



New Farmers, New Generation

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IS ADDING VALUE FOR ME?

"Value-added production" seems to be a popular buzz phrase in agriculture these days. Many agriculturalists are promoting the benefits of adding value to raw commodities. What does that mean?

Perhaps it is best defined by providing some examples. Value-added could include local processing, packaging, or marketing of any food or fiber product. It could include supplemental activity on the farm, such as a bed and breakfast or hunting/fishing privileges. Or it could include a combination of the products, packaging, and marketing.

So how do you determine if value-added is for you? Even if you have a good idea and product that looks like a natural fit in the existing marketplace, getting into that market is not always easy. Competition in the marketplace needs to be carefully evaluated. If you are new to the market, convincing retailers or customers that you have the ability to deliver a reliable supply of

quality goods may be your biggest hurdle to overcome.

Persistence is key to bringing new products into fruition. New product ideas are generally not readily accepted, even though they may eventually have broad appeal to consumers. For example, Coleman Beef of Colorado wanted to market a "natural beef" grown without hormones, feed additives, confinement or vaccinations. Growth of the company was almost nonexistent for the first 15 years and the company didn't operate in the black until the mid-1990s. Today, their beef can be found nationwide. Persistence paid off for them because they identified a product with growth potential and established a solid distribution network for their products by proving they could deliver a consistent supply of quality products.

Penetrating a new market is filled with uncertainty — you don't really know for sure how the consumer is going to respond. Key questions you need to ask include:

- How does my product differ from others in the marketplace?
- How difficult is my identified market to penetrate?
- Have I identified the proper contacts and distribution channels, and how does my product sell with them?
- What is the growth potential of new customers and related products?
- How does my business venture fit in with the community?

All of these questions are important to evaluate when starting a value-added enterprise. It only takes one weak link in the chain to fail. Entering the market takes more than just a competitive price — it also takes a careful assessment of the above mentioned factors.

If you are interested in value-added production, consider attending Pennsylvania Farm Link's next marketing workshop at Meadow View Farm in Kutztown on Sept. 13 from 9 a.m.-11:30 a.m. Owner James Weaver added value to his farm's fruit and vegetable production by offering jams and jellies made from fruit and peppers grown on his farm. He produces more than 100 varieties of peppers and hot peppers and markets them in part through the farm's annual hot pepper festival that attracts more than 1,000 visitors annually. The farm also offers gifts, crafts, and canned goods. Meadow View Farm is located two miles south of Kutztown on Bowers Road.

To learn more about value-added agriculture or to attend the value-added marketing workshop, contact Pennsylvania Farm Link at (717) 664-7077.

Pa. 'Simply Delicious' Sweet Corn Is Coming

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — Lancaster County sweet corn grower Fred Funk said "Consumers will need patience this season." While some growers will be harvesting some early "Simply Delicious" Pennsylvania sweet corn soon, many growers say their sweet corn is running at least two weeks behind schedule because of the cool, wet weather this spring.

Few growers were able to plant their corn on a regular schedule this spring. Consequently the supply of sweet corn is likely to be uneven throughout the summer. Assuming summer weather is here to stay, however, Pennsylvanians can expect to enjoy the delightful taste of fresh "Simply Delicious" Pennsylvania sweet corn dripping with butter this summer as usual.

Most growers expect to begin harvesting sweet corn grown without plastic mulch about the third or fourth week of July. Growers who covered their sweet corn with clear plastic mulch that captures the sun's energy and warms the soil by the greenhouse effect are ready to harvest their corn now. The warm moist environment under the clear plastic mulch is ideal for rapid seed germination and seedling development in cool April days. Planting under the plastic mulch represents a greater investment for the grower in terms of time, equipment, and supplies, but enables the grower to hit the early market.

The main challenge for growers this spring was finding fields dry enough to plant between the numerous rainy days. Growers usually aim to plant patches of sweet corn every 7 to 10 days to insure a continuous harvest throughout the season. Since few if any growers were able to maintain a regular planting schedule, most of them may have periods of time in the summer when they have no corn ripe. Growers can compensate somewhat for irregular schedules by planting corn varieties that mature at different times. Weather throughout the growing season ultimately determines how rapidly each variety grows, so it remains to be seen how even the supply is this summer.

Irrigation has been unnecessary in most parts of the state so far this season, but corn has a critical need for adequate moisture during the period of silking

and ear development. For most of the state's corn crop, that period is during July and August when dry conditions often prevail. More and more growers are using trickle irrigation for their sweet corn. With this method of irrigation, a plastic tube with tiny emitters is laid down between every other row of corn. Water, and oftentimes fertilizer, is pumped into the tubes and trickles out to the roots of the sweet corn crop. It is the most water-efficient method of irrigation available.

The key to good sweet corn is freshness. The sugar in sweet corn rapidly begins turning to starch within hours after being harvested. About 40 percent of the sugar can be lost in six hours at room temperature. Refrigeration slows this process, but the sooner corn is eaten after harvesting, the better.

Many growers are growing sugar-enhanced or super-sweet varieties that genetically have more sugar in the kernels. Some of these early sugar-enhanced varieties were developed at Penn State University. Because they have more sugar to begin with, they can be stored for longer periods and still have acceptable sweetness. However, standard sweet corn varieties, when purchased freshly harvested, will still have a delicious, traditional corn flavor, and sweetness.

According to growers across the state, most Pennsylvanians prefer bi-color corn, traditionally known as Butter and Sugar. However, in south central and southeastern Pennsylvania, white is the preferred corn. Certain localities and clientele still like their corn to be yellow so many growers also grow some yellow varieties.

Regardless of sweet corn color, Pennsylvanians can expect to enjoy an abundant supply each year. It is the leading vegetable crop in the commonwealth with about 22,000 acres grown annually. More than 95 percent of this sweet corn acreage is grown for fresh market sales. As a result, Pennsylvania ranks as the 11th largest fresh-market sweet corn producing state in the nation.

Fresh corn will be available from July into October. About 600 acres of the sweet corn acreage are grown to be processed into frozen, dried, or canned corn products available year around.

LEAD New York Announces 2003-2005 Class

ITHACA, N.Y. — LEAD New York, a nationally recognized leadership program for members of New York state's food and agriculture industries, recently announced the selection of participants for the 2003-2005 class.

The two-year program consists of a curriculum that includes field trips, workshops, and seminars.

The individuals of the food and agricultural industries who have been selected to participate are: Ellen Abend, Cornell Ag Health and Safety Program; Greg Albrecht, Cornell Nutrient Management SPEAR Program; Brian Brandes, a Wellsville, N.Y. Dairy Farmer; Karin Bump, Cazenovia College, Equine Professor; Karen Cartier, Dairylea Cooperative, Inc., Loan Officer; Dean Casey, Ziehm Family Farm, Parlor Manager; Jessica Chittenden, NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets, Director of Communications.

Also, Joseph Daniels, Cargill Animal Nutrition, Territory Sales Manager; Mark Dennis, USDA Farm Services Agency, Public Affairs Specialist; James Doan, Doan Family Farms, Beekeeper; Mike Fargione, Cornell Hudson Valley Regional Fruit Program; Martha Goodsell, Fallow Hollow Deer Farm and Director of NY-Farms; Mariah Hadler, Pharmacia Animal Health, Dairy Sales Consultant; Paul Hadler, Agway Feed and Nutrition, Dairy Nutrition Specialist; Claire Hebbard, NY FarmNet, Assistant Director; Jim Joy, Grape Grower and National Grape Cooperative Field Rep; Charles Kyle, Kyle Farms, Owner; Russell Marquart, NYS Fair, Ag Manager; Linda McCandless, NYS Ag Experiment Station, Director of Communication Services.

Also, Richard McClenning, Premier Dairy Service, LLC, General Manager;

Brian Monckton, Farm Credit of Western N.Y., VP Credit Products; Dana Palmer, Cornell Animal Science Department, Extension Associate; Amy Phelps, Edgewood Farm, LLC, Owner; Mike Riner, CY Farms, Vegetable Crop Manager; Cheryl Ann Rogowski, W. Rogowski Farm, Manager/Co-Owner; John Ruszkiewicz, Ruszkiewicz Farms; Jessica Skinner, Agricultural Consulting Services, Inc., Agricultural Engineer; Dean Smith, Wells Fargo Financial Leasing, Business Development Manager; Velma Smith, Wells Fargo Financial Leasing, Business Development Manager; and Cynthia Stiglitz, First Pioneer Farm Credit, Loan Officer.

LEAD New York's first-year program for the class of 2003-2005 begins this September in Oswegatchie, N.Y., where the class will participate in a three-day team-building retreat. Over the course of the next six months, the group will visit cities across Central New York in addition to making trips to the New York City/Long Island region and

Philadelphia. In its second year, the program begins by focusing on how governmental issues affect the food and agriculture industries. The group will travel north to Ottawa in November of 2004 to study the Canadian government and agriculture system, and then spend four days in Washington, D.C. the following month. The second year is highlighted by an eight-day trip in February 2005. In years past LEAD New York has organized study trips to places such as Mexico, England, and the Netherlands.

Since 1985, more than 250 alumni have graduated from LEAD New York.

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