



September 2010

Tips for Marketing in the Local Meats Market

Matt LeRoux, Cornell Cooperative Extension-Tompkins County

Local foods are enjoying strong demand, however, until recently the buy local movement has been largely concentrated on fresh seasonal produce. Many livestock farmers are now aware that the “buy local” movement is strong and that there is demand for their products in local markets. However, tapping into those markets may be intimidating to farmers new to direct marketing. Who are local meats consumers and where do they shop? What products are they looking for and how do you set pricing? This article begins to answer such commonly asked questions.

Local meats buyers can be divided into three basic groups, experience-driven “foodies”, cause-driven “greens” and price-driven traditional buyers. Each group is driven to local meat, and arguably local foods, by different desires and needs. Here is a basic profile on each group (and summarized in Table 1):

Foodies are food enthusiasts; they seek authentic eating experiences including gourmet and regional specialties. A foodie wants an excellent eating experience and to taste foods that have a story and a known source. Foodies consider the farm name, the cut, and the way it was prepared as bragging rights. As such, foodies are primarily interested in buying high-value cuts, such as steaks, but also other cuts. Of the three consumer groups, foodies are the least price sensitive. They primarily buy meat in small quantities and individual cuts, but may also be interested in buying in bulk or joining a meat CSA. Part of the experience they seek is shopping and talking to the farmer. Foodies like to shop at farmers’ markets and specialty stores when buying meat to prepare at home and also like to order locally raised meats at restaurants.

Green consumers are seeking local meat in the quest for a safe, sustainable, and healthy meal. This category broadly groups all consumers motivated by “social causes” including the environment, humane treatment of animals, supporting the local economy and farmers, as well as those seeking local meats for personal health reasons. Green consumers may also be recently converted vegetarians, or people who choose to not eat commodity meat. These consumers are motivated to purchase meats that they perceive to support any number of social causes and view a purchase as a way to support their beliefs. Such consumers will shop at natural food stores, locally-owned stores and restaurants, and will also like to buy direct from the farmer through

farmers’ markets, meat CSA’s and in bulk. Green consumers want to learn more about the products they buy, such as how and where they were raised and while they will identify with claims such as “natural” and “pasture raised”, they will want to verify the validity of such claims.

The final group is the **traditional local meat buyers**. This group includes consumers that have purchased a quarter or side of beef or other meat for many years. In decades past, it was common to buy the household supply of meat through what is called the “freezer trade”. People, mostly rural residents, would buy a side from a nearby farm and keep a spare freezer in which to store it. Traditional buyers definitely appreciate the quality and range of cuts that come from purchasing local meats in bulk, but are mostly motivated by the low price and high value. Traditional buyers are less likely to buy individual cuts or to shop for meat at farmers’ markets or specialty stores. Traditional buyers, once they have a good experience with a farm, remain loyal, returning to buy again and again.

Table 1: Local Meat Buyers Overview.

	Foodies	Greens	Traditional
Primary motivation	Experience	Social cause/ Personal health	Price and value
What they buy	High value cuts	A variety, from cuts to bulk quantities	Bulk, sides & quarters
Where they shop	Farmers’ markets, restaurants, specialty stores	Meat CSA, farmers’ market, freezer trade, natural foods store	At the farm, freezer trade
Price sensitivity	Least	Medium	Most

Each group comes to the marketplace with different motivations and buying habits, but they all have one demand in common – **quality**. To be successful in the local meats marketplace, it is essential to deliver quality and honesty to customers. As the saying goes, “you can only sell a customer one bad steak.” Each of these consumer groups are potential customers for local meats producers.

For successful results in the local meats market, tailor farm marketing to one or more of these groups. The group or groups chosen will impact marketing choices including marketing channels, prices, cuts, claims and advertising. Once marketing materials are developed, keep some form of brochures, business card, or price sheets on-hand at all times. You never know when you will meet your next customer, and you need to be able to give them your contact information.

Additional tips for marketing include:

- Donate or offer a discount to fundraisers and events, make sure your farm name is highly-visible and well-represented.
- Participate in agricultural events, especially those with tastings and samples of your product.
- Consider giving samples of ground beef to potential high volume buyers.
- Clearly and consistently communicate your claims and practices on all materials.

- Encourage customers to visit your farm to build trust and make a stronger connection to your product.

Direct marketing livestock producers often struggle with managing the inventory of low and high value cuts, and the proportions of each that come from one animal. Another key to success in local meats market is to be sure that the entire carcass is sold. There are a few strategies to accomplish this. One strategy is to price each cut in relation to its yield and desirability. Another is to balance the cut list to a limited selection of cuts that sell well, turning the rest into ground beef. Additionally, you can sell packages of meat which include both low and high value cuts to balance the inventory.

In summary, it is clear that consumers are demanding more local meats. Identifying target consumer types, communicating to their desires and needs, and finding where they shop are good tips for smart marketers. All customers want quality and honesty – all the time. Once a marketing plan and materials have been developed, always have some on hand, you never know when you will meet your next customer. Finally, don't fall into the trap of selling steaks. To last in the meat business you must sell the whole carcass!

“Smart Marketing” is a marketing newsletter for extension publication in local newsletters and for placement in local media. It reviews elements critical to successful marketing in the food and agricultural industry. *Please cite or acknowledge when using this material.* Past articles are available at <http://marketingpwt.aem.cornell.edu/publications.html>.