

CHAPTER 12

Connecting with Consumers – Marketing Systems and Effective Approaches

By Barbara Bowman, *Boss Dog Marketing*

Marketing means communicating about a product in a way that encourages people to buy. In the case of heritage turkeys, you will be communicating about a product that can have multiple attributes:

- A rare variety of turkey that is part of the genetic trust
- A humanely raised bird
- A bird that can fly, forage, and naturally reproduce
- A product of a small farm
- A local product

Clearly there are people who make their purchases based solely on price. They buy based on cost alone, unaware perhaps of the hidden expenses of industrial farming. These are NOT your customers. They will continue to buy their turkeys at the supermarket or the big box store that advertises the lowest price per pound. Trying to compete for this customer base does not make good business sense.

On the other hand, your potential customers are ones that consider more than “bang for the buck” when making food choices. They are “Big Picture” people concerned with both environmental and social factors in their food purchases. These are the customers that will pay more for one of your turkeys because your farming practices are ecologically sound, the turkeys represent an important link to biodiversity, and all taste tests document that these birds have superior flavor and texture.

Your marketing message must speak to the receptive audience of “Big Picture” consumers. Your commitment to farming and rare breeds will engage the attention and loyalty of these customers. They respect you as an on-the-ground farmer (not an absentee landlord) with your hands directly involved in raising turkeys. It will be a key element in your business plan to develop a direct relationship with these customers.

Once you have convinced people to purchase your product, you must include as part of your marketing strategy the education of your consumers about the preparation of the birds. Chefs and cooks agree that these turkeys cook more quickly than the industrial

birds. If your customers eat ill-prepared birds, the likelihood of them becoming return customers will be slim. When customers pick up your birds give them a recipe card with suggestions for brining, stuffing, and cooking the birds. This way the consumer has the best chance for a positive eating experience.

Consumer Direct Strategies

1. On the Farm. No doubt your turkeys are quite an appealing sight, especially when the toms are in full feather and strutting. The health and security of the birds are paramount, but if you can find a safe way for farm visitors to see your birds, it is advantageous for your marketing strategy to do so. Be sure you are prepared with order forms with your farm’s logo and core message to give to visitors (see Chapter 11, *Promotion, Field Days, and Tastings*). If you are scheduling turkey pickups at your farm, make sure you have checked local regulations and are compliant with the law before arranging sales. Having customers collect birds over a period of a few days, instead of one, will offer your busy customers more flexibility and help you avoid being over-run by the holiday rush.

2. Farmers’ Markets. Utilize the farmers’ market to recruit customers and take orders beginning as early as summer. (Remember, you will probably sell out early.) Whether you can deliver the turkeys at the market is a matter of market policy and local ordinances. You will need to check regulations before making plans for pickup. Make plans well in advance since you may be required to have a meat handler’s license and a central delivery point with refrigeration.

3. Raise-To-Own. You can pre-sell your birds to customers during the summer months. This method is attractive for some but can have a drawback: you can’t be certain that your flock will yield the exact weights that people specify when they pre-purchase. You may manage this by raising more birds than you pre-sell so all pre-purchase customers are satisfied. Again, check with local ordinances to ensure that you are complying with the law when selling birds from your farm.

4. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA).

This form of direct marketing partnership is growing rapidly in the United States. Based on mutual support and trust, this arrangement allows customers to pay the farmer a sum in advance (usually at the beginning of the growing season) in exchange for a weekly selection of fresh fruits, vegetables, and sometimes flowers and meats. CSA customers are good food citizens who realize the power of consumers to influence the market. These are your kind of people. Find a way to connect to this market. If your farm already operates on a CSA basis, consider adding a “turkey share” to your offering. Customers will have the option of subscribing for one (or more) of your range-reared standard turkeys at your full retail price. If you are not involved in a CSA, you might partner with a farmer who has established one. Similar arrangements exist between produce growers and farmers who raise Barred Plymouth Rock chickens on range, for example.

5. Internet Marketing. There are a number of ways farmers can market their products to consumers through the internet. You can register your farm free of charge on several organizations’s lists. These include

- **Heritage Turkey Producer’s List**, American Livestock Breeds Conservancy, PO Box 477, Pittsboro, NC, 27312, (919) 542-5704, albc@albc-usa.org, www.albc-usa.org
- **Pastured Products Directory**, Eat Wild, 9609 SW 288th Street, Vashon, WA 98070, (866) 453-8489, www.eatwild.com/products/index.html
- **Eat Well Guide**, Global Resource Action Center for the Environment, Sustainable Table Project, 215 Lexington Avenue, Suite 1001, New York, NY 10016, (212) 991-1858, info@eatwellguide.org, www.eatwellguide.org
- **Local Harvest Farm Listings**, Local Harvest, 220 21st Ave, Santa Cruz, CA 95062, (831) 475-8150, www.localharvest.org

6. Local Marketing Collaborations. Join locally based marketing efforts created by collaborative organizations to support sustainable agriculture. Usually these types of groups have promotional events such as “Farm Days” and follow up by publishing lists of members and products, often with maps to locate growers of local products. Groups such as these deliver a strong, place-based message: *Eat locally and support small farms.* Collaborative marketing is a powerful tool. You can be

an interesting, dynamic fish in a school, and you can swim places you wouldn’t go alone.

7. Other Sales Outlets. The quality of the heritage turkeys and the national publicity that has welcomed their return to the market has created interest from natural food co-ops, independent butcher shops, and restaurants. Explore these outlets in your locale. Although you probably will not realize the benefit of full retail price, these opportunities offer great exposure for your product. Be creative. For example, if you sell to a restaurant, suggest to the chef that the name of your farm appear on the menu.

8. Working with a Professional Marketer.

Marketing your own turkeys has both economic and social benefits for you and your customers. You get top dollar and the gratitude of the people who value your product. Direct contact with their bird’s grower gives customers the satisfaction of knowing the origin of their food. In turn, they will know they have purchased product from a conscientious producer who is making every effort to provide a good life for their birds and superior food for their consumers.

Should you want the assistance of marketing middlemen, consider using a business that promotes and sells heritage birds via mail order and the internet. Some of these companies include D’Artagnan, Dean & DeLuca, Heritage Foods USA, and Local Harvest. But, remember, in order to get the attention of these marketers, you will have to be able to differentiate your farm and tell your story. Keep in mind that once you have your story in place, you may decide down the road to market directly, yourself.

Public Relations

Public relations is the business of generating goodwill toward your farm and products. Through communications and activities, you and others promote a favorable relationship with your customers. The media can be invaluable here. When a member of the press recommends your turkeys (or your breed), the impact is immediate and far reaching. You want to build a strong relationship with your local press and be recognized as a trusted, reliable source for information on poultry, sustainable agriculture, roasting turkeys, saving the family farm, etc. Here are some guidelines for working with the media:

1. Make sure you have a story. What is your message?

Think about the story angle you want to pitch to a busy writer.

2. Become familiar with the writers and the publications including their scope, style, and audience. Consider the publication schedule. Many magazines go to press three months in advance of the publication date (that means August for Thanksgiving).

3. Never *sell* to the press. It is good practice to inform them. Keep in mind that writers are information specialists and professional wordsmiths. Present them with the facts in a concise, well-organized format. Resist the temptation to quote another writer's review of your product regardless of how brilliant the endorsement was. Writers will not quote other writers. Besides, if a writer believes the story has already been written, you will lose his/her interest. Create and use simple tools such as a written history of the farm, your background, and a description of your turkeys and how you raise them.

4. Be consistent. Tell the story that emphasizes how you are unique. Don't pick up on trendy marketing terms (unless they fit like a glove). Trendy terms have a very short shelf life and lose punch very quickly. Paint the genuine picture of your farm. Reach for fresh, precise

words that describe how you are different.

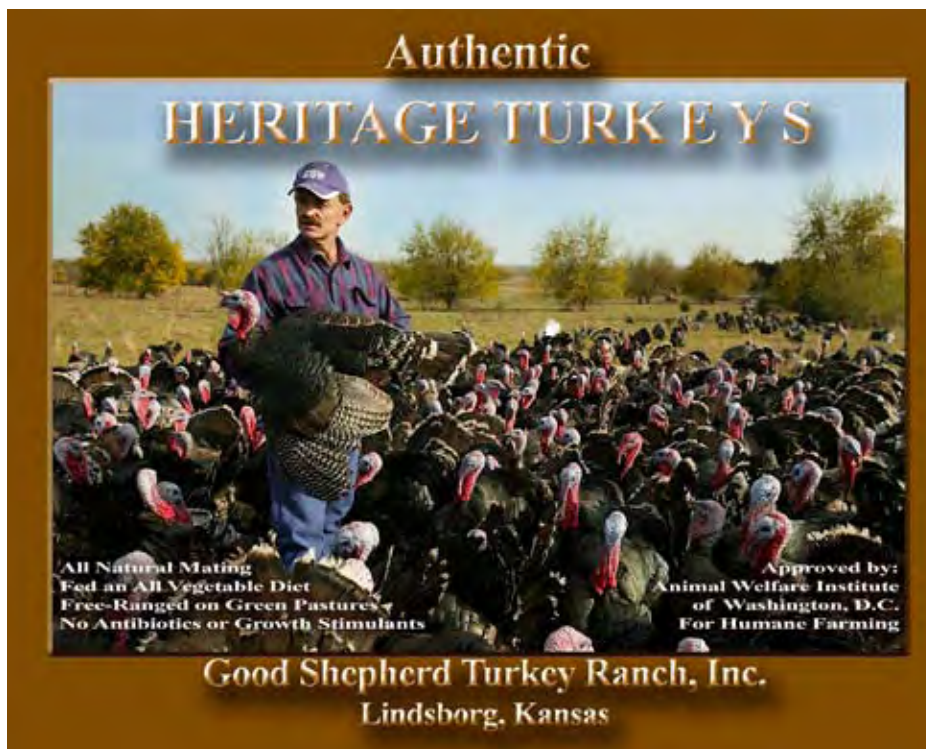
5. Create a good database of food, agriculture, lifestyle and environmental writers that is regularly updated. (Note that writers and editors change publications of-ten.) You want to have the correct name (and spelling) of your contact at the newspaper, magazine, or radio station. A phone call to verify both is a good idea. Learn the writer's preference – e-mail, fax, postal, or phone call. Learn when the deadline days are, and make contact at another, less-pressured time.

6. When you realize the positive impact of their stories, contact the writers and thank them.

Advertising

While you cannot control the content of a journalist's story, you can control the copy and visual content of a paid-for advertisement. Advertising is expensive, and to be effective, it must be repetitive. Cultivating relationships with writers, and benefiting from their third-party endorsements, is preferable to spending money on advertising. However, there are inexpensive ads you will want to consider – for example, ads that tie to your community and the values of your consumer (for example, a small ad in the local Future Farmers program or the *Breeders and Products Directory* of the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy.)

There is a current trendy form of advertisement called the "advertorial." These ads are designed to look like editorial copy. The reader is (mis)led to believe that a page of well-illustrated copy is the objective work of a professional journalist. The advertorial is, in fact, paid advertisement (printed in tiny letters somewhere on the page). Be cautious. Remember, your customers can see straight through a deceptive marketing scheme.



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

Newsletters and Websites

Many small farms consider their newsletters indispensable tools for communicating with customers and building brand loyalty. Remember, the day-to-day activities on your farm are fascinating to people who seek to reconnect to the land, small farms, and animal stewardship. Many CSAs publish monthly (even weekly) newsletters. Customers pass newsletters on to prospective customers, and the market grows. The format is generally straightforward – printed with black ink on recycled paper. Some farms use their websites or e-mail newsletters (conserving postage, ink, and paper). To see examples of how a newsletter can capture and promote the personality of your farm, visit www.ladybugletter.com (California) or www.boggycreekfarm.com (Texas), or www.cedarmeadowfarm.net (Connecticut). These newsletters deliver the engaging, inviting messages of small farm life, healthy environment, the seasons, quality, and stewardship – all values that attract the people you want to be your loyal customers.



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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), www.attra.ncat.org.

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USDA Alternative Farming Systems Information Center, www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/csa, USDA Technical Service Center, Suite 300, Landmark Center, 1299 Farnam Street, Omaha, NE 68102, (402) 344-5000, fax (402) 344-5005.

— *The New American Farmer – Profiles of Agricultural Innovation*.

— *Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Direct Marketing Resource Guide* www.sare.org/publications/dmrg.htm.