

The Farmstand: Direct Marketing Tips



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seasons. And yet that is exactly what several hundred direct marketers did last October and this past July.

The Pennsylvania Direct Farm Marketing Association sponsored two tours to different parts of Pennsylvania to look at successful markets and give participants the opportunity to see what makes them thrive. The theory is to really understand what makes them work, you have to visit when it's busiest. Seeing it on slides during the winter is helpful but important details and frustrations are often overlooked. With this approach, the tours offered great insights of how these marketers were able to create customer appeal and succeed.

Evaluations of individual locations were made after each stop and offered a positive critique of the strengths and weaknesses of each market. The following is a summary of the most com-

monly mentioned ideas and concerns from those who were featured on the tours.

An often-repeated concern was that they never allowed for an orderly expansion. Many never envisioned the need for additional room in the future and failed to plan for it. When starting a building project due to increased demand for your services, assume interest in your business will expand and you will probably be back in the same great predicament in the future. Think about property line setbacks, utility connections, parking, and road visibility. For instance, if you anticipate a separate bakery in the next five years, will you have enough room to add it or will the new commercial kitchen you're now building need to be moved. Consider many of the most probable expansion possibilities and allow for them in your plans. The bottom line is to always think bigger than you are now.

What is the overall look of the market facility? If it's a farm market, does it have that "feel"? Is it an odd assortment of buildings or a small coordinated village of related structures? Multistructured establishments can have rooms with different purposes and themes such as flowers and plants, produce, canned goods, gardening supplies, deli, gift shop and others. Even if you have a single building, do you have a pleasing color scheme inside and out and do display items add or distract from the look? The most successful businesses visited looked at the big picture and coordinated all aspects of the market.

Parking was a concern often expressed. Parking should be convenient and allow easy access to your business. Again, this is an important time to think ahead. If you plan to offer school tours in the future and you will have several buses in the lot turning out, will they and your regular customers both have adequate room along with safe entrance and exit from your location? Even though regulations are always changing, are there already some in your township that could require a relo-

cation of the driveway you're now planning if the traffic load was to change significantly. A little additional research now could potentially save big dollars later. Problems with township regulations are very commonly cited by marketers as roadblocks to growth. And if you plan to get into any type of agri-entertainment, how will the local supervisors view it, as an agricultural enterprise or an unrelated business?

Marketers visited often discussed how they started something in the business on a whim, and customer reception was so good it grew into a main segment of their business. The point is, don't overlook opportunities because they weren't in the business plan. Quirky ideas can be very profitable if you are receptive and open minded to the unexpected. Learn from others in related businesses and compare the similarities in your clientele. Owners often mentioned how important it was to know what your customer base is, what their income levels are, what buying patterns they've discovered, and how they use various advertising mediums to exploit opportunity. Many stated how they advertised

the wrong way only to discover sometime later that few of their customers ever saw their ads. And evaluate your ads, even if it's simply asking every fifth person if they have seen one and whether or not it influenced their decision to visit the store.

Don't try to produce everything you sell in the store. You can't do it all. Concentrate on marketing what you do best and buying complimentary products and services from other vendors. And check the quality of items you bring in to make sure they are up to your standards. Your customers will assume you do and expect you to make good on them if they aren't. Networking with other local producers can be a profitable opportunity for both of you.

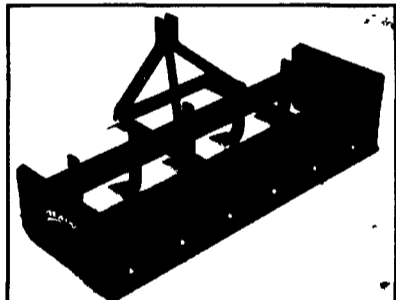
And be as active as possible in your community and with related business organizations. This can often lead to pathways through regulatory dilemmas along with being a responsible neighbor to others nearby.

One such organization is the Pennsylvania Direct Farm Marketing Association. Currently membership in the association is free. They are presently arranging their next marketing tour in another region of the state. The association also has an ongoing project of determining the extent of township regulatory requirements affecting direct marketers and how to make the rules more uniform. The group has been reorganized and made strides in advancing the cause of direct marketing. To join the group, you can contact John Berry, the executive secretary at (610) 391-9840 or visit them at the organization's new website, <http://www.pafarm.com>.

Thomas B. Murphy
Penn State Extension Agent

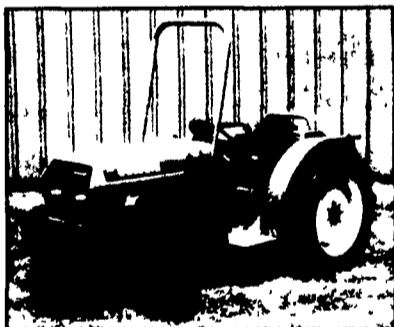
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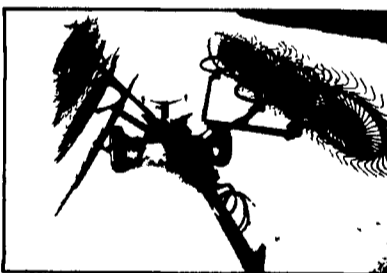
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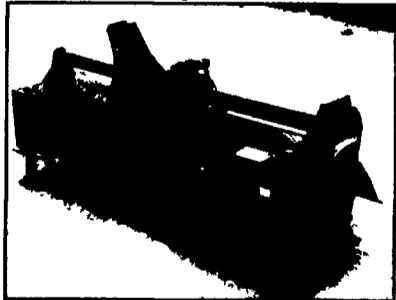
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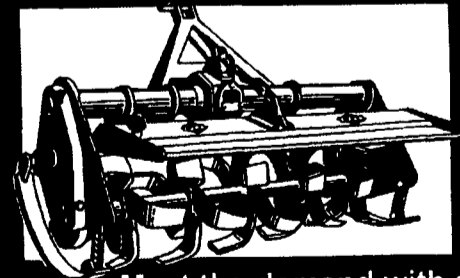


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