

Market Connection



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Meet your board member elect: Kerry Engel, Canada West

Kerry Engel leads the Farm Direct Marketing Initiative for the Alberta Agriculture, Food & Rural Development Ag-Entrepreneurship Division. She first joined NAFDMA three years ago during the Arizona conference.

Kerry became interested in farm direct marketing as a way to help farmers diversify. The farmers' interest grew, and so did Kerry's.

Alberta's direct marketing industry has developed a bit differently than that of most other parts of North America. "In Alberta, ag tourism developed first, and now farmers are looking to sell."

Alberta has a strong country vacation/B&B offering, attracting tourists from Europe and Ontario. Farmers have done a great job at getting tourists to stay at their farms, and now they're looking at ways to open stores and stock their shelves with local products.

Because Alberta has such a strong country vacation industry, that has led to the creation of many partnerships and driving tours. A wide variety of direct marketers have partnered to create these tours, including u-pick farms, market gardeners, alpaca, beef and elk farms, bison ranches, berry farms and artists.

Travel Alberta, the Alberta destination marketing organization, has created a variety of farm-related packages, including "Get Back to the Farm," "Get Back to the Garden—Flowers & Plants, Fruits & Veggies," and "Get Back in the Saddle." Visit www1.travelalberta.com/content/Agricultural for detailed information.

"Alberta also has a really strong farmers' market network," Kerry says. The province is home to 3 million people, mostly located along the corridor from Edmonton to Calgary. Farmers bring their produce and other farm products to Alberta's 100 approved farmers' markets. The markets have a pure farmers' market philosophy of "make it, bake it, grow it." "Eighty percent has to be grown or made on the farm," says Kerry.

Kerry says that an increasing number of farmers in Alberta are interested in direct marketing. "Interest has grown phenomenally," she says, and that interest led her to focus on direct marketing full time.

She leads an education program, *Explore Direct*, which offers farm direct marketing workshops, tours and conferences. She also publishes *Alberta Agripreneur*, a quarterly newslet-

ter for farm direct and ag-tourism entrepreneurs. Explore Direct is a new e-newsletter that the department recently launched. You can learn more about Explore Direct by visiting www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/app21/rtw/index.jsp

Kerry lives in Westlock, Alberta, with her husband, Glenn, and daughters, Aksana, 8, and Tatiana, 5. She is looking forward to using her experiences and skills to benefit both NAFDMA and Alberta's farm direct marketing industry.

Her skills include project management, event planning, marketing, communication, educational design, media, team building and leadership skills as well as creativity and energy.

"I take every opportunity to promote NAFDMA to our



Board member-elect Kerry Engel, left, and vice president Mary Vollmer encountered a lobster during the November board meeting in Boston.

clients," she says. "Its role, benefits, and resources and industry trends are regularly featured in *Alberta Agripreneur* articles and *Explore Direct* programs."

Meet Debbie Pifer,
your other new
board member,
in next month's issue.

Plus, we'll announce all of the winners of our 2003 awards.

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Tips for finding California gold

By Wayne Bishop
Wheatland, CA



By now, Ann and I hope many of you are preparing to depart for Northern California! If you are unable to attend the conference this year, we will certainly miss you. For the rest of you prospectors, we'd like to offer some tips on how to find some gold in our state. I think that NAFDMA has put together another outstanding program for you. There will be lots of opportunity for learning during your time here, but we would like to make sure you have a good time as well.

First, we hope you have signed up for the pre-conference tour and are planning to arrive in San Francisco a little early, even if it's only a few hours. Our hotel, the Sheraton at Fisherman's Wharf, is a great place to start; so head directly there from the airport and get checked in.

From there, the wharf itself is just a block away and the Maritime Museum is just four blocks. Ann says to mention the shopping and restaurants at Pier 39 (next to the wharf) and at Ghirardelli Square (four blocks west.) Be sure to look for the resident sea lions, who are generally snoozing on floating docks between the wharf and Pier 39.

If you have more time, catch the cable car just two blocks from the hotel and enjoy a ride over Nob Hill to Union Square. You'll pass by the "crookidest street in the world" and get a real taste of the city and its colorful (to say the least) residents along the way. Ann says you'll need to check out the upscale shopping at Union Square, but I say take a quick look around and check out nearby Chinatown before heading back to the wharf.

If you have a half day or more, consider taking a tour of Alcatraz! This tour leaves from the Pier 39 area and is very popular. You should book it online or by phone at least a week in advance to be sure of a spot.

Once you arrive in Sacramento, you will again have lots to explore in your free time. Ann and I agree that Old

Sacramento is a must see. It is about a 15 minute walk or short cab ride west of the Sheraton Grand where we are headquartered. Old Sac has one of the world's best railroad museums and oh yes, lots of shopping, restaurants, and nightlife. The State Capitol building is very

near our hotel and is worth a look. Our new governor, Arnold, stays right next door at the Hyatt and has been spotted at several of the restaurants around the capitol building.

If you have a spare day at some point, you could rent a car and explore the gold country. I would head directly to Columbia, about an hour and a half southeast. Columbia is a real operating town that runs just about like it did during the gold rush. From there, you can meander back to Sacramento on Highway 49. Angel's Camp, of Mark Twain fame, and Sutter Creek are two of the towns worth stopping at along the way. Other ways to spend your extra time would be in the wine country, at Yosemite, skiing or gambling at Tahoe, or of course at the huge farm equipment expo in Tulare.

Ann says I have been remiss in not telling you what kinds of clothes to pack. We have gone ahead and ordered up two weeks of sunny weather with highs in the 60s (that's Fahrenheit for you Canadians.) However, just in case that order was not received, you may want to bring a sweater and a jacket that you can layer up with. Also, the ground doesn't freeze here except in the mountains, so be prepared for a little mud here and there. One last tip – throw in some kind of duffel bag that you can use to pack all of your nuggets for your return home!

P.S. My sons, Austin and Lee, have reviewed this article and added San Francisco's Pac Bell Park, where the Giants play, to the list of can't miss sights. See you all soon!

What happened to 2003?

By Brent Warner
Victoria, BC

The only thing that seems to stay constant is change and unfortunately even that keeps speeding up it would appear.

The industry that we are all involved in began as the direct marketing of farm products, in one form or another. It was a means to put the goods that we produced in the consumers' hands. This industry has grown to encompass many different methods to transfer these goods, including farmers' markets and on farm retail, box programs, CSAs and Internet sales. As quickly as this industry has and continues to grow, there are changes occurring that either affect you now, or soon will, no matter in what venue you are selling.

In British Columbia, a larger organization was created this year which is trying to tie all the different products and services that are sold on or about farms together. The BC Agritourism Alliance, BCATA (www.agritourismbc.org), for the first time, has united the accommodation and food service providers of the agriculture experience, with the

more traditional farm producers.

So why is that significant?

Some of you reading this are aware of the reports that some farm stands are actually reporting decreases in fresh produce sold at their markets. This is by no means true across the continent, but it is a trend which you must be aware of.

I believe it points out to all of us that we should not be complacent. Yes, there has been an incredible growth in all aspects of direct agricultural product sales to the consumer over the past decade. USDA statistics report an increase in farmers' markets across the United States from 1,755 in 1990 to 2,863 in 2000. Sales at these markets now exceed a billion dollars.

So what am I saying?

Sales of fresh produce are in decline at roadside markets in some areas of the continent and yet the number of farmers markets has grown exponentially. This sounds contradictory!

While it may sound confusing I believe it points out



a change that is happening to our economies. The BCATA was formed to unify an industry that has expanded to include more than products. Many of the

most successful operations in this Alliance also supply more than services to customers. And I believe that all of you also supply more than products and services to your customers. Unfortunately, I believe many of our marketers across the continent are losing sight of their rapidly evolving customers.

Our customers are no longer coming to the farm or farmers' market only looking for goods and services. They are looking for experiences.

And I also know I am not telling you something you did not understand, on some level. But it is real and in some areas of the country this customer has arrived.

It does not mean these customers do not buy goods and services, they do. In order for that to happen, they come to your business for the experience, which is the festival, your goat walk, or to just have a fun day at the farm.

My New Years Present For all of you.

Unfortunately I cannot afford to buy one for all of you or I would.

If you read no other book next year, read this one. It will explain to you exactly what you know, I hope. And if you did not know it, you then will. It will tell you why you will not survive in the commodity game unless you are very, very large. Nor, will you survive as a farm market, CSA, Internet seller or any other vendor if you don't create, enhance, and constantly change the experience for your customers.

The book is, *The Experience Economy* by James H. Gilmore, B. Joseph Pine II.

Happy New Year to all and I hope to see you in Sacramento where we will all get the experience of a lifetime due to an incredible amount of work done by our California partners and friends, the NAFDMA board, and White Loaf Ridge Management.

May 2004 be an incredible experience for us all, keeping in mind life is about the journey, and not the end. For we can all be certain we will get there.

Coming in March: Board member nominations

Would you like to serve on the NAFDMA board of directors? Or do you know someone who would make a good director? We will be seeking nominations in the following regions: Midwest, Southeast, Canada East, Southwest and Northeast. Look for more details and a nomination form in the March issue of *Market Connection*.

Word Games

In the last newsletter, Charlie Touchette wrote about word games. Well that brings to mind the word games that the U.S. Department of Labor plays. Tanners Orchard has been audited by the DOL about every four years, and this was the fourth year again. The DOL investigator calls again this spring and wants to make an appointment to do a "survey." I have had many survey request from USDA and many others including telemarketers. I always thought that a "survey" was something that the Census Bureau did to count people or land surveyors did to de-

scribe a parcel of land. Boy, what an education I got this spring.

Also about the same time Rural Development wanted to do a "survey" of our migrant housing project. After just finishing a "survey" by the Illinois Department of Revenue, I knew the real definition of "survey." Being the efficient farmer that I am, I scheduled the DOL and Rural Development "surveys" at the same time. I figured that if they wanted my time I would schedule them both to come at the same time so they



could see just how much of an inconvenience government agencies can be to a farm marketer in the middle of June, kind of like killing two birds

with one stone. I survived both "surveys" with no major deficiencies.

Local governments are running short of money and are targeting businesses that handle cash. Also the U.S. Department of Labor is targeting agricultural employers for "surveys" in the areas of the Migrant and Seasonal Workers Protection Act and

wage and hour (read overtime) for roadside markets that are engaged in interstate commerce. Anyone can be involved in interstate commerce if they sell products made in another state, i.e. salad dressings from Georgia, jams from Indiana, or using containers that come from Michigan. Interstate commerce has a very broad definition with DOL.

Moral of the story: Survey means **INVESTIGATION** or **AUDIT**.

Wishing all a prosperous and Happy New Year; may you avoid all surveys with government agencies and departments.

Your Guide to the NAFDMA Membership Handbook

In March, if you didn't attend the conference in California, you'll receive a copy of the 2004 NAFDMA Yearbook, which includes the Conference Digest and Membership Handbook.

This yearbook is a valuable resource and your roadmap to your NAFDMA membership.

The membership handbook is Part 3 of the yearbook. In this section, you'll find a variety of information, including:

- * NAFDMA's mission statement
- * Articles of incorporation
- * Regional districts
- * 2004 board of directors contact information
- * Guide to association services
- * A list of previous award winners
- * Earl Tywater Scholarship information
- * Cider and jam contest details
- * Frequently asked questions (FAQs)
- * A list of current

NAFDMA members

- * 2003 annual meeting minutes
- * Fiscal Year 2003 financial report
- * Farmers' Market Coalition Web page: About Us
- * Insurance Providers Resource List
- * Front Porch posts about insurance and zoning
- * Zoning ordinances from Phoenix and Queen Creek, Ariz., and a draft zoning ordinance from El Dorado County, Calif.

We have included many valuable members-only materials in the 2004 Yearbook. This is especially beneficial for our members who do not yet have Internet access.

For those of you who do have Internet access, the Insurance Providers Resource List is also available in the Back Forty of our Web site. Check back occasionally for updates.

The sample zoning ordinances that we have included in the yearbook are also available in the Back Forty.

They're found in the Bookstore & Library.

If you want to recommend an insurance company to us, or if you want to share your town or county's zoning ordinance with your NAFDMA peers, please mail a copy to us. We'll post it to our Web site.

We've also included a few pages from the NAFDMA Web site, www.nafdma.com. The zoning and insurance questions in the handbook were taken from the Front Porch, which is found in the Back Forty.

For those of you new to NAFDMA, the Front Porch is your place to ask questions and share your knowledge with your fellow NAFDMA members. Do you have something for sale? Post it in the Classified Ad section. (One member is currently selling a barrel-type train in the Classifieds.)

Don't be shy about pulling up a chair on the Front Porch. Most of us are pretty neighborly and enjoy hearing

from our friends. One of the intangible benefits of your NAFDMA membership is the fellowship you share with your peers, particularly after spending a few days together at the conference or on the bus tour.

If you have any questions about your NAFDMA membership, please call the office at 888-884-9270.

We look forward to hearing from you, and we hope that you enjoy your handbook.



Stay Connected!

The NAFDMA Web site (www.nafdma.com) is your one-stop location for staying connected to the farm direct marketing industry. Members can ask and answer each others' questions in the Back Forty, which is the members-only portion of the site. Check often for new questions, or post your own! Share weather woes, successes, and failures with your peers. Buy, sell, or swap equipment. It's your Web site. Use it! Check back for updates and 2004 conference details!

Some thoughts on selling at farmers' markets

Nina Planck
Founder, Local Foods

my mother's most effective signs: WE GROW REALLY GOOD BEANS.

Bring articles and information about **your farm and its role in agriculture**. When an agribusiness meat processor

recalls tons of beef because of *E coli*, or *E coli* is found on organic lettuce, be ready to answer questions from customers. Tell them what you know about agriculture, food safety, or animal welfare. Good customers want to learn about farming and foods. You must help them. A **brochure** with cuts and prices is particularly helpful

buy the same amount anyway. The refrigerator is only so big and a family only eats so much. If your product is rare (a scarce variety or the only one on the market), charge what it's worth. If your product is organic, price accordingly. Customers *do* expect value for money. Give them bargains when you have a lot of something, or if it's inferior (too small or slightly bruised or too old). When you do have a bargain price, **promote it** with large signs, visible placement, multiple locations, and polite suggestions. Offer discounts for volume. We typically sell squash and zucchini for \$1.60/lb, or, when it's scarce, \$2/lb. That's not cheap. But if you buy 5 lbs or more, it's \$1/lb. We also sell slightly more than 5 lbs in a gallon basket for \$5. We move a lot of squash that way to price-conscious shoppers who like squash. We still get top price from the people who want just three zucchini.

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Value for Money is Always Right

It's not a question of high or low prices. A good market—and a good stand—has high-end treats, less expensive foods in larger quantities, and items in between. It's a question of the **right price**. Your prices may change during the market, from week to week, and

Introduction

In 1999, I created the first farmers markets in London, England. The first market opened with 16 farmers selling fruit, vegetables, meat, poultry, cheese, bread, plants, and wine.

Today London Farmers Markets runs 13 farmers markets (12 are weekly) in London all year-round, serving about 115 farmers and food producers whose total sales at the markets are about \$5 million per year.

These suggestions for marketing at farmers markets were originally written for the farmers selling at the London markets. Most had no experience with direct marketing. These ideas, revised for American farmers, rely on my experience selling at farmers markets in the Washington, DC area since 1980. My parents make a living selling vegetables only at farmers markets. In 2003 we attended 14 farmers markets each week.

My mother is a demon farmers marketer and I learned a lot from her. I am never happier than when I'm filling baskets, changing prices, talking about tomato varieties or what to do with fennel, and taking money. I also look at markets as a customer, cook, journalist, farm advocate, and market manager.

The Plancks are very good at marketing now, but we used to be hopeless. Farmers markets were new in our area in 1980. We had to figure out how to do everything. In retrospect, it's clear that we weren't quick. It was *years* before we displayed our produce attractively. It was *years* before we wrote good signs—and laminated them so that they weren't ruined by rain. It was *years* before we stopped growing—and trying to sell—things customers didn't want. (I can document all of this with pictures from the early 1980s.)

Many of the examples below are about fruit and vegetables, but the principles apply to everything you see at farmers markets, including plants, flowers, and bread. I also include specific comments for meat, dairy, and poultry producers.

You are welcome to distribute this to market organizers, farmers, and food producers—or anyone else who is interested in the market for local foods.

These are things we know work well. We are still learning. Do what works for you.

nina planck
january 2004

The more information the better: Prices are the bare minimum

Customers love signs and explanations. You **must** label everything with a name and a price. For some reason, food without prices doesn't sell well. Many people are too shy to ask directly about prices. But there is much more you can say.

How much does it weigh? How do you cook it? What is it called? How hot are the chilies? How is it different? Where is your farm? Why is it scarce? (WE HAD A FROST) Why do the apples have spots? (WE DON'T USE FUNGICIDES) One of

Suggestions for other handouts:

Write a **description of your farm** (location, acres, ownership, family history, crops, animals, climate, workers). Write a description of **your methods of production**. Are you organic? What does integrated pest management mean? What does grass-fed beef mean? Why is it better than grain-fed? What breeds do you raise? Why? If you answer a question often, **write it down**. Save your time and help shy customers who will read a sign but won't ask you a question.

for meat, poultry, and cheese producers, especially when your prices and cuts are steady throughout the season.

Recipes are the **indispensable** handout.

Charge what it's worth. Is it superior, rare, organic?

Better food is worth more. When you have a superior product (better than the supermarket or even the farmer next door), **charge more**. Some customers are price-conscious and some aren't. When you give away good produce at rock-bottom prices, customers often

You can reach Nina Planck at 212-982-6462 or via e-mail at planck@rcn.com

LOCAL FOODS is a non-profit dedicated to developing the market for local foods.

An industry at a crossroads

Each time a new year rolls in, column writers such as myself are challenged to write something insightful and worthy of new beginnings. This time for me, it's been no challenge at all. I've been collecting thoughts on little scraps of paper mounting on my desk for several months now. We once yearned to understand new trends to better expand our industry. Now, we are the new trend.

In the beginning of 2004, it's more and more apparent that we can benchmark shifts, which demonstrates that farm direct marketing has arrived on this continent. Our members have known this for years. But, in the bigger picture, farm direct marketing has merely been an undertone, an alternative lifestyle. For the past 20 years farm direct marketers have on one hand struggled for industry respect, and on the other hand managed to operate under the radar of rules commonly associated with doing business in more advanced and widely understood industries.

The reality today is that farm direct marketing and agritourism are commanding the attention of the agricultural industry, the public, and every level of bureaucracy. The shift over the next 10 years will increasingly be marked by how individuals who have pioneered farm direct marketing in North America can maintain their success, not as pioneers forging new trails, but as settlers managing their businesses and establishing themselves as valued contributors in the eyes of their community.

We have created a dilemma. Our unique approach

to farming has found its way into the hearts of the mainstream as a way to preserve the family farm, the diminishing open space, and the rural traditions

our society has come to value so highly. And many new and evolving government policies are catching hold to support and enable this digression. Yet these same bureaucracies are strapped with the responsibilities of maintaining safe and inexpensive food sources. Further, they are lobbied by corporate food manufacturing and food marketing industries whose agendas are far removed from the interests of the family farm.

The legacies of agricultural policy in North America are founded on the ideals of bountiful food sources and inexpensive distribution channels. Achieving those ideals has driven many of the successes of our North American societies. Conversely, modern farm direct marketing, while deeply rooted in the agricultural sector, has derived from a need on the part of the family farm to survive within the confines of that policy. But the tide is ever slowly turning. While legitimately born from family farm survival strategies, farm direct marketing inherently leads a mild digression from the continent's traditional food and agriculture policies.

Is it farmers who are driving the shift with our need for a fair income and creative ways to grow our businesses? Or is it the wants and needs of our customers



whose lives are sustained by the industrial, technological, and service-oriented sectors who are more and more coming to recognize the value of farms separately

from the value of food? Can local farmers survive feeding local communities in the world, as it seemingly gets smaller? As the tide turns, the interests of farming and of food policy potentially grow further apart. And future successes of farm direct marketing will largely be determined by how we, as an industry, answer these questions.

We're at the beginning of a new era. Now, like so many members have experienced individually, our industry as a whole is discovering that it has succeeded! And with success comes new challenges. The focus of industry growth is about to shift. It's not about fighting the fight any more. Now it's about managing with responsibility in a new mainstream.

Twenty years ago, the NAFDMA conference was founded out of a need to create a forum for sharing. There was little opportunity for the pioneers of farm direct marketing to gather and compare new ideas and trade advancements. How many annual or special conferences are there now across the continent that focus on farm direct marketing and agritourism?

Twenty years ago, a great new idea was the coming of a goat walk or a cornfield maze or how to start a downtown farmers' market. Now, "the next great thing"

could be cloaked in a much more subtle business management strategy or an innovative cost saving measure.

Twenty years ago, we either weren't concerned that a farm visitor might trip on a loose stone and walk away with our farm, or we had no problem asking our neighbor who ran a little insurance business out of his home to add some incidental business insurance rider onto our homeowners' insurance policy for protection.

Twenty years ago, if you put any kind of a sign up on the roadway, you were looked at by your neighbors as being just a little off center thinking you might sell tomatoes or apples to a community filled with backyard gardeners. Today, the same signs would only bring on the suburban sign patrol and beautification police.

Twenty years ago, when you started doing anything on the farm that encouraged people to have fun, your farming neighbors chastised you for giving city slickers the wrong impression of farming. Today, if you have any farming neighbors left, they're keeping a close eye on your success and mimicking your every move only a year or two after each new innovation.

Twenty years ago, most local governments and certainly the federal level would just look the other way as you invited the public onto the farm. Today, inspections and regulations are as commonplace and predictable each year as the plowing, planting, and pruning seasons.

Each of these changes, and so many others, are sim-

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Selling at farmers markets

continued from page 5

throughout the season. Don't be afraid to change prices. When you do, you must change the sign immediately and tell all your staff. It helps to make an announcement about a price reduction as you change the sign. People like to know.

If it doesn't sell, the price is probably wrong. Or the customer does not want that product, or isn't attracted by the way you're selling it.

Give Samples

People love to try things. Teach them about your favorites. If you're tired of Golden Delicious apples and prefer Mutsus, say so. Twenty years ago we started to teach people that pickling cucumbers are wonderful in salads. They have thinner skins and better flavor than standard American cucumbers. We kept searching for new varieties. Now we grow Armenian, European, and Middle Eastern types which are better yet. We sample them all and many people tell us they are the best they've tried.

I often give away a new variety, such as the fluorescent purple eggplant *Neon*, just to encourage customers to try unusual things.

Suggest Ideas—Especially When it's Familiar or in Surplus

People often just don't know what to do with things they see. Tell them how you like to cook it. They often want to try something new, especially with familiar, well-supplied vegetables like zucchini.

When you have a glut, customers feel overwhelmed by the surplus and ever-lower prices won't inspire them. You must give them *more*

ideas. Such as:

Go beyond zucchini bread! Try zucchini soup, zucchini pasta, zucchini frittata, grilled zucchini. For a simple and beautiful dish, peel zucchini with a vegetable peeler and dress with olive oil, lemon, parmesan and pepper—zucchini carpaccio.

Another good sign: HOW to MAKE the MOST of a SURPLUS. Here you tell them how to preserve things easily and on short notice. For example, when I come home with more fresh herbs than I know I can use in three days, I toss them in the food processor with olive oil and salt. Thick or thin, the herb paste is great on vegetables, bread, fish, poultry, and meat.

Eat Your Own Food

Nothing is more discouraging to me than hearing "I don't know what it tastes like" from a farmers' market worker. All staff—those who work on the farm and those who only sell at farmers markets—should eat the food. Restaurant staff have wine and food tastings for staff so they can answer diners' questions fully and—yes—*subjectively*.

Give Customers Personal Opinions

You must be able to answer objective questions—is this apple sweet or tart, does this onion store well, is this cut of meat good for the grill? However, customers also appreciate personal comments. If you have favorites, say so. If the customer is asking about apples but you don't especially like apples, be honest ("I'm not a great apple eater, but people say these have the strongest flavor") and stick to objective descriptions ("Good for bak-

ing"). The customer will admire you for it.

Tell Them How To Keep It

No one likes to waste good food (or flowers). If you tell customers how to keep what they buy fresher longer, they won't fret about

buying too much. For example, make a sign saying:

HOW to KEEP
LETTUCE
Wash, spin dry, and
wrap it in a *damp* kitchen
towel in the fridge for
several days

Nina's article will continue in the March issue of Market Connection.

An industry at a crossroads

continued from page 6

ply the result of industry success. All of them combined demonstrate the trend from a fledgling industry to a growth industry. And now it is incumbent on us to look at ourselves through a set of eyes that takes a responsible look at how we approach the next 20 years. Time and time again, I'm told by individual members that they have little impact on the future of the overall farm direct marketing sector, but it strikes me that members of the past two decades have pretty well proved that theory wrong.

The farm direct marketing sector is at a crossroads that is much like what many of our individual members have already experienced. It began with a vision, and even a dream. For some it was the ideals of a new generation whose crazy idea it was to invite customers onto the farm instead of put up more of Dad's barbed wire fence and no trespassing signs. For others it was the dream of making enough money in some other career to buy a farm some day... then discovering that conventional farming isn't all so romantic. For some it was the once twisted thought that cutting

down large numbers of apple trees and investing more inputs to fewer apples might change the fruit on their farm from a commodity to a near luxury, worthy of celebration by customers and genuine profit by producers. And for so many, it has simply been a last ditch effort to survive—a way to keep the family farm and maybe even keep the family on the farm in spite of all the pressures of the world around us.

I hope you will join other leaders of our industry as we all make a shift in how we approach the growth of farm direct marketing. I continue to have great faith that NAFDMA's culture of cross-pollinating ideas across the continent and rolling up sleeves to work on emerging industry challenges will lead the way to continued successes for our current members, as well as for newcomers who will impact farm direct marketing in positive ways. It would be hard for anyone to make a case against the collective ships rising with the tide if the past 20 years is any indication of the future ones.



**NORTH AMERICAN FARMERS' DIRECT
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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Jan. 26-29, New York

New York State Farmers' Direct Marketing Conference, Best Western Regency Hotel, Binghamton, N.Y. Contact Diane Eggert, 315-475-1101 or e-mail diane99@dreamscape.com

Feb. 2-8, California

North American Farmers' Direct Marketing Conference and Trade Show, Sheraton Grand Sacramento Hotel and Sacramento Convention Center, Sacramento, Calif.

Visit www.nafdma.com, e-mail info@nafdma.com, or call 413-529-0386.

Feb. 5-7, Minnesota

Upper Midwest Regional Fruit and Vegetable Growers

Conference and Trade Show, Minnesota Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association, St. Cloud Civic Center, St. Cloud, Minn. Contact: Marilyn Nysetvold Johnson, 763-434-0400.

Feb. 18-19, Ontario

Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Convention and Trade Show, Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario. Call 905-563-6901.

Feb. 19-21, British Columbia

Pacific Agriculture Show, Tradex Exhibition Centre, Abbotsford, B.C. Call 604-291-1553 or e-mail: jsheward@direct.ca.

Charlie Touchette, NAFDMA's executive director, and Brent Warner,

NAFDMA secretary, will speak.

Feb. 22-25, New Jersey

Mid-Atlantic Direct Marketing Conference, Clarion Hotel & Conference Center, Cherry Hill, NJ.

Contact: Virginia Rosenkranz, vr20@umail.umd.edu, visit www.agnr.umd.edu/madmc/2004.html.

Feb. 23-25

North American Berry Conference, North American Strawberry Growers Association, Tampa, Fla. Call 814-238-3364, info@nasga.org.

March 25-28, PEI

Atlantic Canadian Organic Regional Association's Atlan-

tic Organic Conference & Trade Show, Howard Johnson Dutch Inn, Cornwall, P.E.I. **Charlie Touchette, NAFDMA's executive director, will speak on March 27.**

Call 902-632-2523, e-mail admin@acornorganic.org, or visit www.acornorganic.org.

March 15-17, Washington

Pacific Northwest Farmers' Direct Marketing Association Annual Meeting, Best Western Inn, Leavenworth, Wash. Contact: Mike Smallwood, 509-548-4196.

E-mail your meeting announcements to Kelly@WhiteLoafRidge.com.