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Marketing Options

excerpted from "Profitable Poultry: Raising Birds on Pasture"

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The experience of practically every range poultry producer bears this out: Marketing your product will take as much time and energy as the actual task of raising and processing your product.

In a survey, 80 percent of APPPA members cited direct marketing as a top sales method. For most, the best way to reach family, neighbors and others in the community was word of mouth, posting flyers on local bulletin boards, selling products at farmers markets and contacting customers often.

Marketing Tips

Newspaper stories. Mary Berry-Smith doesn't consider herself a marketing genius, but she managed in one year to have her pastured poultry operation featured twice in the Louisville Courier-Journal. Each time, she received a flood of orders that led to people reserving one of her broilers and turkeys well before the 2001 season was complete.

Marketing is all about capitalizing on advantages. The key lies in what some people call "relationship marketing." Berry-Smith worked with a newspaper editor to explain the benefits of the system, and that made the editor more willing to try, and be impressed by, the product. Joel Salatin and his farm were profiled in the national Smithsonian magazine, as well as ABC news.

Farmers who have received ink in newspapers or magazines report that when people read about their product- and the philosophy and practices behind pasture-based poultry systems- their phones, in Chuck Smith's words, "ring off the walls".

Pre-Orders. David Bosle of central Nebraska prints a newsletter every winter for his

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customer list of close to 300. He includes a self-addressed, stamped envelope to take orders, by month, for the season.

"That's a must," he said. "The biggest cost is to get the customer on the belt, and once you've got them there, it's stupid to let them fall off."

Bosle takes advantage of the short growing time for chickens and he clusters his flocks around spring, summer and fall holidays, including Memorial Day and Labor Day. With the pre-ordering system, he generally sells his birds prior to growing them.

Samples. Robin Way not only praises the virtues of investing in a colorful, easy-to-spot farm sign, but also recommends giving out free meat. "If they take the trouble to drive down our lane, I'll give the people freebies," she said. "Maybe they'll never show up again, but maybe they'll be one of our best customers."

When they first started raising poultry on pasture, the Ways would bring chickens to auctions and meetings and make donations. All of the meat was accompanied by a farm business card.

Selling Other Products. Tom Delahanty, the New Mexico grower, markets his organic meat under a "Real Chicken" brand that commands varying premium prices- as high as \$5 per pound at some upscale groceries in Albuquerque and Santa Fe. Next, he plans to sell organic vegetables he expects will flourish in the manure-rich soil aided by his flocks.

"I've already got the contacts at the farmers markets, grocery stores and restaurants all up and down the valley," he said, "so selling them vegetables the chickens help grow should be easy."

One grower who works with James McNitt at Southern University garners \$2.25 a pound for chicken partly because she already has a dedicated list of customers lining up for her organic blueberries. "And people are pushing her to do more," McNitt said.

Molly and Ted Bartlett offer chickens as an extra option for members of their Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) enterprise in northeast Ohio. When joining their farm for the season, customers decide whether to buy a poultry package. "We offer them 10 birds for \$90," Molly Bartlett said, "and they can take them all at once, or over the course of a year. It works well, it helps the cash flow, and it provides more variety for our customers."

For more on marketing, pastured poultry systems and processing issues, order a copy of "Profitable Poultry: Raising Birds on Pasture" from SAN.