



FLANAGAN
State Bank

Speciality Growers AG NEWSLETTER

WEALTH FOR FARMERS, HEALTH FOR COMMUNITIES: ELDERBERRY MAKES IT POSSIBLE



If you're an American grower looking to diversify your crop offerings, you might be interested in growing elderberry. For the better part of two decades, American elderberry's been recognized as a fast-producing perennial crop with great earning potential.

Who's buying elderberry? People who like using natural compounds to stay healthy. Walk down the supplement aisle of your local pharmacy or health food store and you'll see elderberry products in the cold and flu area, and in the general vitamin area, as well. At the health food store, you'll find additional elderberry products. From locally made elderberry juice, syrup, and jelly, to commercially produced vitamin gummies, elderberry products are claiming a broadening area on retailers' shelves.

Known as a functional food, elderberry is naturally packed with anti-oxidants that everyone recognizes as beneficial, (vitamins A, C, and E). Elderberry also contains quercetin. According to Dole Nutrition Laboratories, "elderberries, of all the berries, are very rich in quercetin," and, "people with high quercetin intake have a 60 percent reduction in lung cancer death rates," and "a third less incidence of heart disease, and research shows they have less pancreatic and colon cancer as well." Also, elderberries are rich in anthocyanins, which, without getting too technical, are phytochemicals in plants (the compounds found in red and blue fruits and vegetables) that "possess anti-diabetic, anti-cancer, anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, and anti-obesity effects, as well as prevention of cardiovascular diseases," as cited in Food and Nutrition Research: article PMID 28970777, Aug. 13, 2017. (ncbi.nlm.nih.gov.) Scientific studies on the amount of these compounds in elderberries, both American and European selections, continue, as the benefits are profound.

Historically, your rural grandparents and great-grandparents, who farmed and wild-crafted, recognized elderberry as a medicinal plant. This knowledge, passed from generation to generation, goes so far back that Hippocrates called elderberry, "Medicine for the common people." And it's good medicine. It became widely known in America during the bird flu outbreak of 2014-15 when elderberry treated it successfully. Its use has been increasing since then and continues in every type of product, including flowers, which are gaining popularity among researchers as well. (cont. pg. 2)

AUGUST 2022

IN THIS ISSUE

Elderberry Health.....	1
Tomato Harvest.....	3
New Generation.....	5
Boost Your Marketing.....	6
How Your Farm Makes \$.....	7
Cucumber Recipes.....	8
Ag Lending Team.....	8

FSB LOCATIONS

- 301 W. Falcon, Flanagan
- 403 State, Benson
- 2401 E. Washington, Bloomington
- 111 N. Fayette, El Paso
- 500 S. Persimmon, Le Roy
- 208 E. Gridley, Gridley

WEALTH FOR FARMERS, HEALTH FOR COMMUNITIES: ELDERBERRY MAKES IT POSSIBLE (CONT.)

Why grow elderberry? In addition to elderberry's health benefits, it is easy to grow, easy to expand the size of the crop, and, unlike many other perennial fruits, it bears a crop in its second season. The yields of well-cared-for berries continue to grow for many years as the plants get established. As a grower, the ability to begin with a relatively small planting and grow in acreage over time is a huge cost benefit. You can propagate and expand your orchard every year. A 2-acre planting is considered a commercial orchard. In 2021, a second-year planting of 20 acres in northern Illinois yielded over \$10,000 per acre, and about \$20,000 worth of cuttings, at wholesale prices.

Ideally, ensuring a good crop starts a year in advance. You can solve a world of problems before they start by getting your ground ready, putting in irrigation, and establishing protective measures. In the first year or two, your biggest enemies are irregular moisture and deer.

Working up beds with proper nutrition, proper spacing, and long-term growth in mind, elderberry is fast to establish. Berry yields from 3000 to 4000 pounds per acre are easy to achieve if plants are watered consistently by the third year.

What to do with your crop? One option is to sell your elderberries to a processor. There are a number of mid-sized processors making locally-grown elder products, like our company, River Hills Harvest. We produce most of our products from raw juice, carefully prepared to retain as many nutritional qualities as possible. We pay a premium for clean berries, and more for organic berries grown in Missouri and locations close to us. Last year, 2021, destemmed, sanitized berries brought \$4 a pound on the organic wholesale market. There are others processors in other regions like us, growing some berries, but requiring more than they grow for their product lines. In addition, larger supplement manufacturers are beginning to acquire elderberries from American growers.

Another advantage of elderberry, since it is a fruit, is that it can be used to create value-added products from the farm. Very few products are made from raw berries, but many shelf-stable products, such as jelly, syrup, and vinegar are made, and some dried and freeze-dried products are being produced. Elderberry is a low-acid product and requires careful handling and the addition of acid to make it shelf-stable.

Check with your local regulatory agencies before processing elderberries at home. If you get big enough to use a commercial kitchen, you'll likely need FDA approval for your products.

What kind of special handling do elderberries require? Elderberries are highly perishable. They need to be harvested, cleaned, which is more accurately called sanitizing, then processed or frozen within 24 hours.

When an elderberry is ripe, it is nearly black and gets a waxy look, much like a blueberry. Berries grow on umbrels. Whole umbrels are cut by hand from the plants and placed in totes for transport to packing, where they must be within a couple of hours of picking. At the packing facility, they are destemmed, washed, skimmed, rinsed, and sanitized before being put into buckets and immediately placed in the freezer.

Berries must be destemmed because the plant contains a chemical we know as cyanide. Eat too much of it and you'll have a sore stomach, with possible more dramatic symptoms. You really want to thoroughly destem your berries. This requires patience and diligence to perform by hand, but there are a few machines that can help you with that process. If you're growing a lot of berries, and a few plants can give you quite a few berries, you'll want to share a machine with another grower or purchase your own.

The planting, growing, and harvesting season. Prepare your ground ahead of time, in the fall before planting in late winter. When your beds thaw (assuming you're in a region that experiences ground-freeze), elderberry propagations, known as 'sticks,' are placed, point-down, in the ground. Or, if

you have an established planting, in December, once the plant is dormant, stems are cut to within a few inches of the ground and from the stems, cuttings are prepared.

Then, the plants are allowed to root and grow. Cultivation of the ground, making sure they are getting water, and keeping pests and deer at bay is the work as the plants grow. They will set flowers in about May, and bloom in June. Harvest typically begins in late July and runs through August in the Midwest.

It's a good time to grow elderberries. American Elderberry research for medical science and food science has taken a leap in the last few years, indicating that there is efficacy in the little purple berry. But, in America, estimates indicate that about 95% of all elderberry products processed and sold in the U.S. are using imported elderberries, primarily from Europe where the crop has been cultivated for a long time.

European varieties grow differently, as trees rather than bushes, and American researchers hope to "prove" that the American elderberry is equally or more nutritious than its European cousin. As more American elderberries become available, we should begin to make a dent in those European imports.

Elderberries grow throughout the United States. In northern regions, careful attention to selection is necessary to get a berry that will ripen in a shorter growing season. But, elderberry is really a two-crop plant, as the flower is a crop unto itself. And, importantly, research shows that American elderberries can withstand harvest of up to 20 to 30% of the flowers and not lose berry weight.

With its double-crop capability, easy entry-level, and quick development to maturity, we think elderberry is a great perennial crop that can help any grower diversify, and help create a more sustainable income for their farm. That's our motto: Wealth for Farmers, Health for Communities. Elderberry makes it possible.

Where to get more information: River Hills Harvest is dedicated to helping growers learn all they need to know to become successful orchardists. We've developed an online elderberry school with in-depth information. In addition, the River Hills Harvest website offers links to free educational materials under the 'Grower' section, including an online financial calculator. You can also take a look at our retail store to see the variety of products we've developed.

Finally, we sponsor the "Comprehensive ElderBerry Workshop & Orchard Tour" in central Missouri every year in June. Please take advantage of these resources if you're interested in learning more about growing elderberries.

River Hills Harvest website: www.riverhillsharvest.com

Online classes: www.growelderberries.com

Facebook home <https://www.facebook.com/RiverHillsHarvest>

Elderberry Financial Decision Support Tool:
<https://centerforagroforestry.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/elderFDST.jpg>

New Elderberry Growers Facebook group:
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1117146551789037>

YouTube Channel:
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDyhVgN8QdfCNEK3nKdpBfA/videos>

Deni Phillips
River Hills Harvest

TOMATO HARVEST SEASON: WHAT TO HARVEST, AND WHAT TO NOT

Approaching mid-July at the South Suburban Cook County Urban Agriculture Demonstration Farm (SoSuCo), we are already a few weeks into harvesting vine-ripe tomatoes from our single 20x48 foot high tunnel. With our high tunnel-protected culture structure, we can plant and harvest tomatoes about a month earlier than outdoor tomatoes. High tunnel tomato production gives the commercial grower a distinct advantage in bringing the ever-popular vine-ripe tomato to market first, expanding the growers marketing potential.

The key to a high-quality market tomato is developing proper harvesting techniques with particular attention paid to grading requirements and visual appearance. Even though misshapen, non-uniform, and insect-damaged tomato fruits may still pack all of the flavors and eating quality of an unblemished tomato. There are still certain quality

standards a grower should hold themselves to, or there may be grading and appearance requirements from a prospective buyer. According to the USDA Agriculture Marketing Service, a U.S. No. 1 grade tomato meets some of the following basic requirements: similar varietal characteristics; mature; not overripe or soft; clean; well developed; fairly well-formed; and fairly smooth. They must also be free from decay, freezing injury, and sunscald. Finally, not damaged by any other cause. As the grading system goes down to No. 3 grade, some qualitative requirements like "fairly well formed and fairly smooth" are more lenient to interpretation. This flexibility gives the grower some leeway in establishing grading guidelines for their farming system and market. Here is a visual standard operating procedure (SOP) for "determining tomato firsts and seconds" developed by my colleague Erin Harper.

Determining Tomato Firsts and Seconds



Funky Bottoms:

- The picture above depicts a funky bottom. If large like this one with zippering like shown, would be a **second**.
- **If a small deformity (quarter-sized) then it would be a first.**



Wet Splits:

- Wet splits will rot prior to market and cause those tomatoes around it to rot
- Would be a **second**.



Blossom-End-Rot:

- Small to large rotting holes in the bottom of the tomato.
- Would be a **second**.



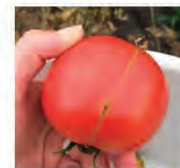
Cat eye:

- Large cat-eyes that cover a portion of the tomato would be a **second**. May or may not be dry as shown.



Top Splits:

- Minor (**first**): small splits at the top of the fruit, not extending down the sides
- Major (**second**): Large and/or wet splits at the top of the fruit, extend down the sides of the fruit (Pictured)



Zippering:

- Minor (**first**): 1-2 zippers on fruit (Pictured)
- Major (**second**): more than 2 zippers on fruit (see multiple zippers in the top splits photo)

Credit: Erin Harper

Shouldering:

- Unripe section at the top of the fruit will never ripen
- **First if:** less than half the top of the fruit and/or less than a third down the side of the fruit
- **Second if:** more than half of the top of the fruit and/or more than a third down the side of the fruit



Credit: Erin Harper

TOMATO HARVEST SEASON: WHAT TO HARVEST, AND WHAT TO NOT (CONT.)

As can be seen from the SOP, these visual guidelines give some flexibility with the clause from the USDA grading standard "not seriously damaged by any other cause." This level of damage and what a grower's market will accept is up to the grower to decide and establish with prospective buyers. The guidelines in this SOP do not guarantee that a prospective buyer will accept a delivery based on these visual fruit examples. Let's examine a few of these guidelines shown in this visual SOP to determine if any growing techniques can be employed to reduce the level of visual defect. When appropriate and necessary, organic techniques will be highlighted.

Wet Splits and Top Splits

Both wet splits, also known as concentric cracking, and top splits, known as radial cracking, are typically related to rain events or irrigation periods. It most commonly occurs near the stem scar. It is a result of rapid fruit growth that occurs following a period of drought then, subsequently followed by heavy rain. In the case of a high tunnel, if tomato plants are inconsistently irrigated and allowed to go through long dry then wet cycles, splitting or cracking is more likely to occur. Some varieties are more prone to this condition than others. As is the case with many tomato diseases, resistant varieties can be utilized to help combat excessive cracking and splitting.

"Cat-Eye", Catfacing, and Zippering

This set of physiological issues typically revolves around poor pollination (catfacing) or possibly incomplete shedding of flower petals and the male anther remaining attached to the newly formed flower (zippering). There is a possibility that herbicide drift may play a role in catfacing. There is not much that can be done about these conditions. The exception is choosing varieties that do not seem prone to the condition.

Blossom-End Rot

Perhaps one of the most misunderstood physiological tomato fruit disorders, this condition is most commonly affiliated with the inadequate movement of Calcium through the plant during development. However, in many cases, a soil or media test will reveal that Calcium is not deficient. Therefore, this condition is technically caused by inadequate soil moisture not carrying Calcium into the plant in a timely fashion. Once the condition is established, it cannot be reversed. This physiological condition often gets confused with a biological disease, as a secondary infection of the affected area can often occur. One of the more common secondary infections is the anthracnose fungus. Management is possible in high tunnels where drip irrigation can be very closely monitored and controlled. There are many organic sources of Calcium available if soil/media Calcium deficiency is the culprit.

Yellow Shoulder, Grey Wall, White Core, & Blotchy Ripening

Finally, we will discuss ripening disorders. While there are many manifestations of ripening disorders, there are some common management factors to consider. Notably, inadequate potassium is often to blame. A soil test and a Hartz Ratio calculator will help determine the relative risk. Most certifiers should allow Potassium Sulfate (K₂SO₄, 40% K and 17% S) for organic growers. This screened raw fertilizer is typically banded in the root zone and incorporated if possible. For organic fertilizers like K₂SO₄, it is essential to remember that they need good soil moisture to mineralize properly. Some certified organic soluble potassium sources may also be directly injected into the drip system via the process known as fertigation. Temperature and inadequate ventilation in high tunnels can also cause fruit ripening disorders. Try to maintain high tunnel temps less than 100 F if possible. This can be partially achieved by active ventilation and the selective use of shade cloth. Notably, yellow shouldering is also linked to varieties with less foliage and a lack of uniform ripening gene.

Learning which fruits to harvest and why is essential in establishing an excellent tomato production program on the farm. Pay close attention to soil moisture, potassium levels, and high tunnel temperatures to reduce the number of defective fruits harvested. Lastly, keep excellent production notes to establish which varieties are less prone to these physiological defects.

Sources:

An IPM Scouting Guide for Common Pests of Solanaceous Crops in Kentucky, UK Vegetable IPM Team Timothy Coolong (ed.) and John Strang, Extension Horticulturists, Ric Bessin, Extension Entomologist Kenneth Seebold, Extension Plant Pathologist. University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service. 2011

Tomato, Physiological Ripening Disorders.

<https://ag.umass.edu/vegetable/fact-sheets/tomato-physiological-ripening-disorders>. UMass Extension Vegetable Program

Zack Grant

*Local Foods and Small Farms Educator
University of Illinois Extension*



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
EXTENSION



A NEW GENERATION OF FARMERS

Sales of farm products directly from farms to consumers have been increasing at a rapid pace throughout the pandemic era. More consumers are permanently working from home at least part of the time. People working from home tend to have a bit more flexibility in their schedules and have time to prepare good meals using high-quality, farm-fresh ingredients. A small but growing cohort of farmers is capitalizing on this market opportunity.

I co-lead Compeer Financial's Emerging Markets loan program, which provides loans to farmers marketing their products directly to consumers or who are engaged in value-added processing or marketing. I've seen a number of factors that make this segment of farmers unique from traditional commodity producers. Here are some things that set these farmers apart.

Many are first-generation farmers. These folks didn't grow up on farms yet chose to become farmers. They bring different knowledge, skills, and interests to their operations. They want to do something tangible and meaningful with their lives. Growing good food isn't a hobby for them, it's a passion.

Many of these farmers are women. Women are the primary operators of approximately half of the farms and farm-based businesses in my loan portfolio. Just like traditional commodity farmers, they may or may not have a spouse or partner working off-farm for health benefits or to supplement household cash flow.

They tend to be avid readers, and especially eager to learn about farm financial management and farm production methods. Attend any conference that attracts an audience of direct-to-consumer farmers and you're likely to find a bookstore as a feature. One of the largest conferences for this segment of agriculture, the MOSES Organic Farming Conference held each February in La Crosse, Wisconsin, sells tens of thousands of dollars worth of books over the span of three days. They are very community-spirited. Farmers who sell directly to consumers often co-market their products with other farmers who produce different items, such as a vegetable grower who markets meat products raised by a neighbor. They share equipment, order inputs together, and host potluck meals on their farms. Sometimes the community spirit progresses into cooperative business ventures such as the Community Kitchen Cooperative in Monticello, Wisconsin. This co-op takes farm-raised products and turns them into ready-to-eat meals that it sells to area consumers.

They tend to grow their operations by scope rather than scale. When commodity farmers need to increase their net farm income, they often add more acres or more livestock to their operations. Direct-to-consumer farmers typically try to generate more net revenue from the same scale of production by extending the growing season, switching to more profitable products, changing their market outlets, starting an additional value-added enterprise, and more. These farmers are maximizing the intensity of their operations, generating as much revenue per acre as they possibly can. Some increase the scale of their operations too but it isn't usually the first choice when they need to grow their net farm income.

They are often debt-averse. This can be a positive or negative attribute depending on the circumstances. Minimizing or avoiding debt reduces demands on a farm's cash flow. However, it can also make a farm an extremely labor-intensive enterprise. It also slows down or prevents a farm from increasing its scope or scale to a level that provides a sustainable living. The key to making debt decisions is being able to distinguish between productive and unproductive debt. Will debt ultimately put the farm in a better or worse financial position? Taking an operating loan with a commercial lender to avoid using credit cards to cover the farm's operating expenses is usually productive debt. Financing the purchase of a brand-new pickup truck for a small farm that generates \$100,000 of gross income is probably unproductive debt.

They are willing to live quite frugally on relatively small acreages. Not many direct-to-consumer farmers are living in 5,000-square-foot McMansions with 20 acres of surrounding lawn needing to be mowed. They tend to live in small, modest homes on farms less than 40 acres...sometimes less than five or ten acres. They grow products for home consumption as well as for sale. Some freeze, can, forage, or butcher their own food. Self-sufficiency is often a motivating factor in their decisions to become farmers.

I graduated from the University of Illinois in the depths of the 80s Farm Crisis. We really lost two generations of farmers back then; existing farmers who were forced out by economic circumstances and my classmates who were told there was no future in farming. It has been incredibly gratifying at this stage of my career to see so many great, hard-working people choosing to enter farming. They bring new energy and new ideas to agriculture. They are revitalizing rural communities that are desperately in need of some vitality. Perhaps the least tangible and most valuable attribute they bring to rural America is optimism. For that alone, we should all be thankful to this new generation of farmers.

Paul Dietmann is a Senior Focused Lending Specialist at Compeer Financial where he co-leads a loan program for direct-to-consumer and value-added farmers. He has been a county agricultural agent, Director of the Wisconsin Farm Center, and Wisconsin's Deputy Secretary of Agriculture. He holds a degree in Agricultural Economics from the University of Illinois and a Master's degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He has authored and co-authored numerous publications on topics related to farm financial management and taught hundreds of farm financial workshops. He lives in Prairie du Sac, Wisconsin with his wife, Julie, and their three children.



5 STEPS TO BOOST YOUR MARKETING AT THE FARMER'S MARKET

Summary: In this article, Grow Marketing + Communications will offer you five steps that you can take right now to help you improve your marketing for the farmers market season.

Your application was approved to participate in the farmers market. You're excited and ready for market day...except...you're not quite prepared when it comes to advertising your farmers market booth both digitally and traditionally. You know social media is an important component of a solid marketing mix, but what else can you do to ensure you stand out at the farmers market? In this article, Natalie Kenny Marquez, owner of Grow Marketing + Communications and President of the Illinois Farmers Market Association, will offer you five steps that you can take right now to help improve your marketing for the farmers market season.

Step 1: Define your audience

Who are your current customers, or rather, who do you WANT to be your customers? Knowing more about your customers such as demographics, general interests, shopping and buying habits, etc. are all necessary to understand when it comes to connecting with your intended customer base. Not sure where to start? Take the opportunity to connect with your customers while you're at the farmers market! Watch, listen, learn, ask questions, and engage with your customers. The farmers market offers you the unique opportunity to facetime directly with your customers. You'll learn so much about them and their shopping habits which you can then use to define your audience.

Follow-up tip from Natalie: If you have staff that helps you at the farmers market, ask them to help out, too. Come up with some questions to ask customers when they visit your booth. For example, simple questions to initiate casual (but helpful) conversation might include: "What brings you to the farmers market today?"; "Do you shop at the farmers market often?"; "What do you plan to do with the _____ when you take it home?"; "What's your favorite way to cook _____?". You can also use these conversations as content topics, which I'll talk more about in step 3.

Step 2: Choose the social media platform(s) that best suit your business and target your audience

Once you define your audience you should take a step back and examine your current social media presence. Are you on more than two or three social media platforms? If so, ask yourself if you are consistent with your presence on these platforms. In other words, are you posting diverse content, regularly, across all the platforms you are on? If not, it's time to scale back! Just because there are more social media platforms than you can count on both hands doesn't mean you need to be on all of them! My motto is to pick a couple of platforms that you can commit to and use them with consistency and effectiveness. More importantly, choose the platforms where your audience(s) are at! For many farmers market vendors, this includes Instagram and Facebook.

Follow-up tip from Natalie: In my experience, I have found that Instagram is one of the best social media platforms for farmers markets. The natural light and vivid colors lend itself to gorgeous photos that garner a lot of attention and likes. Pair this with some of the new features that Instagram offers, like reels and stories, and you're sure to connect with your farmers market audience!

Step 3: Develop high-quality content:

Pull out a notepad and write down 25 things you like about your product, business, farmers market display, farmers market that you attend, your customers, seasonal topics like winter/spring/summer/fall products, etc. If you can't make it to 25 then ask your staff, your favorite customers, or your fellow vendors! Each week pick one of the topics from your list and use it as a starting point for your social media content for the week. This gives you 25 weeks of content, which is about the same length as an outdoor farmers market season! Take photos that support each topic, post a short blog post on your website or a longer post on Facebook or Instagram, and even try to create a short explainer video

that supports that topic. You can even include people (with their permission) from your team and customer base in the content to help bring a more personalized and authentic spin to your storytelling. If you post the content on your social media, be sure to tag anyone involved in the content and, especially, the farmers market as a whole (your farmers market manager will thank you!).

Follow-up tip from Natalie: I love content development and helping farmers market vendors tell their stories. Personal stories are relatable, raw, real, and connectable. Consider using your farm story as content. Share photos of life on the farm, show your hands in the dirt, snap a photo of the box on your doorstep containing this year's seeds. What might seem mundane to you may be really interesting to your customers.

Tip 4: Use a scheduler

Utilize scheduling tools to help you keep consistent with your social media posts, which is key for farmers during the busy summer months. Platforms like Hootsuite and Sprout Social have been around for years and help you to schedule posts out over time. Facebook/Instagram's Meta Business Suite even allows you to schedule within the platform making consistency much easier during your busy times of the year. Although scheduling is great in keeping consistency on your platforms, don't use it as a way to "post it and forget it". If you're like me, you love to cross things off your list and move on. However, with social media, the purpose of the platforms is to increase engagement. It's your opportunity to connect with your customers outside of farmers market day. Therefore, you need to be sure you are regularly checking your platforms to keep up with feedback from your posts. You cannot just post or schedule posts to your social media accounts and forget about them. It is important to respond and like all the comments that come through on your posts.

Follow-up tip from Natalie: Don't be afraid to ask for help if you're new to social media or aren't sure how to navigate scheduling systems. Have someone walk you through how to do it the first few times, take a few notes, and then you should be able to do it on your own in the future. The purpose of scheduling is to help you be more efficient with your online presence, not to stress you out even more.

Tip 5: Check your digital insights and analytics

Social media platforms and websites offer a wealth of information about your customers and your online content. Digital analytics provide you with helpful data such as, what content brought the most engagement, what days or times of day you have the most user engagement, and what pages on your website get the most traffic. I love data because it really helps to define what works, and what doesn't work, and pushes you to strategize your marketing efforts to be more effective. You can often carry over what you learn from your digital presence into paid advertising. Understanding trends from your social media and website will help you know where to spend money on paid advertising. For example, if you want to create an ad on Facebook or Instagram, you're likely to choose a better target audience for that ad given that you have learned more about your audience from the insights provided by Meta Business Suite. Having data also helps when you have the budget to scale up your advertising to more traditional media, such as radio, television, and print. Knowing who your audience is, and confirming this through your analytics, will help you be wiser in your advertising choices and more likely to have a better return on your paid advertising investment.

Follow-up tip from Natalie: Use your digital analytics to understand when your users are engaging most with your content, then schedule your posts during these hours/days! Knowing this also helps you choose the best timeframe to post videos, share a Facebook live, etc.

Natalie Kenny Marquez
Grow Marketing + Communications, LLC
natalie@growmktg.com
www.growmktg.com

ENTERPRISE ANALYSIS: DETERMINING HOW YOUR FARM MAKES MONEY?

Any farmer can tell you IF their farm makes money, but it takes a higher-level manager to tell you HOW their farm makes money. Every farm knows whether there was a positive or negative number on the bottom line of last year's Schedule F tax form, indicating a net farm profit or loss. If the number was negative, they can probably also tell you if it was only negative due to non-cash expenses, like depreciation, and would have been positive otherwise. Or, if the number was positive, they can tell you how big a check they had to write for income taxes.

If you ask how much of the farmer's total profit came from each of their farm enterprises - e.g. how much came from corn, how much came from soybeans, how much came from hay, how much came from feeder cattle, and how much came from selling finished beef - you're more likely to get a response that comes with qualifiers like "best guess" and "gut feeling." Then, if you ask them how much of their profitability is likely to come from each enterprise in the NEXT year, your answer may be another question, such as "Can you tell me how much rain we're going to get?" or "Can you tell me what the markets are going to do?"

I feel like many farmers - especially beginning and early career farmers - are done a disservice by accounting only for the Schedule F, and thus only examining data they could use to make better financial decisions the following spring (or even the following fall if they apply for an income tax extension). Plus, the Schedule F is only designed to determine IF your farm made a profit - and thus has an income tax obligation - not HOW your farm made a profit. By placing all farm expenses in one big bucket, so to speak, any farm with multiple enterprises is on its own to determine how each enterprise contributed to net farm profitability.

My clients get immense value out of completing an enterprise budget for each one of their crop, livestock, or value-added pursuits. Importantly, enterprise budgets provide insight into unit-by-unit direct costs of production to determine gross profitability - that is, profitability before overhead expenses are subtracted out. It gives a great indication of primary cost centers, so if a farmer is trying to improve enterprise profitability, these production costs are the best place to start because every cost reduction will be multiplied through every acre, critter, or unit they produce. Of course, it's great to reduce overhead costs, too, they just don't add up as quickly.

Taking a hard look at each enterprise individually shows how each one is contributing to the bottom-line net profitability of the overall farm business (HOW you are making money). If an enterprise is a star performer with great profit margins, perhaps it can be expanded. If an enterprise has lower-than-expected profitability, the cost center with an outsized negative effect may become apparent. If an enterprise is actually losing money, the farmer can decide to make a drastic change, or cut it entirely. Once your financial management systems are in place, some of the most powerful insights come from setting enterprise objectives and evaluating how trends change over time now that you can make proactive decisions using timely financial data.

I know that very few farmers got into farming because they were excited to do paperwork, and some consider it a necessary evil that takes time away from the fun parts of farming. Nonetheless, I encourage my farmer clients to think beyond the Schedule F and do their financial management for themselves, not the "tax man." You can only manage what you measure, and this extra effort spent with your farm enterprise numbers can truly pay dividends.

Andy Larson
Farm Outreach Specialist
Food Finance Institute
780 Regent St, Suite 305
Madison, WI 53715
(608) 265-0621




CUCUMBER RECIPES

You talked, we listened! We heard from a lot of farmers and consumers that many people do not know what to do with fresh produce. To help fill the information gap we would like to include a produce tip and/or recipe at the end of every newsletter. If you have a recipe or a tip on how to prepare produce, please email Sarah at shoerner@fsbfamily.com. We will do our best to share as many as we can fit on the last page of every newsletter!

ICE BOX PICKLES IN A JAR

Shirley Zehr
Graymont, IL



Cucumbers sliced thin (fill jar to top)
3 big onions
4 cups sugar
4 cups Vinegar

1/2 cup salt
1 1/3 tsp turmeric
1 1/3 tsp celery seed
1 1/3 tsp mustard seed

Put onion in bottom of jar then cucumbers on top. Pour Mixture over the top of cucumbers. Ready in 5 days. Put in refrigerator they will keep until they are gone. (you do not have to heat anything)

BREAD AND BUTTER PICKLES

Mae/Shirley Zehr
Graymont, IL

12 cucumbers
1 cup sugar
1 tsp ginger
1 tsp turmeric

6 onions
1 tsp salt
1 tsp ground dry mustard
1 qt vinegar

Put cucumbers and onions in syrup and heat throughly. Do not boil. Put in jar and seal.



AG LENDING TEAM



RICH RITTER

Gridley

rritter@fsbfamily.com

309-747-3600



DAVID WYSS

Flanagan

dwyss@fsbfamily.com

815-796-2264

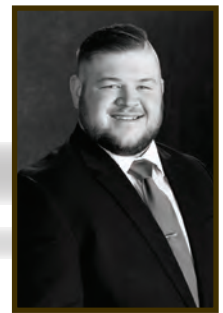


SARAH HOERNER

LeRoy

shoerner@fsbfamily.com

309-962-4707



LOGAN WEBER

Benson

lweber@fsbfamily.com

309-394-2785

www.flanaganstatebank.com

