

# Vegetable Conference Offers Marketing Ideas For Produce

## Grocery Chains Want Local Produce

(Continued from Page A1)

distant states.

With 112 stores to service Richard Shefchunas representing Riverside Markets said, "We are looking for growers to come to us. We use farmers who farm from 10-2,000 acres and will consider whatever you have to offer."

Robert Hartman said that Giant Foods (not to be confused with Pennsylvania Giant's chain) made a decision three years ago to purchase local produce. The plan has increased sales significantly in the chain's 174 stores and the chain plans to open 40 new stores in the northeast. The new stores in Pennsylvania will be under the name Super G since the company does not hold the sole rights to "Giant" in this state.

"We are the new boy on the block in Pennsylvania, and we welcome you with open arms," Hartman told growers.

Through displaying television commercials, slides, and newspaper ads, the two companies demonstrated how thoroughly they incorporate local growers into their advertising promotions.

Several growers in the audience who already supply products for the two chains reported enthusiastic satisfaction with the fairness of their treatment.

Both supermarket chains use buyers to supply from as little as

one store to as much as their distribution centers. Both stores do much more than buy local produce. They make a big deal out of spotlighting the farmers.

Riverside Markets photographs growers with their produce and use the photos in ads and in-store promotions.

Giant runs television commercials with Hartman inspecting local fields with the farmers.

Although Hartman and Shefchunas are sensitive to growers needs since they have grown up in families, the emphasis on promoting the farm lifestyle is not sentimental, but means more dollars for the chain stores.

The customer wants fresh taste. They want local produce.

"We believe Pennsylvania grows the best fruits and vegetables in the world and we want to promote that. We went to the fields to take the pictures," said John S.

In addition to using the photo in newspaper ads, the store also puts a blown up photograph with the farmer's name and town on a easel to display it with the produce. The produce is heaped on baskets to portray freshly gathered, abundant produce.

"We started with 20 growers and now have 60. We plan to increase to 80-100 within the next year," Shefchunas said.

"We used to think you couldn't



Panel members share tips for successful selling at farmers' markets. From left, Daniel Janoski, Lois Klinger, Paul Hauser, and Ernie Greaser. Cary Oshins of Rodale Institute is at far right.

get variety from Pennsylvania produce but we were proven wrong. Local grown is the best in the world," Shefchunas said.

"We can't say enough about the quality and are willing to pay extra for packaging because customers are willing to pay for quality."

The Riverside chain is so confident of the superior quality of the produce that they have a 200% guarantee attached to home-grown produce.

This, of course, encourages growers to provide quality and variety.

"People buy with their eyes. Quality has got to be there. We have a good 'marriage' with the growers but will move out of the relationship if the grower becomes sloppy," Shefchunas said.

The Riverside chain also displays a special sign with a clock to move the hands to indicate when a fresh shipment of in-season produce such as corn is expected.

The Giant chain also uses signs to identify growers with the produce. In addition, they run five three-minute commercials throughout the growing season showing farmers planting and harvesting crops.

"We used no actors — only farm families," said Hartman who ties the ads to increasing five times the volume of produce sold. In addition, customers who come for the produce buy other items, which resulted in a 21 percent of overall income.



Representatives from retail chains say they changed their minds about using local produce in recent years. Previously they erroneously believed that variety was limited. Now they are convinced that Pennsylvania grows the best fruits and vegetables in the world.

During the three-year period that the Giant chain has been working with farmers, changes have been made. Giant now pays farmers weekly. Payment is not based on auctions or the cheapest price but open market prices.

"The success of any program depends on three things: People. People. People," Hartman said. "We are willing to work with you to support our family as you work with us to support your family."

This working together has resulted in growers setting up fax machines and answering services

so that ordering and supplying produce at the right time is simplified.

"I, as the buyer, am not the boss. You as the grower are not the boss. The boss is Mrs. Consumer," Hartman said. "You need to make a profit and so do we. We want you back next year."

To encourage up front communication, appointments are set up with growers to discuss and work out problem areas.

Hartman said that \$12 million was paid to Maryland area growers last year. "We are glad to put that money back into the community," he said.

## Farmers' Markets Attract City And Country Dwellers

LOU ANN GOOD

Lancaster Farming Staff  
HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.)

— Selling successfully at a farmer's market requires attractive displays, a friendly personality, and diversity of food items according to panel participants at the Vegetable Conference held this week in Hershey.

Four growers who operate stands at different markets shared secrets of success during a panel discussion on Tuesday.

"The panel represents different parts of the state and different types of markets," said Jeff Patton who moderated the session.

Ernie Greaser who operates Woodside Farm in Quakertown told how he has watched farmers succeed and fail at the market he attends.

"You must sell yourself. After a sales presentation, ask how many

would you like?" Greaser said. He referred to a survey that showed 20 percent of the people buy after a sales presentation (offering tips, care, and a way to use the product) but that percentage rises to 80% when the salesperson asks the person how many he or she would like.

"Ask for an order. People hate to say, 'no,' he said.

Arrive early, set up a neat display by color. Use continuity every week. Change confuses people.

Surround yourself with friendly, courteous help.

Help must know varieties of produce and how it is used.

Greaser uses what he calls "verbal press releases," such as telling a customer, "cantaloupes will be ready next week." That way the customer will come expecting to buy cantaloupe and won't buy elsewhere," Greaser said.

If customers complain about prices being high, Greaser said, "Justify the price, then immediately ask how many can I get you."

Don't try to sell anything that you wouldn't buy yourself," Greaser said.

Some pitfalls to avoid are sitting in chairs — people won't want to bother you. Having unsupervised children or youth operating the stand almost always is detrimental.

Paul Hauser, a Lincoln University grower, described the market where he sells as an upscale small town market.

"Look to create real or psychological differences, not only among vendors but supermarkets," said Hauser, who stresses that a person's attitude must show that he loves marketing to be successful.

"Visual appearances are important. Fill containers until they

bulge. The more you put in, the more you sell," he said. Also, make sure that traffic flows easily around your stand.

Hauser prefers flat tables, and places high demand items at the end so that while customers are walking to the other end to pick up an item, they will be enticed to pick up more items on the way.

"When a customer asks for green beans, Hauser counters, "What kind would you like, Kentucky Wonders?" Or, if they ask for tomatoes, say, "I prefer German Butterballs."

"Soon customers won't just buy any red tomato but will seek out your stand because you're the only one selling the variety they want.

"Comments such as these also reinforces the idea that everything I sell, I grow," Hauser said.

He is a firm believer in the value of offering samples. So what if a

few eat several pieces or some kids pick up a handful, the majority will buy," he said.

Hauser does a lot of what he calls cross selling. This means suggesting another product by asking, "Have you tried our cantaloupes?"

"Use recipes. Tell someone how to cook an item, and they'll buy it," Hauser said.

Lois Klinger of Catawissa operates a stand at a small market. "The same factors that are important at large markets are important at the smaller ones," she said.

She cautions against taking leftover produce from one market to another. "Never take it to market if it doesn't look fresh," she said.

Lois grows a variety of unusual vegetables. While they are not a large volume of demand for something such as okra, it often entices

(Turn to Page A26)



The annual meeting of the State Horticultural Association offers a place to find out about new products and new methods of marketing. Here Hank Milstein, left, of Old Plantation Spice offers free samples of mulled cider spices to Bob Ross of Du Pont, Del.

See Next Week's Issue For More On Vegetable Conference