



A Case Study of Marketing Strategies Used by Small Farmers in Tuskegee & Montgomery, Alabama

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Introduction

Marketing is a commonly misunderstood term and is usually associated with the selling of a product. Marketing involves the planning, promotion, pricing, product placement, and distribution of a product or service (Attra, 1999). Although there are many different marketing strategies used by farmers, direct marketing is the most commonly used. Direct marketing can be defined as the ability to provide a variety of fresh quality products directly to consumers through a variety of marketing channels such as farmer's markets, u-pick, road side stands, restaurants, internet or mail orders, etc. (J.J VanSickle, 2009). Having a sound direct marketing strategy allows farmers to increase their profits and minimized their losses. When developing a marketing strategy farmers should consider the following questions:

1. Is there a market for their products?
2. Who are their potential and targeted customers/buyers?
3. Who are their competitors?
4. How can they make their products stand out?

The purpose of this study is to analyze the marketing strategies used by small, limited resource farmers in Macon County and Montgomery, Alabama. The specific objectives are to:

1. Identify and describe the marketing strategies used by small farmers; and
2. to recommend additional marketing strategies that can be used to expand their markets.



Method

A qualitative case study approach was used for this study. The cases that were selected for in-depth analysis included: Farmers Markets in Tuskegee, AL and the State Farmers Market located in Montgomery, AL. Five semi-structured interviews were completed



Results

Marketing is a complex activity with many components. The implementation of a good, well researched marketing strategy can increase the farmer's ability to compete and thrive in an oversaturated industry filled with many sellers. The results of this study indicated that many farmers view the display of signs, word of mouth, providing high quality products, and promotional activities, as beneficial to their farm survival and success. Their responses are summarized below:

1. What marketing strategies do you use to sell/promote your products?
 - a. Word of mouth
 - b. Business cards
 - c. Reasonable prices
 - d. Signs
2. What services do you provide to the customers to keep them coming back?
 - a. Provide customers with good quality products
 - b. Charge a reasonable price
 - c. Promote locally grown products
 - d. Provide fresh vegetables
 - e. Am willing to negotiate price. If customer only has a certain amount of money, will sell the product for that amount. Also, if customer buys so much, will give them something free.
 - f. Provide friendly service
3. How do you compete with other vendors selling at the Farmers Market?
 - a. Provide value added products such as pre-sliced & bagged vegetables
 - b. Accept advanced orders
 - c. Grow all products sold versus buying from the store and selling at market
 - d. Accept Vouchers and EBTs.

Conclusions

In my research, I discovered that farmers markets are different based on the location and size of the community. Marketing strategies that have local farmers include: advertising through signs and colorful displays, and word of mouth. In addition, I also learned that in order for farmers to be successful, they have to provide the consumers with a good quality product, friendly service, and reasonable prices. My recommendations to local farmers selling at the two farmers market that I visited are:

- provide educational tours of their farm for the youth to increase awareness;
- Host a farmer's market day. This would increase their profits and create competition among farmers to expand their business.
- Create community awareness by opening or sponsoring a food pantry. The products that were not used can be given back to the community, therefore creating awareness of locally grown products.

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