



Putting a Handle on the Tomato

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Webinar Questions and Answers

- 1. When you offer a high-quality product, how do you draw the line between offering some kind of "special" while not undercutting the integrity of your product's reputation (or your bottom line)?**

Pair a high quality product with something more common. For example, bundle a common bell pepper with another special pepper, say a less common hot pepper. Using the more common product will reduce the economic impact on you with a bundled price, but may ultimately increase your sales when people become familiar with the unique product and come to buy that independently. Be sure your strategy includes getting feedback from your customers.

- 2. It is hard to do good communications and questions when you are busy. It can be done, but at the end of the day, I cannot remember the responses. And it is hard to take time to write their responses down. How can this be done? It is done when slow, but I can never get to the "busy time of day" customers.**

It really is all about the question you ask. The more focused the question, the more direct and memorable their response will be. A more open ended question leads to a much longer conversation with too much information that is not relevant to the information you are seeking. So make your questions to the consumer more targeted.

- 3. If we bundle items like tomatoes, onions, basil, is that considered processing and requires special permits?**

As long as the products are not altered then this would not be considered processing. So unless you are cutting, chopping or cooking any of the components, putting raw ingredients together in a package would not be processing.

- 4. Local is a critical tag for direct marketing farmers, but you say it is not a position. Can you explain further?**

Local is indeed important. Consumers are looking to better support local businesses and eat local so they can support their local farmers and local economy. However, local is a feature and not a benefit. So when you promote your business and your products, the best money is spent on the benefits or buying your products. Consumers may already perceive you as local because you are a farmer in the community's farmers market, but they seek YOU out because of the quality of your products or the health benefits, etc. So as we have learned throughout these marketing presentations - features should be made known to consumers, but promote the benefits to capture the sale.

5. What are some resources that direct marketing farmers should look into to better prepare for crisis positioning?

Just like when you leave your children's babysitter with the phone numbers of the fire department, the police and poison control, there are critical numbers and resources that should be at your fingertips should a crisis occur, whether a crisis with your business or elsewhere. Look at government agencies, such as the Ag Department and the local Health Department. Others would be Cooperative Extension and industry organizations.

For more information on preparing and implementing a crisis plan, the Farmers Market Federation of NY has a market managers training manual online with guidance to preparing a plan, http://www.nyfarmersmarket.com/NYFM_Training_Manual.pdf. The Federation has also created a document to assist you in dealing with the media in times of crisis. This piece can help you craft you a consistent message, <http://www.nyfarmersmarket.com/images/documents/training/handouts/Crisis-Communication-Guidelines.pdf>.