

Advertising a Pick-Your-Own Farm or Farm Stand

Just as farmers need to condition the soil to grow crops, they also need advertising to condition customers to buy their crops. Advertising is a tool, one which you can use to attract customers to your farm and your products. Also, like many farm tools, advertising can be expensive! It is important to carefully research the best types and amounts of advertising for your situation. Then you'll get the best return on your investment. Here are some tips to help you make the most of your advertising dollar.

Surveys show that most of your customers are within 20 miles of your farm. Advertising outside this area may not pay off. Focus your advertising in the densest population centers, such as urban areas. Families with children tend to spend the most money at retail farms, so place your ads where these people will see or hear them.

Your ads should promote benefits, not objects. What will people get by coming to your farm? Fresh, high-quality, delicious produce, fun, and friends! Don't just advertise "Smith's Farm."

That's not what the customers want to buy. Emphasize quality, family fun and friendly, helpful service. Don't waste time and space talking about prices. This is not what attracts most people to the farm stands. Keep your ad simple, attractive, and recognizable.

Signs: Your roadside signs are the first real impression customers get of your farm. They should be neat, high quality, attractive, and readable. They should represent the farm and farmers. Customers will read a lot into a sloppily painted shingle, especially one that's next door to a neat, professional sign.

Take care when selecting your color scheme. Be sure there is enough contrast between the background and the lettering so that it is easy to read. For example, red or black letters are easy to see against a white background. Yellow letters are very hard to read.

Make your signs large enough to be easily read by passing motorists. At 50 mph, a motorist has only three to five seconds to read your sign; it must have less than eight words to be readable. Remember, road signs are not the place to state your prices. Leave prices to small signs inside the stand.

Symbols are often more effective than words. Create a simple logo for your farm and use it on all your signs. This will develop customer recognition for your products.

Be aware that there are strict rules on the use of roadside signs. Depending on the road and location, there may be federal, state, and/or local



ordinances that govern the use of roadside signs. Start by checking with the city or county planning/zoning department.

Direct Mailings: One of the most effective advertising tools is a customer mailing list. A mailing list will help you develop a direct line of communication with your customers. For example, use postcards with pictures of your farm or products and a short promotional message. Send them out just before harvest time to bring in customers. This makes customers feel you have a special interest in them, which makes them more likely to respond than if they just see an ad.

You can also develop a mailing list by asking people to sign up for mailings when they visit your farm. Better yet, ask customers to fill out a survey, asking what they like and how they found out about your stand. The survey data will help you plan future advertising.

Newspapers: A lot of people read local newspapers every day. Newspaper ads can be a good way to reach your customers. Choose the newspaper most likely to be read by your clientele. Have the ad placed where your desired audience is most likely to see it. The weekly food or marketplace section might be a good spot for your ad.

Space for newspaper ads is sold by the column inch. A quarter-page ad may cost over \$800, but, depending on how many people see it, it may be an effective, worthwhile investment. Use your farm logo and photos in the ad to grab the readers attention. Offer coupons in the ad to draw people to your farm. The number of coupons redeemed is a good way to measure how well the ad worked.

Radio: To get the most effect from radio advertising, pick a station your customers listen to. A customer survey can provide you with this information. The prices of radio ads vary based on the station's

audience, length of ad, and time of the broadcast.

Repetition is the key to a successful radio ad. Your money will be better spent on 20 spots on one station than one spot on 20 stations. Consider sponsoring morning weather reports, and follow them with "picking condition reports" from your farm.

Television: The high cost of television advertising makes it less attractive to small farm businesses. However, prices during some time slots and on local channels may work if a lot of clients are likely to be watching. Daytime ads can reach a family audience through homemakers, and they are cheaper than prime time. Production costs of a TV ad can be very high, too, depending on the type of ad you want.

Advertise your crop when it is ready. Give the customer what they want, when they want it. Begin advertising lightly just before the season. Advertise heavily at the beginning of the season, and taper off as the season progresses. Don't wait for slack sales to advertise; keep things moving!

As a rule, budget advertising at five to 10 percent of your sales income. With experience, you'll know how much to spend. Keep track of money spent on advertising versus income from sales. If an ad campaign does not bring a quick and noticeable increase in income, re-evaluate it. Perhaps it didn't reach the target audience, or its content didn't attract attention.

Increase your advertising budget if local competition is great or your location is distant from the target audience. Too much advertising will bring diminishing returns and too many customers. Remember that crowds and low supplies are sure ways to lose patrons.

Remember, a good advertisement will bring customers to your farm, but it is also a promise to customers that they'll find what they want once they get there. To get repeat customers ("regulars"), you must give them a reason to come back—excellent quality and service, a friendly atmosphere, neat, clean and attractive surroundings, good parking, and fair prices.

Always let your customers know how important they are to you. If treated well, they'll provide the best kind of advertising: word of mouth. This is one of the best types of promotion, but it is not free. You must earn it. (DJ)

Acreage Insights



New Models Save Water



Older toilets typically use three to seven gallons per flush and account for about 30 to 50 percent of the water used indoors. New water-saver toilet standards are set at 1.6 gallons per flush. Newer models can save 8,000 or more gallons of water per year per household or about 50 percent of older toilets. (DJ)

When Push is Better Than Pull

New water-saver toilets may use pressure-assisted, vacuum-assisted, and wash-down or gravity-flush. Pressure-assisted or compressed air toilets may perform better than gravity flush, but may make more noise. Gravity flush toilets are easier for do-it-yourselfers to fix. In any case, the toilet must have enough force and water to carry the flushed waste through the wastewater system. (DJ)

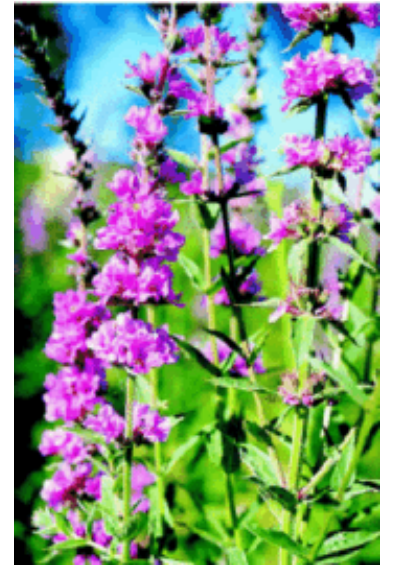


Nebraska's Newest Noxious Weed

On January 1, 2001, purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria* and *Lythrum virgatum*) officially became the state's seventh noxious weed. Purple loosestrife is an aggressive wetland invader which displaces native plants important to wildlife. This plant also infests subirrigated pastures and hay meadows.

Purple loosestrife is found in wetlands, wet meadows, and along streams and rivers from near North Platte toward eastern Nebraska. In the past, it has also been sold as an ornamental and can be found in flower gardens throughout the state. Most nurseries agreed to stop selling it after our announcement on May 1.

Purple loosestrife can be easily identified by its long spikes of six-petal, rose/purple-colored flowers. The plant has narrow leaves which grow from opposite sides of squarish stems. Homeowners should dig or pull the plant, making sure to remove as much of the root



mass as possible. Place the plant and root material in a plastic bag and seal the bag tightly and dispose of it in an approved sanitary landfill.

Large infestations can be controlled with herbicides. Several products are available for control of purple loosestrife. Contact your local county weed control authority or the University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension Service for more information on approved herbicides and other control options. County weed control superintendents will begin contacting landowners and homeowners to assist in developing management plans to attack this aggressive invader.

Other weeds deemed noxious in Nebraska are musk thistle, plumeless thistle, Canada thistle, leafy spurge, diffused knapweed, and spotted knapweed. (DJ)

Waste Pesticide Disposal Program

Homeowners, producers, and pesticide dealerships will again have the opportunity in 2001 to dispose of unuseable or unwanted pesticides free of charge. Beginning in mid-March, a waste pesticide management company will go through the state collecting these materials.

The collection sites and dates will be made available by March 1. The anticipated number of collection sites will be approximately 20. Every attempt will be made to locate the sites throughout the state so everyone has the opportunity to participate.

Previous collections held during the past five years have resulted in excess of 1.4 million pounds being collected. Everyone with products which need to be disposed of are encouraged to participate in this program, because the future availability of funds for the project is uncertain. (DJ)