



Module 5 – Promoting your farm experience

This module will give inputs about different ways to reach target groups and stakeholders in order to promote the educational activities on your farm.



What is the goal of this module?

Unit 1. Marketing yourself and your activities

In this unit you will learn the basics of marketing for farmers. At the end of the unit you will know how to determine what people want, how to plan and provide products and services to meet those wants, and how to select the most effective ways of reaching those who might pay for these products and services.

Unit 2. Selecting the right audience

At the end of this unit you should be able to select the right audience for your on-farm services and communicate with them in a appropriate way.

Unit 3. Promoting your event

The unit will teach you how to promote your on-farm event using public and media relations, and other communication tools.

After finishing this module I will have learnt....

1. How to create and implement a marketing plan for your farm.
2. How to select the right audience for your on-farm services.
3. How to use communication tools in order to promote your on-farm event.

Introduction to the topic

There are obvious marketing opportunities associated with farm visits and on-farm education. Farm walks and open days not only provide an opportunity to educate the public but also to generate additional customers and relatively cheap publicity. Extra income directly derived from educational visits is quite small. However, the other benefits are not inconsequential, and can be capitalised on. Income can also be generated by adding value to visits by providing catering or other facilities.

Unit 1 – Marketing yourself and your activities

Effective marketing is a key element in any business enterprise. Landowners who do not have experience in marketing a service business often overlook its importance. Even the best-managed fee-recreation business can be unsuccessful if prospective clients are unaware of the enterprise.

Marketing is simply determining what people want, planning and providing products and services to meet those wants, and selecting the most effective ways of reaching those who might pay for these products and services.

Gaining and maintaining customer trust is the most important goal of any marketing strategy. Whenever you communicate with existing or potential customers, make sure you tell your story but always do so honestly.



Developing a Marketing Plan

Your Business Plan should contain a section that includes your Marketing Plan. Keep your plan simple, **define your**



audience, define your service, and develop a plan for getting information about your enterprise to potential clients. You must remember to budget each year for marketing.

As you develop a marketing strategy you will want to identify the **two or three strong selling points** of your service or operation. It might be the organic practices, exclusivity and solitude, facilities, location and access to area attractions, special food offer, educational program, price, or other services you provide. Determining your audience first will help choose the key selling points for your marketing strategy.

Marketing Your Business

The type and amount of marketing you use in your on-farm education enterprise will depend on the specifics of your operation. Marketing can be as simple as word-of-mouth referral, or involve an intensive regional, national, or international media campaign.

Your marketing style and message must be directed to your identified audience. If you are providing dude-ranch activities, for example, you may emphasize the experience of riding horses and outdoor activities. Anything you print must reflect these selling points in neat, high quality, and tasteful presentation.

The three basics of advertising include: the message (the two or three strong selling points and additional information about your service), the medium (publications, radio, online, etc.), and the target audience you're trying to reach.



The Message

Your message should tell about the type of activity or enterprise you offer; additional goods and services; directions to your location; costs of the activities; and how to make reservations. Try to be original in your marketing. Keep your message simple. Always check dates, fees, addresses and phone numbers for accuracy. Make certain the goods and services advertised represent what you can deliver. Contact someone experienced in desktop publishing to assist in design and creation of printed pieces if you don't have this experience.

The Medium

Marketing includes a wide range of activities, from public relations and advertising, to promotions and trade shows. Advertising is the most expensive approach. You should carefully consider all the following media and focus on those that fit your budget and reach your target audience. The medium is the method by which the message is delivered to your potential clients.

They might include:

- Billboards
- Local outdoor goods stores
- Trade journals
- Magazines
- Trade shows
- Brochures
- Newsletters
- Travel agents
- Chamber of Commerce
- Newspapers
- Radio
- Regional Visitors Bureau
- Direct Mail
- Word-of-mouth referral

The Target Audience

Target audiences are distinct groups or segments of clients that you expect to reach when you employ different marketing strategies. You may decide to target your service based on the characteristics of:



1. income level
2. location (in or out-of-state; urban/rural, international)
3. age
4. client preference (lodging, level of involvement -- self guided versus guided, experience, etc.)

If you currently have people entering your property without paying (hunters, fishers, wildlife viewers, etc.) you may want to conduct a survey of their interests and ability to pay for services.



Possible Positions for Marketing Your Farm Operation

- **The feature** that makes your product or service different than the offerings of competing attractions (e.g. a restaurant on an organic farm, a B&B on an exotic animal farm, a cornfield maze at a u-pick produce stand, etc.)
- **The length of time** your organization has been in business (e.g., a family-run farm for over a century.
- **The unique people** involved in your operation (e.g. clinics by a nationally-renowned horse trainer, home cookin' by a former cooking competition winner, etc.)
- **Your location** (e.g. in the heart of prime bird watching habitat, within an hour of the ...river/lake/park..., far off the beaten path, etc.).
- **The size** of your operation (e.g. a small, intimate inn on a working ranch; a large cattle ranch, etc.).
- **The benefits** of your product or services (e.g. catch the romantic spirit of the ..., restful solitude and tranquility, fulfill a childhood dream, guaranteed catch or wildlife sightings, etc.).
- **The services** of your organization (e.g. educational program for children, guided farm walks, outdoor recreation for young singles).
- **Your price** (e.g., an affordable family adventure).
- **Your reputation**
- **The lifestyle-defining** aspect of your offering (e.g. escape the ordinary, edge of danger rockclimbing, etc.).



Top Marketing Ideas for On-farm Education Operations

1. **Happy customers are the most important key to success.** They will return, and they will tell their friends about your operation. Learn their names. Remember what they like and have it ready for them. Keep a database if you can't keep it all in your head. The little touches make all the differences.
2. **Develop a mailing list.** Get names from outdoor magazines, associations, local school board, and other sources of people that like outdoor activities. Your mailing list is your most important asset. Mail to your customers at least twice a year.
3. **People don't come to hunt or fish or ride a horse or tractor.** They come to have fun and relax. You are in the hospitality business; take care of your customers and you will succeed. Always ask your customers what they liked about their stay and what could be improved.
4. **Take care of details.** Make sure that your telephone is answered professionally. Your answering machine should have a professional message. Return calls promptly.
5. **Let your neighbors know about you.** Join the Chamber of Commerce, talk to gas station owners, cafes, clubs, motels, and neighboring farms. Give people your brochure and make sure that people in your area know about you. Start close to home at first and move out gradually.
6. **Send information about your farm to magazines and newspapers.** Send them news releases and story ideas. Invite them out for a free stay. Follow mailings with personal calls. Think of things that will interest them.
7. **Obtain brochures and literature from other operations that are similar to yours.** See what they are offering and what it costs. Look at their brochures to see what you like and don't like. Improve your materials accordingly.
8. **Produce quality brochures and PR materials.** On brochures, less is more. Don't clutter it with lots of words. Use photos. Hire a graphic artist or get lots of feedback from other business people before you go to print. Don't use a photocopier. Color is costlier than a black and white brochure, but it shows a commitment to quality and attracts a lot more attention.



Sample farm information brochure



Unit 2 – Selecting Your Audience

Tours on the farm should be aimed at carefully targeted audiences. Your farm operation may not be appropriate for large groups or children; make certain you can provide an appropriate tour for your guests. Also do not commit to tours during peak production times as you may not have the time to have visitors on the farm.



Assessing Your Preferences, Options, and Goals

A key point before venturing into farm recreation/education is to identify or revisit the real goals of the farm and to discuss these goals with all parties who may influence the decision-making. If any of the "partners" do not have the same goals, success will be limited and interpersonal stress may be the major result. ALL partners (this may be family members or outside interests) must meet together and seriously express their personal and business goals.

Define your goals

- What kind of visitors do you want to attract?
- What kind of guests can you attract to your farm with the operation you have today?
- What kind of visitors will you be able to attract in the future?

Here are a few comments on your audience and what you might expect:

- Schools, youth groups and community members usually find farm tours enjoyable field trips. Often, teachers can link what students have learned on the farm with their classroom curriculum, and are encouraged to do so.
- Providing a farm tour to local businesses and community leaders gives you the opportunity to showcase your agri-business and allows them the opportunity to experience life on a present-day working farm. This can be very advantageous if agriculture is an integral part of the community.
- Consider hosting a tour for the media highlighting the positive aspects of your farm. This can be beneficial to better prepare journalists for future agricultural and food related news stories.
- Local officials can benefit from the insight gained from attending a farm tour when making important decisions that affect the community. Consider organizing a tour for elected official and invite residents and media to attend and interact with their representatives.



Welcoming school visits

If you are hosting school visits as a response to requests then you will not need to market yourself. If, however, you would like to develop regular school visits, then you will need to be pro-active in encouraging visits. A farm visitor centre catering for thousands of visitors will have a sizable marketing budget. Most farms, on the other hand, will be operating on very limited budgets. Therefore, there is a need to be creative and imaginative in getting yourself noticed by schools.

What you should consider:

- Are you going to rely on word-of-mouth or are you going to purchase advertising?
- Do you have a brochure, web site, and signs directing visitors to your farm?
- How will you distribute brochures or promote your website?
- Will you use any other marketing methods (print, radio, online, personal visit to schools)?

Providing attractive activities and experiences on your farm will generate good publicity but initially you need to let people know what you can provide. Buying advertising can be costly and not particularly cost effective if you are only catering for small numbers.

A few tips for attracting the general public:

- Mailing of home-made posters, with contact details on sticky label on the back, to local groups and organisations.
- Homemade posters in local shops/travel agents/visitor centers and libraries.



- Get included on local and national websites that list events and activities.
- Have a website of your own.
- Get your name into local media by writing press releases.



Unit 3 – Promoting the event

In a world where people are constantly bombarded by advertising, effective marketing that makes your business stand out is more important than ever. While happy customers will promote your business to others through word of mouth, any farm operation that wants to become and stay successful needs to spend some time and effort on active marketing communication.



Sample invitation to a farm festival. Source: [Skagit Valley Festival of Family Farms](#)

Basic rules for successful promotion of your farm events:

- **Describe Your Farm Enterprise:** When was it started, or projected to start? Why was it started? Who started it? How does the recreation/education enterprise fit in with your overall farm operation?
- **Describe Your Product or Service:** Write down what you are selling to the public. Why should people buy your service? What does it do? What makes it unique? What will it cost to provide this service or product? How much will you charge? How does it compare to other similar enterprises? Are there complementary services in the area?
- **Define Your Customers:** Who are you targeting for your farm enterprise? You'll want to define gender, age, income, occupation, location, family status, children, education, and interests.
- **Develop a Marketing Strategy:** Your marketing and advertising method may be as simple as word of mouth and repeat customers, or it may involve an ad campaign with printed materials, radio spots, newspaper or other media advertising, mass mailings, and the like.



The Importance of Public Relations

Public relations are defined as the creation and maintenance of a favorable image. It is part of marketing and advertising, but it goes further. As a landowner, you should always be concerned with your business image. Your public relation goals can range from client's satisfaction with their experience, to acceptance of your operation by neighbors, local community leaders, and the general public. It's worth the effort to foster the support of neighbors, state and federal agencies, citizen groups and your local Chamber of Commerce or Visitors Bureau.

Media relations

Having the media at your event is very beneficial and offers an opportunity for your farm tour to be highlighted in local newspapers and other media sources. Your media needs will depend on the nature of your farm services. If you are opening your farm to the general public, contact your media source early to ensure time to advertise and promote your event.

Follow these tips when organizing for media to be at your event:

- Determine how you want to promote the farm event and contact the appropriate media sources.
- Start early – be sure to allow enough time for media to make arrangements.
- Invite different sources of media (newspaper, local television, local radio, etc.)
- Be sure to tell your farm staff that media will be at your farm tour.
- Be prepared to answer any questions that the media may ask – either in the planning stages or during your event.
- Make sure you are clear about any restrictions you have about taking pictures



The media is an excellent resource if utilized appropriately. Cooperatively working with the media is more effective when getting your story out. Remember it is the media's responsibility to deliver the story, but it is your responsibility to tell it. Be friendly and stay positive - journalists are helping you promote your farm.



Press Releases

Depending on the nature of your farm event having the media present may be a great idea. However, ensure they are going to promote a positive message about agriculture and the farm tour when they write their story. Consider photographs and advise the media of your preference on this issue. If the media is present during your event, write your own press release and send it to the local paper. As reference, an example press release is included in the 'sample templates' section.

- Make the readership aware of your farm event and the highlights of the day.
- Follow the who, what, when, where, why, how format to successfully highlight your day and the audience in attendance.
- If you are willing to host more events, include your contact information and encourage people to consider visiting your next event.
- Be sure to thank those involved in your event and any sponsors you may have had that supported the day.
- Send the press release to a couple of local papers – try to send it within a week of your event. No one wants to read 'old' news and the paper will likely not print something that happened three months ago!

Raise your local profile by emailing press releases to local media, anything from first lambs of the year, events, interesting visitors etc. are all grist to the media mill and will keep you on their radar for local comment on news stories or for write-ups in 'quiet' news periods.

The key to getting press releases accepted is to send newsworthy information. This does not mean that it has to be earth shattering or fantastic. Anything of interest or usefulness to readers will stand you in good stead. Avoid blatantly self-promotional pieces – editors want news, not advertising. The name of your farm and its location, worked in with the rest of the story, is sufficient to enable readers to get in touch with you.

Possible headlines for your press release might be:

'Organic farm open day', or 'Organic farm offers public chance to see new piglets'. Other angles might include new products or services, awards and noteworthy accomplishments, developments on the farm, eg, a new farm trail, new farm shop, an outbuilding converted for use by visiting school parties and so on.

Ten tips for writing a successful press release:

1. Your writing should be clear and factual providing details of dates, times, prices, and activities.
2. Press releases should be printed. Leave a wide margin and double spacing between lines to allow for editing.
3. Keep to one side of A4 paper.
4. Include a short quote from yourself or another relevant person.
5. Provide background information, such as details of organisations, people and regulations, in a section after the main press release, headed 'Notes to editor'.
6. Provide a contact name, telephone number, and email at the bottom of the release.
7. Ring the publication you are sending your press release to and get the name of the appropriate editor, eg, news, food, farming, women's interest.
8. Send the press release to a named individual, by email.
9. If possible include one or two photographs showing working scenes on your farm.
10. Telephone your contact a few days after sending, to see if they can use the story or want further information.

Use of other communication tools to promote your event and farm

Customer Mailing List

Consider using a guest book where visitors can add their names and e-mail addresses to a mailing list. The mailing list can later be used to send your newsletter or reminder notices.



Farm web page

Does your farm need a website? The simple answer is: Yes. A farm needs a good simple website that is nicely laid out, full of great images, and linked to other websites. It should fit the theme of your business and should use the same logo and graphic design that is on your card and other marketing materials. Keep the site updated and make sure your contact information is current. Include links to the sites of local business associations, other area farms, tourist attractions, and local farm organizations. Make sure the web offers accurate and up-to-date information on your on-farm educational services, the farm amenities and, most important, description of how to reach the farm.



Sample farm web page: [Riverford Organic Farm, UK](#)

Use of social media

Learn from the masters. Remember that every account starts with zero followers, and look to the ones you adore for inspiration. Note their content, imagery, and posting frequency, then mimic those practices until you find your routine. Look for example at on Facebook, and and on Instagram.

Your first assignment: Facebook.

You might be tempted to blast your message across every hot new platform. Resist the urge and begin on the most tested one - Facebook. Launch a business page and include contact details and links to your site in the description. Adopt your farm's logo as the profile picture to bolster brand recognition. Facebook also offers easy-to-understand analytics and advertising tools, which can help you reach potential customers.

Expand to other platforms.

Once you're comfortable with the rhythm of Facebook, test the waters on Instagram and Twitter, using the same profile picture but tweaking the message slightly, as needed. Twitter's better for sharing links and discussing ideas, while Instagram is built for photos. Make the pics good; a mobile editing app, such as [Snapseed](#), can help. To expand your audience fast, include popular hashtags that describe your content.

Be consistent.

Cultivating an active audience requires regular interaction. Post on every one of your platforms at least once a day to keep current and potential customers engaged. And don't let the comments linger: Treat them like calls on a customer-service hotline, and respond promptly and politely.

Spark conversation.

Pose meaningful questions to generate engagement. Asking opinions works best - this builds a sense of learning and community that you should strive to foster.

Sample video about a farm event: [Riverford Organics Pumpkin Day 2017](#)

Convert followers into customers.

Cement the relationship by offering discounts to the first five people who comment on a post or farm tours for new CSA members. You can also grow your email list with a simple sign-up sheet at the farmers market. When you send out your newsletter, ask your subscribers to follow you on Facebook. It's an honest, old-school way to build your virtual network.



A few suggestions for getting schools out

If the appropriate target audience for your farm events are schools, follow these suggestions:

- Get your farm, its features and activities, listed on as many relevant websites as possible.
- Personal contact is all important, lookout for opportunities to network with teachers and always have your diary



with you when speaking with schools.

- Get into schools and speak to people face to face. Exploit your contacts and customers for marketing your activities.
- Identify keen teachers and head teachers and work with these people.
- Network with local environment groups etc., who may know active and interested schools. Identify local council posts, ie, sustainability or environment officers, arts development officers, etc., that may promote, or be keen to develop, projects using your resources.
- Schools associations (clusters of schools working together in certain areas) are often willing to allow you a minor slot at their meetings. Keep your presentation short and concise. Have information leaflets with your activities and contact details ready to give out.
- Researching individual schools' topics for the school year can pay dividends by enabling your marketing to focus on farm resources that may not be obvious to teachers. Be creative and imaginative.
- Open days are a good opportunity to provide information about school visits to teachers, governors, parents, and children. Make sure you have some promotional materials available for them to take on to the school.

Sample video: kindergarten visit to a farm. Source: [Skutecne zdrava skola](#)

- Mailing schools can yield poor results, (schools are the target of lots of mail-shots) and can be an expensive and time-consuming exercise. Following up with a phone call might increase chances of success.
- Consider using email as this is a cheaper option than post.
- Long letters to teachers are unlikely to be looked at. Colourful postcards with concise information are likely to have a greater impact. Consider themed weeks to stimulate interest.
- Consider running competitions or offering prizes that can be used to by the school to raise funds for the visit, this can also be done via local media to market farm open days thus giving relatively cheap publicity.
- Use positive feedback from teachers to sell the value of a farm visit to other schools.
- Spell out in your literature features that will make life easier for teachers, ie,
 1. Offer a pre-visit into the school.
 2. Emphasise links between your activities and the national curriculum.
 3. Offer a pre-visit and a risk assessment to the teachers.
 4. Offer the opportunity for some email communication with school children.
- Inform your local education authority and let them know what you can do and offer to facilitate or host training or seminar events.
- Local councillors are very influential. If you can get any of them to the farm to show them what you are doing, this could be very worthwhile. Invite them to open days and make time to show them around.
- Make the most of free publicity by sending in press releases to the local media.



Supporting materials and sample forms:

- [Sample invitation letter to schools](#)
- [Sample Press release](#)
- [Check-list for promotional activities – pre-visit, during visit, post-visit](#)
- [Welcoming visitors – sample text](#)

Key actions

1. Develop a marketing plan for your farm business
2. Select the best target audience for your farm business
3. Define goals you want to achieve in your farm education activities
4. Plan, promote and manage your event
5. Welcome first visitors and guests