

MARKETING

Marketing Pasture-Raised Products: Study Shows What Consumers Are Looking For

By Jano Nightingale

If you're a farmer producing pasture-raised meat and poultry products, you should be interested to learn what consumers think about these products. A recent study by Food Routes Network and Midwest Collaborators provides some useful information. The study was part of an effort to help farmers market their pasture-raised products more effectively.

The study involved six different focus groups with urban consumers in the states of Minnesota, Wisconsin and Iowa. The participants were of mixed ages, gender and education level, and were the primary food buyers in their households. It's important to note that this was not a random sample; consumers were selected who showed some awareness of the impacts of their food purchases on the environment.

OPPORTUNITIES AND BARRIERS

The study revealed a number of opportunities and barriers for marketing pasture-raised products. On one hand, these consumers said that they are open to trying new products. They care about the potential health benefits they see in pasture-raised products. They also would like to support local farmers and have some concern about animal welfare.

On the other hand, they said they are less likely to trust products produced without regulation. As consumers, they would expect the product to cost more. But in order for them to be willing to pay the higher price, they would also expect a higher quality product.

KNOW YOUR CUSTOMERS' SHOPPING HABITS AND CONCERNS

Convenience was a key issue for con-

FARM FOLLIES

The Joy of Gardening - Or Not

By Rebecca Schuelke

Summertime always brings to mind fresh vegetables and for many of us from farms, that means homegrown fresh vegetables.

My first garden was in a corner of a cornfield on my father's dairy farm in Upstate New York. I was 11 and a member of the Snickerdoodle 4-H Club in Cayuga County. It wasn't really a club because it was just my two brothers and me, but that's what we called it and it suited our purposes. At that time, our purposes were going to Cayuga County Fair and bringing home as many ribbons as possible. I had already come to the conclusion that I was not going to win champion dairy-showing ribbons, so, like a good farmer's daughter, I diversified into baked goods, a wildflower collection and vegetables.

I work for 4-H now and of course we teach all our youth that club work is not about winning prizes; it's an educational process and the skills you teach yourself are more valuable than the ribbons. Back then, though, I really wanted that cheap strip of blue cloth.

My father was all for sending me out into the yard with a pickaxe and shovel to start my garden. However, it quickly became apparent to me that the corner of a cornfield is an ideal place for a garden, because you can skip all the pesky details of garden preparation, including plotting out a spot, digging, breaking ground, digging, pulling weeds and digging. The downside is your father might make you walk behind the tiller

sumers in this study. Although they may take the trouble to shop at farmers markets, roadside stands and butcher shops, they want the shopping location to be convenient. "I go on cost and convenience - the amount of time I have to shop and if I'm already in that area," said one of the participants.

These customers all agreed that coupons, sales promotions and samples encourage them to try new products. Recommendations from friends and family also inspire them to try a new product.

Many consumers said that when it comes to meat and poultry, looks sell. They want to see the product to check for freshness and fat deposits. Some check for the date on the package, but acknowledge that they have seen too many stories about repackaging to truly trust the date.

When it comes to dairy, it's the expiration date these respondents look for first. Brand names were also sited as being extremely important with dairy products. "I always buy Morning Glory milk. I don't care how much it costs. The other stuff doesn't seem to stay fresh as long," commented one of the respondents.

The focus groups agreed that pasture-raised animals should be generally healthier, with less toxins and disease than those raised in a confined area. Their concerns about pasture systems included the quality of pasture and the effect of a grass-based diet on the taste of the product.

Although many participants had purchased meat and poultry directly from farmers, they experienced some problems in doing so. Most expressed satisfaction with the product, but found that there was either too

picking up rocks for a whole cornfield, but at least you get out of digging a garden.

I carefully selected my garden plants based on my favorite vegetables: turnips, parsnips, and radishes. Or maybe I just grabbed the first 10 seed packets I saw. After careful tending of my garden all summer, or maybe it was just dumb luck, I had a nice selection of parsnips to enter into the fair. Of course, that year was a drought and the Cayuga County Fair comes a little early in the growing season, so these parsnips were the size of baby corn. Nonetheless, my parsnips were selected for exhibition at the New York State Fair. This was a banner year for me, the first and only year my projects were selected to go onto the state fair. My wildflower collection, dietetic cookies and parsnips all made the trip to Syracuse. Regrettably, no one suggested my Holstein heifer, Dusky, should come along, too.

My wildflowers and cookies both yielded ribbons, but, amazingly — considering all the hard work I put into the garden - my parsnips went home with a participation ribbon. I know a lot of adults who would suggest there is a lesson to be learned here, but, personally, I blame the parsnips.

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much meat for their family or they ended up with cuts they didn't want. Some also said that they stopped buying meat this way when prices went up for processing.

Consumers also expressed some skepticism about how products sold at farmers markets or roadside stands are processed, and whether they meet standards for safety. Most respondents were not particularly trusting of the corporations that provide food products either. "I look at the expiration date, though now I've seen the reports that they actually change the date," said one of the participants.

While many of the respondents say they worry about the use of hormones and antibiotics, they worry even more about e-coli, salmonella, mad cow disease and other illness causing bacteria. Many say that they look for hormone-free, antibiotic-free, and organic products when available.

DEVELOP AN EFFECTIVE MARKETING "MESSAGE"

Participants in the six focus groups were asked numerous questions about the terms pasture-raised, natural, free range and grass-fed. Their consensus was that pasture-raised is the term that best represents the type of production described and the benefits mentioned.

When it comes right down to it, respondents said that the message they need to hear is one of healthy and tasty food for their families. They are in favor of production practices that promotes the animal's well being and the environment. But in the

FARM FOLLIES

Farmer vs. Car Salesman

A wise old farmer went to town to buy a new pickup truck that he saw advertised in the paper for a certain price. After telling the salesman which truck he wanted, they set down to do the paperwork. The salesman handed the farmer the bill, and the farmer declared "This isn't the price I saw!". The salesman went on to tell the old wise farmer how he was getting extras such as power steering, power brakes, power windows, special tires, etc. and that was what took the price up. The farmer, needing the truck badly, paid the price and went home.

A few months later, the salesman called up the farmer and said, "My son is in 4-H and he needs a cow for a project. Do you have any for sale?"

The farmer replied, "Yes, I have a few cows I would sell for \$500 apiece, Come and look at them and take your pick". The salesman said he and his son would be right out. After spending a few hours in the field checking out all the farmer's cows, the two decided on one and the salesman proceeded to write out a check for \$500.

The farmer said "Now wait a minute, that's not the final price of the cow, you're getting extras with it and you have to pay for that too".

"What extras?" asked the salesman. Below is the list the farmer gave the salesman for the final price of the cow...

BASIC COW	.....	\$ 500.00
Two-tone exterior	.....	.45.00
Extra stomach	.....	.75.00
Product storing equipment	.....	60.00
Straw compartment	.....	120.00
4 spigots @\$10 ea	.....	.40.00
Leather upholstery	.....	125.00
Dual horns.	.....	.45.00
Automatic fly swatter	.....	.38.00
Fertilizer attachment.	.....	.185.00
GRAND TOTAL	.....	\$1,233.00

end their biggest concern is convenient access to healthy, good tasting food at a reasonable price.

They agreed that a marketing message to promote pasture-raised products should be brief and to the point, easy to understand, and should indicate benefits to the customer. According to these consumers, the "REAL" label coined by the dairy industry is an example of an effective message.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRODUCERS

The focus groups made several recommendations for marketing pasture-raised products. First is that producers should develop a logo or label to identify their products. Second, they recommended that farmers explore the options for a cooperative marketing campaign that would develop and publicize general standards.

Marketing efforts that include coupons, discounts and samples at grocery stores, farmers markets or roadside stands were also recommended. Information about the consumer health aspects of pasture-raised products should be provided. And finally, it was suggested that farmers make access to the product as convenient as possible while still maintaining consistency and a sense of professionalism.

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What do you give a sick pig?
Oinkment

What is the easiest way to
count cattle?
Cowculator

Why did the foal cough?
It was a little horse

Why did the pig go to the casino?
To play the slop machine

What kind of milk comes
from a forgetful cow?
Milk of amnesia

How did the egg stay fit?
Eggercise

Did you hear the one about the
cat who ate the ball of yarn?
It had mittens

Why did the turkey
cross the road?
To prove it wasn't chicken

Why can't cows drive boats?
Because they can't
steer the udder

What do you call a sleeping bull?
A bulldozer

What did the egg do
when it read these jokes?
It cracked up
