



Are You Ready to Sell? *Selling Strategies for Local Food Producers*

Adapted from University of Missouri Extension Guide G6222 by Bill McKelvey, Department of Rural Sociology; Mary Hendrickson, Department of Rural Sociology; and Joe Parcell, Department of Agricultural Economics, originally published in 2007.

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For many farmers, marketing and selling their products are the most challenging parts of the farm enterprise, especially when selling directly to consumers. However, direct markets for fresh and unique food products are among the most rapidly growing farm opportunities. People around the country are looking to buy tasty, healthy food directly from farmers — farmers with whom they can talk, ask questions and build relationships. However, these new market opportunities, particularly in farmers' markets, community supported agriculture (CSA), roadside stands, restaurants and cooperatives, require expertise in selling as well as marketing, production and financial management.

In any business, marketing and selling go hand in hand. Marketing describes a range of activities that include deciding what to

produce and how to price, distribute and promote a product. Selling, on the other hand, describes the techniques used to entice buyers to exchange their cash for the seller's products. Despite the images that many people hold of pushy "salesmen" who won't take no for an answer, or the "natural-born salesman" who gets people to buy products without much effort, developing strong selling skills is critically important to acquiring and keeping customers in a direct marketing enterprise. And, while many farmers may be intimidated by the idea of selling, it is important to remember that selling skills — just like other skills — can be learned.

The selling techniques described in this guide are customer-friendly and ethical. There is no advice on how to trick or manipulate customers, or how to get customers to buy something they don't

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THE CHESTNUT GROWER

Fall 2019

About Chestnut Growers of America, Inc.

The purpose of Chestnut Growers of America is to promote chestnuts, to disseminate information to growers of chestnuts, to improve communications between growers within the industry, to support research and breeding work, and generally to further the interests and knowledge of chestnut growers. CGA advocates the delivery of only high-quality chestnuts to the marketplace.

CGA began as the Western Chestnut Growers in 1996 in Oregon where about 30 or so chestnut growers understood the need to join forces to promote chestnuts in the U.S. Eventually they realized that they needed to be a national organization and solicited memberships from every grower in the country, which took the membership to over 100. The name of the organization was changed to Chestnut Growers of America, Inc., and it was granted 501(c)(5) status. Annual meetings take place around the country in an effort to make it possible for a maximum number of people to attend. A newsletter, *The Chestnut Grower*, is published quarterly and distributed by mail and/or email. CGA maintains an extensive resource site available only to members containing information helpful in growing and marketing. Visit chestnutgrowers.org for more information.

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Single membership, \$35; Household membership, \$45; Associate membership, \$50. Members receive *The Chestnut Grower* quarterly. Emailed newsletters are included. Mailed newsletters are an additional \$5 per year. A \$5 discount applies if payment is postmarked or submitted through the website by Feb. 15.

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Deadlines

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Deadline</i>	<i>Mailed</i>
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Editorial Opinion

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Message from CGA President Roger Blackwell, Chestnut Grower



I hope your chestnut harvest season is going well. Some of the chestnut orchards this year are having mixed results because of extreme weather conditions, like too much rain at the wrong time of the year. Climate change has impacted some of our chestnut orchards across the country.

In this message, I am presenting two topics for our attention this next year. This next year our 2020 annual CGA meeting will be in a new location, State College, Pennsylvania. The dates of the meeting are **Sunday, June 7, 2020 through Tuesday, June 9, 2020**. These changes were made due to better prices for hotel rooms and meeting rooms available. At Penn State University, the chestnut facilities will be open for touring on Monday, June 8, 2020. We will have more information in the January issue for everyone's planning schedules.

The second topic is the chestnut allergen classification. Erin Lizotte, MSU Senior Educator, is researching if there is a legitimate justification for chestnuts being included on the FDA list of major food allergens or if it was just consolidated with what most people think is another tree nut. Erin has a theory that chestnuts were such a small industry at the time of drafting the guidelines that the FDA decided to be on the safe side as to the classification of chestnut. Erin is working with University of Nebraska Food Allergy Resource and Outreach Program as well as an Ag economist who specializes in law at MSU. Their recommendations would be to have the chestnut industry submit a proposed revision to FDA. We as an organization with the other chestnut growers' groups around the country will need to start working to draft a proposed revision together. We will start here in Michigan and reach out to get feedback to create the changes necessary to write the draft proposal. More information on this topic will be shared in the next year.

As this is the harvest season, the focus of this newsletter is on marketing. Last October, we covered marketing techniques such as farm trails, on-farm markets, farmers' markets, and u-pick. In this issue, we cover selling strategies for local food producers and selling to local chefs/restaurants.

I encourage anyone in our organization to provide articles for future newsletters. We are all learning each year something new about growing chestnut trees in our orchards.

I hope you all have a plentiful harvest in the fall 2019 and a wonderful holiday season. Best regards,

Roger



Chestnuts: Not “Tree Nuts”

When it comes to marketing chestnuts, the task should be easy from a nutritional standpoint, right? This food product is gluten-free, low in fat, high in vitamin C and cholesterol-free. In addition to all of these things though, chestnuts are also technically classified as a tree nut in the FDA's Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act (FALCPA) of 2004. Chestnuts must be labeled as tree nuts, which are classified as a “major food allergen” by the FDA. In addition to the technical definition of tree nuts as allergens, another connotation exists. Tree nuts are also viewed as fatty and oily by many.

Erin Lizotte, Senior Educator at Michigan State University Extension, is currently researching if there is a legitimate justification for chestnuts being included on the FDA list of major food allergens or if it was just consolidated with what most people think is another tree nut. Erin has a theory that chestnuts were such a small industry at the time of drafting the guidelines that the FDA decided to be on the safe side as to the classification of chestnut. Erin is working with University of Nebraska Food Allergy Resource and Outreach Program as well as an Ag economist who specializes in law at MSU. Their recommendations would be to have the chestnut industry submit a proposed revision to FDA. We as an organization with the other chestnut growers' groups around the country will need to start working to draft a proposed revision together. We will start in Michigan and

reach out to get feedback to create the changes necessary to write the draft proposal. More information on this topic will be shared with the CGA membership in the next year.

If you have thoughts on these movements or information that might be helpful, please contact Erin Lizotte at taylo548@msu.edu or 231-944-6504.

In 2007, there were two different pushes to get chestnuts classified as something other than tree nuts, one due to the allergy issue, the other due to the fatty connotation. Here is a sampling of correspondence on the issue that was published in *The Chestnut Grower* at that time, for context:

From Dennis Fulbright, Professor Emeritus, Department of Plant, Soil and Microbial Sciences, Michigan State University:

We have had a consultant looking into chestnut and its potential allergenic issues. In brief emails with Dr. Steve Taylor at U Nebraska, Lincoln (He's among the nation's top experts on food allergens), he advised that the latex allergy is the most common one associated with chestnuts. The low presence of chestnuts in the market likely play into very low incidents, and not a lot of study on the subject. It appears that there is no known correlation between other tree nut allergens and chestnuts.

However, we now have found that they have done something completely different. Summarizing:

What it comes down to is simply that the FALCPA law says they are tree nuts and therefore they must be labeled as such (and by implication treated as such in the food processing sector).

Furthermore, if the chestnut industry wants to make an argument that chestnuts are not tree nuts or that chestnut protein is non-allergenic or that chestnut allergen protein is present only in low levels below a threshold of concern, it's up to the industry to petition the FDA. The reality is that there is no defined 'threshold,' and only when the thresholds are defined can we petition – a bit of a catch-22.

So, the law is the law, and science will not carry the day until the science is on record. And that will be a whole other investment by some part of the industry at some future date.

In further inquiries to the FDA, its representative provided the following insight:

Regarding your question asking about the inclusion of chestnuts on FDA's list of tree nuts in our FALCPA industry guidance document, please see the last paragraph at the bottom page 6 of the attached Senate Committee Report that accompanied the bill that became the law known as the Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act of 2004 (FALCPA). That paragraph explains the Senate Committee's view of what the term 'major food allergen' should mean in plain English. It also describes the term 'tree nuts' in more detail as follows:

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Mark Your Calendars!

For the Chestnut Growers of America 2020 Annual Meeting, to be hosted next year in State College, Pennsylvania:

Sunday, June 7 - Tuesday, June 9

More details coming next year!

National Chestnut Week

National Chestnut Week is the second week of October every year (this year, October 6-12). See the Fall 2016 edition of *The Chestnut Grower* for background and event ideas. Past newsletters issues are available on the member page at chestnutgrowers.org. Did you have an event for National Chestnut Week or sometime during the fall of '19? Send us the highlights for the Winter '20 newsletter!

really need. Rather, the guide provides practical advice on how to increase sales by building a loyal customer base. The guide is organized around a counselor approach to selling outlined in the book *Win-Win Selling* (Wilson Learning Library, 2003) and takes readers through the process of

- Building relationships with customers
- Discovering customers' needs and preferences
- Being an advocate for one's products
- Providing quality service

While much of the information in this guide is focused on selling at farmers' markets, the tips are appropriate for anyone wishing to sell their products directly to consumers.

Before You Start

Selling is just one part of a successful direct-marketing business. Good production skills and superior postharvest handling techniques can ensure high-quality products that command premium prices. Likewise, a thorough knowledge of your farm's financial condition can ensure that you employ the right pricing and advertising strategies to gain the most profit.

Being aware that you are competing with supermarkets and other farmers at your market or in your particular region can also help ensure success. At the end of the day, you want customers to spend more of their dollars with you. This means that you have to constantly improve your skills and look for competitive advantages to keep your business profitable.

Build Relationships with Your Customers

Understanding nonverbal communication. Waving "Hi" to a neighbor; slouching in a chair; looking intently into the eyes of a loved one. These are all ways that we communicate without using words.

Nonverbal communication takes many forms and can convey diverse meanings. However, its significance is often overlooked. Nonverbal communication can actually convey more meaning than verbal communication. Researchers estimate that at least 60 percent of the impact of a conversation or message comes from nonverbal factors such as eye behavior, gestures, posture and voice.

Your relationships with customers can be enhanced by not only having an awareness of the ways messages are conveyed

nonverbally, but by taking steps to improve your nonverbal communication. Consider the following suggestions from *Successful Nonverbal Communication*, by Dale G. Leathers (1986):

- Try to sustain eye contact with customers when serving them or having a conversation with them. Avoid shifting your eyes too much or looking down or away from customers.
- Keep hands and elbows away from your body. When listening to customers, nod your head and smile. Avoid fidgeting, handwringing and touching your face.
- Keep an open and relaxed posture. Lean forward slightly. Avoid crossing your arms and standing rigidly.
- Speak at an appropriate volume and rate. Vary your pitch. Avoid speaking in a monotone, using too many pauses and "ahs," and repeating words.

In any business, building relationships with customers is key. This is even more important in the world of direct marketing. However, building relationships with customers takes time and depends on being personable and paying attention to a few basic details. The following suggestions are offered to help you make a good first impression and begin the process of building a loyal base of customers.

First, pay attention to your personal appearance. Consciously or unconsciously, customers often base their purchasing decisions on their first impression of you. Be clean, neat, well dressed and well groomed. This doesn't mean you have to wear your Sunday best when selling. On the contrary, a clean pair of blue jeans and a fresh shirt are acceptable attire for farmers. Also consider wearing a name tag or having your farm logo inscribed on shirts and hats.

Second, engage customers as soon as you can at the market so they don't have the opportunity to go somewhere else. Always stand rather than sit. Make eye contact with customers and avoid wearing sunglasses if possible. Smile. Say "Hello" and "How are you today?" The idea here is to be inviting and make it easy for customers to visit your stand and get to know you both as a farmer and as a person. When customers do visit your stand, make an effort to learn their names and something about them. This allows you to address them by name and strike up casual conversation when they revisit

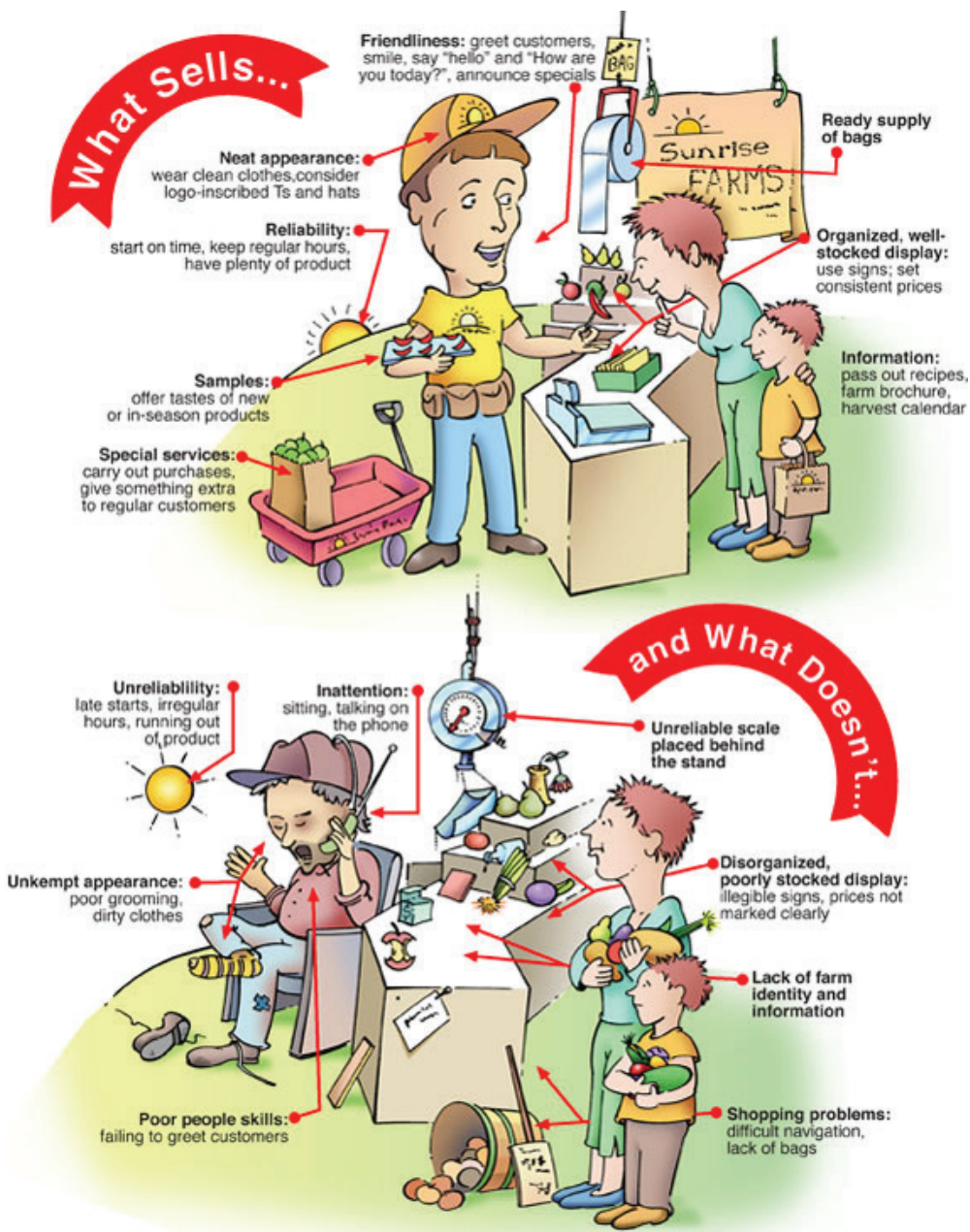
your stand. When working with chefs, do some homework to learn their names before you make your first sales call. If the market is slow, keep busy by polishing fruit, straightening the stand, or passing out samples, or consider having a partner in front of the stand to draw people in.

Third, be reliable. Show up on time, keep regular hours and have adequate supplies of your product. It is hard for customers to trust you if they don't know when you're going to be at the market, when you're going to arrive with a delivery, how long you'll be open for business or how much product you'll have. If you are trying to sell to a restaurant, reliability is a key factor in gaining and maintaining your customer. Make sure to tell the chef as far in advance as possible that you won't be able to deliver their order. With advance warning, chefs may be able to take the lack of product in stride and still continue to order from you. Without it, you may lose the entire account.

Fourth, share your knowledge about your products and skills. Customers are often interested in the nutritional value of different foods, how they are grown or processed, or what makes your offerings special. This is especially important if you sell specialty products. Customers also appreciate hearing about how your products are used by other satisfied customers.

Fifth, go the extra mile for customers. Offer to carry or cart-out purchases. Allow customers to leave purchased items at your stand until they've completed their other shopping. Always try to deliver more than the customer expects. Give away something extra or throw in a sample of a new product to regular customers. These and other services demonstrate your commitment to your customers and show them how much you appreciate their business.

Finally, be pragmatic and have a sense of humor. It is guaranteed that you will not satisfy everyone all of the time. Placing reasonable expectations on yourself and others, and being able to laugh at yourself on occasion, will allow you to keep a good attitude and attract customers to your business. Also, if you really don't believe that you are outgoing enough for direct marketing, find someone in your family or hire someone who is. Remember to take the time to educate them about your products and the importance of providing great customer service.



a notepad and pen nearby to record orders, comments and special requests.

Second, do some homework. Spend time at the library or on the Internet researching the latest consumer trends, particularly by reading lifestyle magazines (e.g., Martha Stewart Living, Oprah, Real Simple). Look for information about the types of products you sell. Stay abreast of the latest developments in direct marketing and farming. This information, along with what you learn directly from your customers, can be used to adjust your product selection to better meet your customers' needs.

Be an advocate for your products. Once you've developed a relationship with your customers and have a good idea of what they're looking for, it's time to match their needs with your products. Your goal here is to create a partnership with your customers rather than try to sell them something they don't need.

Building relationships with chefs. When selling to chefs, it may be even more important to invest time in building strong relationships, in part because you stand to gain or lose a higher volume of sales than with an individual customer at the farmers' market. It can also take more time to establish relationships with chefs. You may have to make 10 or more visits or telephone calls to an establishment before the chef starts to take an interest. Being persistent (in a polite way) can pay off.

Once a chef is interested, schedule a meeting well before the start of the season to determine his or her needs. Ask a few questions, such as:

- "What is your favorite meal to prepare?"
- "What are some of your best-selling items?"
- "Are there any products that you would like to source locally?"
- "Are there any hard-to-find or highly perishable products not available from your current distributor?"

Take a seed catalog with you and review it with the chef to determine which products they want. Provide samples of your highest-quality products for the chef to use at home or in the restaurant. Talk about your best-selling products at market and ask the chef if they are interested in the same ones.

When setting up a meeting with a chef, keep in mind that chefs have different

Discover Your Customers' Needs and Preferences

Top five annoyances for farmers' market customers:

- Vendor takes or makes cell phone calls while serving customers.
- Vendor chats a long while with other vendors or customers who have been helped while others are waiting.
- Long line has formed at the vendor's stand — most customers won't wait.
- Vendor fails to acknowledge waiting customers.
- Vendor cannot make change.

Discovering the needs and preferences of customers takes time, patience and a good ear. It also follows naturally from a commitment to building relationships with

customers and getting to know them on a more personal level.

Finding out what customers want can be achieved in a couple of different ways.

First, when talking to customers, ask questions about their preferences. For instance, ask questions such as, "Are you looking for anything special today?" or "Are you preparing any special meals this week?" If a family is shopping with their children, ask the kids, "What's your favorite vegetable?" You can also relate your products to the season or upcoming holidays by asking, "Are you planning to do any canning this year?" or "Will you be cooking out for the Fourth of July?" Listen carefully to what customers say. If you are taking orders, restate the customer's order to be sure you heard them correctly. Keep

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schedules than farmers. Chefs are extremely busy during mealtimes and will not welcome interruptions. If you call on a chef specializing in the lunch business at 11:30 a.m., you will lose the sale. The best time to call or drop by is midmorning, generally before 10 a.m., or in the afternoon, around 2:00 or 3:00 p.m., after the lunchtime rush is over and before the dinner hour starts.

Try to find a balance between sharing information about your products and socializing with customers while at the market. Talking about the nutritional qualities of your products or how to store, preserve, and use your products is a great way to promote them. With chefs, talk about the ease of using your products in the restaurant, or their unique flavors and qualities. Keep in mind that while most people are interested in receiving some information, they don't necessarily have the time to sit through a lecture at the market or in the restaurant. Keep the conversation light and friendly. Passing out informational fliers is an additional way to share information.

Sharing recipes is another great way to promote your products, especially if they are new or unique. People are generally interested in simple, seasonal recipes with only a few ingredients. Recipes can be gathered in the off-season and printed on tear-off note pads with your farm logo and contact information.

Offering samples is a great way to introduce new or in-season products. When sampling at a farmers' market, be sure to consult with your local health department or the market bylaws regarding sampling rules. Generally, samples should be fresh and served in individual cups on a covered tray. Keep a trash can nearby and always use sanitizing water to clean knives and cutting boards between uses. When providing samples to chefs, take small quantities of your product to the restaurant with some information about your farm. Try to have a brief conversation with the chef if possible. Check back a week later to see if the chef liked your product and is interested in doing business with you.

Make signs or announcements to let customers know about products that will be available in coming weeks. Give customers a reason to visit your booth again and the opportunity to become

preferred customers. Also, if you sell many different products, consider offering a weekly special at a reduced price. Everyone likes to feel like they are getting a deal. This information can also be conveyed using signs or announcements.

Don't be afraid to put a little flair into your presentation. Wear a costume or make periodic announcements to passersby about new or special products. Be sure to use discretion though and be considerate of other vendors and shoppers.

Finally, remember to ask for the sale. Be specific rather than general. Assume the sale by asking questions that will make a sale regardless of the answer. The best questions include two choices with no negative outcome (i.e., no loss of sale). If you ask for the sale and it doesn't happen, then you may need to make another attempt to discover your customers' wants and needs. Remember though, to increase your sales, you ultimately must ask for the sale — many sales don't happen without it!

Provide Quality Service

Creating printed and online materials.

Many farmers involved in direct marketing have invested time and energy in communicating with customers through printed and online materials. This is great way for farmers to enhance their relationship with customers and demonstrate the unique qualities of their farm and farm products.

Before starting, consider creating a unique "brand" for your business or product, if you don't already have one. Combine the name of your farm or a special product name with a unique type style and color scheme to create a logo. Once you've created this design and identity, use it consistently on all printed and online materials. Customers are more likely to remember you if you have a strong and consistent identity.

Below are suggestions of different types of materials to consider, many of which can be created using basic word processing or publishing software.

- **Farm pamphlet or brochure.** Include pictures, a farm history, a statement of your farming philosophy, products, and a harvest calendar.
- **Coupons.** Create a double coupon that gives the customer a discount on their next purchase from you, and also includes a discount for one of their

friends to purchase from you. Include the coupon with every purchase and vary it from week to week.

- **Weekly or monthly newsletter.** This is a great way to update customers about new products and developments on your farm. Include seasonal recipes, along with food storage and preservation tips.
- **Informational fliers.** Consider creating a 1/2- to 1-page handout on a range of topics such as nutrition, cooking, storage and preservation tips, classes, events, contests, history and origins of select food crops, relevant news stories and policy issues.
- **Website.** Take your farm online and combine all of the options above in one place. However, having a dysfunctional website or failing to promptly respond to web requests may be worse than having no website at all. If needed, seek help from a professional web designer or web manager.

You may be familiar with the following adage: a satisfied customer will tell fewer than five people about your business, but a dissatisfied customer will tell at least 10 people. This demonstrates two important points. First, satisfied customers are an essential part of any business. Second, word-of-mouth publicity can make or break a business. With this in mind, it is important to focus on strengthening relationships with existing customers by providing outstanding service.

Once the market opens, serving customers should be the first priority. All other activities, such as conversations with other vendors or rearranging the display, should wait until the customer is served. Also, be sure to thank customers as they leave and make it clear that all products are guaranteed.

Providing prompt service is also important, especially during busy times. However, try to give each customer the time they deserve. Develop a way to serve customers in order and acknowledge customers who are waiting in line. Make eye contact with waiting customers, tell them that you'll be with them in a moment, and thank them for their patience. If possible, offer waiting customers a sample or a pamphlet about your farm. When selling to chefs or other direct customers, return phone calls within a minimum of 24 hours to avoid losing the sale. Consider hiring employees, recruiting

family members or prepackaging items for extremely busy periods.

Address any post-sale dissatisfaction politely and promptly. And, whatever you do, avoid arguing with customers. Acknowledge all complaints, apologize and take appropriate steps to remedy the complaint. It is sometimes helpful to ask customers how they would like a situation resolved. Once the complaint is resolved, thank the customer for bringing the complaint to your attention and make a note of the complaint for future reference. Keep in mind that it takes more energy and effort to gain new customers than it does to keep existing ones. Even when a customer has a negative experience, they will likely return to purchase from you again if they feel their complaint was resolved in an appropriate and timely way.

Providing good service is particularly essential for restaurant customers. Samples can introduce your product to a chef, but they have to be packaged well and contain enough of your product so that the chef can experiment. Good packaging will allow the product to show visibly if possible, will be consistent from package to package, and will be standardized by weight or count, so a chef can confidently order the necessary amount.

You will also need to include current, easy-to-read price lists with samples and any printed materials you leave with the chef. Price lists can introduce new products to the chefs, especially if you highlight the variety of products you have available. Part of providing good service is making it easy to order your product. Some chefs will place their orders after their dinner service closes, which means you are likely to lose the sale if you can't take email or online orders.

Products will need to be delivered on a regular basis, at predetermined times, when it is convenient for the chef. Since chefs have limited storage on-site, delaying your delivery by even a day can disrupt the restaurant's menu and damage your relationship. You will also need to include a separate, legible invoice with any products you deliver. Invoices are usually passed to the bookkeeper, who has to be able to understand the information to process a timely payment.

Beyond the Basics

Can you learn to be a good salesperson?

Anyone can learn to be a good salesperson.

Those who naturally excel at selling will enjoy working with a wide variety of personalities, have excellent interpersonal skills and enjoy thinking creatively about positioning or placing their products. They will pay attention to detail and be comfortable when customers don't want their product or don't return their sales calls.

For others, learning to be a good salesperson may take time and attention. Initially, it may require making an extra effort to be outgoing and start conversations with customers.

Additionally, it's important to remember that all farm enterprises require broad sets of skills in production, marketing, financial management and selling. Most farmers shine in one or two areas and struggle with the others — only a mythical "Super Farmer" can master all of them. Farmers who know all about producing and harvesting high-quality products and understand exactly how profitable each of their enterprises is may be completely intimidated by the idea of marketing and selling their products. Or, someone who knows how to market well and produce great products may find it very challenging to determine which of their crop or livestock enterprises make them the most money.

Because developing expertise in all skill areas is generally not easy, direct marketers should honestly evaluate their talents and skills, take strides to develop broad skills in areas that need improvement and seek help from other farmers, workers or family members who possess expertise in particular areas.

Although providing outstanding customer service is a proven way to build and strengthen relationships with existing customers, there are additional ways you can improve service.

First, when interacting with customers, find other products to sell them. Take note of what they have in their shopping bags or on their restaurant menus and offer complementary items. Remember their previous purchases, ask them how they enjoyed those items, and ask if they'd like more. If customers are looking for items you don't carry, recommend other vendors who do carry those items.

If you see a regular customer carrying a competitor's product, offer a sample of your own product with an appropriate promotion to bring them to your stand

next week.

Second, consider creative ways to communicate with customers throughout the year. Many farms use newsletters, pamphlets, informational brochures, coupons or handwritten letters to stay in touch with customers. Create a mailing list by collecting customers' contact information from checks or a guest book. Mail printed items or email electronic versions, depending on your customers' preferences.

Third, think about hosting events, classes or contests. An open house or farm tour is a great way to show appreciation for customers. Sponsor free classes on preserving foods. Partner with a local chef to offer tasting parties or cooking classes. Have a drawing or recipe contest.

Finally, make a concerted effort to evaluate and improve your service. Record yourself during busy times with a video or audio recorder. Listen to and watch other vendors. Tour other markets, visit other roadside stands, or go to the supermarket to check their selection, display and prices. Put yourself in the customers' shoes and think about your business from their perspective. Some businesses measure customer satisfaction through customer surveys, meetings with customers, or customer complaints and compliments. The goal is to reflect on both successes and failures and be willing to change.

Summary

Being successful in direct marketing takes a great deal of time, effort and attention. It requires not only the ability to produce a quality product, but also the commitment to build lasting relationships with customers. It also takes a combination of skills, and ideally a group effort, to create a lasting, profitable enterprise.

However, marketing directly to consumers also has many rewards. As a farmer, you are able to gain greater control over both production and marketing decisions. You have the opportunity take advantage of unique marketing opportunities and earn retail prices for your products. You also become a valued member of the community and gain satisfaction from both your work and the relationships you build with community members. 🍷

The authors acknowledge the assistance of John Emery, Lane McConnell and Ann Wilkinson in the preparation of this guide.

From Your Orchard to the Local Menu

A Conversation with an Executive Chef

We asked Craig Cyr, Executive Chef and Proprietor, The Wine Cellar and Bistro, Columbia, Missouri, how growers should go about marketing chestnuts to local restaurants. Cyr has prepared unique recipes at the Missouri Chestnut Roast Festival in the fall for the audience during a cooking demonstration (see photo next page), working with fresh chestnuts from the orchard. Cyr also has used chestnuts on the menu at his restaurant in Columbia.

Following is a Q & A with Cyr by Michelle Hall. We hope this information directly from a chef/restaurant owner will help growers market their nuts!

Q: What do restaurant owners need to know about chestnuts to help them decide whether to buy them from a grower? What do restaurant owners look for in chestnuts? What do you like about chestnuts?

A: Depending on the application of

chestnuts in recipes, the restaurant should look at what type of chestnut products the growers have to offer. There are many different ways to purchase the nuts: individually quick frozen (frozen individually and out of the shell), fresh in the shell, candied, ground in flour, etc. The growers should have all the information needed for the consumer to make an informed decision. If buying fresh in the shell chestnuts, I look for firmness, color and quality of the meat inside the shell, which should be a nice shade of yellow with no sign of shrinkage, discoloration, or decay. Fresh chestnuts should be kept cold for storage to avoid spoilage. Fresh chestnuts are my choice for cooking because of the unparalleled color, flavor, and texture. The frozen chestnuts, however useful they are for many applications due to the ease of not having to peel them, do not retain the wonderful color of a fresh chestnut. Another big thing for me in

purchasing chestnuts is buying them as local as possible.

I like using chestnuts for a variety of reasons. First, I love the versatility of chestnut's flavor. The nuts lend themselves to many dishes, sweet or savory. The chestnut also has a kind of nostalgia to it and is not widely used in most restaurants, which makes it a fun and sort of obscure ingredient to use. The versatility of the starchy nut also is wonderful to use in a variety of applications from soup to stuffing, and from bread to pasta dough.

Q: How should growers approach restaurant owners about buying and cooking with their chestnuts? Anything you should NOT do when marketing to restaurants? Chestnuts are a seasonal, highly perishable food. How can growers work around that?

A: The grower should be sure to have all the necessary information to give to chefs and restaurants to have a good chance

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'For example, the term 'tree nuts' refers to a variety of individual nuts, including almonds, Brazil nuts, cashews, chestnuts, filberts/hazelnuts, macadamia nuts, pecans, pine nuts, pistachios, and walnuts.' This information along with other considerations was used to develop the list. We have received several questions regarding why certain tree nuts are on the list. In a future edition of our FALCPA questions and answers, FDA will describe the process it used to develop the list.

We hope that this information is helpful to you.

Sincerely,

Rhonda R. Kane, MS, RD Consumer Safety Officer (HFS-820) Food Labeling and Standards Staff (FLSS) ONLDS / CFSAN / FDA"

From Carolyn Young, retired chestnut grower and former CGA editor:

I just received this email from Ian Patterson. Ray and I met Ian and his wife last year in Australia and spent a weekend helping them harvest. Ian is an M.D. who practices in Melbourne but his interest is his chestnut

orchard about 5 hours away from there about 100 miles into the outback.

I think his proposal has merit. One of the first questions we get is about shelf life of our flour. People think about hazelnut flour and almond flour that have to be refrigerated or frozen. We've tested our chestnut flour for up to 8 months and know that if the nuts are dried properly the flour will last a long time. For our tests I bagged samples of flour. I put half in the freezer and half on a kitchen shelf. Each month we'd take bags out and taste them. At 8 months none of us (the Boles and Ray and I) could tell which was which. While there may have been some minor chemical changes, we weren't able to discern them. If we could allay consumer concern by explaining that chestnuts are part of the 'floury' group it might be helpful. If we could identify the nutritional benefits from this group it would also be a good selling point. What do you think?

Ian's letter:

Hi to you both. I am endeavoring to remove chestnuts from the general grouping of tree nuts. During the past year I have tried a number of approaches without great success. I recently ended up with CODEX

ALIMENTARIUS and their grouping of foods which relates to pesticide residues. Ultimately I have found from this that British Codes (Eurocode as it is called) are generally accepted by CODEX, WHO and FAO and that the researcher was Ian Unwin. In turn I have emailed him in an effort to perhaps divide tree nuts (or dry fruits as one worker advocates) into FLOURY & OILY subgroups. The floury group would only include chestnuts and possibly carobs. It is my view that, in this country at least, the wonderful merits of chestnuts from a nutritional perspective are not appreciated because of the general association between NUTS and Fats/Oils. I am reluctant to pursue 'A grain that grows on a tree' because pesticide residues are a problem in grains and not so much in nuts because of their thick coating. If you folk in USA have similar views we might have more success if we band together. There are many in Europe who also might help. I do hope John Morton and Chestnuts Australia can organize something for next year as has been suggested and we will be able to see you again.

*Cheers for now,
Ian Patterson* 🍎

Looking at Chestnuts from a Chef's Point of View

The following is adapted from a report done for the Midwestern Nut Producers Council by Kathleen M. Kelley, Postdoctoral Research Associate, and Bridget K. Behe, Associate Professor Department of Horticulture, Michigan State University, originally published in 2001.

Chefs' Perceptions and Uses of Chestnuts

Chestnuts (*Castanea sativa*) are a traditional, but currently a seasonal nut, used by several Michigan chefs who work at upscale restaurants. In an initial study conducted with funding from the U.S.D.A. Federal State Market Improvement Program (FSMIP) provided to the Midwestern Nut Producers Council (MNPC), 21 Michigan chefs were given 20 lbs. of 'Colossal' chestnuts to prepare dishes of their choice. Information gathered during the follow-up survey showed that many chefs had positive experiences using the nuts; however, others needed additional information pertaining to either preparation or use. Not all chefs were properly informed about chestnuts or had not had an opportunity to create dishes using whole, fresh chestnuts because there was no supply.

Materials and Methods

We conducted the study to determine chefs' acceptance and uses of chestnuts. During the month of August 2000, 25 restaurants in Michigan were contacted to participate. Restaurants were primarily chosen from the Metro Detroit area, the Greater Lansing area and Northern Lower Michigan. Upon initial contact chefs were told that researchers would like to send them between 25 and 50 lbs of chestnuts for them to use in a dish(es) of their choice. The follow-up survey was conducted after chefs prepared and served their chestnut dinner. Some of the questions the chefs were asked included whether they had used chestnuts before, whether they preferred the size of 'Colossal', where they had purchased chestnuts before, and whether they had problems preparing the chestnuts.

In mid-October 20 lbs of chestnuts were delivered to five chefs, with the first chestnut dinner taking place on 25 October. Dinners were completed by 1 November, with at least two MSU representatives attending each event. Conversations and follow-up surveys with chefs revealed that few chefs know how to properly prepare chestnuts and were having difficulty removing the shells and pellicle.

Results

Twenty of 21 chefs completed the follow-up survey. All 20 chefs were asked about their past experience with chestnuts. Every chef had used at least some chestnut product in the past whether it was a whole chestnut, canned chestnut, or pureed chestnut product. Four chefs purchased nuts from their local grocery stores. Six other chefs purchase European chestnuts from local produce buyers. These nuts were either whole, halves, pieces, peeled

and canned in brine, pureed, or candied. Five others purchased these products from similar sources, but did not know the origin of the nuts. One chef used a partially dried product but noted that it was used for soups, but for very few other applications. Four other chefs used chestnuts infrequently. One stated that chestnuts were roasted occasionally, but that they had not been purchased in the last 7-8 years. Two really hadn't used chestnuts in the past, only in culinary school and the fourth never liked to use chestnuts, only using them in season because of customer demand. Twelve of the 20 chefs indicated that they had some problems removing the shells from the chestnuts. Comments ranged from not being able to remove the shell, to stating that the pellicle would stick to the nut meat and indicating that it was a very labor-intensive job. Some chefs mentioned that they either had a small staff or had to pay their unionized staff members to perform this duty. Chefs commented that they made the extra effort to remove the shell since the nuts were free, but in the future seven of these chefs would prefer to purchase peeled chestnuts. An additional two chefs who did not have a problem removing the shells would like to purchase peeled chestnuts in the future also. Five of the chefs who had trouble removing the shells would prefer to purchase unpeeled chestnuts or did not have a preference for either product. Comments from all chefs who would purchase unpeeled chestnuts included: a) They believed the shell protects the nut from the time of harvest to the time when it arrives at the restaurant and that they are fresher; b) They like to roast food and like the taste and texture of the nut after roasting, it removes some of the moisture; c) They prefer the shells on because when roasting the shells trap the steam and the nut is still moist; or d) They would like to pay the lowest price possible and believe that unpeeled chestnuts are less expensive than peeled chestnuts.

Chefs not only used the methods described in the handout given to them during the peeling process, but also experimented with additional ideas or combinations of the ones provided. One chef boiled the nuts for 1½ hours and then roasted them. Another used a heated fryolator at 375°F, adding one cup of nuts to the oil for 25 seconds. This chef noticed that some shells came off easier than others and that the ones that came off easy had more space between the nut and the shell, though the meat was still good. He attributed this difference to the age of the nut and noted that the yellow-green color of the nuts provided to him was a pleasant color to work with. Only one chef

failed to score the chestnuts prior to roasting them, with the rest of chestnuts "popping" in the oven. The chef was not given the chestnut knife or the other information until after the chestnut dinner.

All chefs reported that they stored the chestnuts in a "walk-in" type of refrigeration unit. Chefs noted that the nuts needed to be removed from either the plastic zip lock bags (resulted in condensation) or nylon netting (resulted in moisture loss) they were transported into the restaurant. One chef would prefer them to be placed in perforated bags to allow for air movement. Another stored the nuts in cooler in a bucket of water to keep them void of air movement. One chef with an extensive facility stored them in a 32-24°F meat aging box with low air movement and low humidity. Nuts were stored for a period of a couple of days to a little over a month. One chef stated that chestnuts could be stored for two weeks if stored properly. A few chefs processed the nuts and froze them for use later. Overall, chefs still need to be educated about storing chestnuts and be provided with the proper storing materials when chestnuts are delivered.

Most chefs used all of the chestnuts provided with a few exceptions. Five chefs stated that they could use less than the 20 lbs. they were given, three could use more in the future with one chef saying he could use up to 100 lbs. in a season. All chefs were pleased with the quality of the nuts, but there was some spoilage. Four chefs experienced a loss of 5% or less of the nuts provided due to molding or rotting. One chef could not use 16-19 of the nuts in the 15 lbs. that he had used prior to the follow-up survey. Another stated that he observed that 20% were "germinating." Lastly, a chef found that only one in six to eight nuts were usable, primarily due to difficulty peeling them. In general, chefs were pleased with the size of the nuts. Two chefs found that the size was average, one chef found that the size varied greatly in the shipment he received. Eleven chefs would prefer a larger nut if quality, flavor, or sweetness is not sacrificed and if the price is not much higher than smaller nuts. One chef would prefer smaller nuts for petite presentations such as ragu. The majority of chefs would prefer both whole, half pieces, and chestnut crumbles, while one chef would not have much use for pieces and crumbles. Four chefs would strictly use halves and crumbles in their presentations.

Future research efforts will continue to focus on expanding the base of chestnut marketing research with chefs. ●

Baby Back Ribs with Tequila, Orange, Molasses, & Chestnut Glaze

Recipe courtesy Craig Cyr; prepared at 2007 Missouri Chestnut Roast cooking demonstration.

For Ribs:

1 slab baby back ribs (local if possible)
 Spice blend: paprika, garlic powder, onion powder, dried rosemary, salt and fresh ground pepper
 1 qt. chicken broth
 Season ribs with spice, marinate for one hour. Place in oven-proof pan with chicken stock and wrap with aluminum foil. Place in oven at 250 degrees for approximately two hours; until fall-apart tender. Top ribs with glaze before serving.

For Glaze:

1/2 onion, diced small
 6 garlic cloves, minced
 1 serrano pepper or crushed dried red pepper
 1/2 cup tequila
 1/2 cup orange juice
 1/2 cup molasses
 1/4 cup soy sauce
 2 Tbsp. cumin
 2 Tbsp. paprika
 Canola oil for saute
 1 cup chestnut puree

In saucepan, saute onion and garlic with serrano peppers until tender. Add tequila then flame and burn off alcohol. Add remaining ingredients and simmer to a spoon-coating glaze.

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to sell. First, some literature of the farm and where they are produced; secondly, information on price and quantity of the nut, and how long the season is in which the products will be available. Next, some information on preparation for people who are unfamiliar with how to peel, store, and use the nuts, maybe even a variety of tested recipes to give with the nuts. Call on restaurants in the morning or call to set up an appointment with the chef (preferable for me). Shucking and freezing is a good way for growers to store excess nuts and most likely get a better price per pound. Excess nuts can also be frozen whole and sold while supplies last throughout the off season.

Q: *How have you used chestnuts?*

A: We have been a part of the Chestnut Festival for four years and have done many different recipes with chestnuts at the restaurant as well. This year we will be featuring chestnuts in a chestnut and hazelnut granola, stir fry of roasted chestnuts and local vegetables, and a roasted acorn squash stuffed with chestnuts, local pork sausage, and spiced sage butter. In previous years we have featured chestnut raviolis with goat cheese, apples, and fried sage brown butter; a lobster and chestnut bisque with porcini mushroom and Oregon black truffles; and chestnut encrusted patchwork pork loin with local honey and wholegrain mustard glaze.

I really enjoy using chestnuts on the menu at the Wine Cellar – it adds a new

dimension every time I create a dish. We will always try to incorporate these wonderful delicacies into our menu.

See one of Craig's recipes above. 🍷

This Q & A was originally published in The Chestnut Grower in 2008.



Cyr doing cooking demonstration for audience at the Missouri Chestnut Roast Festival.

Upcoming Chestnut Events

Perennial Farm Gathering

December 6-7, 2019 | Savanna Institute | Sinsinawa Mound Center, Sinsinawa, IA

This year's Perennial Farm Gathering will feature keynote speaker Reginaldo Haslett-Marroquín (President and CEO of Regenerative Agriculture Alliance), panels and workshops with Midwest agroforestry experts, perennial food and beverage tastings, and the ever-popular 5-minute Nutshell Show & Tell talks, which are open to all attendees. Session topics will include chestnut, hazelnut, and elderberry production, silvopasture, financing perennial agriculture, land access and land tenure agreements, online marketing, beneficial insects, and more!

More information and registration at www.savannainstitute.org/events.

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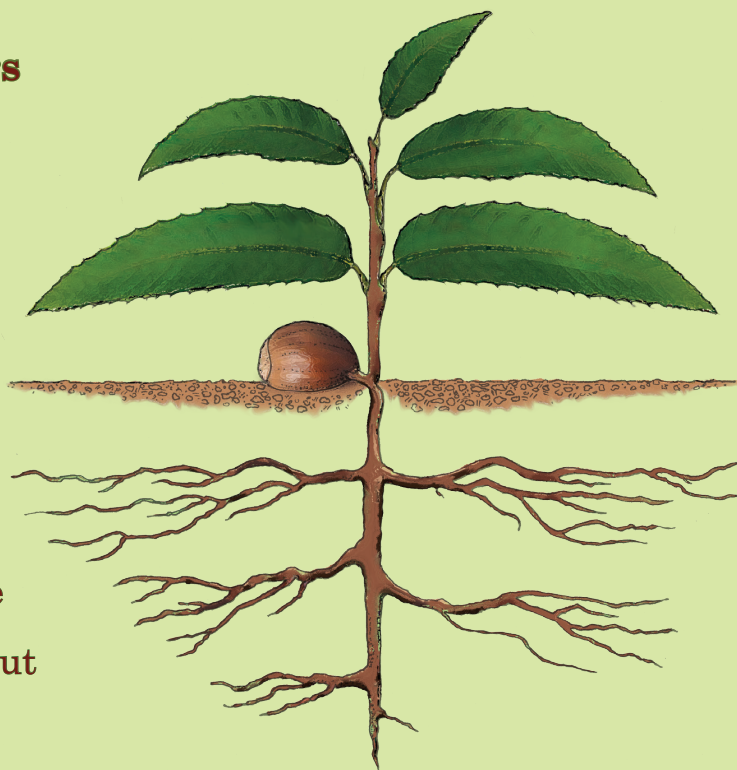


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Our web site has full descriptions of each cultivar and lots of help with growing chestnut trees.

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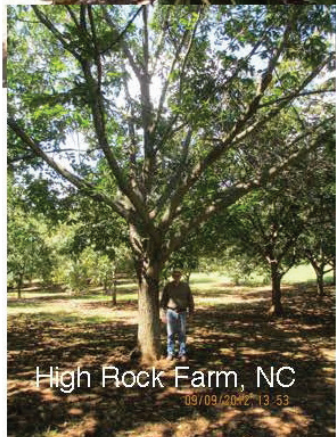
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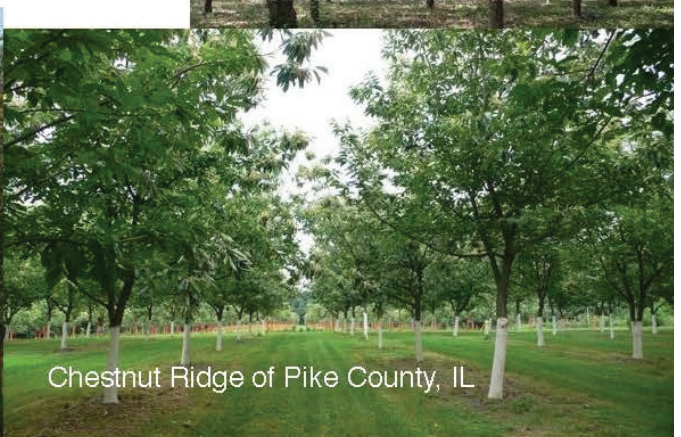
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