



# Farm Talk

by  
**Jerry Webb**

## Farmers must do marketing

Marketing is part of management whether you as a farmer believe it or not. For too long the main thing for farmers was to be a producer. That is no longer sufficient, if it ever was, to be successful.

We as farmers must become marketers of our product. We must

sell it to consumers who are bombarded on every side by advertisements from others who want their spendable buck.

We must stop fighting the consumer with slogans. What do farmers gain by antagonizing their only customer? How often would you go back to a store that insulted

you or ignored you every time you went in to buy an item?

Farmers on a one-to-one basis are without question the most hospitable people on earth. Farmers as a group can be another matter.

Let's get back to the basics of selling our products. Back when there were a lot of small-farm, direct-to-the-consumers type of businesses, farmers dealing with the public soon learned to use "public relations."

The egg route man or woman was polite and usually had a pleasant word for everyone. The local dairyman knew his customers personally and greeted each one by name. The produce man knew just how ripe a customer wanted her tomatoes. There was a warm relationship that resulted in some loyalty.

There is no reason that farmers today could not gain that same consumer loyalty if they used a little public relations and told the customers they were important. This is called advertising. For small operations the advertising might be mostly word of mouth from satisfied customers.

### ADVERTISING

Advertising is a necessary part of marketing whether it is the word of mouth type that small operations may use or the more formal news media ads used by big business. Let's face it, Coke did not become No. 1 by saying, "let Pepsi do it." Advertising comes in many parts:

- Ads as most people know them - in papers, on TV, on radio, as posters or placards on subways or other public walls.

- Quality products - one of the least recognized phases of advertising - without quality, a product may sell the first time but there will be no repeat business.

- Appealing product - any livestock producer or dairyman knows that there are some things that animals like better than others. That is why many farmers put molasses in their feed, so the critters will eat it better - right?

- Appearances - who among you would buy clothing from a junk yard with rusty parts, greasy cloths, clumps of weeds, etc. strewn around? How many of your

customers do you think will buy your food product if they saw your farmstead?

- Feelings - who are you most apt to buy from, the salesman who comes in and says buy from me because I deserve it or you owe it to me - or the one who says you are a great person and I really appreciate your business or your business is important to me and I want to meet your needs?

### WHAT TO DO

The 15 cent check off in the dairy industry was the first really concerted national dairy advertising effort that provided enough money to do any good. It is hard to access the results of any advertising but for the first time there has been a lot of interest in osteoporosis (lack of calcium - especially in women).

Ads are effective or Coke and Pepsi would not be spending the bucks they are in their battle over first place. Just think, if the dairy industry could get their act together, milk could easily slip in ahead of both of them and become the undisputed beverage of the present and future.

There is no question that quality will prevail. If you have a recognized quality product, consumers will be willing to pay a little more for it. The beauty of most farm products is that the quality is there to start with. Poor handling probably does more to reduce a top quality product to average or below than we realize sometimes.

Appeal is the name of the game. You could have the best ad campaign and the best quality in the world and your product will go to waste if it has no appeal. We in the farming business need to learn how to study our consumers to see what they want.

Remember in any part of our economy, wants have a habit of becoming needs. Yes, it is not only farmers and their families who have this happen. For example why don't dairymen realize that they might be able to increase milk sales by offering new drinks based around milk. What about rootbeer flavored milk, or orange flavored milk, or milk with carbonated fizz in it with different flavors.

Or for weight and cholesterol conscious people why not a lite-milk (skim) in flavors including milk flavor (but also vanilla chocolate, raspberry). Part of the advertising money should be going to research and development to improve keeping quality and new products.

### REFERENDUM

At the risk of getting a few people upset, I am going to urge anyone who will listen to me to continue the 15 cent promotional program when it comes up for a vote this summer. Dairymen should at least give it a few more years to see if it will continue to help sell milk.



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