

Farmers Can Gather Retail Advice At Conference

LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.) — If supermarket managers gather once a year at the Supermarket Industry Convention, gourmet store managers flock to the Fancy Foods Show, and natural foods store managers brush up at the Natural Products Expo, then what's the central event for farm market managers?

Answer: The Mid-Atlantic Direct Marketing Conference and Trade Show.

Purpose: To help farmers make more money selling directly to consumers.

Result: More farm families who'll survive the 1990s and more consumers who know the meaning of "farm fresh."

This year's Mid-Atlantic Direct Marketing Conference and Trade Show takes place on Thursday and Friday, February 18 and 19, at the Lancaster Host Resort just east of Lancaster on Route 30.

Tours of Lancaster area farm markets occur on Saturday, February 20. A preconference idea exchange takes place on Wednesday evening, January 17.

Why do farmers who sell to consumers attend the Mid-Atlantic Direct Marketing Conference and Trade Show?

Ask Fred Funk, Manager of Funk's Farm Market near Millersville in Lancaster County.

"There's no way farmers can survive on wholesale prices — which haven't improved much over the 30 years I've been raising crops. But when we start to retail our fruits, vegetables, plants, meats, dairy products, we take on some new headaches and gigantic competitors. We need all the knowledge, tips, and inspiration we can get."

Funk is on the conference planning committee, which saw to it that the conference program addressed the issues that matter to

farmers.

For instance, the two-day conference program features:

- Thirteen hours of presentations.
- 34 speakers, half of whom are farm marketers sharing ideas that worked for them.
- Five periods of concurrent sessions on hot topics.
- A trade show of suppliers open to attendees.

This annual event is organized by Cooperative Extension staff from Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland and New Jersey, along with farmers involved in direct marketing and state department of agriculture staff. The event rotates among the four states, and moves to Maryland in 1994.

The program is geared to those farmers who sell their products directly to consumers — primarily fruit and vegetable growers who run retail roadside stands or farmers' market stalls. But other operations with direct sales can benefit from the conference, including milk juggers, livestock and poultry farms, farm-based bakeries, wineries, and greenhouses.

All of these producers wrestle with the issue, "What's the best direction for my retail outfit?" The conference theme, "Paths to Success," addresses that perennial issue.

Each farm family has their own situation and goals and, through the conference, they'll see how they can achieve them. Attendees will come away with a clearer view of the marketing choices they have and their probable outcomes.

The conference opens with a keynote address on the need to be committed to customer satisfaction. Retailers tend to brush this point off with a "sure, we aim to please!" However, the presenter, Dr. John Stanton, will explore the

implications for direct marketers of this commitment. This address, "Customer Satisfaction — Where All Paths Begin," takes the audience on a thinking-cap tour of consumers' food shopping decisions and how that relates to what's done in the back room of the typical market.

Stanton, a food marketing consultant, has just returned from a six-month consultation with the world's largest food retailer, Tengelmanns of Germany (parent of A&P and Shop Rite). He has also consulted with Campbell Soup Company and several other national and regional food firms. Stanton is a professor of food marketing at St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia. In 1991, he co-authored the book, "Making Niche Marketing Work."

Stanton's address will be followed by a "reactor panel" of three farm market managers. They are Stanley Nehrbs of Sabrhen Farm, David Conover of Blossom Hill Farm, and Ronald Rohrbach of Rohrbach Farm Market. They will add their perspectives to Stanton's address.

The trade show opens after this keynote session, and conference goers have full access to the show through Friday afternoon. Exhibitors include a selection of these suppliers:

- Specialty food and beverage products
- Retail packaging, labeling, and sales promotion materials
- Services such as consultants and produce auctions.

A new station at the trade show will feature the latest resources that farm marketers should be aware of, such as Quaker Oat's low-cost "Self-Study Program in Retail Food Store Operations" or the latest reports from the Food Marketing Institute.

Thursday afternoon features two periods of concurrent sessions. Topics to be covered by out-

side speakers and farm marketers include customer service, new advertising methods, business plans for farm markets, post-harvest handling, and new approaches to direct marketing.

Most sessions have three speakers. The sessions break at 5 p.m. for supper.

Joseph Anthony of USDA at Beltsville, Md., is one of the speakers at the postharvest handling session. He will describe how a farmer can build a new batch cooling unit with off-the-shelf materials for under \$1,000. The concept was recently unveiled for the first time in December at an ag engineers convention. This event marks one of the early presentations to mid-Atlantic farmers.

The evening offers farmer-to-farmer roundtables on topics as diverse as personal selling, recycling requirements, dried flowers and ribbons, retaining the farm market image, keeping kids in the business, and services that add value. The evening concludes with an ice cream social.

Friday morning has two more sets of concurrent sessions. The first set offers presentations on offering entertainment in the market, understanding baby-boomers, and setting up an estate plan. The second session covers major festivals for farms, how to learn what customers want, and part two of estate planning.

The afternoon program for Friday features an in-depth look at uniquely successful farm markets in Maryland, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. Each farm family presents slides and an insider's review of their market progress.

Pennsylvania is represented by the Merwarth farm family near Easton and their Upstream Farm Market. Their story describes the decision to re-open a dairy store closed six years ago, when they were dairying. One family member conducted an extensive feasi-

bility study, which included surveys to consumers. Their new store takes the unusual approach of a gourmet foods store, deli, bakery and cafe. After the session, there will be a discussion of issues and problems that affect Pennsylvania farm markets. Friday concludes with a banquet, entertainment, and pool party.

The Saturday tour program begins with an address by Dr. Charles Coale, ag marketing specialist at Virginia Tech, entitled "How to Grow a Farm Market." Coale will share insights on how the farm market managers can plan their success for next season's cropping.

The tour buses then depart for A.L. Kauffman and Son's Farm Market, the Bird-in-Hand Farmers Market, Oregon Dairy Farm Market, Kitchen Kettle Village, Shady Maple Farm Market, and a quick review of the Leola Produce Auction.

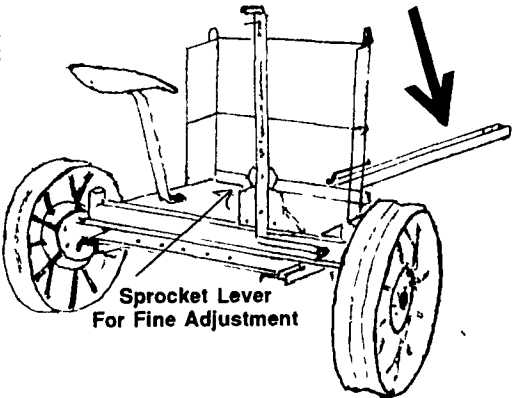
For Saturday evening, conference and tour goers have the option to enjoy supper and "Nonsense" at the Dutch Apple Dinner Theatre.

The conference fee is \$40 for the first attendee from a farm market and \$20 for additional attendees. The Friday banquet costs \$30 and the Saturday breakfast buffet, talk, and tours cost \$25. There is a 20 percent discount if reservations are made by February 1.

The Lancaster Host Resort is on Route 30, just east of Lancaster, and is in the heart of the region's shopping district. For those planning to stay at the hotel, special room rates are available — \$45 for a single room and \$49 for a double room. Attendees need to specify they are with the Mid-Atlantic Direct Marketing Conference.

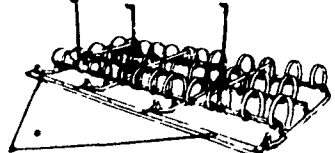
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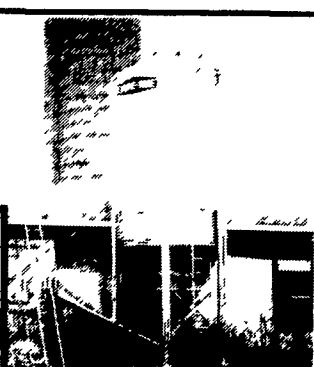
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