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Acreage Living is published monthly. Please share it with your acreage neighbors. Call your local ISU Extension Office for more information or contact an ISU Extension staff member listed below to suggest topics for future articles.

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Techniques to Improve Your Success at Farmers' Market

By Andy Larson, ISU Extension Specialist in Small Farm Sustainability

In last month's article, I talked about the time, effort, and planning that goes into your farm's image at the farmers' market. You can boost your success even more by knowing your customer and market, and creatively merchandising your produce.

Know your customer

Market research provides a comprehensive picture of the social, economic, and demographic characteristics of the people likely to shop at your market. The U.S. Census Bureau's American FactFinder (<http://factfinder.census.gov/>) and the Bureau of Labor Statistics (<http://www.bls.gov/>) have information on race, education, income, household type, employment, consumer expenditures, and much more. For instance, the BLS site says the average Midwesterner spent \$161 on fresh vegetables in 2007. Iowa State University MarketMaker (<http://ia.marketmaker.uiuc.edu/>) features local population demographics and details about nearby food businesses in an interactive mapping format.

Know your marketplace

In addition to understanding the profile of your typical customer, you need to know how the customer behaves in the marketplace. Go to multiple farmers' markets in your area and see what is selling quickly, what is selling slowly, and at what price. Ask the market manager what products tend to be in short supply and ask the vendors whether this tends to be one of their more profitable markets. Check nearby grocery stores and find out whether they sell local produce, and if so, in what quantity, at what quality, and in what price range.

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Have a marketing strategy

Now, take what you have learned about the local marketplace, combine it with what you know about your farm and your personal preferences, and apply it to a marketing strategy that meets your objectives as well as the needs of the consumer. First, sell people on the quality of your familiar items such as green beans, garlic, tomatoes, or apples. Then tell them about your less familiar items such as kohlrabi, komatsuna, and celeriac, including how they taste, how they should be cooked, and some possible food pairings. If customers seem intrigued by something unfamiliar but hesitant to buy, give them a sample (if market rules and county health regulations allow) or put a free sample in their shopping bag.



Pricing

Price your produce to be a value to your customer and profitable to you. Being the least expensive at the farmers' market is not

necessarily a winning strategy. Consumers often equate lower prices with lower value.

Avoid growing items that you cannot price high enough to be profitable. Many "bulk" vegetables (e.g. sweet corn, potatoes, squash, and cabbage) require a certain economy of scale to make them profitable if they are not commanding a premium price. Keep detailed production cost and sales records to make sure each one of your crops is worth your time. Higher value crops often require more labor and management, but for a small grower at a farmers' market, they are more likely to return satisfying profits.

Creative merchandising

Attract customers through creative merchandising. In addition to selling tomatoes and bell peppers, bundle some with garlic, onions, chiles, and cilantro and sell a salsa kit. Instead of selling plain lettuce, sell a spring lettuce mix with baby greens. Sell garlic braids rather than just garlic bulbs and you're sure to get a higher per-bulb return. If your market allows you to sell non-food agricultural items, this further broadens your merchandising opportunities. You could sell vegetable transplants if



you have extras you did not use. If you're having trouble moving hot chile peppers, sell the whole plant in a small plastic pot as an ornamental. In the fall, you could sell multi-colored decorative corn and sell the stalks in bundles separately. If you have extra straw mulch, sell mini-bales. You're only limited by your creativity, and, of course, the amount of time you have to prepare all these items!

Secondary outlet

Finally, not everything you grow is going to sell exactly as you'd planned. The farmers' market is generally an outlet for "first" quality produce. Aesthetically inferior "seconds" are great for the restaurant market where they will be processed before they are consumed. Avoid the temptation to "dump" your remaining inventory at deep discounts just before the market closes. Having a secondary outlet such as a restaurant or food pantry, or even a compost pile, can be better than diminishing the perceived value of your produce.



More Americans feel added stress and anxiety about their financial future as talk of rising consumer debt, falling housing prices, rising costs of living and declining retail sales bring up worries about the nation's economic health.

Learn positive money management techniques to help you and your family adapt to tough economic times.

http://www.extension.org/pageFinancial_Security:_Managing_Money_in_Tough_Times

Do You Have a Welcoming Home?

By Mary Years, ISU Extension Housing Specialist

It's easy to overlook the home fix-it projects until you're cooped up inside during the dark days of winter. But besides the touch-up painting, consider whether you need bigger changes to create a more welcoming home. Overnight guests—especially those who use wheelchairs—will enjoy their stay more if you have a no-step entrance, a bedroom or sleeping area and a full-sized bathroom on the main level.

No-step entrance

A home with a no-step entrance makes it easy to carry groceries, move furniture or push a baby stroller through the doorway. You'll be glad you don't have to climb exterior steps during Iowa's icy winters. There are many attractive ways to create a no-step entrance without building a ramp—even on an older home (see Figures 1 and 2). Get a copy of *The Welcoming Home*, ISU Extension publication Pm-1804 (www.extension.iastate.edu/Publications/PM1804.pdf) for details.

Bedroom or sleeping area on main level

A bedroom or sleeping area on the main level is convenient for guests who aren't able to climb stairs and is a good place for family members to recuperate following an injury or illness. If you don't have a bedroom on the main level, consider how an office or family room might double as a

guest bedroom with the use of a sofa bed.

Full-sized bathroom on main level

A full-sized bathroom on the main level is a must. A skimpy powder room won't work for guests who use walkers or wheelchairs. At a minimum, guests will need a five-foot circle of open floor space for maneuvering a wheelchair between bathroom fixtures. A shower stall will be more convenient than a tub for most guests. Make sure the bathroom door is at least 32 inches wide (preferably 36 inches).

Universal Design Learning Laboratory

If it's hard for you to visualize how these changes might look, visit the Universal Design Learning Laboratory (www.hdfs.hs.iastate.edu/centers/udll/) on the Iowa State University campus. You will be able to try special features that make a home more convenient, comfortable, and safe in a life-sized bathroom, kitchen and living area. Call 515-294-6568 to schedule a tour. Bring along photos and floor plans if you would like some one-on-one assistance in planning your remodeling project. You're welcome to come as an individual or a family; group tours may be arranged.

Resources

For other resources on home

remodeling, get a copy of *Update Your Home for a Lifetime of Living*, ISU Extension publication Pm-1824 (www.extension.iastate.edu/Publications/PM1824.pdf), check out the Web site on *Universal Design and Home Accessibility*: (www.extension.iastate.edu/universaldesign) or purchase a copy of *The House Handbook, MWPS-16*, at your local County Extension office or on the Web: (www.mwps.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=c_products.view&catID=717&productID=6408).



Figure 1: Front view of home entrance showing typical steps leading to front door.



Figure 2: Side view of home entrance with section of porch railing removed. A gently sloping sidewalk creates a no-step design that is integrated with porch and surrounding landscape.

Cost Saving Tips for Equine Feeding

By Chris Mortensen, Clemson University Extension Horse Specialist

A large portion of horse enterprise operating expense is feeding cost. Only housing tends to cost more. There are many tips that can help reduce costs, however, you need to be cautious as a proper balanced diet is critical to your animal's health.

Feeding Based on Body Condition

The first tip that can help reduce feed cost is to feed your horse based on body weight and current [body condition score \(BCS\)](#). The ideal body condition score for a horse is 5.0 - 5.5 on a scale of 1 (emaciated) to 9 (obese).

Horses need 2 to 3 percent of their body weight (BW) per day in feed. How much of that is forage (hay) and how much is concentrate (grain) depends on horse workload. For example, horses that are ridden less frequently or not at all can be sustained on good quality hay. Horses that are ridden frequently, but not in intense competition, can be maintained on 2.0 percent BW

hay and 0.5-1.0 percent BW concentrate per day. For equine athletes that compete and train frequently (i.e. polo, racing, endurance riding) can require up to 1.5 percent BW hay and 1.5 percent BW concentrate per day. Each horse differs metabolically, much like people, and the best gauge on how well your horse is being fed is body condition. Many resources are available on how to [body condition score](#) your horse. It is important to remember that keeping your horse too lean (4 or less BCS) or too fat (7 or greater BCS) can be dangerous to your animal's health and can result in expensive veterinarian bills.

Estimating Body Weight

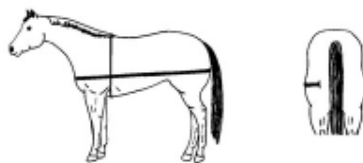


Figure 1. Measuring locations used to estimate a horse's body weight.

Figure 1 illustrates how to estimate a horse's body weight using a

simple weight tape (available at many feed stores) and using the simple formula below. First, measure body circumference (heart girth) by measuring all around the horse at the highest point of the withers. Second, measure body length starting at the point of the shoulder and measuring down the side of the horse to the point of the buttocks. Multiply heart girth x heart girth x body length, then divide by 330 for a good estimate on live horse weight.



Example: heart girth = 70 inches, length = 72 inches

Body weight = $70 \times 70 \times 72 / 330$
= 1069 pounds

Next month we'll discuss adding fat and supplements to horse diets along with other cost saving tips.

... and justice for all

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