

CHAPTER 11

Promotion, Field Days, and Tastings

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We know from the experience of the past five years that the market for range-reared standard turkeys (also known as “heritage” turkeys) is increasing dramatically. A prime example of this trend is a farmer in Sonoma County, California who had pre-sold all her 200 Narragansett and Standard Bronze turkeys by Memorial Day weekend for the 2005 holiday season. Who are the customers who order Thanksgiving turkeys in May and pay top dollar? What will attract others like them to be your customers?

These consumers are people who make choices based on what they believe, and their actions line up with their personal values. Typically, they care deeply about the well-being of people, animals, and the environment. They want to know where their food comes from, and they value the role the small producer plays in providing clean, nutritious, fresh food. These consumers favor direct, first-hand experience and enjoy building relationships with farmers and ranchers. Your potential customers value authenticity and reject things that are glitzy or fake. Some good news for the small farmer is that there are tens of millions of these people in the United States, and their number is growing. They are not tied to any geographic region, political party, level of education, or income. They represent all walks of life such as teachers, accountants, artists, pastors, chefs, and shoe saleswomen. You have an opportunity as a producer to communicate your story to them, and in turn, they will support you and your product.

Your Story

To promote your farm to this receptive group of potential customers, you must tell them the story that is most true about you, your farm, and your turkeys. Make the effort to articulate your story. This will be a critically important investment of your time. Be assured that the life you live every day on your farm is full of fascination for your customers, even if it seems commonplace to you. What you do may seem ordinary, but it is extraordinary in the eyes of others.

In composing your story, here are some things to think about:

- What is your farm’s history, size, and location?
- How many generations of your family are involved in the farm? What roles do they play?
- What role does your farm play in your community?
- What is the history of your turkey variety(s)? Why have you selected this variety?
- What unique farming practices are you using?
- What are the flavors and textures that come from the variety of turkey, the environment, your stewardship?
- Who are your competitors, and why are you better? How are you distinctive and memorable?

This is not an invitation to spin or concoct a story. Your customers are interested in what is real and genuine. Composing your story is not simple, so be easy on yourself. Choose words that serve your image and position in the poultry market. Be clear and direct and avoid the passive voice. For example use phrases like “I feed my turkeys,” not “My turkeys get fed.” Your message must be as comfortable to you as an old pair of boots – otherwise, you won’t wear it.

Every manifestation of your message (letterhead, newsletter, logo on a t-shirt) must be consistent. Good, effective promotion is the result of a thousand consistent acts, all supporting the same message. With practice you will be able to describe your farm and birds in a concise, compelling statement. Some people call this the “30-second commercial” or the “elevator speech.” You may tire of repeating it, but remember this image-builder’s adage: “When the DJ is getting sick of the song, the public is just picking up the beat!”

Your Logo and Packaging

A logo is a graphic element that captures and represents the personality of your business. Think of the Nike swoosh on Tiger Woods’s baseball cap. You want your logo to be distinctly different from others in the market.



Sample label from Good Shepherd Turkey Ranch. Photo by Frank Reese.

You may already have a logo for your farm. Is it appropriate for your turkey production? Does it deliver the message that fits the values of your target consumers described above? Does it represent the personality of your farm? Your logo is the hallmark of your image.

A good logo incorporates the following characteristics:

- Uniqueness
- A clear and identifiable image
- Appropriate colors
- Ability to be effectively reproduced in black-and-white or color, in a small or large size
- Ability to be easily printed on a variety of materials (newsprint, cardstock, cloth)

Packaging is an extension of your message. To have impact, the design of your image and packaging must be consistent with your story. Stay away from fast food colors (red and bright yellow) and embrace subdued tones that convey dependability, quality, and earthiness. A well-chosen logo and packaging can serve you for ten years or more.

Your logo and packaging do not need to be fancy or expensive. For example a successful small producer of

sheep's milk cheese wraps her product in old-fashioned, white butcher paper that she decorates by rubber stamping the image of a sheep she found in a child's art kit. If you decide you would like the assistance of a professional designer, see if you can trade your farm's product for the service.

Labeling

Most labels contain the logo and some wording. The words can be your slogan or tagline. Labels can include:

- Name and logo
- Address
- Directions for handling the product
- Net weight
- Claims – e.g. organic, pasture-raised, natural
- Geographic region
- Breed

USDA regulates labeling, and a label must be pre-approved before use. This can take a long time so you must take this into consideration far in advance of your processing date. Also, some states may have their own regulations, so you will need to investigate with your state government for details as well. (See Chapter 9, Processing and Marketing Regulations, for more details on labeling.)

Promotional Activities

As good as your farm's product looks and tastes at the local farmers' market, your customers may find it even more appealing and delicious if they buy and pick up at the farm. Being on the farm lets your customers see first hand your place, your people, your passion, and your poultry. The customers will connect to your farm and form a strong, lasting link to your products.

There are various ways to bring customers to your farm. These include Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) pickup, a farm stand, and special events such as field days. Each of these can contribute positively to building agricultural literacy in your community while having positive effects to your financial flow. Your customers will become avid supporters of a local food system and become less dependent on agribusiness and industrial food. It all ties together to create local production that is truly supported by local consumption.

A well-planned field day will promote your farm and

its products. It is an event that is fun for everyone, but it will be a large amount of work for you. The farm should be in tip-top shape with no unmended fences or muddy pathways. There should be shelter from the rain or sun, ample parking, adequate restrooms, and plenty of signage. Plan for structured and engaging activities for the children that come to visit the farm. Post rules such as “Please don’t feed the animals” so that it is clear that the safety of your animals and guests are a priority. As with any event and venue, check with your insurance agent regarding your liability coverage.

Contact your local newspaper several months before your field day and ask to be listed in the paper’s community calendar. Give the paper a short description of your event that is tied to your image and core message. Tell people what to expect and encourage them to wear appropriate attire for “tromping” around a farm. If you are cooking or offering samples, make sure to include this information in your advertising of the event. Will you be offering recipes? If so, mention it. Be sure to

invite your local newspaper to send a reporter and photographer to enjoy the fun.

Tastings

With an estimated 400 million inexpensive, industrial turkeys flooding the U.S. market each year, most of us have not had the pleasure of tasting one of the rare turkey varieties. Fortunately, the nation’s food writers are enthusiastic supporters of range-reared standard turkeys. Here are just a few comments:

“We were amazed at the white meat, which was finely grained, extremely succulent, and the most flavorful.”

— Leslie Brenner, *L.A. Times*

“It has the turkey flavor that is merely hinted at in supermarket turkeys.”

— Marian Burros, *New York Times*

“Now I understand what turkey was like before the triumph of the Broad Breasted White, and why turkey had once been considered a great treat – heretofore one of the mysteries of life.”

— Michael Pollan, author and journalist

“\$3.99: Price per pound for a rare heritage turkey.

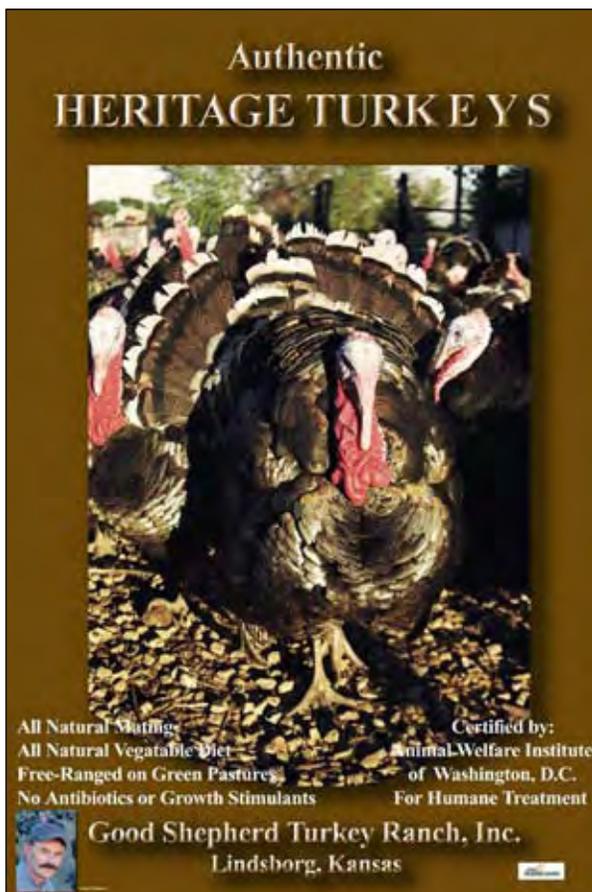
These old-fashioned, low tech turkeys are smaller and skinnier than their broad-breasted cousins. Don’t fret about the price; they’re all sold out.”

— *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*

In 2006 the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy, in collaboration with the Renewing American Food Traditions (RAFT) project, began the development of poultry tasting protocols. You can contact ALBC to receive instructions on “blind tasting” your turkeys alongside samples of industrial birds. Invite local chefs to join the tasting.

Chefs often rave about the taste of heritage turkeys. Building a relationship with a local chef who believes in the “Eat Local” food ethic will be advantageous to your marketing plan. Encourage the chef to use your turkeys and suggest attributing your farm on the menu.

A notable marketing resource for independent producers is Slow Food USA, an organization dedicated to supporting and celebrating the food traditions of North America. The organization includes thousands of members in the United States and can provide national exposure for your farm. If there is a Slow Food chapter (also known as a Convivium) in your area, contact the members about a tasting opportunity.



Promotional poster for supermarket display. Photo courtesy of Frank Reese.

In all of your contacts and promotional activities, it is important and beneficial to deliver a clear and consistent image. Aim your marketing message at people who will value your products because your farm is small, your practices are ecologically sound, and your turkeys are non-industrial, rare breeds that deserve a place on the farm and table.

Resources

American Livestock Breeds Conservancy, PO Box 477, Pittsboro, NC 27312, (919) 542-5704, albc@albc-usa.org, www.albc-usa.org.

ATTRA - National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service, PO Box 3657, Fayetteville, AR, 72702, (800) 346-9140 (English), (800) 411-3222 (Español), <http://attra.ncat.org/>.

Chefs Collaborative, 262 Beacon St. Boston, MA 02116, (617) 236-5200, (617) 236-5272, www.chefscollaborative.com.

Slow Food USA, 20 Jay Street, Suite 313, Brooklyn, NY 11201, (718) 260-8000, fax (718) 260-8068, info@slowfoodusa.org, www.slowfoodusa.org.

USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service Labeling and Consumer Protection Staff, http://www.fsis.usda.gov/About_Fsis/labeling_&_consumer_protection/index.asp, USDA Technical Service Center, Suite 300, Landmark Center, 1299 Farnam Street, Omaha, NE, 68102, (402) 344-5000, fax (402) 344-5005.

USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service, *Labeling 101*, <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/oppde/larc/Policies/Label101/Index.htm>, USDA Technical Service Center, Suite 300, Landmark Center, 1299 Farnam Street, Omaha, NE, 68102, (402) 344-5000, fax (402) 344-5005.



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