

Freshness - The Key to Roadside Market Success

"People buy sweet corn from us because they know it's always fresh," says Clarence Shenk. The Shenks operate a roadside market on the Old Philadelphia Pike, near Strasburg. Nearly all the produce sold at the stand is grown on Shenk's 22 acres. He is convinced that freshness is the primary reason for the stand's success.

Mrs. Shenk is quick to point out that her husband has been in the market business since the age of four, and the experience has certainly been valuable. He helped his father tend market stands in Philadelphia and Lancaster, selling vegetables and poultry. Celery was a speciality at the Lancaster stand.

The present operation started

in 1958, when the family set up a card table in the front yard to sell surplus sweet corn and tomatoes, grown in a small garden plot. They owned more land at the time, but they were renting it to someone else. In 1961, Shenk decided they could put the land to better use by planting it for the market stand.

The stand now provides the bulk of the family's income. Shenk also drives a school bus, and there is a chicken house with 10,000 broilers.

"Actually," Shenk says, "the stand keeps us busy from February till the beginning of November. In February, we're starting the eggplants, peppers and tomatoes in the greenhouse. And in November we'll be selling

Indian corn, gourds, squash and a lot of pumpkins. Officially, we close the first of November, but sometimes we sell neck pumpkins and squash on into Thanksgiving.

"Our busy season runs from the first or second week in July to the end of October. That's when we're all really going."

During the season, there's usually at least one person tending the stand from 8:30 in the morning until eight or nine in the evening. Shenk employs one girl to watch the stand, which is open Monday through Saturday.

A busy Saturday might keep three people busy at the stand, with Shenk and his son, Jack, running constantly to the field for corn. Some Saturday's they



Clarence M. Shenk and son, Jack, tied up their tomatoes recently, getting ready for a busy summer at the family's roadside market.

might sell as much as 300 dozen ears of sweet corn.

Corn is the biggest crop, and takes about 16 acres. String

beans, limas, and sugar peas are also important. Other crops grown on the farm are tomatoes, peppers, egg plants, cucumbers, canteloupes, watermelons, pumpkins, squash and gourds.

The gourds are washed and shellaced, and many of them are sold wholesale to other markets.

Shenk buys a few things from other growers, but never handles produce shipped in from the South or West. He buys peaches from York County, and apples and potatoes locally. Everything else is grown on the farm.

Most of Shenk's business comes from local people. His market, he feels, has a reputation for freshness and quality and the news has been spread by satisfied customers. He never advertises.

Tourists might account for 20 per cent of Shenk's volume. Quite



often, they'll stop on their way home and stock up on produce. Normally, these are one-time customers, but many of them do stop back on subsequent visits to the County Gourds, Indian corn and pumpkins are big tourist items in the fall.

On prices, Shenk feels that he might be a bit lower than local supermarkets. In season, however, a housewife is likely to pay about the same for corn, whether she buys at Shenk's or her grocer's.

"She comes here because our corn is fresher," Shenk concludes.

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To put ourselves in your shoes.**

All the question-asking has ended. Every strong opinion has been heard and noted.

And now our directors and management are planning the future based on the recent findings.

Those findings ranged from the frivolous and funny to the emotional and serious. The interviewees told us, not only about banking here, but about banking there and everywhere.

"Twenty-two," one fellow responded when asked his number of children. Then he grinned expansively, and so did the questioner. "Pay higher interest on savings," said a woman, who didn't know our rates are among the highest.

And we breathed easier upon learn-

ing that a complaint about drive-in services concerned another drive-in window—not ours.

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