs answer lots of questions."

### Does your farm need a website?

In most cases the answer is: Yes. A farm needs only a good simple website that is nicely laid out, full of great images, and linked to other websites. It should fit the theme of your business and should use the same logo that is on your card and other marketing materials. Keep the site updated and make sure your contact information is current. Include links to the sites of local business associations, other area farms, tourist attractions, and local farm organizations.





**When developing the plan, ask yourself the following questions:**

- ❖ Will I rely on word-of-mouth or am I going to purchase advertising?
- ❖ What will my farm signs look like?
- ❖ Will I have a brochure or a website?
- ❖ How will I distribute the brochures or promote my website?
- ❖ What other marketing methods will I use, if any (e.g., print, radio, TV)?

**note** ON HIRING A CONSULTANT


Before hiring someone, check references. Ask their customers if they are easy to work with, easy to reach, receptive and quick to respond to feedback, stick to their quoted budget, and complete their work in a timely manner. Professional help can be great if it meets your needs and reflects the values of your business. If you get a message or an image back from a consultant that just doesn't feel right to you, speak up! You will have to live with the final result for a long time.

**STEP 4 DEVELOPING THE PLAN**

Now that you have identified the unique features and benefits of your farm, it's time to develop a timeline and a budget for developing your marketing tools and using them.

- ❖ Identify your market area (geographic area your customers will come from).
- ❖ Identify your target market. (Who are your potential customers within this region?).
- ❖ Identify your competition.
- ❖ Set your total marketing budget.
- ❖ Decide which marketing tools you will use to spread the word about your business and how much of your budget you will spend on each marketing strategy.
- ❖ Develop a timeline for marketing tool development and advertising and promotions deadlines.
- ❖ Decide how you will determine if your marketing strategies were effective. What benchmarks will you set for the business (e.g. number of new customers, percent increase in sales, number of people visiting your festival)?

*Therese Fitzsimmons adapted materials for this "Tip Sheet" from Creating Successful Agritourism Activities for Your Farm by Mark Lattanzi (May 2005), a CISA publication. See [www.buylocalfood.com](http://www.buylocalfood.com) to order a copy. Special thanks to Deb Habib, Karen Randall, and Lilian Jackman for interviews.*

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