



Mastering Marketing

Highlight

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Define Your Markets First

I never met anyone who told me that they got into farming because they enjoyed trying to predict what the Basic Formula Price (BFP) for milk would be six months down the road, or because they got great personal satisfaction from tracking the futures market. Farmers want to farm. They don't prefer to be marketers. For most farmers, marketing has long been a way to get rid of the commodity they have grown, regardless of the price; the farmer is a "price taker".

Over the past 50 years, improved production practices have resulted in greater output, but shrinking returns on raw commodities. In agricultural areas on the urban fringe, development pressures have forced farmers to consider alternative and value-added agricultural enterprises to increase their farm gate receipts. Whether pursuing traditional agronomic enterprises or transitioning into agricultural alternatives a consumer-oriented approach to marketing is essential to the success of an enterprise.

Here are ten rules of successful marketing in today's environment:

1. Cultivate your creativity and an open mind. People ask me what is the best alternative agricultural enterprise to consider starting today. There is no A+B=C formula for a successful agricultural enterprise. Success depends on the individual. Be open to whatever pops up.
2. If you let someone else do your marketing, you're leaving money on the table. The fewer hands the product passes through on its way to the consumer, the more profit for you.
3. Marketing begins when the first seed hits the ground or the first hoof hits the pasture.
4. Think "consumer" first. What products can you produce or services can you render to satisfy a need that's out there?
5. Marketing isn't just selling. It's planning, production, promotion, pricing and distribution; once you get feedback from your customers, it starts all over again.
6. A good marketing approach spreads out your risk. Try to develop more than one marketing avenue and be cautious of having too great a percentage of your sales with any one customer.
7. You're selling yourself and your farm, as well as your product. Make your product or services stand out from the crowd. Educate your customers.
8. Read, talk, look, ask questions, and attend events that will help hone your marketing skills. Farmers often tell me they're too busy with their work routine to attend a seminar or a workshop. These events can be good sources of information and inspiration.
9. Marketing takes time, but it can be a most cost-effective use of your time of any activity on the farm.
10. There isn't a clear path to success. Refer back to number 1.

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