

Farming On The Edge

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1996. The farm value rises only slightly over those 26 years, while the marketing share shoots to the heavens like a steep ski slope.

Both graphics serve as constant reminders of what's wrong with this picture — and what farmers can do about it.

What can farmers do? Simple. Start capturing a much larger share of the food dollar.

How? The answer is two simple words: Direct marketing.

The more farmers sell directly to consumers, the more money is going to go into producer's pockets where, I believe most of us would agree, it rightfully belongs.

That's easier said than done, I know. But it can — and is — being done on more and more farms throughout the region and the country. A few of the more obvious ways include:

- Farmers' markets, especially producer-only farmers' markets.
- Roadside stands.
- Buying clubs, whether you call it Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), a subscription service, or a "members only" on-farm market.

Many efforts are also under way to supply school districts, colleges, hospitals, restaurants, government, and even corporate cafeterias with fresh, local farm products. (More about that in the next column.)

Farmers in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, New York, and New Jersey live within just a few hours driving time of more than 25 million people in some of the biggest cities and richest markets in the entire world.

Looking at the bigger picture, Pennsylvania farmers are within just one day's drive of half the population of the U.S. and about 60 percent of the population of Canada, Pennsylvania Secretary of Agriculture Dennis Wolff said at the 5th Annual Future of Our Food and Farms Summit last week in Wilmington, Del.

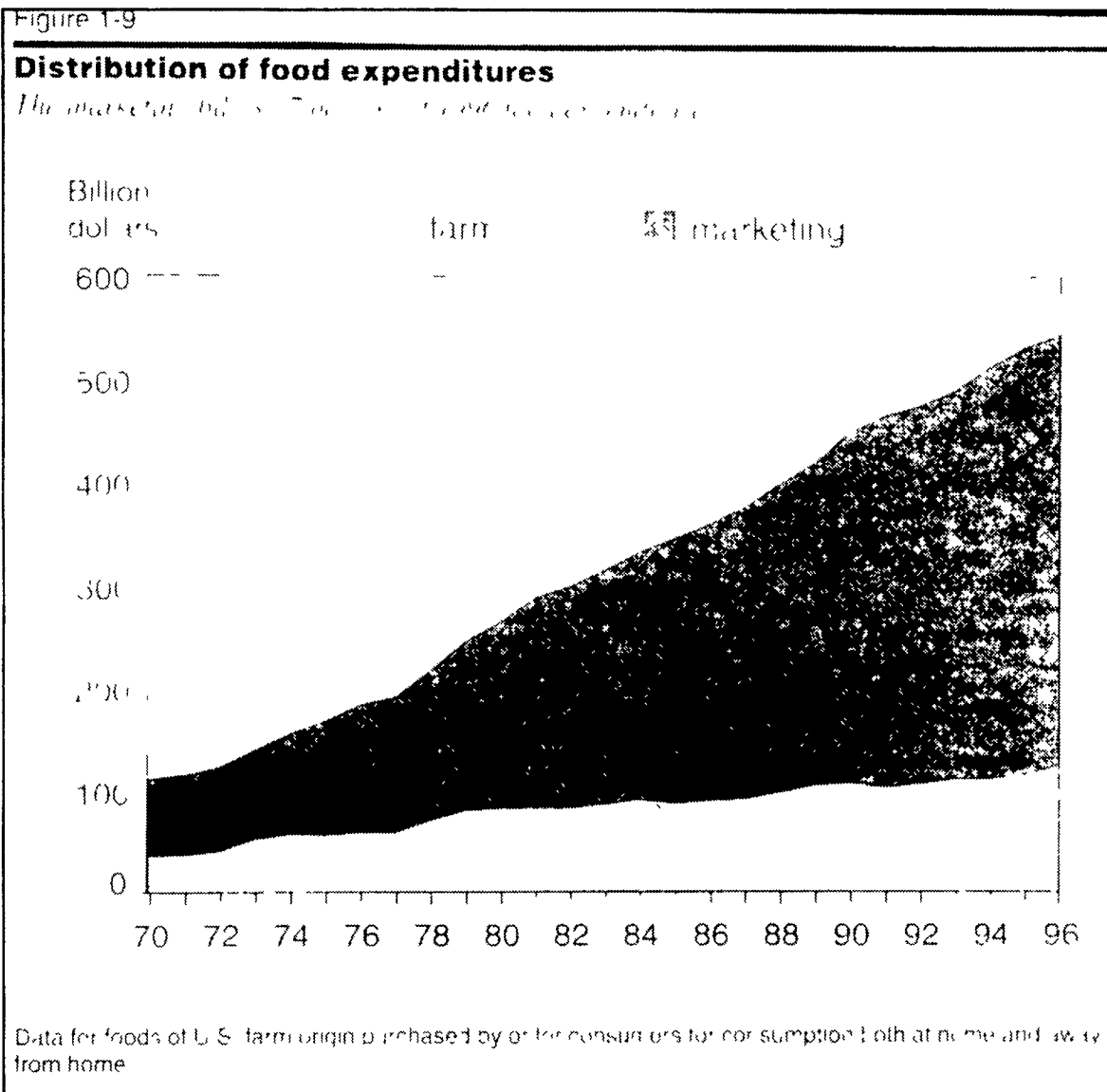
Wolff said that his family's dairy farm has been actively engaged in direct marketing for 30 years. The challenge facing farmers today, he stressed, is "getting more of the consumers' dollar."

How can we do that? For starters, by changing what we produce, how we produce it, and when we produce it, not just how we sell it. More and more consumers want locally grown often organic fruit, vegetables, meat and dairy products, as fresh from the farm as they can possibly get them, throughout as much of the year as is possible. They are willing to pay, and pay well, for what they want.

Consider vegetable consumption in the U.S. It has increased about 20 percent since the 1970s, yet vegetable imports are up about 180 percent. "U.S. agricultural imports in 2002 totaled \$41 billion, up 5 percent from the previous year," reports USDA.

Farmers can capture more of the food dollar there simply by diversifying — growing more of what Americans eat today — extending our growing season with high tunnels and planting different varieties.

Pennsylvania leads the nation in preserving farmland. The next step, Wolff told the gathering in Wilmington, is figuring out how



to preserve farmers by making farming more profitable.

Putting more of the food dollar in producers' pockets is a perfect place to start.

Editor's note: With his wife, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau member George DeVault raises certi-

fied organic vegetables near Emmaus. He is a Food and Society Policy Fellow with the Thomas Jefferson Agricultural Institute and Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy in a program funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (www.foodandsocietyfellows.org).

The DeVaults' articles on diversification, high-value crops, cut flowers and direct marketing are available on the Rodale Institute's Website, www.newfarm.org.

2004 Pa. Holstein Convention

STATE COLLEGE (Centre Co.) — The Pennsylvania Holstein Association's annual convention is scheduled for Feb. 19-21 at the Four Points Sheraton, Greensburg. Holstein breeders from southwest Pennsylvania are planning this convention for the statewide membership of Pennsylvania Holstein breeders.

The convention's theme "We have what you are looking for in 2004" is to bring Holstein enthusiasts from across the state together to share their experiences and ideas, and to enjoy themselves.

In addition to the adult convention, the junior convention will

take place at the Four Points Sheraton from Feb. 6-8. County Dairy Bowl teams will compete for the honor to represent Pennsylvania at the National Junior Holstein Dairy Bowl Contest. Distinguished Junior Member and Holstein Scholarship recipients will be named. The seventh public speaking contest will also be conducted. There will be workshops and activities for the approximately 400 youth that attend. This convention encourages and provides opportunity for our youth.

Convention sponsorship categories have been assigned as follows:

- Partner — more than \$1,000
- Sponsor — \$400-\$999
- Contributor — \$100-\$399
- Friend — Up to \$99

Commercial exhibitor space is available at the following rates:

- \$225 — Adult and Junior Conventions

- \$175 — Adult Convention ONLY
- \$100 — Junior Convention ONLY

If you have a commercial exhibit and also make a monetary donation, the combined amount of money will be used to determine your sponsorship category.

Please make your checks payable to "2004 PA Holstein Convention" and mail before Jan. 20 to 2004 PA Holstein Convention, c/o Bailey Herring, 433 Gibbon Glade Road, Farmington, PA 15437.

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