

Marketing Considerations for Small Food Processors

Successful marketing of your food product requires an understanding of why your product is unique and why the public would wish to purchase your item. Small scale food processors often realize that their marketable advantage is the production of a **high quality** product. Your product may also appeal to consumers through uniqueness, savings (time, money, energy, etc.), attractive design or packaging, or distinctive processing. In all cases, success is dependent on the entrepreneur's understanding of the market in which the product will thrive.

Marketing includes all of the decisions involved in your business. The entrepreneur should evaluate the appeal of their product, the target consumer audience, their competition, demand, pricing, and cost of manufacturing as well as indirect costs such as advertising, phones, postage, transportation, etc. It is important that your business meets the needs of the consumers as well as the business details.

Developing a marketing plan will help the entrepreneur target important business goals and strategies. A good marketing plan will help the entrepreneur understand where the product fits into the market. The marketing plan should include research of existing markets and competition. A part of the research should include testing the food product with consumers and gathering feedback. Part of the feedback should include consumer willingness to purchase the product and how much they would be willing to spend.

Another important aspect in the marketing plan is to decide where your food product should be marketed. This may include selling at farmer's markets, festivals, or grocery stores. Selling at venues where you can meet the consumer face-to-face will create opportunities for the entrepreneur to gather immediate feedback from the consumer and be a good venue for testing out new products or ideas.

The Marketing Plan Should Include:

- Research of the competition
- Research of existing markets
- Consumer feedback
- Where food will be marketed
- Promotion and advertising strategies

Promotion and advertising are also inclusive of a marketing plan. Planning promotion and advertising will assure that you expose your product to your target audience. For this, you must know your audience, what they enjoy doing, where they shop, etc. You should then decide what the best avenue would be in order to reach your audience. Do not waste time or money on advertising and promotion in areas that will not reach your audience.

The marketing plan should include a frequent review of the food community to identify emerging trends and values. The marketing plan should also be reviewed anytime a major change takes place, such as adding new products to your business, moving from your home kitchen to a co-packer, or expanding your distribution.

Where to Find Help with Your Marketing Plan

The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) houses **VDACS Marketing Development Services** to assist the states varied agricultural community by enabling producers and processors to locate the best markets for their products both in Virginia and abroad. The Division of Marketing serves producers, commodity boards and associations, retailers, and buyers by providing marketing assistance.

The VDACS Marketing Services can also help you become certified with the **Virginia's Finest Program**, a recognizable branding that will signal that your product is a top quality Virginia-produced and processed item.

Another great place for marketing resources is the Virginia Small Business Development Center Network. This network of offices throughout the Commonwealth can help new businesses with business counseling, training, and resources. While there are many offices throughout Virginia willing to help, they can also be found online at <http://www.virginiasbdc.org/>.



Virginia's Finest