

MADMC

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lost art — we're constantly training people."

The farm is also cooperating with other farms to sell eggs and cheese and will possibly expand into grains.

Diversity is key in dealing with crop failures and insufficiencies, said Baki. "Last year we had trouble with eggplant, but it's hardly noticeable because there are 11 other things there."

In addition Matt Steiman, organic farm manager for the Fulton Center for Sustainable Living, based at Wilson College, Chambersburg, gave a review of their operation. The center has a core group of volunteers so the gardeners can focus less on administrative tasks and more on agricultural tasks. Steiman has a goal of getting more members to take on responsibilities of the CSA, such as the newsletters or computer work, in exchange for a break on the cost of a share.

He advised conducting meetings with the members, which

made the business arrangement less of a customer and more "people-to-people" relationship.

The center also collaborates with nearby farms to sell bread, eggs, cheese, and meats. Although it's a service to the CSA, the farmer should still make a profit, said Steiman, to cover the administrative aspect of the arrangement.

Because the center grows more food than necessary for their own shareholders, they also participate in a farmers market. However "in case of drought, members come first," he said.

Dr. Richard George, St. Joseph's University, addressed changing consumerism and delighting customers.

Food consumed at home takes up approximately seven percent of the average American's disposable income, said George, and is growing at a rate of less than two percent a year. Also there are fewer components, or ingredients and side dishes, in each meal. In the 1960s, for example, there are seven components compared to today's meal of 1-2 components.

"You have to address how people are changing. You can no longer say, 'I wish it wasn't that way,'" he said.

"Here's the interesting part — only 10 percent of those surveyed don't like or don't know how to cook. We just haven't helped people. If we're in the food business, how are we helping them? What we can do for the new moms and working moms? What's the opportunity?"

He highlighted the fact that shoppers say that they do not want to go to supermarkets, a fact that farm stand owners should capitalize on. "How do we make shopping fun or easier?" he said. "It's about solving customer problems."

Post a weekly meal planner or pair produce with complements, such as cool whip with strawberries.

Besides providing planning solutions, another way a farm stand can have an edge on competition is by customer service.

"We aren't doing them a favor by waiting on them — it's our job," said George. "Ask the customers how you could serve



Chuck Brunner, York, of Brunner's Exotic Fruits, is joined by Dan Leese, manager of the York Market House, and York Market House board member Tony Dobrosky, right.

them better. Ask them what frustrates them about your service. What would they like you to do more of? Less of?

"Look at complaints as opportunities and profit from them. They can tell the difference between personal and assembly-line treatment."

A satisfied customer is still

willing to listen to your competition, he said. However "a delighted customer is a walking billboard."

Good business is not just making a sale, it is developing the loyalty of that consumer.

"The goal is customer delight, not profit. We're trying to bring people back," he said.

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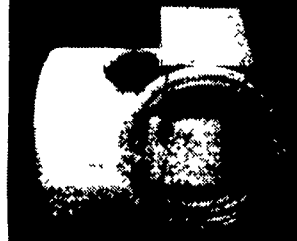
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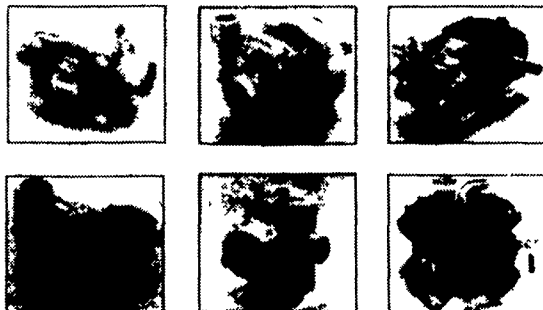
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